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The Pax Romana Conferences:

I. The Great Religions

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The Pax Romana Conferences In Manila

A SPECIAL REPORT

ON 26 December 1959 His Excellency the Archbishop of Manila (recently raised to the cardinalate by His Holiness Pope John XXIII) formally opened a series of conferences sponsored by Pax Romana, an international organization of students and graduates. The series consisted of: (1) the 1959 Interfederal Assembly of the International Movement of Catholic Students (26 December to 7 January); (2) the First Pax Romana Graduate Conference in Asia (27 December to 9 January); (3) the Pax Romana Chaplains' Meeting (29 to 31 December); (4) the Pax Romana Faculty Advisers' Conference (29 to 30 December); and (5) the Conference of Experts on the Great Religions of the World, jointly sponsored by UNESCO and Pax Romana (2 to 9 January).

The conferences were organized by the General Secretariat of Pax Romana which has for its Cardinal Protector His Eminence, Giuseppe Cardinal Pizzardo. Some days before the opening date M. Ramon Sugranyes de Franch, the president of the organization, Mr. Thom Kerstiens, its secretary-general, and Mr. A. Noel Ross, its assistant secretary-general, came to Manila to work on the arrangements. They received the wholehearted cooperation of Catholic Action of the Philippines and Students' Catholic Action of the Philippines under their respective national directors, the Most Rev. Vicente P. Reyes, Auxiliary Bishop of Manila, and the Rev. Miguel P. Nuguid.

Mrs. Gerónima Pecson, Chairman of the UNESCO National Commission of the Philippines, also with great generosity placed the resources of her staff at their disposal. The conferences were held partly in the University of Santo Tomás, partly in the conference hall of the World Health Organization.

PHILIPPINE STUDIES is happy to present the following eyewitness accounts of these important conferences.

1. The Great Religions

Last January 2-9 a conference of experts on the world's great religions met in the conference hall of the World Health Organization in Manila. The meeting was jointly sponsored by UNESCO and Pax Romana as part of the UNESCO major project on "Mutual Appreciation of Eastern and Western Cultural Values." The official theme was "The Present Impact of the Great Religions of the World upon the Lives of the People in the Orient and Occident."

The chairman, Prof. Olivier Lacombe,¹ pointed out in his opening speech that the aim of the conference was not to arrive at a decision concerning points of doctrinal disagreement nor to discover a minimum of doctrinal content on which all religions could agree; its humble goal was to achieve mutual understanding. Each religion was not asked to shed its individuality until it was sufficiently colorless to discuss the weather with the other religions, but, remaining fully and vitally itself, it was to strive to understand and be understood by them. The experts were to engage in a "living and loving dialogue." They were to speak not merely as scientists of religion but as believers. The focus of the discussion was the influence of the great religions on the lives of the human community in our increasingly industrialized and technological age.

The conference met twice a day, but only the morning sessions were open to the public. This report covers only the open

¹ Professor of the History of Philosophy at the University of Lille; Director of Studies for Indian Religions at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* of the Sorbonne.

sessions. It is evident that we cannot fully present the rich and complex thought of the experts; we can only indicate certain aspects that might interest the readers of this quarterly.

Speaking for Hinduism, Prof. S. B. Das Gupta² reported that the new social patterns demanded by industrialization were gradually destroying old social patterns in India. The result has been a purification of Hinduism. Myths and routine rituals are being discarded. Hindus are turning away from the ascetic doctrine that considers the material world an unreal illusion because profound studies of the Upanishads have inspired a return to the ancient doctrine that the Ultimate Reality is both transcendent and immanent. According to this doctrine, the Absolute is in itself infinite and unchanging; yet it is identical with the material world. The world is its self-projection, its partial self-manifestation. The world, therefore, is real. Science is desirable because it gives knowledge of the immanent Absolute. Social service is a necessity because by drawing closer to one's fellows one draws closer to the Ultimate Reality. Since this Reality is identical with the universe, it follows that the universe is ruled not by blind but by moral forces. One fights injustice by uniting himself with these moral forces through the practice of non-violence; in so doing, one becomes stronger than any wielder of violence.

Contact with western political ideas and technology has worked great changes in the Muslim world, according to Dr. Mahmud Hussein.³ Yet Islam has succeeded in changing with the changing world without compromise on fundamentals. The Muslim can accept science because the Koran urges him to use his reason to investigate and control the universe. He can accept democratic ideas because his religion teaches him that man is higher than the animals, since he is free, and that all men are equal, since they all have their origin in God. Dr. Osman

² Head of the Department of Modern Languages of the University of Calcutta.

