Features

Interfaith Dialogue

In our feature this issue we concentrate on several different aspects of the continuing dialogue between world religions. Winifred Lamb offers us a new theoretical model to further interfaith discussion and Doug Pratt draws on his recent experience at Selley Oaks to look at the history and theory of Christian- Muslim dialogue. In three practical pieces Juliet Sheen looks at the world picture and the UN Report, John Baldock gives us the state of dialogue in Australia, and Philip Hughes looks at interfaith relations in non-Christian Thailand. Diana Law and John Wren Lewis share their personal journeys in reaching greater interfaith awareness. Finally John May and Marianne Dacy report on recent international conferences focused on interfaith dialogue.

Intellectual Eros: a model for inter-faith dialogue

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In this paper, I hope to sketch out the process of understanding that may be most fruitful for the situation of inter-faith dialogue. This discussion also raises bigger epistemological issues, questions of the nature of truth, of objectivity, of relativism, of inter-perspective understanding, of 'how we speak of the truth and yet speak from our particularity?'[1]

This last question is one addressed in a very interesting way by Janet Martin Soskice in relation to ecumenical conversation. Her discussion raises epistemological questions which I will not take up. My primary aim is to discuss the kind of attitude, or epistemological stance that would be most fruitful for inter-faith understanding and I think that discussion is possible without commitment to any particular epistemological or theological position on inter-faith dialogue.[2]

In the situation of inter-faith conversation, there is rightly appreciated, the need for certain attitudes of mind to prevail for genuine dialogue and understanding. We recognise the fact that existing within the situation are attitudes that may militate against genuine dialogue. For example,

the sense of conviction about one's own faith may militate against the genuineness of the attempt to understand another. There may, for example, be the fear of being sold short on one's own position. On the other hand, there is the concern that one does justice to another's faith, that one hears and understands what the other says.

Is it, in fact, possible to genuinely understand another's point of view, another's faith perspective when one is convinced of one's own different, even opposing view of reality?

I pose this as a philosophical question as I am aware that there is a view within philosophy of religion that asserts the inevitability of an intelligibility gap between believers from different traditions. This is the position of the 'Wittgensteinian fideists', who see genuine understanding of another's faith as being only possible when one has seen it as 'adequate' and has accepted it as 'true'.[3]

From this point of view, inter-faith dialogue will involve a talking at cross-purpose and will not really get anywhere. This view is not one that I hold. I believe that it is possible to understand another's faith and that inter-faith conversation can be fruitful.

The question that I am concerned to address is how understanding can occur and how the situation can be viewed not as threatening but rather as enriching.

What attitudes of mind, then are necessary for understanding in such a context? What view of knowledge and understanding makes possible such a conversation? What view of enquiry? What kind of stance enables the participants to 'recognise the other as other'?

I think that there is a dominant view abroad about what is involved in the achievement of understanding in this kind of context. It is a view that emphasises the need to achieve some kind of neutrality in order to achieve a position of objectivity, the assumption being that subjectivity is an inevitable hindrance in the process of trying to do justice to the point of view of others.

I think that this is a common view and is one that we have inherited from the kind of rationalist philosophy that has marked the way many of us have been educated. This view is eloquently advocated by the once influential philosopher of education, Richard Peters who represents in many ways the intellectual approach of the decent liberal.

Now, it is not controversial to say that in the situation of dialogue between people of widely differing world-views, what is required is intellectual integrity. Peters' account presents intellectual integrity as objectivity achieved by the exercise of reason which is described as a kind of self-transcendence with reference to public procedures of objectivity. Peters writes from within the tradition that looks with suspicion on the emotions and his view of intellectual integrity is greatly affected by this bias.

Peters defines reason as 'the transcendence of the particular, the here and now'[4] involving the employment of public procedures of criticism, of testing, and the production of counter-examples. It is based on the rational principle of no distinctions without relevant differences. It is integral to reason that a search must always be made for the negative instance. Since reason is opposed to any kind of arbitrariness, assumptions are constantly tested against public procedures that guarantee objectivity and the 'escape from arbitrariness.'

The reasonable person thus cultivated is one 'who has taken a critic into his own

consciousness'. He is one 'who is prepared to discuss things, to look at a situation from the point of view of others than himself, to discount his own particular biases and predilections', and who is able 'to adopt the point of view of the "generalised other"'.[5]

This account captures, I think a fairly general view of the decent person who is open-minded and rational. The hallmark of the attitudes of mind within this account is carefulness and rationality and a sense of fairness achieved through self-transcendence with reference to public criteria of enquiry. It is also assumed that this kind of stance is the ideal posture to take for the settling of differences and living with differences. So it is in this vein that Peters talks about the role of rationality in the settling of differences and conflict.

My contention is that as admirable as the rational person looks here, there seems to be something vital lacking in this largely intellectual personality. And Peters recognises this, as he then goes on to discuss the place of 'rational passions' that act in the service of reason. These are inclinations against irrationality, monitors to 'keep our eye on the ball', with their concern for standards of consistency, order and objectivity.

Even with this minor addition of 'rational passions', one still wonders if this view of intellectual enquiry is adequate for the purpose of inter-faith understanding. The point of view of the 'generalised other', by virtue of the fact that it aims at rational abstracted understanding, is surely inadequate for understanding another's point of view, particularly another's faith.

For Peters writes[6]:

> ..... *in the use of reason, particularities of time, place and identity are irrelevant to the determination of what is true, correct or to be done.*

This position of abstraction, of the 'generalised other', it seems to me, is particularly inappropriate for approaching a religious position as it is likely to distort the very particularised nature of religious faith, embedded as it is in existential context.

Philosophers of religion have referred to the fact that part of the distinctiveness of religious claims rests on the existential context out of which they arise. They cannot therefore be understood fully on an intellectual basis alone since it is in 'turmoil of soul' that they are conceived.[7] The intellectual approach to them, of abstracted reason, would surely distort their existential and holistic nature. Indeed, the point of view of the 'generalised other' could not adequately access the particularity of a faith position.

Soskice's discussion on the truth and our particularity helps to show that the view of enquiry presented by Peters reflects a rationalist Enlightenment search for the one truth, and the one reason. She shows how this was prefigured in theological controversy that was engendered by the Reformation, citing a very interesting example of the correspondence between Calvin and Cardinal Sadolet in 1539. In their very divided positions on doctrine, Soskice says that they shared the same assumptions about the nature of truth and this shared view of 'Truth is always one, while falsehood is varied and multiform.'[8] was what divided these men so fundamentally. For, if the truth is one, and error is multiform, then only one position could be true. The other must be in error.

This view of truth has obvious implications for inter-faith understanding. If the truth is one, and if I possess it, albeit by the grace of God, then it follows also that I have nothing to learn from you. Soskice shows how this leads to the intransigence of separating 'God-given' and 'man-made' truths, the intransigence also of my point of view, an intransigence vis-a vis the other.

This theological position accords with Peters' rationalist one with their shared assumption that enquiry is the search for the one truth and one reason. For the rationalist, the assumption about the arbitrating role of reason, with reference to public objectivity, in the face of conflicting positions, suggests this kind of stance on truth.

Soskice recommends a different epistemic position, that of 'theological perspectivalism', the thesis that 'the truth may look different from here.' Far from being an expression of relativism, it is, argues Soskice, a revival of the Christian insight of Thomas Aquinas[9] who said that

There is nothing to stop a thing that is objectively more certain by its nature from being subjectively less certain to us because of the disability of our minds.

She continues, citing Aristotle that we are like bats who, in the sunshine, blink at the most obvious things. This is because, what may be objectively certain in itself may be subjectively uncertain to us.

This view of theological perspectivalism does not sit well with Peters' view of enquiry in terms of adopting the point of view of the generalised other, in order to attain objectivity. We saw how in consideration of different points of views, he allowed the limited role of the emotions in the form of the 'rational passions' to achieve objectivity. We also noted that Peters' idea of objectivity is the notion of truth claims fulfilling certain public truth criteria, the idea of objectivity that R.K. Elliott calls 'public objectivity'

Now Elliott, another philosopher of education, makes the distinction between 'public' and 'private' objectivity to make the further point that it is the latter that is largely forgotten in an account like Peters'. This latter is a notion that Elliott wishes to revive from the Kierkegaardian-Socratic tradition, which stresses, not the consensus of the group, i.e. public criteria of verification. Instead, it stresses that the enquirer should be 'in a right relation to the reality towards which he transcends'[10].

The notion of 'private objectivity' is developed in Elliott's account of the love of truth which is understood as the desire to achieve understanding. It is indeed more appropriate to employ the concept of 'understanding' rather than 'knowledge' in relation to religious claims because the former suggests something more profound, synoptic, and 'sensitive to hidden significances, delicate emphasis and nuances of expression.'[11]

To achieve understanding, the individual has to exercise what Elliott calls 'psychical powers' which are a composite of energy and desire called them into play for the sake of achieving understanding.

Elliott says that the qualities that are called into play are not adequately described by Peters' 'rational passions', but are actually more like 'eros', involving characteristics of adventurousness, tenacity, endurance, hope and faith. In other words, the effort to understand is not simply a matter of employing reason, with a smattering of calm rational passions, rather, it involves a process that is far more personally engaging in which the

elements of play and imagination form an integral part.

Elliott says that there is a need to revive a kind of knowing that has largely been lost in much of contemporary academic enquiry. This is a kind of knowing that has the character of resting in the object to which the mind was directed from the beginning of the enquiry. He calls this 'contemplation'.[12]

Contemplation is not the restless hurrying on which Elliott says is typical of enquiry, or the directing of the mind to explanations, opinion or any other object which comes between the mind and its original object. It is an experience that nurtures the contemplator and this is made possible by the fact that within the contemplative attitude, there is a state of 'friendship' towards the object, the mind is directed towards it with the intention of coming to know it.

Elliott[13] describes the attitude of 'friendship' as a willingness to

let the object be itself as it is, the revelation to be received without any turning against the object; rather as a friend is willing for one to 'be oneself' in his company.....

An opposite of intellectual friendship is that in which one is concerned with the object

only in so far as it exhibits aspects which conform to a certain pre-given system of concepts and other conventions, with the implicit intention of acquiring knowledge of the same kind. Aspects which cannot be properly described by the accepted vocabulary are nevertheless assimilated to its standard patterns or, if in a particular case this is too obviously an act of violence, the thinker turns away from that aspect, assigning it to some class which justifies his ignoring it.

Elliott says that this manner of knowing is 'like catching prey in a net, for the sake of what one can go on to do with it when it is caught, or for the sake of the hunting.'[14]

Elliott says that the contemplative experience within enquiry of this kind has the character of an insight and is often psychologically nourishing. It is in fact this sense of satisfaction afforded by enquiry that generates the desire to understand. Elliott then goes on to characterise the 'love of truth' which because it involves the psychical powers that he has been describing is more appropriately called 'intellectual eros', with its combination of energy and desire.

Intellectual eros is therefore very far from being the adoption of a neutral point of view, rather, says Elliott, it is 'more like loving one's enemy' or, friendship with the other.

Let us then apply this model of understanding and intellectual eros to interfaith dialogue.

To start with, the lover of truth, according to Elliott, is not like the person who takes the neutral stance, or who, in Peters' terms, adopts 'the point of view of the generalised other'. The neutral thinker, says Elliott is detached and tries not to identify with either side.

Besides not fitting the situation that we are considering in which believers from different faith traditions are trying to understand one another's beliefs with the sense of ambivalence that this may entail, the position of neutrality, according to Elliott is not even desirable. Neutrality does not accord with the love of truth.

Elliott says that the lover of truth is more like a 'double-minded person' than the neutral person. In contrast to the self-transcendence and apparent objectivity of the neutral person, the double-minded per-

son has a sense of urgency about the situation. Intellectual eros is the will and desire to understand, not in the sense primarily of wanting to subject claims to the criteria of public objectivity, but rather, the desire to broaden understanding. The lover of truth enters into the dialogue between positions and sees each as genuinely viable. This prevents her from trivialising any position as a partisan would do.

Indeed, she may in fact be partisan in the sense of holding a faith position, but it is the desire to enlarge understanding within intellectual eros that causes her to go beyond the position of partisanship. The motivation within intellectual eros is not self-transcending, but in a sense, it is self-regarding, even self-absorbing.

As Elliott[15] says:

unlike the neutral thinker, the double-minded thinker lacks neither the sense of urgency nor the inventiveness of the partisan, and he is not tempted to trivialise the issue by underestimating the difference between the two positions. He knows why such importance is attached to matters which seem minor to the neutral.

It seems to me that this model of understanding from Elliott is well fitted for inter-faith dialogue and can take us much further than the self-transcending model offered by Peters. It accommodates the reality of the situation in which one embraces faith, which characteristically occurs with some passion and possessiveness.

Within Elliott's model, the 'double-minded thinker' is one who is able to retain a sense of conviction at the same time as being imaginative about an opposite position. Generated as love of truth is by the desire for understanding and ever more comprehensive understanding, the other in the dialogue need not be regarded as a threat but as the enabling of that enlarged understanding that I seek.

For the religious believer who loves truth, inter-faith conversations is necessary for the fulfilment of the love of truth. The other in the conversation is a source of my own enlightenment but only as I see him or her as other, in the particularity of her position, only as I contemplate, have an attitude of 'friendship' towards her position, allowing the particularity and difference of that position to count for something.[16]

This can be personally very challenging, involving an experience that goes beyond abstracted reason, of neutrality and the composure of public objectivity that we find in an account like Peters. It is the tenacity of the desire to understand within intellectual eros that can take one this far.

When we consider Buddhist-Christian dialogue, for example, such dialogue for the Christian has potential to enlarge understanding. This occurs, says DiNoia, in its potential to stimulate 'the desired recovery of forgotten or neglected elements in one's own Christian tradition'[17]

But argues DiNoia, this occurs only as the distinctiveness of Buddhist traditions are taken seriously as 'live options'. With the approach of the 'double-minded thinker' and the lover of truth, the Christian can allow the Buddhist to challenge her own notions, leading to more fertile and broad understanding.

As DiNoia[18] writes

... interreligious dialogue promises a mutual enhancement of understanding for the dialogue partners when they are prepared to recognise the other as other.

Fruitfulness in such dialogue is, I suggest, possible through the practice of intellectual eros.

Notes

1. Janet Martin Soskice, 'The Truth looks different from here', in H Regan & A Torrance (eds). 1988. *Christ and Context.* T & T Clark.

2. I refer here to the stands that have been classified as exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralist.

3. See for example, SC Brown, 1969. *Do Religious Claims Make Sense?* SCM Press. Philosophers like SC Brown and DZ Phillips have been called 'Wittgensteinian fideists', notably by Kai Nielsen, but the appropriateness of the link of their positions with Wittgenstein has been disputed, see Fergus Kerr, 1986. *Theology after Wittgenstein.* Blackwell

4. RS Peters, 'Reason and Passion', from *Education and the Development of Reason.* London, RKP, 1972: 210

5. ibid: 212

6. ibid: 210

7. See e.g. Norman Malcolm, 'Anselm's ontological arguments', *The Philosophical Review*, vol LXIX, 1960; Robert Coburn, 'A neglected use of theological language' *Mind*, vol LXXII, July, 1963

8. Soskice, op. cit: 45

9. ibid,

10. RK Elliott, 'Education and Objectivity' *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 16, 1 (1982): 52

11. Elliott, 'Education and Human Being', in SC Brown, (ed.) *Philosophers Discuss Education*, NJ Rowman and Littlefield, 1975: 45

12. Elliott, 'Education, love of one's subject and the love of truth' *Proceedings of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain*, VII, Jan, 1974.

13. ibid: 143

14. ibid

15. ibid: 149

16. It has been suggested that the search for neutrality and disinterestedness is rooted in the Cartesian view of the self and the Enlightenment tradition. This has led to a denigration of prejudice and to an unrealistic view of understanding as the shedding of assumptions and prejudice.

There is an interesting discussion of the nature of understanding as a form of dialogue and 'friendship' in Roger Lundin's *Culture of Interpretation: Christian Faith and the Postmodern World*, Eerdmans, 1993. Drawing upon Gadamer and Ricoeur, Lundin says that to understand another person, one does not put on another's glasses to see the object through entirely different eyes; instead one looks with another upon the object and enters into dialogue in search of understanding. Lundin says that this suggests a 'friendship' model of understanding, (see: 223)

17. JA DiNoia, 'Teaching Differences', *The Journal of Religion*, Jan 1993, 73, 1: 65

18. ibid: 66

Christian-Muslim Encounter: From Diatribe to Dialogue

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The phenomenon of inter-faith dialogue is one of the more notable religious advances of the twentieth century. Indeed, it is only in and through this development that the negative consequences of religious diversity - expressed in the many violent interactions that have occurred in the name of religion - can be overcome. It

also offers a way whereby any underlying 'unity', or, perhaps better, 'comm-unity' between and among various religious communities may be realised, even as the reality of religious pluralism is affirmed and acknowledged. Theodore Ludwig has noted that

the real question is not whether there will be religion in the future. It is whether the sacred paths can help shape the future of humankind in a creative, beneficial, hopeful way. (Ludwig:510)

It would seem to me that if there is to be any hope of a positive shaping to which religion might contribute then the sacred paths must cross in dialogue. In an age of manifest religious pluralism the call to take the road of dialogue is an imperative. And, of course, both the issue of religious pluralism itself, as well as issues of appropriate interaction and relationship between religions, are addressed as the matter of religious dialogue is taken up. For many, however, it is still the case that dialogue is perceived as either a non-issue or as some sort of threat. But, as Ludwig avers,

.. it is not necessary to give up critical thinking in order to dialogue with people of different religions. Dialogue involves a give-and-take that includes questions and challenges as well as respect and acceptance. Comparing religious ideas and practices calls for accurate information and good critical thinking.(Ludwig:514)

The maintenance of critical acumen and intellectual integrity for both parties is of primary concern when the subject of interreligious dialogue is approached. And this is no less the case when considering dialogue between Muslim and Christian.

Since its inception as an historical religion in the seventh century CE Islam has been in interaction with Christianity. The history of this interaction has not been altogether a happy one. Both Islam and Christianity are pre-eminently religions of belief. Each has struggled to define its own orthodoxy against variant heterodoxies from within, and each has a history of self-proclamation as universal truth over against any other claimant from without. So it is little wonder that these two religions have a history of mutual competition, to put it mildly. Despite gestures of relative goodwill, such as that of the Christian Nestorian patriarch Timothy (c8th-9thC) who assumed that "the Muslim and Christian are referring to the same God, although they understand his nature and attributes differently" (Nazir-Ali:18) it is clear that the depth of the differences in understanding goes beyond mere conceptual debate.

Although cues to the dogmatic beliefs of each religion lie in their respective scriptures, the articulation of them into definitive doctrines has emerged, broadly speaking, out of their respective decrees on matters of faith and belief. Each, in their formative years, took both the witness of scripture and the guide of faith-experience - for Christians *Tradition*, for Muslims *Sunnah* - and moulded their respective orthodoxies. Doctrine and dogma cemented orthodox identity. Yet for both religions the task of conceptual re-interpretation and formulaic articulation, if not development and change in particular beliefs or in the understanding of them, have continued through the processes of their respective scholarly debate and discussion. And decrees of orthodoxy notwithstanding, these processes continue.

Even though Islam and Christianity share a common religious heritage from

out of the monotheistic tradition derived from Abraham, Charles Kimball notes that so far as interaction between them is concerned it "has been characterised by mistrust, misunderstanding and mutual antipathy." He asks:

Why have these two communities clashed so vigorously through the centuries? What informs the sense of mistrust that pervades the history of Christian-Muslim relations and skews attempts to relate more constructively today? (Kimball:37)

If the history of Christian-Muslim relations has been one largely of encounters and clashes - to use Gaudeul's phrase - then the need for meaningful dialogue in today's world is indeed pressing. In this paper I shall discuss, in broad outline, some of the features and interpretations of the history of Christian-Muslim encounter and also review some aspects of, and possibilities for, dialogue.

I

Within a century or so of its inception as an historical religion Islam presented to Christianity not simply a rival world religion, but a rival worldview and world power. Islam was first treated by Christians as heresy, implying that it spoke the same religious language but that it derived alternate and incorrect religious conclusions. Yet many Christians went over to this new faith. As Kimball remarks:

With the notable exception of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt, the once thriving Christian communities across North Africa virtually disappeared after the seventh century. Since forced conversion was not the primary reason for the phenomenon, the power of Islamic theology and ideology cannot be ignored.(Kimball:39)

The challenge of Islam to Christianity has, indeed, been impossible to ignore, even though, at times, it has been downplayed. Equally, Christianity has posed an ongoing challenge to Islam: these people of the book simply will not submit to God (Allah) in keeping with the tenets of the Prophet. The issues and history that the mutual challenge involves are complex. Jean-Marie Gaudeul, in his *Encounters and Clashes* offers a useful review of the history of the relationship between Islam and Christianity in which the mutual challenge and response that has engaged the attentions of each may be tracked through broad ages, or what I choose to call a series of 'identifying epochs'. These 'epochs' serve to mark or delineate the ebb and flow of the encounter between these two religions in relation to the dominant historical dynamic that could be said to be operative within Islam at any given time.

The first epoch covers the era of conquests and their aftermath, spanning the 7th-10th centuries of the Common Era: this we may call the epoch of expansion. The second spans the 11th and 12th centuries, a turning point period which Gaudeul refers to as a time of stalemate and power balance. This can also be referred to as the epoch of equilibrium. The next two centuries, broadly speaking, constitutes an epoch of exhortation marked by the two worlds - Christendom and Islam - being at war. Then follows a time of "hostile indifference" (15th-18thC) which we may deem an epoch of enmity. Finally, the period since then - down to the present day - is one which has seen the resurgence of old quarrels but also the emergence of new perspectives. We may call this the epoch of exploration. Thus a review - or rather overview - of the history of Christian-Muslim interaction yields to an analysis of five epochs, viz, expansion,

equilibrium, exhortation, enmity and exploration. Furthermore, these terms themselves not only indicate trends in respect of the broad sweep of history, they also and in particular indicate modalities of relationship and interaction which have variously dominated the historical eras to which they predominantly apply. And, arguably, it is also the case that they are always part of the wider ongoing picture: they certainly all persist, to varying degrees, into the present day.

Alongside these historical modalities that are pertinent to the issue of Christian-Muslim dialogue, we need also to address a number of relationship issues pertinent to the question of dialogue. The Muslim perspective on Christianity begins with the Quranic call to the religiously other - the "people of the Book" - to join with Muslims in a united affirmation of the One God (cf sura 3:64). But, in reality, Jews and Christians, as a whole, could not embrace Islam, even though some communities did during the epoch of expansion. The Christian doctrines concerning the Trinity and the divinity of Christ are traditionally viewed by Islam "as compromising the unity and transcendence of God" (Kimball:46). Yet there is an acknowledged salvific efficacy in Christianity - "they shall have their reward" (sura 2:62 & 5:69). Toleration is affirmed with the injunction that "different religious communities should exist in complete freedom" (Kimball, ibid). Indeed, as the famous sura 2:256 affirms: "There shall be no compulsion in religious matters". Yet it is nonetheless the case that

With few exceptions, most Islamic literature on Christianity has been framed in the language of polemics. Recurring themes include charges of altering or forging parts of the divine revelation, seriously errant doctrine (e.g., original sin, incarnation, atonement, the Trinity) and grievous mistakes in religious practice (e.g. celibacy, veneration of saints, "idol" worship). (Kimball:47)

Perspectives on both sides were based, for the most part, on limited information and an inadequate understanding about the wider tradition of the other. The interplay of ignorance about each other, and the pervasive impact of the worldview presumptions of each, were at work. Also, and in particular, Western scholars on the subject

began with the assumption that Islam was, by definition, false. The finality of God's redemptive action in Jesus Christ was the definitive event for human history. A new religion arising after Christianity, the reasoning goes, must be false or a heretical deviation from the faith.(ibid)

It was but a short step to link Muhammad to the Devil or the Antichrist.

On the other hand, and by way of sharp contrast, Muslims "began with the assumption that Jesus was one of the greatest among the special messengers from God". Indeed, their presumption concerning Jesus was that

the revelation he brought was true and accurate. The frustration and fear vis-a-vis Christendom was never vented through fraudulent or derogatory assaults on Jesus. Rather, it is the distortions and even blasphemous teachings and practices of the Christian community that Muslims feel need to be addressed.(ibid)

II

For dialogue to proceed in the hope, if not expectation, of a productive outcome, the misapprehensions of the past, together with the prejudices of the present, must

be addressed in a climate of mutual and reciprocal correction. And this requires that the very paradigms and perspectives whereby dialogue is framed and constituted must also be addressed. For the ideology of the dialogical encounter will set the context for the extent and nature of inter-religious relationship. In this regard David Lochhead has identified four ideological perspectives - viz, isolation, hostility, competition, and partnership - that apply to the dialogical relationship.

The ideology of **Isolation** is the situation of mutual stand-off, the context for a climate of reciprocal indifference. Indeed it forms the context wherein the "isolated community defines reality for itself". Such a community is unable even to take account of other worldviews or allow that there may even be alternate views of reality. The ideology of **Hostility**, on the other hand, means that the community is no longer isolated, but that it is actively antagonistic towards perceived alternate worldviews. Thus,

> *... the impact of another construction of reality is experienced as a threat. The closeness of the other and the difference of the worldview of the other calls into question the community's own understanding. The challenge of the other community is experienced as a challenge to God. (Lochhead:12)*

This ideology of hostility embraces three features - the other perceived as threat; the 'error' of the other is viewed as being not naive but culpable ('The other is a liar or a deceiver'); and the other is engaging in a deliberate undermining stratagem. Such an ideology yields a "rhetoric of hostility", including powerful images, as, for example, that of the Antichrist in respect of Christianity.

The ideology of **Competition** is second only to Isolation in typifying the predominant mode of Christian-Muslim interfaith relationship and is marked by two features, namely that "competing communities implicitly acknowledge that they have some similarities" and that "competing communities place considerable stress on their differences." Competition may or may not be hostile: but it certainly asserts the superiority of our community and religion over yours. On the other hand, the ideology of **Partnership**, with its inherent values of co-operation and mutual respect, arose initially within the orbit of Christianity, but, in practical terms, may also apply between religions. As an ideology "it is based on the axiomatic affirmation that any real God must be a universal God". (Lochhead:26)

Now Lochhead criticises all these ideologies as dependent on prior valuations of the 'other': each determines the validity or authenticity of any other religious tradition in abstraction from the actual encounter of living dialogue. When 'dialogue' is used as a preparation for conversion, for example, the governing perspective is competitive. The ideology of isolation supports the religious stance of exclusivism, as does the ideology of hostility: maintenance of the purity of faith in isolation results in a form of faithfulness that requires the religiously 'other' to be seen as "fundamentally ignorant and superstitious". Indeed, for the exclusivist, "Openness to other traditions ...would seem to be openness to idolatry. Faithfulness would seem to require a relationship of hostility to communities of other religious traditions." (Lochhead:41) Competition allows a measure of validity in the other whilst maintaining the claim of ultimate superiority - the undergirding motif of religious inclusivism. For many Christians their very identity has been given form and substance by beliefs and

dogmas, expressed in creed and confessional statement, demanding loyalty and assent such that "to fail to defend these definitions, to fail to insist on their non-negotiable character, as required in a competitive relationship with other traditions, implies a failure to be faithful" (Lochhead:41). On the other hand, a partnership ideology, somewhat akin to the pluralist perspective - that is, the view that affirms the mutual relativity of religious worldviews - whilst itself is seen to be vulnerable to the very charges the others seek to combat, raises some profound theological challenges of its own.

Lochhead argues that the relationship types - isolation, hostility, competition, and even partnership - are in fact all monological because their substantive content is predetermined.

A relationship of isolation is monological because it has been determined a priori that the other has nothing significant to say to us. A relationship of hostility discounts a priori anything that the other might say. (Lochhead:78)

The relationship of competition appears open to the other, but it is in fact also monological.

In competition, the other is heard only because the good competitor needs to know the competition... the other is heard primarily so that the position of the competitor can be "answered." (ibid.)

And although partnership is open to dialogical encounter, the openness is qualified: the relationship is established on the basis of some "common ground" and usually within the horizon of a set of parameters, either explicit or implicit. Thus,

in a partnership relationship, everything that the other has to say is interpreted in the context of the common ground as understood by the hearer. ... nothing that the other says ever calls into question the agenda that is set by the "common ground." (ibid.)

As a mode of negotiation, dialogue aims at agreement which requires a measure of compromise, the apparently dangerous side of which is "syncretism". But the first or primary goal of dialogue is understanding, not agreement. Lochhead suggests that dialogue may instead be viewed as **integrative**, for "dialogue with another tradition leads us to a deeper understanding of and loyalty to our own faith traditions." (Lochhead:66). This is so by virtue of the new light and perspective that knowing the other throws on the knowing of self. The dialogical process and attitude may itself be self-reflectively transformative without leading necessarily to either syncretism on the one hand or conversion on the other. Lochhead gives explication to this through an analogy with bilingualism:

When one becomes bilingual, one learns to operate within the categories that are appropriate to each particular language. Each language is considered to have its own integrity. .. one comes to understand one's own language in a more profound way by experiencing it in contrast to a second language. (Lochhead:69)

Thus dialogue has the prospect of "integration", that is, of attaining a new level of self-reflexive understanding and awareness, as well as a concomitant understanding and sympathetic awareness of the other.

III

At this juncture we shall briefly review some of the key issues and themes that have emerged throughout the history of Christian-Muslim encounter. The place of Holy Scripture, both Bible and Qur'an, is clearly a primary issue. From the Muslim perspective, "...the *Qur'an* repeatedly claims continuity with Jewish-Christian tradition and is seen by Muslims as the last Scripture in a long line of Scriptures given to the Prophets.." (cf Sura 2:136) (Nazir-Ali:45) Other scriptures are mentioned within the Qur'an, and "Jews and Christians are challenged to live by the revealed will of God, as found in their books". But it is clear that the principle of abrogation and the doctrine of *tahrif*, in terms of both corruption of meaning, and corruption of the text itself, are critically determinative decreed perspectives, even though "most *Qur'anic* scholars claim that the *Qur'an* does not assert general corruption of the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures, but rather that texts have been misused and certain passages concealed" (Nazir-Ali:46). A typical Christian response to Muslim polemics in respect of the Bible asks "if it is held that the revelation to the Jews and the Christians was time-, people- and place-specific, why should the *Qur'an* not also be regarded in the same way?" (Nazir-Ali:47). There is a fundamental difference in the way the two religions understand the meaning and phenomenon of scripture.