³ Head of the Department of History and International Relations, University of Karachi.

Yahia⁴ read a paper on Muslim mysticism. He interpreted Islam to mean "gift": God is the uncreated gift, the world the created gift; man must make a complete gift of himself to the uncreated gift.

Dr. Hajime Nakamura⁵ expressed the hope that Buddhist teachings on love, peace, and compassion might help solve the problems of the modern world. The basis of these teachings is the Void. The Void is an emptiness that is not nothingness. The Void is that which stands right in the middle between affirmation and negation, existence and non-existence, eternity and annihilation. Since the Void is none of these, it can accept them all: the Void is all-inclusiveness. It is, therefore, love. The man who has entered the Void through detachment sees himself, all men, and all the good done by men as all one in the Void. He becomes compassionate and a lover of peace.

Dr. Minoru Shibata⁶ denied that Shintoism is equivalent to exaggerated militarism and nationalism; this is a misinterpretation unfortunately popularized by certain militarists during the 1930's. Shinto is basically devotion to the divine ancestry of one's family, village, nation. This devotion is manifested by the erection of shrines, the celebration of festivals, closeness to nature, graceful motion, simple and plain living.

Modern ways of living, according to Dr. Simon Greenberg,⁷ have made it difficult for the Jews to preserve the theological principles and prescribed patterns of daily behavior which make up their religious tradition. Yet they have succeeded in adapting themselves to the technological and democratic world. Jews today have gained a new appreciation of their traditions; there is a growing conviction among them that ethical goals, divorced from theological principles and patterns of daily behavior, be-

⁴ Author of a history and classification of the works of Ibn 'Arabi and a French translation of the works of Tirmidhi; at present engaged in research in Paris.

⁵ Professor of Hindu and Buddhist Philosophy at the University of Tokyo.

⁶ Professor of Japanese History at the Imperial University of Kyoto.

⁷ Vice-Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and President of the University of Judaism, Los Angeles.

come mere abstractions. The Jewish tradition stresses the equality of all men, the responsibility of the individual, the value of even a single human life: to save one human life is to save the universe, to destroy one human life is to destroy the universe.

Dr. Hendrik Kraemer⁸ traced the tendency to disunity in Protestantism to its emphasis on personal decision and sincere personal insight into Christian truth. Modern Protestants realize that this disunity is a scandal because they are aware that Christ taught that his followers should be united in truth. The World Council of Churches strives to remove this scandal. The WCC is not co-terminous with the Protestant world, yet it is the most clear-cut embodiment of "non-Roman" Christianity in its confrontation with the modern world. The WCC strives to attain unity in authoritative truth, to convey the Christian message throughout the world, to minister to the needs of men. Its member churches should be ready to exercise a sincere and frank self-criticism and be eager to invent new ways of manifesting the nature of the church of Christ to the world.

An unfortunate accident kept Dr. Nikos Louvaris⁹ from coming; however his paper on Greek Orthodox Christianity was read at the Conference. The history of Greek Orthodoxy shows two main tendencies. The church of the monks emphasizes God's transcendence; its way of life is mystical. The church in the world emphasizes the immanence of God in the universe and the Incarnation of the Son of God; its work, therefore, has been in the fields of liturgy, education, culture, and social service. The tension between the monastery and the world has not resulted in conflict but in mutual enrichment.

Speaking on Catholicism in the West, Fr. Horacio de la Costa, S.J.,¹⁰ pointed out that modern Europe began to take shape

⁸ One-time Professor of the Phenomenology of Religions at Leyden University; currently Director of the Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches.

⁹ At various times Professor of Holy Scripture, of Philosophy and of the History of Religions at the University of Athens.

¹⁰ Professor of History at the Ateneo de Manila and Editor of this quarterly.