As with Christian understandings of Islam, Muslim views also tended to develop on the basis of information that was "partial, inadequate, superficial, or erroneous" at least so far as the broader Christian tradition was concerned. But similar dynamics of ignorance and worldview presumptions were at work on both sides. Also, and for the most part,

> *Christian interpreters in the West began with the assumption that Islam was, by definition, false. The finality of God's redemptive action in Jesus Christ was the definitive event for human history. A new religion arising after Christianity, the reasoning goes, must be false or a heretical deviation from the faith. (Kimball:47)*

There was, as we have previously noted, also a popular acceptance abroad that in some way Muhammad was linked to the Devil or Antichrist.

With respect to the figure of Christ, the Muslim perspective sees Jesus affirmed and exalted in the Qur'an. Thus the Muslim view is that any point of conflict between the Christian and Quranic perspectives must "arise in relation to the erroneous teachings propagated by Christians" (Kimball:45). Indeed, Islam, from the beginning, simply assumed that Jesus was one of the greatest of the special messengers from God. His revelation was assumed to be true and accurate. From the Muslim point of view it is the Christians who have both distorted the message and wrongly attributed divinity to the messenger. Likewise the doctrine of the Trinity has proved a persistently stubborn stumbling block so far as dialogue is concerned.

Other issues could be reviewed, but the themes of scripture (Bible and Qur'an); messenger or revealer (Jesus and Muhammad); and divinity (Trinity and *tawhid*, the Islamic doctrine of the unity of God) seem to be key ones. And then, of course, there is the matter of the mode of dialogue itself. Dialogue as relationship is a mode of being. Dialogue is both a matter of attitude as well as relation-

ship: a mode of being that governs the ways of doing.

IV

Not all of the modes of encounter and interaction between Christianity and Islam would we see as 'dialogical' strictly speaking, either throughout the history of the relationship, or in terms of present day encounters. Earlier I remarked that the epochs of expansion, equilibrium, exhortation, enmity, and exploration not only denote historical phases but also aspects of contemporary relationship. Expansion stands for the expansiveness of self-confidence, embracing self-righteousness on the one hand and magnanimity on the other. Religion in the expansion mode is determined and assertive. This can be seen today in both Islam and Christianity. But also, too, there is more than a hint of equilibrium: hesitancy to be overly self-assertive; an inclination to humility that properly counterpoints self-righteousness; a measure of openness that marks a balanced approach to the religious 'other'. Again we could say this is a feature of both religions to some degree in the present age. But so, too, do we see contemporary evidence of mutual exhortation: the proclamation and witness which, in its more extreme forms, seeks to declare an exclusive truth and engages with the 'other' only in order to win. There is evidence aplenty of enmity; of dismissive, derogatory and deprecatory prejudice that makes of the religiously 'other' an enemy to be fought and vanquished. But, all these elements notwithstanding, perhaps the undergirding feature of the present age is the motif of exploration; the willingness for a sincere, tentative, open and honest quest to know the religious 'other' - for Christian to know Muslim, and for Muslim to know Christian - and to do so in a climate of mutual recognition of integrity and validity, even as there is recognition of difference and diversity.

To conclude this foray into matters concerning Christian-Muslim dialogue we might agree with Charles Kimball that

For many people in both communities the basic theological issues constitute the primary agenda for Christian-Muslim dialogue. Understanding different orientations is an important step, but it does not resolve the seemingly inherent conflicts. Thoughtful, creative, and persevering efforts are required in order to bridge some of the real and perceived differences in foundational theological understandings. ... Although we all carry the cumulative baggage provided by our deep-rooted heritage, developments in the past 150 years have challenged traditional assumptions and prompted the vexing questions confronting people of faith today. (Kimball:48)

By pursuing the challenge of dialogue we may better comprehend the respective faiths in which we live and move and have our being.

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Interfaith Initiatives and the Preparation of a World Report on Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion or Belief

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I have to confess to coming to the subject of interfaith dialogue rather late in life. Even though I had compiled a large volume of material on religious discrimination for the NSW Anti-Discrimination Board, which was published in 1984, the importance of interfaith dialogue was not truly borne in on me until I attended a United Nations Seminar on encouraging understanding, tolerance and respect for religion or belief, in Geneva the same year.

A vehemently anti-semitic address by the Saudi Arabian delegate shocked the Seminar delegates. He was quoting from materials about the mediaeval blood libel which he had learned in theology at university and had never questioned. Listening to his deluge of century-old hate, I knew that no matter what could be done to improve national and international policy and law, the changes we all wanted could not be achieved without changes to the relationships among believers and their institutions. Seminar participants spoke favourably of interfaith dialogue and urged religious leaders to educate believers about human rights as a whole, not just in matters directly concerning their own belief groups. This is essential for promoting respect for others' beliefs.

The UN Seminar said that tolerance and moral dignity are inherent in all major religions and belief systems:

> *The religions of the world and the systems of humanistic belief are in their essence tolerant and have the same moral dignity. While safeguarding their own principles they can guide their followers or adherents to increasing harmony based on the dignity to be accorded to each human being and based on mutual tolerance, respect and understanding for their respective interpretations of the truth.*[1]

We all know the difficulties which stand in the way of progress. Action is needed at all levels to eliminate intolerance and discrimination and to ensure respect for and freedom of religion or belief. The Seminar encouraged religious bodies to act:

> *Religious bodies and groups at every level have a role to play in the promotion and protection of religious freedoms or beliefs. They should foster the spirit of tolerance within their ranks and between religions or beliefs. Interfaith dialogue based on the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief should be pursued at all levels.*[2]

Most institutional entities take it for granted that they know what are the freedom of belief issues which concern them. Yet their assumptions deserve further examination because the scope of freedom of belief is very large. It involves all kinds of beliefs, both religious and secular, and also includes thought and conscience, matters which have traditionally been associated with the right to belief.

The right to freedom of belief is incorporated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), namely:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

This basic human right is also incorporated in Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which has been ratified by Australia and is the basis for the federal Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986. Last year, the Australian Government confirmed recognition of the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, expanding our understanding of the area of freedom of belief under the federal Act.

There are big gaps in our knowledge about freedom of belief. We need more information to form a consistent picture of how the right to freedom of belief is observed around the world. International human rights protection for this important human right is incomplete. The 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief is not a legally binding international instrument. It has only moral suasion on governments which are signatories. It was passed by consensus in 1981, a triumph of negotiation. It had taken almost 20 years to reach that agreement. Everyone acknowledges that it will be very difficult to get international agreement on a binding Convention. In 1989, Professor Theo van Boven said:

There is a need for solid preparatory work, on the basis of sound research and careful analysis.... The complexity of the subject-matter and the potentially divisive phenomena of religious prejudice and intolerance require such a diligent approach.[3]

Non-government organisations acted on the recommendations of the UN Seminar. A project for compiling a World Report on Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion or Belief came out of this, involving Project Tandem Inc and the Human Rights Centre of the University of Essex.

Here is some background on the work these organisations have been doing. Project Tandem of Minneapolis was formed after the Geneva Seminar especially to promote the Declaration from a non-aligned, pluralist perspective. Between 1986 and 1991, Michael Roan of Tandem put together several international conferences promoting and implementing the 1981 UN Declaration on freedom of belief. He has worked with Kevin Boyle, who had been the rapporteur of the UN Seminar and now is professor of international law and director of the University of Essex Human Rights Centre. Both the University of Essex and Project Tandem set up the World Report project with funding from Pew Charitable Trusts of Philadelphia. Kevin Boyle is the World Report's editor.

The World Report will contain around eighty country reports written primarily by people who live or have been living in those countries. Their reports will form the basis of relatively short but highly concentrated entries in the first volume of the Report. Research associates will contribute further information, and further research on the political, legal, social and economic context will be included. The

second volume will contain analysis of issues and themes which cross country or regional boundaries. The editorial board and project management are agreed on a pluralistic approach to freedom of conscience and belief. We are guided by an International Advisory Board drawn from around the world. Its members come from many belief groups and are people of standing and distinction in the field of religion and belief as well as the field of international human rights. The Report should be released in 1995.

The Report will draw on many sources: UN documents, expert analyses, media reporting, national and international human rights organisations both government and non-government (like Amnesty International), legal networks and expertise, academic researchers in many relevant fields. A major source of information will be belief groups and their members, who will contribute information about what it is like to live as a believer in their own country: what are the prospects for freedom of belief, what restrictions, what opportunities?

The focus of the Report will be on country compliance with the principles of the 1981 UN Declaration on freedom of belief. It will contain information about the political, legal and economic context in which believers live, how much respect for human rights is given, the relationship between majorities and minorities, issues of gender and ethnicity, the position of indigenous people. Instances of discrimination and intolerance will be accompanied by reports of efforts to increase tolerance and respect for belief. Interfaith initiatives, that quiet diplomacy between religious groups, will also be reported wherever possible to encourage even greater efforts in this direction. Religious and interreligious non-government organisation (NGO) committees based in New York and Geneva have been involved in the project since it began.The different contexts and particularities of the country reports reveal a variety of issues and themes. Let me give a number of examples.

My first example concerns theocratic and communist regimes, where the dominance of one belief system may be embedded in law, the political process, government policy-making and the education system. Orthodoxy in belief and nationalist ideology go hand in hand. Minority beliefs and practices are likely to be regarded as political subversion. Consider the case of the Ba'hai's in Iran and Christians like the Jehovah's Witnesses in southern Sudan. Consider Buddhist Tibetans in China. It seems to me that interfaith initiatives can only proceed in these areas with extreme difficulty because of the pressure to ideological conformity with the majority group.

In the following example, we can see that action in the area of law alone is not enough to bring resolution of conflict and a life free of intolerance. There are numerous constitutional guarantees of religion around the world's statute books, but any court of last resort however incorruptible cannot substitute for a culture which respects human rights at all levels. India shows this clearly. The former British colony has a secular basis and constitutional guarantees safeguarding the status of minorities including the so-called untouchables. Yet examples of both religious harmony and religious bigotry are in India constantly before one. Communalism, populist political exploitation of Hindu community prejudice against Muslims, has resulted in loss of life and destruction of an ancient Muslim shrine at Ayodhya.

But communalism in a smaller scope can also be found closer to home. In suburban Sydney, local government officials have been known on occasion to lend their weight to local residents objections to development applications for building a mosque, a shrine, a school for a minority religious organisation which is not Christian. In late February this year, the Premier of Victoria condemned the federal government when he made a public statement to 60,000 Greek protesters about the federal decision to recognise the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The Premier's statement heightened community dissension which had already resulted in the firebombing of two Macedonian Orthodox churches.

In a third instance of one of the issues arising from the project, it is not surprising that political instability may lead to new developments in the relationships between community and religious groups. The dissolution of the USSR has led to tremendous uncertainty about direction. It is still in the process of emerging from over half a century of religious persecution and repression of free expression; there is no history of familiarity with democratic processes. The Russian Orthodox Church, as other Orthodox churches have done elsewhere in the former communist bloc, has moved swiftly to attempt to regain its former eminence and benefits from the state. The Catholic Church did the same in Poland. Minority religions which had some access to communist government ministries of religion in communism's later years suddenly found they could not get the ear of government to express their concerns. Under such conditions, previously close relations with dominant religious groups may become distant.

Fourthly, not all religious groups are on an equal footing in their relationships with government. For instance, in Hungary, methods of registering religious organisations are said to have changed recently. Only religions whose membership is over 10,000 can be registered, and so eligible for government benefits like tax exemptions. There may well be a good public interest argument which underlies this move, such as that tax exemptions should benefit a sizeable portion of the public because they are funded from the public purse. However, such a rationale is rarely articulated by the bureaucracy and thus draws the fire of groups who can say, with some legitimacy, that the early Christians would not have qualified to be registered as a religious body. Formerly colonial countries may also have negotiated church-state relations where mainstream groups have established connections and benefits such as tax-exempt status. In a country like Singapore, mainstream religious interests in retaining benefits and the ear of government are used by the government to shore up its policy of authoritarian pluralism. This makes it difficult for religious bodies to play an independent role, for instance, to be critical of government's social policy. The government requires that 80% of tax exempt donations must be spent openly and accountably in any one year; only 20% may go into accumulated funds. By this means the government ensures that religious groups do not accumulate wealth which they may use in ways which in the government's view threaten the security and stability of the state. Smaller religious groups do not have comparable tax-exempt status.

Another matter on which the World Report will comment will be the status of women in religion and the impact that re-

ligious laws have on the lives of women. For instance, special tribunals may be set up under legislation to administer codes of personal law governed by the rabbinate or shariah. These codes govern issues which in the West we associate with private areas of life: marriage, divorce, sexual relations, fertility, children and custody issues. Because women bear the children and mostly look after them around the world, these laws affect women's lives more than men's and women may not have equal rights with men. Israel's major women's organisations have opposed Section 21 of Israel's first written constitution because it leaves marriage and divorce in the hands of religious courts where a women cannot gain a divorce without the consent of the husband.

Earlier in this article, I referred to the large scope of religious freedom. Many religious institutions would assume that this freedom concerned only the relationship between their institution and others or church-state relations. But there is a further dimension. How can interfaith initiatives relate to tolerance for diversity of conscience within a religious group?

Freedom of belief involves not only an individual freedom (to have and change belief) and a community freedom (a right of association and religious practice with others). It also implies a relationship of reciprocal respect towards the beliefs of others. This respect is as much due to individuals within a religious group as it is to individuals and communities outside the group. The practice of human rights is as important inside as outside a group. It involves respect for the expression of individual thought and conscience.

As we know, there are various barriers to respect for another different or divergent belief. Evangelising on the basis of disrespect and destruction of another's belief may at its worst invoke racial vilification and hatred, rather than a conversion based on espousing a different belief for its own sake. If we claim our own path to truth as the sole one and if we damn everybody else to eternal perdition on the basis of literal readings of sacred texts, are we too arrogant about what is in the mind of God and too little self-examining about human factors? A siege mentality, which creates a wall against change, can have much to do with the exercise of secular power inside a group, even though it may maintain religious group identity and integrity against what seem like the incursions of a hostile world or betrayal from within. Flexibility, change and diversity are, on the contrary, signs of the life and renewal of faith.

Scholars of the five world religions who met in Philadelphia in 1985 thought that there should be awareness of the wide range of human rights inside the belief community as well as in the wider community. Their final statement included these words:

We are convinced that the way each religion and belief teaches its own members to treat fellow members who think differently than they do will tend to carry over in the treatment of members of other religions or beliefs. Hence, it is imperative that all religions or beliefs school their members to accord all others, both within and outside their ranks, the full human integrity, dignity, and religious liberty they claim for themselves. Moreover, the fundamental integrity of all religions and beliefs demands consistency and reciprocity by extending the same level of religious liberty to adherents of other religions and beliefs that they expect for their own members.[4]

Notes

1. Conclusion (d) from Chapter VI of the Seminar on the Encouragement of Understanding, Tolerance and Respect in Matters Relating to Freedom of Religion or Belief, Geneva 3-14 December 1984, United Nations, ST/HR/SER.A/16 :24

2. Recommendation (h) from Chapter VI of the 1984 UN Seminar, op cit :25

3. Concluding observations of Professor Theo van Boven, 'Compilation of Provisions relevant to the Elimination of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief', document of the UN Sub-Committee on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, United Nations, E/CN.4Sub.2/1989/32 quoted in *Belief and State*, newsletter of Project Tandem Inc, Minneapolis Jan 1994

4. *Religious Liberty and Human Rights in Nations and Religions*. Leonard Swidler (ed.). Ecumenical Press, Philadelphia, and Hippocrene Books, New York 1986 :245

Responses to Religious Pluralism in Australia

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No one is now unaware that immigration has profoundly influenced Australia's religious profile. Rushdie, the Gulf War, and increasingly frequent applications to build temples and mosques, have highlighted what many had already begun to notice about their suburbs - that religious diversity is changing Australian society.

In the way of things, the established religious institutions have been slow to react. Facing significant enough challenges already, the issue of religious pluralism has in most cases been of marginal importance.

But this situation itself is changing. At a local level there is an increasing interest in the belief and practices of others. And among hierarchies there is now a greater preparedness to meet with religious leaders across faith boundaries - even in some cases, to join in common action and concern.

The Sources of Increasing Interest in Religious Pluralism

The sources of this change are many, although some factors appear to be particularly influential. No doubt contrary to expectation, the Churches renewed focus on evangelism has led to considerable reflection on religious practice, especially conversion, in a pluralist society. Accompanying this has been a desire to better understand differing belief systems, at least in some cases, though not exclusively, to improve strategies for evangelism.

Religious Encounter in Local Communities

For many, however, an interest in other religions arises out of a completely different context. Encountering the breadth of spirituality that immigration has brought to their communities, many are concerned to understand what the people next door actually believe. Not so

much an interest in doctrine or theological niceties, their concern is much more a matter of practical neighbourliness. How do I act? How will I offend? Will my beliefs necessarily separate us? In this situation, acknowledging and understanding differences occurs simply as another consequence of multiculturalism. Not unlike learning about and tolerating other social and cultural practices.

Interreligious Conflict Overseas

But this interest in other religions has also occurred in a context of increasing interreligious conflict overseas. Correspondingly, there has been a greater awareness of how religion has been used to divide and undermine communities, and a fear that this may be repeated in Australia. Many remain, therefore, apprehensive about the apparently rapid growth of 'foreign' religions, although there is at least a common desire not to provoke interreligious rivalries and divisions.

Whatever the source, however, the consequence has been increasing interreligious activity and reflection in recent years. What follows is a survey of how various people and groups have sought to respond to religious change in Australia, both at an institutional and local level, followed by a reflection on some of the issues raised by this increasing diversity. But first some background.

The Beginnings of Interreligious Contact

Contact between religions in Australia is not new. Ignorance rather than understanding, however, seems to have characterised much of the early history between religious groups in this country. Perhaps the first significant attempt at dialogue began in the late 1960s with Archbishop Woods of Melbourne. As much an act of courtesy, Frank Woods would occasionally invite faith leaders to Bishopscourt for a meal and discussion around a common theme. Although never quite a fixed event in the liturgical calender, contact was at least sufficiently regular to allow a degree of friendship to be established. Many of those who reflect back on these meetings remember gracious hospitality and a genuine interest in discovery and understanding. The road from there, however, has not always been so easy.

The 1980s

Among Anglicans in Melbourne at least, the situation was more difficult under Archbishop Penman. Despite a very strong personal commitment to multiculturalism, David Penman's support for the Arabic and Palestinian communities, combined with frequent criticism of the State of Israel, meant ongoing conflict with local Jewish leaders. There was interaction but it was often uneasy and reserved. In contrast, relations with the Arab and Muslim communities were broad and sustained, and to a much lesser extent friendships were also established with Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs.

And the situation was little different with the Uniting Church, both within Melbourne and nationally. Again, criticism of the State of Israel by Synods and social justice agencies often provoked an angry reaction from Jewish leaders and organisations. A good measure of support existed for the Palestinian cause, although actual dialogue with Muslims was limited to the efforts of just a few.

And Australian Catholics were even more restrained. Again, a few were engaged in dialogue, but the Church hierarchy avoided significant involvement in interreligious activities, save, that is, for participation in the Council of Christians and Jews. Established as a meeting point for senior leaders across the churches and Jewish community, the Council provided a relatively non-threatening forum for interaction. Naturally strongest in Melbourne and Sydney, there was a conscious, though not always successful avoidance of political controversies, which sustained a respectability for the organisation. While perhaps compromising and limiting for some, the significance of maintaining these contacts, given the conflict at other levels, underscored the value of the organisation.

Multifaith Resource Centre

But a recognition in the mid-1980s of the increasing prominence of other religions in Australia, began to gather interest in establishing a much broader organisation to address issues of growing religious pluralism. With financial assistance from the Office of Multicultural Affairs and after considerable consultation, a Multifaith Resource Centre was established in Melbourne. Its function was two-fold, to act as a clearing-house on interreligious issues, and as a resource for education on the spectrum of religious beliefs and practices now represented in the country. The Centre attracted considerable support and interest from the major Christian denominations and other religious communities as well. Indeed, the breadth of participation on its Executive allowed the Resource Centre to function, albeit in a de facto way, as a kind of interreligious council.

Its rapid demise a few years later, therefore, came as a considerable shock to all those interested in such broad ecumenism. After a controversial and divisive Annual General Meeting, the organisation lost all significant support and consequently dissolved. While the story is an interesting one, the important lesson from the experience reinforced the necessity of maintaining considerable trust and accountability in endeavours of this kind.

WCRP V

But while many people in Melbourne were hurt by this experience and have never returned to significant interreligious involvement, the interest generated by the project was quickly transfered to a somewhat dormant World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP). An Australian Chapter of WCRP had been established in 1970 following the return of Max Charlesworth and the Reverend Arthur Preston from the First World Conference on Religion and Peace held in Kyoto, Japan. Early participants in the organisation read something like a who's-who of religious peace and ecumenical workers at that time, but interest had gradually waned. A small Chapter continued in Melbourne with the Reverend Philip Huggins acting as Chairperson, and in Sydney, Stella Cornelius and the Reverend Berne Stevens attempted to maintain a profile for the organisation. Nancy Shelley and others in Canberra attempted an annual interfaith observance under WCRP auspices but only with limited success.

Interest in WCRP, however, was sharply refocussed in early 1987 by the

decision of the WCRP International Governing Board to hold its Fifth World Assembly in Melbourne in January 1989. A Host Committee was formed with Archbishop Penman as Chairperson, including many of those who had been involved in the Multi-faith Resource Centre. With assistance from the Victorian State Government a Conference Secretariat was established and Sheikh Abdullah Nu'man was employed as the Executive Officer.

Despite the enormity of the task undertaken, by any measure WCRP V was a significant success. Indeed, it was to prove a turning-point in interreligious relations in this country. Around 350 people attended from overseas, matched by a similar number participating in some way from Australia. While the gathering was not without some controversy - particularly over the issues of PLO representation and the involvement of a delegate from Tibet - the potential for good community relations signalled by the event was obvious. The Melbourne Assembly established WCRP as a credible organisation to which the State Government was willing to offer further support. On this basis a national Office was established in Melbourne in December 1989 and the Reverend John Baldock was employed as its Secretary-General.

The 1990s

And the momentum in interreligious activity of the late 1980s has only increased in the past three years. WCRP has continued to expand nationally, while other groups have been established where no existing organisation has been present.

At a national level the Uniting Church has established working groups on relations with both the Muslim and Jewish communities. And the Council of Christians and Jews has continued to expand and develop a national structure. The Commission for Dialogue with Living Faith and Community Relations of the Australian Council of Churches has been far more focused under its Chairperson, the Reverend John Bodycomb, who has also been active within the Working Group on Religious Liberty.

State Initiatives

But there has also been increasing activity at a State level, as new groups have been established or reinforced by the growing interest in interreligious dialogue.

Adelaide

Among these, the Interreligious Forum in Adelaide has been one of the more active groups. Chaired by Fr Jeffries Foale, Director of the Catholic Multicultural Office in Adelaide, it has continued to run regular visits to various faith communities and organised an annual interreligious observance.

Perth

And a similar group has also recently been established in Perth, undertaking much the same activities. Having attracted significant involvement from senior faith leaders, the group also functions as an interreligious Council for Western Australia.

Brisbane

One of the most recent attempts to develop interreligious cooperation has occurred in Brisbane, through the impetus of Bureau of Ethnic Affairs in that State. Entitled the 'Interfaith Multicultural Forum', the group was formed in early 1993 to promote and enhance multiculturalism. It has taken a public stand on a number of social issues, consistent with its to com-

mitment to 'religious freedom and the development of a society free from racial and religious prejudice, hatred and discrimination'.

Sydney

And in New South Wales, despite a history of uneasy ecumenical relations, contact between faith communities has been steadily increasing. WCRP maintains a part-time secretariat in Sydney, staffed by Fr Bill Burt, a Divine Word Missionary. The Council for Christian and Jews continues to serve as a forum allowing senior Christian and Jewish leaders to meet, as well as organising regular activities for its members. And, as the Uniting Church's working groups on Jewish and Muslim relations are based in Sydney, much of their focus has been on developing relationships in that city. Furthermore, another informal interreligious group has also arisen, organised with assistance from the Brahma Kumaris. Its focus, however, is generally directed towards supporting Brahma Kumaris initiatives.

Melbourne

But Melbourne continues to be the most ecumenical Australian city, and within Melbourne, WCRP has been most active in work among religious communities. Involved in a broad program in recent years, it has conducted research into Muslim settlement for the Bureau of Immigration and Population Research, held seminars, study-groups, exhibitions, as well as various other activities aimed at encouraging contact and understanding between different faith communities.

The Council for Christians and Jews (CCJ) also continues to prosper in Melbourne, greatly assisted by the Catholic order, the Sisters of Sion. Apart from their involvement with the CCJ, the Sion Sisters are also active in educating Catholics on Judaism and building bridges between the two communities.

Relations between Christian and Jewish groups continue to have the odd moment's tension, such as when recently a prominent Jewish leader raised the issue of religious instruction in Church schools, with respect to the treatment of seemingly anti-Jewish passages in the Christian scriptures. Having entered a classroom after a lesson on the stoning of Saint Stephen, Mark Leibler was rightly concerned that such passages had been used in the past to vilify Jews, and should be understood in the context of the Holocaust. Following a fairly heated debate in the Jewish journal 'Generation', including the publication of private correspondence from the Anglican Archbishop Keith Rayner, a consultative group was formed, comprising prominent Jewish and Christian academics, in order to set guidelines on the treatment of such texts in religious instruction.

Local initiatives

But beyond these more formal initiatives, there have also been a range of activities in recent years in response to both the changing situation in local communities and events like the Gulf War. Perhaps the most creative of these has occurred in Springvale through the work of its Access and Equity Officer, Joyce Robeiro. Acknowledging that the profile of the municipality had changed dramatically over recent years, the Council has worked alongside the local Ministers Association to establish a forum for all faith leaders to meet. A covenant of good neighbourliness has been entered into, a commitment to which is repeated each year at an annual interfaith service. A monthly meeting of faith leaders continues, which among other things, organises regular visits to local religious communities, as well

as further opportunities to encounter the beliefs of others.

Similarly in Broadmeadows, in response to a dramatic increase in the number of Muslims in the area, the local Ministers Fraternal last year organised a study-series on understanding Islam. Examining how Christians might respond to the local Muslim community, around 45 people attended the series each week, indicating the significant interest that can arise in those communities most affected by changes in Australia's religious composition.

Organisational Responses

Indeed the question of mission in a multi-faith context has prompted a number of Christian-based organisations to raise the issue of pluralism within their own constituencies. World Vision, for example, is planning a seminar for early February entitled 'Experiencing Christ in a multi-faith world'. And St Andrew's Hall, the education faculty of the Church Missionary Society, recently conducted a series of consultations around Australia on developing studies on mission in pluralist societies. Their program will supplement an increasing number of courses already available within other ministry faculties.

In themselves, these may be taken to indicate the extent to which interest in studying religion is growing. To give some perspective to this interest in the wider community, Deakin University's correspondence and campus based courses on religious studies will this year enrol some 770 students, while the number studying the Open Learning religious studies option will total somewhere around 800.

Cooperation between Religious Leaders

But this activity is only one consequence of an increasing awareness of Australia's religious pluralism. Whereas once, for example, religious commentary on contemporary social issues was the domain of the Churches, the views of other faith communities are increasingly sought and reported by the media. Moreover, more than in any previous year, 1993 witnessed a preparedness among religious leaders to join together on matters of mutual concern. Statements were issued, for example, on Mabo and in response to decreasing levels of social services in Victoria. With assistance from the World Conference on Religion and Peace and the Australian Council of Churches, the Council on Aboriginal Reconciliation brought together representatives of the various faith communities in support of the reconciliation process. Again with the assistance of WCRP and the Victorian Council of Churches, the Victorian Council of Social Services organised a much publicised Community Summit, which gave prominence to the involvement of faith leaders from various religious traditions.

Again, in August last year, WCRP organised a day seminar entitled **'Towards a Theology of Pluralism'**, involving 26 faith leaders from around the country. As such, the gathering was first extensive meeting of heads of churches and other faith communities in Australia. Discussion on the issue of pluralism occurred not only at a theological level but also in practical consideration of the likely affects of growing religious diversity in this country.

And then again in September last year, with the support of Unicef, WCRP organised a major consultation on the state of children in Asia, Australia and the Pacific. Apart from those attending from overseas, around 70 senior religious leaders and children's workers came from within Australia. The Declaration and Action Plan agreed to by participants, committed them to further cooperation in support of children throughout the region. It was a significant demonstration of how religious communities can join together on matters of shared moral and social concern.

Where is all this going?

But while there has been a growing interest in contact across faith boundaries, relationships are still often hesitant and uncommittal. Many senior Church leaders avoid interreligious forums, as do some from other faiths who are concerned to maintain factional loyalties. In time, however, it may be hoped that both these reactions will diminish in frequency and importance.

But there is also a tendency in many denominations to leave interreligious dialogue to those who are somewhat marginal within their own structures. While obviously there are considerable time demands upon senior religious leaders, this often creates a disparity in interfaith meetings. Some participants may hold considerable representative status, while others will represent virtually no one at all. It can also create an impression that the Churches are not really committed to building strong relationships between faith communities, otherwise more senior representatives would be found.

The Issue of Representivity

But this also raises an important issue for those seeking to organise interreligious activities. There is an immediate dilemma to be faced, do you accept involvement from people of goodwill with little or no representative status, or should effort be directed towards bringing together those in established leadership positions? Experience would suggest that it is difficult to combine both. Alternatively, should a range of forums be organised involving people at different levels of denominational status, enabling participation for all those willing to meet? While the answer is probably the latter, this tends to diminish the human and financial resources available to organise such events. WCRP is the only organisation in Australia to maintain a full-time secretariat available to develop interreligious activities. For others, therefore, organising such events must fit alongside competing demands.

And there is another issue here as well. Most leadership positions within the various faith communities are held by men, also raising the question of whether it is important to involve senior religious women in gatherings among denominational leaders. This requires, however, a decision about who are the most appropriate women to involve. Should it be the head of a religious women's organisation, or someone whose leadership is recognised according to different criteria?

Other Factors affecting Interreligious Relationships

But there are other factors as well likely to affect the development of interfaith relations in Australia. The reaction

to the Muslim and Arab communities during the Gulf War reminded many that the position of minority groups can be extremely fragile during moments of such apparent crisis. Similarly, the rise of ultra-nationalism overseas has demonstrated how easily anti-Jewish sentiments can be heightened and then utilised for cheap political purposes. While on the whole the Churches respond well to such occurrences, their interest in supporting other faith communities is often reactive rather than preventative. There is a scurry to find a representative faith leader to contact or involve in a service of prayers, but often just as quickly as the crisis provoked a reaction, contact will fade away. While no doubt people will be grateful for the Churches support in moments of crisis, they could be forgiven for being somewhat cynical about the purpose of such interest. Much better for the Churches response to arise out of an ongoing relationship consistent with a truly deep level of concern.