during the Middle Ages and the principal agent in its formation was the Catholic Church. Since the 16th century, large segments of the West have rejected Catholicism; the Church has nevertheless survived not as a fossil but as a living and growing thing. Modern Western man is faced with a three-fold crisis. There is a crisis of the understanding because Western man can no longer see the universe as one intelligible whole; a crisis of organization because he cannot find a principle to unify and order society; a crisis of the spirit because in spite of—or perhaps because of—scientific and technological achievements, a deep sense of frustration pervades his current philosophies. To these crises, the Catholic Church offers a self-consistent vision of reality. In this vision, the universe is seen as intelligible and orderly because its origin is from God and his providence pervades it. True, many of the theories of the medieval thinkers have been discarded, but the framework of their total vision of reality has held firm; the framework is open to development and can fuse all the disparate findings of science into a rational synthesis. To the crisis of organization, the church proposes a social program that respects the sacredness and freedom of the human person and finds the basis of law in human nature itself. To the crisis of the spirit the Church offers, quite simply, the revelation of God in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Dr. Masao Matsumoto¹¹ traced the complicated historical trajectory of the Catholic Church in Japan. He made some profound observations concerning the nature of the Catholic Church as revealed in its experience of preaching the Gospel in the East. He stressed the need for distinguishing between Christianity and Christian civilization. In his terminology, "Christianity" stands for the fulness of revelation to be found in Jesus Christ; "Christian civilization" is something built by those who have accepted the revelation. Christianity is perfect, Christian civilization imperfect; Christian civilization strives to steep itself in Christianity, but it does not always succeed; it bears the marks of human frailty. In the East, the Catholic Church finds itself face to face with ancient, highly developed civilizations. Its mission is to preach Christianity. But it is

¹¹ Professor of Aristotelian Philosophy at the University of Keio.

important to remember that "preaching Christianity" is not synonymous with "preaching the Western version of Christian civilization."

This, then, is our oversimplified summary of some highlights of the conference. Of necessity, we have done less than justice to the nuanced complexity of the papers read.

It is outside the range of this report to comment on the views expressed by the different experts. We wish, however, to face a question that almost automatically suggests itself to a Catholic. Why did Pax Romana, a Catholic organization, co-sponsor this Conference? In one of the speeches on the opening day the president of Pax Romana, M. Ramon Sugranyes de Franch, explained that his organization co-sponsored the conference in response to an invitation from UNESCO. UNESCO realized that its major project on the "Mutual Appreciation of Eastern and Western Cultural Values" would be an impertinent failure if it did not give serious consideration to religious values. But UNESCO felt that, as a government organization, it could not be sole sponsor of a conference on religion; hence the invitation to Pax Romana. Why did UNESCO select a Catholic organization? The Director General of UNESCO explained to the 24th World Congress of Pax Romana convened in Vienna in 1958 that he was inviting a Catholic organization because the Catholic church has experienced the confrontation of different cultures for two millenia. The following passages from his speech are illuminating:

For two thousand years the Catholic world has experienced the confrontation of different cultures in the same ideal, or rather, I should say, it has experienced the communion of different cultures in a faith which at once respects, animates and transcends them.

The message you bear had to be incorporated into countless languages; it has been professed in countless sacred places where religious belief came to discover the Divine Presence; it has slipped into countless ritual ceremonies, social feasts and moral customs. The native clergy in every country testifies that access to a certain ideal is not the privilege of a race or continent, that you can remain true to yourself while communicating with men from other parts. Here is one of the invaluable lessons of your past and present history: East and West can understand one another, appreciate one another, love one another.¹²

¹² From a brochure distributed at the Conference.

These words, coming from a non-Catholic, are startling. But they only express the simple truth. Through two thousand years of striving to fulfill its mission, the Catholic Church has had to deal with a fantastic variety of religions and has incorporated into itself the best elements of the most disparate cultures. More than anyone, therefore, the Catholic can be said to have a vocation to understand and appreciate cultures and religions that differ from his own.

We can go further and say that, since the Catholic church is the Mystical Body of Christ who is Truth itself — "I am the way, the truth, and the life"—the Catholic should be in the best position to recognize, penetrate, and bring to its full flowering the partial truths that can be found in other religions.

In the words of Newman:

As the inferior animals have tokens of an immaterial principle in them, yet have not souls, so the philosophies and religions of men have their life in certain true ideas, though they are not directly divine. What man is amid the brute creation, such is the Church among the schools of the world; and as Adam gave names to the animals about him, so has the Church from the first looked round upon the earth, noting and visiting the doctrines she found there.

Then he represents the Church as traveling through various countries including Chaldea, Egypt, Arabia, Babylon, Greece.

And wherever she went, in trouble or in triumph, still she was a living spirit, the mind and voice of the Most High; "sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions;" claiming to herself what they said rightly, correcting their errors, supplying their defects, completing their beginnings, expanding their surmises, and thus gradually by means of them enlarging the range and refining the sense of her own teaching.¹³

The Catholic, through no merit of his own, but through the sheer gift of God, shares the life of Infinite Truth. Many a Catholic who attended the Conference must have been humbled to see that men who, not having received the gift, possessed but partial truth, could still be so intensely inflamed by it.

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¹³ "Milman's View of Christianity," *Essays Critical and Historical* II (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1890), 231-232.