But obviously events overseas can affect relations between faith communities in other ways as well. The Israeli-Palestinian Accord, for example, has allowed a level of public interaction between those communities that a year ago would have been impossible. Conversely, the war within the former Yugoslavia has severely disturbed relationships between the immigrant faith communities from that region. In as much as such events are understood along confessional lines, broad acceptance across denominations will always be complex and often strained.

Potential Disharmony in Australia?

But there are also potential causes of disharmony within this country, not least arising from the Churches desire to maintain their privileged position in society. A number of Church leaders, for example, last year openly opposed the annexure of the 1981 Declaration Against Religious Discrimination to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Act (HEREOC), on the basis that it would undermine the Churches ability to employ staff of Christian conviction. While their concern may have been justified if indeed this was a consequence of the Declaration's annexure, though in fact the HEREOC Act provides an exemption for religious communities in employing adherents, their opposition raised the issue of balancing the protection of established interests against securing wider benefits for all religious communities.

And while on this occasion only a minority reacted in this way, it is not the first time that Church leaders have chosen to defend their own interests over assisting the position of others. The strong opposition by many Church leaders at the time of the last referendum to the inclusion of a right to freedom of religion in the Constitution demonstrated a similar attitude. While based primarily on a fear of loosing Government funding for Church schools, their reaction placed the protection of established interests over and above securing the rights of others.

While in one sense their reaction is understandable, ultimately this is a divisive strategy, as it promotes privileges for some that are not available to others. This is hardly likely to promote the kind of generosity in relationships between faith communities that might be considered necessary for building a tolerant multireligious society.

But this issue surfaces in other ways as well. The frequent difficulties encountered by religious minorities in attempting

to build community facilities, which so often causes friction and resentment, also reinforces an appearance that the established religious communities are accepted but others are not welcome. While perhaps most often planning difficulties arise through the encounter with unfamiliar and complicated planning regulations, this is not always the case. Once in private conversation, a former State Planning Minister commented that some local Councils appeared to deliberately misapply planning laws in order to exclude minorities and maintain favour among more established ratepayers. While not responsible for this situation, the Churches and local congregations appear to benefit from it, and could, therefore, be far more active in urging equal treatment for minority religious communities.

Similarly, local Councils have also naturally been loathe to extend the rate exemptions enjoyed by the major Churches to other religious denominations as well. Again the disparity between faith communities maintains an impression that certain religious groups are favoured while others are not. While probably the reality in contemporary Australia is that 'no religion' is the favoured position, continuing inequality between religious groups simply reinforces an attitude of us and them. The Churches position of accepting privileges but not defending similar rights for others is contradictory and unsustainable, and it is time this attitude changed.

At a Governmental Level

But there is also a mixed response to Australia's changing religious profile from other levels of Government as well. For the most part, this seems to derive from the well established tradition that there must be a clear separation of Church and State in Australia, and the Constitutional instruction that no Government funds should be used to promote individual religious traditions. As a consequence, at a Governmental level, there is no established mechanism for dealing with religious institutions outside the structure of those Departments, like Education, Health and Welfare, which are specifically involved in funding community programs organised under religious auspices. The result is that no one arm of Government has a clear responsibility for dealing with the issues raised by Australia's changing religious profile. The Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) will deal with the issue of religious pluralism in as much as it relates to ethnic religious communities. Foreign Affairs may become involved if trade or diplomatic relations are affected. The Attorney General's Department will be concerned if questions like religious divorce or polygamy are raised. And Health may become involved in an issue like female circumcision. But no one Department will have any coordinating brief or oversight, nor even a knowledge of what others are doing or with whom they are working.

One consequence of this is that Governments are enormously hesitant about becoming involved in say a general approach to promote religious tolerance and understanding. There is a basic desire to stay aloof from such issues in case they be accused of favouring one group or disadvantaging another. Where support is forthcoming, in response to particular situations like the Gulf War, as is common with Governments and to a large degree as a result of their ad hoc dealings with religious communities, it is often the most vocal groups which gain attention and some assistance, without regard to issues

of representivity or an appreciation of the religious tradition being espoused.

Hence, apart from limited support received for a few imaginative programs from OMA, the Department of Foreign Affairs, and the previous Victorian State Government, the promotion of good community relations among religious communities would have very much been left to chance and the ad hoc efforts of a few committed individuals. And yet the fear that religious conflict may arise in Australia is strong, both among Governments and the wider population. It seems appropriate, therefore, that the policy of avoiding direct support to promote religious tolerance in Australia be reviewed.

Investing in Religious Tolerance

This also raises the question as to whether the major religious communities themselves will one day consider it appropriate to fund activities aimed at developing interreligious tolerance and understanding. Few would question, for example, the value of senior religious leaders meeting regularly to deal with the range of issues that may arise in a multi-faith society, but this needs coordination. Ultimately it implies the existence of a broadly ecumenical body, not 'owned' by one faith community or another, which is able to perform the task.

And this is more than simply self-justification, but rather a concern that the issues raised by increasing religious pluralism are dealt with consistently and impassionedly, and not only addressed when some crisis occurs.

Generosity Required

Ultimately this will require a spirit of generosity from all parties, but particularly from the major Churches, who are best positioned to support such activities. There is evidence that that support is emerging, though it is still often tentative and noncommittal. In this context, it should be recognised that the rise in minority religious communities in Australia ultimately poses no threat to the position or status of the established Churches. Australia will remain for the very foreseeable future a predominantly Christian society.

A Positive Role for Religious Communities

But perhaps there is another dimension to this as well. Religious communities have considerable moral, motivational, and financial resources to contribute towards the development of a just and tolerant society. Is it not appropriate, therefore, that all people of faith seek ways of enriching the spiritual life of this country and strengthening the ethical foundations of our society? Surely we can learn to put aside differences to such a degree that we can work together to achieve a tolerant and fairer life for all?

Finally

Many have begun to learn that the qualities and hopes they aspire to are often shared in similar measure by their neighbours, even though they may be from a different religion or culture. We may not all be the same but we share enough in common to at least perceive the sincerity and integrity of those who also pray and mediate for a holy life and a

peaceful world. My hope is that the fear of others may soon so begin to subside that the benefits of struggling for good together may prove to be a blessing to this society. For what alternative do we have?

Dialogue and Identity in the Protestant Church of Northern Thailand

Philip Hughes
Christian Research Association

In the years since World War II there has been an increasing interest in interfaith dialogue in many missionary communities. In some places, however, the missionaries find that the local people and national church leaders are either uninterested or actively opposed to dialogue. Indeed, it seems that the modern missionary often has more interest in dialogue and the more general questions of indigenisation than do the local people. An understanding of the historical experiences of the Asian churches rooted in the Western Protestant missionary movements goes a long way in explaining the sources of indifference and opposition. Northern Thailand provides an instructive case.

The missionaries who brought Christianity to northern Thailand saw Buddhism and Christianity as competing religious systems. Daniel McGilvary, the first missionary to northern Thailand, arrived in the city of Chiang Mai to settle there in 1867. He was an American Presbyterian of Scottish parentage and deeply concerned to preserve Protestant orthodoxy against all forms of un-Christian thought. He was quite sure that Christianity was bringing light to replace false beliefs and superstitions. Buddhism, he said, had no remedy for the problem of sin. Christianity provided the only answer and was the only true system of faith. McGilvary and many early missionaries pointed to Western civilisation and technology as evidence of the validity of Christianity.

Nevertheless, McGilvary relished opportunities to debate the relative strengths of Christianity and Buddhism. Among the regular visitors to his house was a Buddhist monk, who would spend many hours with him discussing the merits of their respective religions. While McGilvary could never accept the truth of Buddhism, he did appear open to accepting the spirituality of certain Buddhists. For example, two years after McGilvary arrived, the king of Chiang Mai had two of the first converts killed. McGilvary and his family, and another missionary family were ostracised and isolated. The missionaries were in fear of their lives. They send messages to Bangkok to seek support. During the months that followed, two people, a Buddhist monk and a princess in the royal household, continued to help the missionaries. Neither gave up their loyalty to Buddhism despite a great interest in Christianity. McGilvary often wondered if, in some way, these two people were not 'Christian' in some sense, despite their unwillingness to give up their Buddhist involvement.

With one or two minor exceptions, the missionaries affirmed strongly that Christianity was the only true religion. It pro-

vided, they said, the only solution for the basic human problem of sin, and it would change the lives of those who adopted it. Not only would it change the lives of individuals, but of the whole society. Rev. Henry White, later dean of the mission's theological school, argued that the gospel had made Great Britain into the greatest and mightiest Christian Empire on the face of the earth. 'What the Gospel has done for Europe it can do for her sister continent, Asia' through conviction of sin, moral accountability, and the acceptance of Christ as Saviour[1].

The missionaries urged all converts to separate themselves totally from Buddhism. They prohibited the converts from taking part in any Buddhist ceremonies or visiting any temples. The mission established schools for the children of the converts so that they would not become contaminated with Buddhist teaching. In other words, the missionaries encouraged total separation from anything Buddhist.

This separation created a Christian community which appeared alien to the larger culture. In general, Thai Buddhists saw Christianity as a foreign, Western religion. To involve oneself in it meant to give up something of what it meant to be Thai. A sociologist, Carl Zimmerman, who did a study of the Christian community in Thailand in 1931 noted how foreign it appeared. Its art, literature, music, art, and architecture, and even many social customs practised in the church were foreign. The confrontational, aggressive crusading style of Christianity, he said, was incompatible with the culture. Thus a convert would be de-nationalised and de-culturised from his or her own social system[2].

Between the two world wars, some missionaries became concerned about the view of Christianity as foreign and competing with Buddhism. Roderick Gillies, one of the leading missionaries during this period, wrote[3],

Becoming a Christian has meant in some ways a radical break with the established order. Christianity has looked on one side of it like a destructive force. It has been difficult to bring home the fact that the Christian way is not to destroy but to fulfil, that it seeks to destroy nothing and oppose nothing save what is untrue and bad, that its aim is rather the fulfilment of all righteousness and all good wherever found.

Few of Gillies' missionary colleagues shared his concern. In any event, the Christian community experienced a fresh infusion of 'separatism' in the form of evangelistic campaigns in 1938 and 1939 led by John Sung, a Chinese evangelist. He stressed the idea of a totally pure life, consecrated to God. In his meetings, he named specific sins, and asked the congregation to put up their hands in confession if they had committed any of them. He was very critical of many missionaries who were not as pure and separate in his eyes as they should have been. Sung made a substantial impression on the northern Thai Protestant community, visiting nearly all the regional and sub-regional centres where Christians lived. He ignited fervour hitherto lacking, but, it must be said, the fervour he aroused was hardly conducive to dialogue between faiths.

The years immediately following the second World War witnessed a rapid growth in the church. Since the United States and its allies won the war, many Thai people felt that Thailand had failed in allowing Japan to overrun the land. American science and technology were held in high regard. Many people wanted their children to learn the American ways

through the Christian schools. Some joined the church. However, this spurt of growth did not last.

The missionaries maintained the superiority of Christianity arguing that it affirmed the world while, they said, Buddhism was essentially world-denying. They also claimed that Christianity was a more suitable religion for a country going through modernisation. It would also be able to withstand the pressures of Communism, as Buddhism had not been able to do in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.

However, there was a greater appreciation of some aspects of Buddhism. The head of the Christian boys' school in Chiang Mai, Kenneth Wells studied Buddhism and wrote what is still regarded as the authoritative English text on the rituals of Thai Buddhism. Yet, in lectures that he gave in 1963, he argued that in most respects Christianity and Buddhism were quite distinct. Regarding the nature of religion, he said Christianity saw it as revelation, while Buddhism saw it as teaching. Their views of history are also distinct: linear versus cyclical. Their views of life are different: inherently good versus inherently evil. There are, according to Wells, similarities in their moral systems and their acknowledgment of the human predicament, but their respective solutions were totally distinct. For Buddhism, the solution lay in faith in one's self, he said, while for Christianity it was faith in God[4].

Kenneth Wells represented the mainstream Presbyterian missionary view of Buddhism that began to emerge in the 1920s. Superficially it was more appreciative and less antagonistic to Buddhism, tending to replace Buddhism with animism as 'the enemy'. These changes were, in part, due to decades of experience of Buddhism, in which the missionaries found Buddhism to be not as evil as they had originally claimed. It was also due to government policy which pressured missionaries to cease attacking Buddhism.

An interest in what might be termed 'proto-dialogue' finally appeared among some missionaries in the 1950s. Sinclair Thompson, for example, was interested in the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity. Following Thompson's death in a train accident in 1961, the McGilvary Theological Seminary established a lectureship series on the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity called the 'Sinclair Thompson Memorial Lectures'. These lectures have represented perhaps the greatest contribution from Protestants in Thailand to interfaith dialogue. The series has exposed a variety of view points and allowed both Thais and Westerners invaluable opportunities to reflect on the relationship between these two faiths, particularly in the Thai context.

Francis Seely was another missionary who became increasingly interested in Buddhism. He spent a great deal of time with the Buddhists and did all he could to promote mutual understanding and dialogue. In 1970s he established the Dharma Logos Project which had dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism as its aim. The project gathered a library. He published a regular newsletter and it brought people together for discussion.

A few missionaries came to reflect on the significance of Buddhism through a concern to find indigenous expressions of faith in the Thai context. They were deeply concerned that Christianity was seen as a 'foreign' religion and wanted it to be Thai. They encouraged the use of Thai music, and symbols and spoke about the necessity of 'indigenising' the Chris-

tian faith. Theologically, Kosuke Koyama, a Japanese missionary who taught theology at the theological seminary in Chiang Mai, was a leader in this movement[5].

The issues of 'indigenisation' were taken up again in different forms. For example, Dr Maen Pongudom, dean of the theological seminary in Chiang Mai, wrote about the need to find how God has been at work not just in Israel, but in the history of the Thai people. The assumption is that God must have been at work, somehow, within Buddhism[6].

However, there has been very little positive response among the Thai Protestant Christians to these initiatives. Few have taken opportunity for formal dialogue while the majority remain committed to separatism. Thai Protestants do not often go into the Buddhist temples and they are ambivalent about participating in any ceremonies which have strong Buddhist or animist overtones. In general, they will avoid what they consider to be Buddhist language in the discussion of their own religion. They have little interest in using Thai music in worship, and avoid any hint of Buddhist styles of architecture.

To understand this reaction, it is important to understand why these people have become Christians, or why, as in many cases, their grandparents or great-grandparents became Christians. From the emergence of Christian communities in the 1880s until well into the twentieth century, Protestant converts largely came from three identifiable groups.

1.**People who were impressed by the effectiveness of the medical work of the missionaries**. The missionaries established hospitals in nearly every region in the north and developed an impressive medical system of clinics, dispensaries and medical evangelism. The missionary doctors played an important role in the introduction of Western medicine and frequently effected cures that seemed miraculous to the people. They saw the purpose of Western medicine as:

(1) showing humanitarian concern;
(2) reaching people who in their need were more open to Christianity;
(3) demonstrating the superiority of Western science, which they believed was an outgrowth of 'Christian civilisation' and proved the superiority of Christianity.

Many Thai people saw the results as showing that the missionaries had access to superior powers to those of the local spirits and many people who were cured through the missionaries' medical agencies were converted to Christianity.

Although the missionaries were involved in medical work virtually from the beginning, it achieved an apex during the great malaria epidemic of 1911 to 1913, which accompanied famine conditions in several regions of northern Siam. The Thai people initially made offerings to the local spirits. When the epidemic continued and the famine grew more severe, they tried the medicines and food distributed by bands of Thai Christian evangelists. Some reports suggest that two thousand people converted to Christianity in the city of Chiang Mai alone at this time.

In later years, the missionary medical work lost much of its evangelistic significance as the government and private 'secular' agencies came to dominate medicine in Thailand.

2. **People accused of witchcraft**. If someone became ill in a village, traditionally, a spirit doctor would be called in. He would go through a ceremony during which the sick person had to call out the name of the spirit causing the sickness.

The spirit doctor then identified the person responsible for feeding and humouring this spirit. Often those accused of causing the problems suffered severe persecution. Ostracism was common and death not unheard of.

Due to social pressures, accusations of witchcraft became very common for a few years during a time of rapid social change in the late nineteenth century. Many accused found that the only people who would accept them were the missionaries, who had no fear of the spirits for whom they were responsible. Indeed, by identifying with Christianity and cutting off all contact with the spirits who were causing them trouble, they appeared to overcome their problems.

The last instance in which a Christian community arose because of accusations occurred in the early 1930s. In northeastern Thailand, however, accusations of witchcraft still occasionally bring converts into Christianity.

3. **People seeking missionary patronage.** During the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, there were considerable social changes in northern Thailand. These changes were caused partly by the gradual takeover of the feudal system in northern Thailand by the central Thai government bureaucracy. As feudal lords were pensioned off and removed by the bureaucracy, they could no longer offer patronage to local peasants. The peasants were forced to find new patrons. Quite a number turned to the missionaries. Between 1910 and 1915, for example, the mission in northern Thailand employed several hundred people. These people included evangelists, pastors, teachers, nurses, other hospital employees, employees at the mission press, servants in missionary homes, guards for mission property, cleaners, gardeners and cooks. The larger circle of missionary dependants, direct or indirect, ran into thousands. In general, the mission employed only Christians.

The mission in northern Thailand ceased to grow in size about 1915. Through the 1920s, the economic depression in the United States meant less money for the employment of people in Thailand. Between 1920 and 1940, the number of Thai people employed by the mission stabilised at about 220. Employment maintained the loyalty of many Christians, but no longer had any influence in drawing people into the Christian circle.

Since 1915, the Protestant Christian community in northern Thailand has grown more through biological growth than through conversions from the Buddhist community. Many people in the Christian community today trace their involvement back several generations. Among those who have been converted more recently, many have been leprosy patients. Society has frequently shunned people suffering from leprosy and forced many to leave their home villages. Prior to World War II, about one thousand, five hundred leprosy sufferers came to live at the McKean Leprosarium outside Chiang Mai operated by the Presbyterian mission. They found there a new identity. They were not rejected as people cursed by the sins of past lives. Rather, many saw themselves anew as children of God who had a special identity and role in Thailand. Today, leprosy patients, past or present, and their families constitute a substantial proportion of the northern Thai church, perhaps as much as 20%. In many cases, families have maintained their links with the Christian faith over several generations.

The development of the Christian community in northern Thailand has not occurred because people have become logically convinced of the arguments for Christianity compared with Buddhism. Each group of converts mentioned above has come into the Christian community because it has been rejected by, or has found resources in its own community inadequate. Many of them have faced ostracised from their Buddhist neighbours, either through accusations of witchcraft, or because of the problem of leprosy. Others have found resources within their own religion and own community inadequate to cope with their problems of health or their need for employment. The Christian community accepted people unacceptable in their own community. It has offered resources for health and employment to many others who could not find those resources elsewhere.

The change from Buddhism to Christianity has been a change in the community with which they identified. It has meant a change in institutions, a change in customs and ceremonies. With this has come the learning of new forms of expression in music and language, and a new set of symbols. Research conducted by Philip Hughes[7] confirmed that conversion involved a change of community and identification rather than basic life values or even forms of religiosity.

This change in the community with which the converts identified has involved an ethos of 'separatism' from the wider, Buddhist community for several reasons. The first is that the early missionaries created the Christian community as a total separate identity and encouraged the converts to separate themselves as far as possible from the Buddhist community. The missionaries formed the Christian community as something totally distinct and separate in terms of its institutions, customs, and religious language and symbols. They also created a distinct Christian community through providing alternative Christian institutions for schooling, health, and for employment opportunities. Christians could live largely within these Christian institutions, and were physically able to separate themselves largely from the wider community. Thus, a strong ethos of separatism was developed in the Christian community from its foundation.

This was compounded by the fact that many converts were people who felt rejected by or were disillusioned with the wider Buddhist community. Many of them turned to the Christian community because they had been ostracised, either because of problems with spirits, or because of leprosy. Having been ostracised, they were not interested in seeking to return to the Buddhist community, and many of them did not have the opportunity to do so.

The Christian community not only accepted these people, but gave them a new identity in which they could find self-esteem. This identity was predicated on the fact that they were now different. They had been saved out of the evil world. The Christians were encouraged to see themselves both by the theology they were taught and by their situation as 'the saved' over against the 'unsaved' of the world.

The result of the missionaries' efforts was inevitably the formation of what sociologists would term a 'sect'. The Christian community was necessarily one to which individuals or groups of people made distinctive and free commitment. It was a community which sought total and exclusive allegiance. The community identified itself by its distinctiveness from

the Buddhist world. Thus, it was, in a sense, a 'world-denying' sect.

The idea of dialogue with the Buddhist world brings into question some of the primary characteristics of the Thai Protestant Christian community. For it suggests that the Buddhist world may contain some truth and some value, and that not all truth is contained within the Christian community. Dialogue requires the Christian community to be open to the Buddhist community while the Christian community has found its identity in opposition to the Buddhists and in an exclusive claim to the truth.

It is a little ironic that the World Council of Churches held a theological consultation on dialogue in Chiang Mai. The consultation exhorted Christians to find their identity not only in their Christian faith, but also in the 'world of Christian communities'. It was argued that 'it is the Christian faith which sets us free to be open to the faiths of others, to risk, to trust, and to be vulnerable'. It invited Christians to consider again the mission of God in the world (*misseo Dei*) with the implication that God has been at work in Buddhism and in the Thai history and culture outside the Christian community.

For people whose very identity is founded upon their distinctiveness and their community upon separation, such exhortations could only be perceived as a threat.

Notes

1. Henry White, 'The Aim and Value of Mission Enterprise, *Laos News*, 3, 1,(January 1911): 14-17.

2. C.C. Zimmerman and Mrs. Geo B. McFarland, 'Report on Siam, 1931', in Maen Research Papers, Manuscript Division, Payap University, Chiang Mai.

3. Roderick Gillies, 'Christian Evangelism in Northern Siam', *Siam Outlook*, April 1935: 76.

4. Kenneth E. Wells, *Theravada Buddhism and Protestant Christianity*, Sinclair Thompson Memorial Lectures series no. 2, Chiang Mai: Thailand Theological Seminary, 1963.

5. See, in particular, Kosuke Koyama, *Water-buffalo Theology*, London: SCM Press, 1974.

6. For example, in Maen Pongudom, *Tang Ork Peu Kwarm Yoorort*, Bangkok: Church of Christ in Thailand, 2520 B.E.

7. Philip J. Hughes, 'Christianity and Culture: A Case Study in Northern Thailand', D.Theol thesis submitted to the South East Asia Graduate School of Theology, 1983.

8. S. J. Samartha (ed.), *Faith in the midst of faiths: Reflections on Dialogue in Community*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1977. See especially the statement adopted by the consultation pages 134-149.

The Lotus and the Cross
A Personal Journey into Religious Interconnectedness

Diana Law

Engines roared, the plane soared and I heaved deeply, knowing that a chapter of life was drawing to a definitive close. Up till now all had unfolded within the firm confines of a Catholic environment. While saying good-bye to one of my brothers at Mascot, he slipped a small inconspicuous book into my hands with a bland title indicating it was a simple introduction to Zen Buddhism. I buried it into my handbag and made a mental note of its irrelevance. With 'missionary' stamped onto my visa, he could have at least given me something with a Christian flavour to support me on this trip into 'aloneness'.

Arriving at Tokyo, I was met by the comforting smiles of two Good Samaritan Sisters. Had the sense of 'aloneness' been an illusion? The old familiar firm confines were transposed into another cultural setting. Like a rabbit to a burrow, I could run for refuge!

Boarding the monorail in days when they were still a novelty, Pamela said: "This train only runs on one rail". Sitting in a carriage packed with Japanese people, sensing a deep peace which I had always interpreted theologically as the presence of the Holy Spirit, I pondered the monorail's deeper symbolic significance.

The door creaked softly. Inside the small chapel a Japanese Sister sat in the 'sei-za' position. Outside, a troubled voice whispered to me: "I don't know why she sits like that!"

"Why shouldn't she?" I mused.

Days unfolded into weeks and more and more I sensed a Mystery of meaning and at-one-ment, which was beyond the confines of church parameters. My conceptual consciousness was jarred by the existential experience of a train which didn't need two rails. It was silenced into awesome receptivity by the Presence of Mystery, which did not depend on any of the rails with which I was familiar within the Christian tradition.

Cornered by ignorance and language problems, I chose to wait, watch and to open up my ears as far as my feet! If I searched for the key to understanding, I sensed it would elude me but if waited long enough I presumed that my eyes would adjust to the light and I would be able to see it naturally.

Somewhere in the midst of this waiting time, I remembered my brother's farewell gift, an *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*. I rapidly gleaned through the book from cover to cover and felt a little closer to the key. Somehow, at a time I could never predict, the cataract of conceptual blindness would dissolve!

Responding to an invitation to participate in a retreat about the 'Jesus Prayer', I sensed that the unknown waters of Buddhism would gently mingle at unknowable depths of consciousness and that the time for the meeting of the currents was drawing close. The retreat leader spoke about the necessity of a breakthrough from the head to the heart.

The bridge was the breathing. Over and over again we said the name of Jesus. Over and over again, we breathed the name of Jesus. "Stay with your breathing, morning till night"..."Stay with your breathing"..."Be conscious of your breathing"..."If you want a breakthrough from your head to your heart, keep breathing the Name of Jesus"..."The breakthrough will occur within six months if you keep breathing the name of Jesus"...

Back in the silence of my room, I knew that I needed inner discipline. Silencing the mind through the discipline of breathing with awareness was the changing from a double to a single railway track. I would take the risk! Jumping over the cliff from mental securities was far more demanding than sitting in a jumbo jet and leaving behind native language, intimate bonds and cultural heritages.

With the screeching of an alarm at 4.00am each morning, my intellect was subjected to the hardest discipline it had to endure. It was silenced not by the soothing gentleness of divine, human or cosmic union but by the stern dictates of a will which denounced its activity for the first waking hour in order to breath the name: 'Je-s-us'. Bare boards, freezing temperatures and efforts to sit in the now familiar 'sei-za' position with back erect, all combined to make the enforced hour into a fiesta at its passing.

Thus, days and weeks passed in what seemed like a 'tunnel-confined' marathon in physical and mental discipline. It did not provide the slightest glimmer of light in its distant horizon to suggest that a breakthrough from the head to the heart was occurring

However, joy-oh!-bliss, the end of the hour when the effort ceased, bubbled with its own blessings. At communal times of meditation, the unction of God's all-pervading presence seemed far more perceptible; during the recitation of psalms and readings from other parts of Scripture, the inner meaning seemed to leap from the written word; Strolling down the busy, narrow streets of Hatsudai to the railway station, some small birds surviving the pollution seemed to sing the name, Jesus. Jammed, crammed in peak-hour from Shinjuku, with no chance of moving an arm from its wedged position, a rhythmic movement of the train pulsed with the name and presence: Je-s-us. Mounting the steps to begin teaching at the University, the usual last-minute butterflies seemed to have fluttered away and the sixty pairs of deep eyes all seemed to communicate to me the name and presence of Jesus. Joy, inner peace and confidence lit up the day like the rising sun after the darkness, struggle and boredom of the hour of discipline in the cold of the parting hours of the night. Neither person nor event nor thing could be seen, heard or experienced except as a manifestation of the person and presence of Jesus. Theologically, I interpreted this awareness as a consciousness of the Cosmic Christ, the Kyrios, in whom we live, move and have our being and through whom the whole of the cosmos groans towards completion [rf. Rom. 8].

While visiting Buddhist temples or Shinto shrines, I revelled in the peace and harmony which, like ripples in a pond, seemed to resonate throughout the universe. I waited patiently for the door to open so that I could taste more deeply the living waters, drawn from non-familiar wells, through shared interreligious praxis and existential living.

Thus, it seemed as natural as the rising of the moon with the waning of the sun, to respond to an invitation of a university colleague to attend a Christian-Zen retreat

at Shinmeikutsu, a Jesuit Christian-Zen monastery to the North of Tokyo. For the first time I met Fr Enomiya Lasalle, a Jesuit priest who was endowed with the title "Zen Master", after completing all the koan training at San-Un Zen-do in Kamakurra under Yamada Roshi.

Crouched in a mountainous region, Shinmeikutsu seemed like a motionless crocodile. Quietness, gentleness, stillness, beauty exuded from its walls and blended with its equally lavish natural surroundings of pine-decked mountains, cloaked in the transparent veil of rising, coiling mists. It was not without intrepidity, I crossed the threshold. Could I hear the crocodile's teeth chattering? The inner journey can do more than dismember the body!

Alone, in my designated paper-walled room I eyed my rolled mat which was to be my bed for the next five days. There was nothing else. I sensed that I was approaching a mighty chasm. It beckoned me to let go of securities (physical, mental, psychic and spiritual) so as to leap into unknown territories. Somehow, I was expecting to face such a chasm when I entered the Convent ten years earlier. Suddenly, I was arriving where I had expected the journey to start. The setting was culled in Buddhist culture and spirituality and rooted in Christian connectedness.

Moment unfolded into moment, day into day without any clashing of crocodile's teeth or dramatic hurling from cliffs. Every muscle ached from being stretched into the lotus position, every breath searched for a new realisation of Jesus, beyond all conceptual parameters. "If you know the Buddha, kill it; if you have a concept of Jesus, kill it!" was the advice of Fr Enomiya Lasalle. Toughness, boredom, discipline, fatigue and pain were constant companions throughout the week.

Therefore, while it was a relief to leave this Christian Zen monastery, I knew that life would never be the same again. Walking up the bush track, everything shone, sparkled, sped in splendour. The Spirit pulsing within me was the Spirit pulsing within all creation and the demarcation line between identities was grounded in a unity which embraced the whole cosmos.

Already the chasm of 'no-mind' was revealing its secrets. The more purely the eye is opened the more one sees things in finest detail. The sound of the distant bell rings within one's being and nothing is external for in a real sense one's parameters expand without limit. I gleaned the depth of Jesus' prayer: "Father, I pray that they may be one, as you are in me and I am in you; may they be one in us." Ruminating intellectually, such unity evaded comprehension. However, the more I opened my eyes to see with my heart and opened my ears to receive the trains roaring through me or the birds singing within me, I knew that all was one.

The challenge became not one of knowledge but rather of awareness. This in no way depreciates the value of acquired learning and I still pursue post-doctoral research in interreligious dialogue and connectedness knowing that it is an important key to holistic healing. Not only healing of the pain, loneliness, rejection and fears of the individual which cause so many interrelated psychic and physical illnesses but also healing of the fractures in mutual care and respect between nations which has caused widespread oppression, exploitation, brutality and destruction.

It is both a sociological and psychological fact that once change occurs be-

yond a certain point there is no return to the original premise. A paradigm shift occurs. Thus, as the days and weeks unfolded after the 'Sesshin' at Shinmeikutsu, I knew that there was no going back to old securities. At times, for very brief periods, I have attempted to do so but it only leads to inner disturbance and outer security has little value if it is divorced from inner stability. At the right time, I sensed that the door would open for me to practise Zen under a Zen Master within a Buddhist milieu. I didn't want to push the parameters of my psyche too far or too quickly. I waited for the door to open, extending the morning hour of disciplined sitting and breathing with awareness. The more consciously I breathed, the more deeply aware I was of God's all-pervading presence. It was not necessary to mentally articulate the name of Jesus any more for somehow to breathe was to breathe Jesus. On a deeper level the beat of my heart and pulse throughout my body, was the pulse, Jesus. When my mind was stilled through disciplined breathing, the interior dialogue surrendered to the orchestral cosmos.

The eternal, infinite, almighty Word of God became flesh. In Jesus, the same matter, from which you and me and the whole cosmos is composed, is transfigured in glory and through the process of death and resurrection is irrevocably glorified and divinised. As the first fruits of all creation, the whole cosmos started to unfold so much wonder, power and beauty that I realised my mind could not cope with the greatness and that the road ahead was to be one of increasing surrender, openness, receptivity and gratitude. In the incomprehensible totality of cosmic radiance, meaning and fulfilment, "he must increase and I must decrease". In fact, as the 'grain of wheat', the road ahead had to also be one of death to all that was not in tune with this awareness.

Grading a pile of assignments in a shared office on the twelfth floor of Jochi University, Tokyo, books suddenly started to fall as the building rocked furiously in an earth tremor. I sat glued to the seat even though the building was equipped with steel desks to climb under for safety during such displays of natural vehemence. For the previous two weeks, I had taught a double quota of classes, helping a colleague who was attending a Conference in Rome. I was tired. Bewildered by the suicide of one of the pupils from my colleague's classes and trying to exonerate myself from responsibility, all I could do was sit. Sit and let happen what was going to happen!

The books stopped falling and the building ceased rocking. The debris was relatively easy to rectify. However, the assignments were anchored securely under my arms beckoning me by their quantity to receive further attention. Scanning through them, my eyes fell upon the name of the student who was to be buried the following day. If only I had read her work before she killed herself, would I have picked up a cry for help? Suddenly, I realised the great distance which I had to travel before I could walk in other's shoes. Compassion (karuna) was fairly dull even though I professed to be a sister of the Good Samaritan. Lightning was flashing, thunder roaring and rain pouring. I recalled both the Buddhist journey of enlightenment leading to the marketplace of human suffering and the deep meaning of the Christian Eucharist, which transforms lives so that people become as bread broken and shared for others.

Thus, it was with a growing awareness of the importance of the 'great death' as the mystery at the heart of religious tradi-

tions that I responded to an invitation to attend introductory talks which would then open the door to the way of Zen as practised and taught by Yamada Roshi at San-Un Buddhist Zen-do in Kamakurra. This was a moment I had waited for with both eagerness and trepidation. Some of my colleagues were already avid practitioners. I was also assured by the knowledge that Fr Enomiya Lasalle had completed all his Zen training here and that Thomas Merton was en route to this Zen Master at the time of his death in Bangkok.

Quietness, austerity, warmth, coldness, solitude, community, single-mindedness and commitment enveloped and nurtured me a I became part of this Zen group. No questions were asked about my personal religious affiliations but I sensed an extraordinary sensitivity and respect by the Zen Master for the whole Christian way of life. I recalled the Latin derivation of the word 'religion' and its intrinsic meaning to bind people together. If all religious traditions were as faithful to their name as this man epitomised, what extraordinary power for societal change would be released globally.

Training was all-pervasive, centred in the Zen-do but extending into every facet of life. By this time, sitting in the semi-lotus position was not a source of great discomfort and in fact I was beginning to reap some of the advantages to mental and physical well-being from sitting in such a disciplined way. Awareness of breathing and of its potential for bridging conscious and unconscious forces within the psyche was becoming a way of life. Koan training began in full force with the usual gateless gate: "What is MU"; "Show MU". A literal translation of 'mu' is 'nothingness'. In Philippians 2:6, it is used by translators for the kenosis of Jesus: "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing."

However, in all koan training one learns to surrender conceptual searching and to delve into deeper levels of consciousness for more holistic solutions which are accompanied by on-going awareness. How often I am stimulated, challenged, 'blown out of my mind' by intellectual insights but how difficult it is for the intellect to be wedded to on-going awareness.

From the beginning of serious Zen practice, I did not experience any dichotomy between immersion within a Christian community and immersion within a Zen-Buddhist community. The depth experience was poignant with interconnectedness and its concomitant synergism of creative energies.

In the periods of private interviews (dokusan) with the Zen Master, only solutions to the Zen koan are expressed either conceptually or non-verbally. If the Master is convinced of the level of awareness within the solution, he gives another conceptually insolvable puzzle. Again one returns to the meditation hall and sits, focusing the mind in intense stillness so as to surrender to the solution.

Even though it seems like an introverted journey, the dichotomy between the inner and outer world dissolves into unity. There is solution, awareness, 'is'ness pulsating within every human person and throughout the whole cosmos. To be able to let go of what separates and surrender to what 'IS' is surely the 'pearl of great price'.

How often unjust economic systems have thrived through engendered religious prejudice. Oppression, exploitation, greed and war cannot exist amongst people who are interconnected with each other through a sharing of their fundamen-

tal transformative religious experience. Consequently, I came to the realisation that although no one religious tradition is currently able to engender world peace, if each religious person and tradition could make some efforts to interconnect according to their existential situation, the creative power in the consequential synergistic situation is beyond conceptualisation.

After every twenty minutes sitting in total stillness within the Zen-do, a small bell rings. Everyone stands, bows in gratitude and then for a few minutes walks (kinhin) one behind the other slowly and rhythmically, maintaining the same deep breathing pattern, searching constantly for the solution to the koan. This not only assists the meditative process but also symbolically prepares a person to maintain this process throughout the whole of life.

So often religious groups of people are over-burdened by acquired cultural and economic baggage which is confused with the essence of a religious tradition. The danger is in not alerting to the insidious introspection which binds people together through bondages which separate. Japan had taught me to be at home in another religious tradition. Once the bondages are broken, the whole cosmos is our home and every person and every group of people is a microcosm of the macrocosm. The journey ahead can only be towards love, compassion and consequential interconnectedness.

Zen koan training enables the heart to ease out of domination by the small whirlwind mind and to connect with a 'cosmic' mind. To be free to step out of the picture of life so that all is because it IS without any reference to me, is one acquired blessing. To soar with the eagles, to flutter with leaves in the breeze, to shine with the sun and to lap gently onto the sand, present various problems while our minds are tied to conceptual thinking. However, to learn how to walk in the shoes of our brothers and sisters who are oppressed and exploited, and to stand against the injustices of war, greed and global exploitation it helps to be able, consciously, to still the mind and step out of the picture. The power of control gives way to surrender to a deeper power which acts creatively at the heart of the universe. Having all the answers gives way to receptivity and listening, for embedded within the deep pulse of human and cosmic life is the conviction that 'all is well and all manner of things is well' (Julian of Norwich).

Passing a Zen koan is an explosion of exhilaration. The hours of disciplined sitting, aching muscles, determination and fatigue are almost eliminated from consciousness. It is in the market place of human suffering that this exuberance is channelled from the Source which has no beginning or end and which has no limits other than what we choose to enforce as our parameters in entering into the 'great death'.

Whenever possible, I found myself on the Kamakurra train, bound for the Zen-do. I knew that 'my cup was overflowing' and that all I had received needed time for integration within the whole of life, especially in the marketplace of human suffering. Thus, while helping to establish a refugee camp, I explored the effects of Zen training on various aspects of physical, mental, psychic and societal well-being.

Besides 'the art of motorbike riding', the martial arts, the tea ceremony and flower arrangement, the traditional praxis and spirituality of Zen flows into whole schools of psychiatry and medicine. Inner stillness and silence is seen as the key to holistic healing. At first the inner journey

seems distinct from the outward journey especially the journey into the marketplace of human suffering. However, the inner journey and the outer journey become one. There is no difference, no distinction. The 'I' becomes as a swinging door which opens either inward or outward.

However, within the healing process the stilling of the 'whirlwind mind' is linked to detachment. Freedom from greed and material possessiveness and freedom from clinging to past hurts, rejection or failure is intrinsically linked with this 'stillness'. In some therapeutic situations, people are encouraged to be totally alone within a confined space until they are able to let go of the inner hurts and experience an attitudinal change which fills them with a basic sense of gratitude for all aspects of life. During this period of silence and solitude, consciousness deepens and stabilises in the source of energy which generates love and connectedness. This stability is maintained through the psycho-physical effects of deep breathing. Although depending on acquired discipline, such breathing is the bridge to transformation and integration on various levels of physical, psychic, spiritual and societal well-being.

Because of the 'hidden power' in breathing, I visited a Zen Master who focuses his attention specifically on teaching people how to breathe. Nothing else! Several sessions later, I realised why some medical practitioners found physical cures depending far more on correct breathing than upon anything which is artificially prescribed. I examined scientific data and saw the enormous changes in brain patterns as people learn to breathe in harmony with the deep forces of love within themselves and the whole cosmos. It seemed as though I stood on the brink of a new reality, a paradigm shift in human and global well-being through religious interconnectedness.

With eagerness, I looked to where such interconnectedness was already occurring and began to examine what was happening where groups of people within different religious traditions were bonding with each other in various modes of spirituality and existential living. Seeing the immeasurable potential for holistic healing and societal transformation through such interconnectedness, I have documented this in a manuscript, which is in the last stages of preparation before submission for publication. I believe we have moved out of the era of interreligious dialogue into an era of religious connectedness and that 'dialogians' are catalysts with growing responsibility for human and global transformation.

Mystical Awakening Through Close Encounter with Death
A Significant New Inter-Religious Spiritual Phenomenon

John Wren-Lewis

You will feel like one come back from the dead. This is true realisation.
Bassui Tokusho (Rinzai Zen Master, 1327-1387)

In earlier centuries, tales of people being miraculously rescued from the brink of death and returning with strange reports of other dimensions of life were the stuff of legend, superstition and religious propaganda. Today the miracles of science have made such occurrences almost commonplace, and scientists themselves, professionally trained in scepticism towards legend and superstition, are being impelled to investigate what such experiences mean.[1] The phenomenon has even acquired the dignity of an official medical name reducible to initials - 'near-Death Experience' (NDE) and the 1980s saw the establishment of a prestigious International Association for Near Death Studies, (IANDS) which publishes a first-class Journal of Near Death Studies.[2] I am calling attention to it here because I believe it is in fact an 'inter-religious' phenomenon of the highest importance for the future.

One of the first facts to emerge from systematic study of the subject was that very large numbers of these experiences have gone unrecorded because sceptically-biased medical authorities have simply dismissed them as hallucinations produced by the brain under stress, or by the drugs used in surgery. Indeed, many people have admitted keeping quiet about their experiences for fear of being thought crazy. Detailed questioning by sympathetic investigators has revealed, however, that amongst the many thousands of people who are nowadays snatched back every year from the very last stages of heart attacks, electric shock, drowning and other traumas, about one-third insist they experienced something for which terms like 'hallucinations' are utterly inappropriate.

Individual descriptions vary enormously, and many are simply called 'indescribable', but there's an almost universal insistence on 'something rich and strange', like the opening-up of a whole new dimension in consciousness, which has given the person a hitherto undreamed-of level of confidence, equilibrium and creative energy-all the symptoms, in fact, of sanity rather than craziness. Anxiety in general, and fear of death in particular, have been dramatically reduced or even abolished by the experience, along with the everyday manifestations of anxiety like boredom, restlessness, competitiveness, acquisitiveness and aggression. No fantasy due to brain aberration has ever been known to produce effects like these, nor any drug, and NDEs quite often occur when no drug is involved. Yet the effects can't be explained simply as *joi de vivre* after a

close shave, because such changes aren't reported on anything like the same scale by the larger group of survivors who recall no special experience; on the contrary, such people often have greater fear of death precisely because the narrow escape has made them value life more.

And these are not just matters of personal testimony. Professionals like Dr Kenneth Ring, professor of psychology at the University of Connecticut, and British psychologist Dr Margot Grey in her PhD research at the University of London, have carried out batteries of tests to confirm these very positive characteristics of post-NDE lives.[3] Other investigators have shown that NDEs and their remarkable results are not confined to any particular sex, race, personality-type, educational level, religious background, or socio-economic class; and they can happen to people with almost any prior philosophy of life, or no articulated philosophy at all. IANDS (USA) has even documented some remarkable NDE accounts from children, which have been summarised in a recent book by Seattle paediatrician Dr Melvyn Morse, along with fascinating firsthand accounts of cases he has encountered in his own practice.[4]

The publication of such findings has started a snowballing effect as more and more people who have had NDEs in the past are emboldened to come out of the closet, while even sceptical doctors - probably still a substantial majority in the profession as a whole - are beginning to take the phenomenon seriously enough to contribute to the factual record of evidence. And at this stage of the game, scepticism has an important positive role to play, for two reasons.

A healthy discipline of scepticism is obviously essential in evaluating NDE reports, and it's equally important when looking for patterns in the data that might provide clues to what these experiences are really all about. The human mind has a tendency, even in the most sincere inquirers, to jump to conclusions and then ignore, play down or distort all evidence that doesn't fit. Five hundred years ago, Christopher Columbus saddled the native peoples of America with the name 'Indians' because he'd set out to find a round-the-world route to the Orient and didn't realise he'd actually discovered a whole new continent. The same kind of mistake, which I've proposed calling 'the Columbus Confusion', has occurred even in the most hard-nosed scientific investigations, and it's very likely to happen in studying NDEs because this subject touches on such deep human concerns.

The most obvious instance is the disproportionate amount of attention given to reports of people seeing their own near-dead bodies from above (usually from a point somewhere near the ceiling in the operating theatre, or a few feet above the car that's just crashed) and/or going through a dark tunnel to a heavenly light beyond. In the early days of NDE studies, in the 1970s, these two kinds of experience attracted the attention of many researchers, even though they occur in only a minority of cases, because they strongly suggest that human consciousness may be independent of the physical brain and might make a transition to some non-physical realm when the body dies, as claimed in one way or another by religious traditions from time immemorial.

Today these images have been so established in popular mythology that the Monty Python team could satirise the tunnel trip in their movie *The Meaning of Life* - the heaven at the tunnels end being depicted as a luxury hotel with a Holly-

wood-style Great Christmas Cabaret permanently in progress.

And this isn't just the outcome of sensational journalism, though NDEs have been subjected to quite a bit of that. Many serious researchers still lay special emphasis on the minority of NDEs which seem to indicate the independence of consciousness from the brain and those special 'out-of-body' experiences (sometimes called OOBEs) where the person was apparently able to travel to a distant place, or to another room in the hospital, and bring back accurate information about things which couldn't have been known by any physical means.[5]

Of course these claims are important, and if in due course the evidence for cases like these stands up to proper critical scrutiny, science will have to revise some of its current materialistic concepts about consciousness as merely a brain function. But this may be a complete red herring in terms of understanding what NDEs in general are about, comparable to Columbus noticing an American native who happened to look very like drawings of East Indian peoples. For the plain fact is that just as most Native Americans don't look like East Indians, so the great majority of NDEs don't really look like glimpses of the soul leaving the body and entering a literal Other World; they can be fitted into that model only by ignoring of fudging the evidence.

Many NDEs don't involve visions at all. Those who have experiences simply use expressions like 'indescribably blissful place', 'a kind of dreamless depth that wasn't somehow unconscious', 'an incredible sense of sinking into pure timeless love'; yet their lives are still changed in extremely positive ways, and they still lose their former fear of death. And even amongst experiences that do sound like other-world visions, the vast majority can't seriously be accepted as literal glimpses of an undiscovered country beyond the grave, because they contradict one another in many significant details.

It is obvious, when all the evidence is considered, that play of imagination must be involved to a considerable degree in most NDEs, hence probably in all - and this would still be true even if it could be proved that consciousness was functioning without the brain. Similarly, for every 'out-of-body' experience that looks like an accurate psychic perception of real physical events, there are dozens that quite plainly are plays of imagination, however vivid they seem, since they involve definite non-events.

It is the imaginative element in NDEs that has led many dogmatic religious authorities, who believe they already know from divine revelation what really happens at death, to join hands with materialists in dismissing the whole phenomenon as mere fantasy.

Several cases are on record of hospital chaplains doing this, thereby driving patients who have had NDE's firmly into the closet. In the marked contrast, however, experiencers themselves, while insisting that there experiences were utterly real, are usually resistant to dogmatism of any kind, **even if before their NDE they had held a rigid faith**. This was discovered by Professor Ring in America, and has recently been confirmed in Australia by Dr Cherie Sutherland in the course of a PhD research project at the University of New South Wales.[6] NDE's seem to have the effect of making people willing to acknowledge and affirm one another's experiences as valid even when they differ markedly in details or form - yet they all make statements like, "This was the

most real thing that has ever happened to me."

Clearly, the word 'real' is here being used to mean something other than merely 'literal-and-not-involving-imagination', and over the past few years many NDE researchers (of whom I am one)[7] have been coming to the conclusion that this is the essential clue to the 'new continent' discovered by travellers who return from the brink. Irrespective of whatever NDEs may prove, much further down the track, about the possibility of consciousness separating from the brain and surviving the body's death in some other realm, they are already discoveries of a hitherto unsuspected depth-dimension in consciousness itself (unsuspected, that is, except by those strange individuals usually called mystics); and this is experienced as 'real aliveness', an intensity of living that makes ordinary worldly existence seem like a mere play of shadows.

Although the time at the brink during which the experience takes place may be only minutes or even seconds by the hospital clocks, the experience itself has a quality of *timeless* depth and intensity, bringing with it a feeling of utter well-being that's often called indescribable, though 'peace beyond understanding', gives a faint hint of it. This is an almost universal feature of NDEs, it even comes at the end in most of those very rare ones that start off 'hellish'; and it is shared both by experiencers who describe enormous 'other-world journeys' and by the many others who report only the sense of an infinite aliveness, peace and wellbeing which seems altogether beyond time.

My personal hypothesis would be that the other-world journeys (tunnel trips included) are the minds efforts to express this inexpressible 'extra dimension' in symbolic dream-style images, though I'd add that experiencers are absolutely justified in insisting that they're more real than any dream, because ordinary dreams express only the feelings of ordinary life,[8] whereas NDEs involve this whole other order of 'real aliveness' which mystics have usually called Eternity. I'd say, for instance, that the experiencers who claim they met lost loved ones in heaven are in no way deluded, for although my own experience wasn't quite like that, its timeless depth seemed to include a unity of all beings every bit as real - indeed more real - than the relationships of everyday life I'd known beforehand.

Now even if there were no more to NDEs than the discovery that dying can be something like the ultimate mystical trip, it would still carry more importance for humanity's future than anything Columbus discovered; it would justify urgent research, for example, to find out why approach to death happens this way for some and not for others, and whether there's any way to make it universally available. But my own experience has convinced me there's an even more important prospect. While many experiencers report that medical resuscitation brought them back with enormous reluctance from the heavenly 'place' to the narrow ordinary world, I for some reason brought the timeless depth of consciousness back with me, and I've been 'simply living' with it in *this* world ever since. As a result, I've been, and still am, experiencing this world as anything but narrow, in a way I'd never have believed possible during my fifty-nine-odd years before the NDE.

Professor Ring's researches found without any 'bias' from an experience of his own, that the experiencers he'd studied were living more fully, not primarily because they'd become convinced of im-

mortality beyond the grave as he'd at first assumed (Columbus Confusion again!) but mainly because they'd undergone what he calls a mystical opening or enlightenment-experience during the NDE.[9]

The fact that this can happen to millions of quite ordinary people all over the world has to be a major discovery indeed, with shattering implications for all our ideas about what the good life consists of, what 'mental health' really is, indeed about every aspect of human affairs, including art, ethics, religion and even science itself.

The mother of all questions as I see it, which I hope will become a main future thrust for research in this field, is: Can this astonishing intensity and depth of consciousness be opened up without dicing with death (and without getting bogged down in the mystique and mystification that has so often surrounded mysticism in the past)?

Notes

1. For an excellent overview of the whole subject, see Zaleski, C., *Other World Journeys: Accounts of Near-Death Experience in Medieval and Modern Times* (New York & Oxford, Oxford University Press 1987.)

2. Obtainable from Human Sciences Press, New York; the editor is Dr Bruce Greyson, M.D., Dept of Psychiatry, University of Connecticut Health Centre, Farmington, CT 06030.

3. See Ring, K., *Life at Death*, (New York Coward McCann & Geoghegan, 1980) and Grey, M., *Return from Death*, (Condon, Arkana 1985).

4. Morse, M. with Paul Perry, *Closer to the Light*, (New York, Villard 1990).

5. See for example, Sabom, M. B., *Recollections of Death: A Medical Investigation*, (New York, Harper & Row 1982) Dr Peter Fenwick of London's Institute of psychiatry has recently announced a project for seeking really hard evidence in this area.

6. See Ring, K., *Heading Towards Omega; In Search of the Meaning of Near-Death Experiences*, (New York, Morrow 1984), and Sutherland, Cherie, *Transformed by the Light*, (Sydney Bantam 1992).

7. See Wren-Lewis, J., 'The Darkness of God: A Personal Report on Consciousness Transformation through an Encounter with Death,' *J. Humanistic Psychology*, Vol 28, No 2, 1988, p.105.

8. For the modern scientific assessment of how dreams relate either literally or symbolically to unfinished emotional business in waking life, see Faraday, A., *The Dream Game*, (New York, Harper & Row 1984).

9. Ring op cit

Fourth International Buddhist-Christian Conference Boston, 30-July - 3 August 1992 A Report

Buddhism, Christianity and Global Healing

The Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies demonstrated its maturity as an academic body with this superbly organised conference. One of its most straightforward benefits was simply to meet so many of the authors of the books and articles I recommend to my students, and there were added bonuses such as a unique evening of music drawn from both traditions (the Buddhist pieces being performed almost exclusively by Western Buddhists), a slide lecture on comparative iconography, visits to some of the many Buddhist meditation centres around Boston, and the opportunity to meditate with a variety of teachers, East and West.

By no means all the participants were academics, and perhaps for this reason spiritual experience was close to the heart of the conference. A paper read on behalf of Seiichi Yagi spoke of an 'absolute' experience in a 'place' where there is no language, and Niklaus Brantschen SJ of Zürich, a disciple of Yamada Roshi of Kamakura, completed Hans Küng's well-known formula "No peace among nations without peace among religions, no peace among religions without dialogue of religions' by adding: "No dialogue of religions without spiritual experience, no spiritual experience without the wisdom that comes of silent meditation". Sr Pia Gyger, who learned meditation with the same master at a time she was working closely with delinquent youth and assuming the leadership of a Roman Catholic lay institute, pointed resolutely to the possibility of harnessing spiritual experience to overcome the social-structural deficiencies of which so many personal and political problems are the symptoms, going so far as to suggest that the Zen oneness which embraces the whole universe and the Christian oneness of John 17, which is expressed in personal relationships and social structures, must be actively realised in a process of unification which will eventually result in a world community with global structures for a planetising humanity.

Zen Buddhists themselves, whether Asian or American, seemed much more pessimistic about the ethical possibilities of their tradition. Strictly speaking, Zen has no ethic, unless it be on the 'human' level of 'popular' religion which Zen aims to transcend. Western humanists such as Trevor Ling may have been anachronistic in attributing a beneficial social impact to historical Buddhism. Japanese Buddhism has been singularly lacking in any convincing response to the problems posed by medical and ecological ethics, and it bears the stigma of having been co-opted by totalitarian regimes in the past. Japanese Zen philosophers appear to be wrestling with the problem of how to locate the 'subject' of ethical action in and on the world beyond the Great Death of *satori*. It was suggested, how-

ever, that the securing of food, clothing and shelter already involves the sage of ethics, and that there is a 'return' after the Great Death which may provide the key to grounding a Zen ethic.

The other pole of this discussion was the search for an ecological ethic 'beyond anthropocentrism'. Masao Abe pinpointed Western anthropocentrism as the ultimate cause of our ecological problems because it makes nature the object of conquest and fails to dissolve the alliance between egotism and power. He wondered how Christian theology could neglect the lead given by St Paul in Romans 8, and he was confident in the possibility of Christian trans-anthropocentrism, a 'cosmo-personalism' which would not deny the significance of the human in the universe. Rosemary Redford Ruether accused her fellow Christians of reading Genesis through the lens of Plato's *Timaeus*, thus entrenching a dualism which regards the body as a form of punishment, women as just above animals in the hierarchy of being and nature as dead matter. In such a scheme of things, God becomes the ultimate scientist, the transcendent male mind vainly trying to control nature by dominating it. The ethical issues involved were sharpened in the impressive presentation by animal rights activist Tom Regan. Though aware that the task of tackling environmentally destructive forces such as the meat and fur industries has political implications and that the holistic view of the ecosystem provides a rational basis for protests against disturbing it, Regan insists on the ethical conviction originally inspired in him by Gandhi that animals as living, feeling creatures already enjoy something analogous to human rights quite independently of their use or misuse for human benefit and that we have no right to "consume their pain".

It was noticeable how many of the Buddhists present were Americans, and that several of these were scientists. Dr Suwanda Suganasiri claimed that Buddhism is "the majority spirituality in Canada". There were numerous indications of incipient 'Buddhist ecumenism' as Western Buddhists criticised their adopted tradition for having no place for feminism and nothing to say about social justice. Many speakers went out of their way to emphasise the contribution made by the more 'popular' Shin Buddhism, foremost among them the Zen master Ryomin Akizuki Roshi, who warned that Zen could become a sect by basing itself too narrowly on *jiriki* (self-effort) and acknowledging that Shin is just as firmly based in the *Mahayana-sutras* as Zen is.

There were focal points in the course of the conference at which all that was being offered seemed to fuse together in insights of far-reaching significance. One was when the Japanese Christian Seiichi Yagi and the Zen master Akizuki Roshi both seized upon St Paul's phrase "Christ in me" as an expression of the true, trans-individual Self symbolised by the appropriation of the Buddha-nature. Another was the symposium on Donald Mitchell's groundbreaking book *Spirituality and Emptiness*, during which Masao Abe sought to penetrate beyond Jürgen Moltmann's 'crucified God' to the 'absolute interior' of God, the utterly self-negating love to which the 'God' of conventional theology and piety can never be reduced because it is the absolute *Nichts*, at once absolute interior and absolute exterior, of which every existing thing is an incarnation. Taitetsu Uno pressed the point that truth embraces untruth, the realm of the Buddha includes the realm of hell. The non-duality of Zen would therefore insist

on integrating evil into the Christian conception of the trinity.

This is the stuff of which true dialogue is made, and it will have its 'ethical payoff', as one participant put it, in due course. In the interim, the Society would be considerably enhanced by involving more Christians from Europe and more Buddhists from Southeast Asia in order to broaden the sources of its inspiration and the range of its influence. One first step in this direction, a direct result of contacts made at the Boston conference, was a planning meeting in July 1993 for a European Society of Buddhist-Christian Studies under the auspices of a new Centre for the Dialogue of World Religions in Basel. The European Society's inaugural conference will be held in Switzerland in July 1994.

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International Interfaith Colloquium Israel, July 1993

In the land of Israel, Jews, Christians and Moslems, Druze and people of other faiths and convictions live side by side.

Many have been hurt by recent and bitter experiences in the past, which continue to cause deep divisions. Despite a tragic history, the people of this area struggle to live together in dignity. At the same time they are often subjected to the critical gaze of the world's media.

The International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ), with member organisations in 23 countries, was established to help overcome one of the oldest interreligious conflicts of the world - namely that between Christians and Jews. By holding its 1993 colloquium and annual general meeting in Israel, the ICCJ wished to express its solidarity and support to all Jews, Christians, Muslims, Druze and others in the Holy Land who all strive to live with each other in a peace based on justice and reconciliation. It was also a way of getting better acquainted with the efforts being made towards this end. The basic vision inspiring the colloquium was an examination of the concept of 'sharing the blessing of Abraham', in the double sense of 'being blessed' and 'being a blessing' today in the Holy Land.

Abraham, for the adherents of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, stands at the origin of their faiths. Having being blessed by God in many ways, he was also commanded to be a blessing to all humankind. Yet in the past, this very same blessing of Abraham has been considered to be a matter of rivalry, strife and war.

The July colloquium opened in the auditorium of the Yaarot Hacarmel. The health resort is set amid the picturesque mountainous area of the Carmel ranges, about 20 minutes from Haifa.

Professor Martin Stohr, the ICCJ president, emphasised that Abraham is "not a comfortable father", for according to the Midrash he shattered idols and within a day tore off the mask of things that were not of God's, but of human creation. Stohr saw the idols of today as not being made of pottery, but consisting of the raw materials of prejudice, ignorance and fear. Many served the idols of nationalism, xenophobia and antisemitism. While

heartened by every act of solidarity and protest on behalf of minorities, he expressed concern that there are only a few extremists, but far too many bystanders. In mentioning that we met at a time filled with hope for the Middle East peace process, he cautioned that the legacy of Abraham obliges each of us to deepen our understanding of our respective traditions. None of the religions assembled existed for its own sake only, but to the glory of the one God and to the benefit of the one humanity.

In order to receive a more immediate learning experience of the present situation in Israel, the participants spent one day out in the Galilee and Carmel area to have direct encounters with those actively involved in efforts towards peaceful relations among people of different religions and communities. Five coaches carrying about 200 people set out in different directions to meet Jews, Arabs, and Druzes working together in co-operative projects. Places visited included Ulpan Akiva, where Jews and Arabs respectively learn Arabic and Hebrew; a hospital staffed by Jewish and Palestinian doctors; a Druze village; the house of the mayor of west Baita, a town divided between Israel and Jordan in 1949; and Givat Haviva, an institute that promotes Arab - Jewish dialogue and where young people - Jews and Moslems - learn each others language and culture in a 50 acre campus staffed equally between the groups. Later, participants were taken to visit sites which are held in reverence by Jews, Christians, Muslims, Druze and Bahai. One group focused on the city of Tiberias and its surroundings; another on holy places connected with Elijah; a third visited the Haifa area, and another the tomb of Zipporah, and a Druze village. On another day many local residents of Israel joined the meeting to follow a series of workshops and to participate in a panel discussion with representatives of various religious communities in Israel on the theme 'Religious Visions for Future Coexistence in the Holy Land.

Workshop speakers included representatives from Jewish, Moslem and Druze groups. The musical program, 'The White Bird', that closed the colloquium, consisted of a duet performed by a Jewish (Miguel Hirschstein) and an Arab (Taysir Elias) musician on instruments from the West and East, plated in the style of each culture.

Every day participants shared kosher meals in the Yaarot Hacarmel. It was not uncommon for a rabbi to sit beside a Moslem, or a Christian Arab from Nazareth to speak with someone from East Germany. The language of the event was English, and the bulk of the participants appear to have been from Europe, with a smaller amount from the U.S. and South Africa.

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