

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

Towards a “Dialogue of Life”

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Philippine Studies vol. 25, no. 1 (1977) 121–124

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

TOWARDS A "DIALOGUE OF LIFE": Ecumenism in the Asian Context. Edited by Pedro S. de Achutegui, S.J. (Cardinal Bea Studies IV). Quezon City: Loyola School of Theology, 1976. 336 pages. ₱32.00.

Ever more frequently Asian Christians are meeting to diagnose their own problems and solve them in their own way. In line with this trend Jesuits from Asia involved in ecumenical work met in Manila in June 1975 for their first Asian Congress which had as its theme "Jesus Christ Frees and Unites Us for Common Witness in Asia." For five days 45 participants – Jesuits, other Catholics, and some Protestants, from Pakistan to Japan, including Australia and Micronesia, listened to position papers and exchanged views on ecumenism, evangelization, and community in Asia. The proceedings of the Congress are now presented in a substantial volume edited by its coordinator.

The material included in the book falls into five sections. The customary addresses (section 1) are followed (section 2) by the six main papers presented at the Congress. There follow six shorter, but very instructive lectures (section 3) dealing mostly with Asian religions. Section 4 consists of twelve "country reports" on the respective ecumenical (interchurch) situation. Finally, (section 5) the most tangible result of the Congress is given: "Final Statement and Recommendations." A "List of Participants" and an extensive "General Index" conclude the volume.

Evidently, the thrust of the Congress is contained in the papers and the Final Statement (hereafter FS). The most noticeable characteristic is the broadening of the term ecumenism. Ecumenism is consistently presented as including in its scope non-Christian religions, and socialist, especially Marxist, movements. "We believe that concern for ecumenism has wider connotations in Asia than in Europe . . . Dialogue with men of these religions and traditions is *the* central area of ecumenism in Asia" (FS, p. 299). The broadening of ecumenism is advocated precisely because of the specific situation of *Asia*. Hence the subtitle of the book: Ecumenism in the Asian Context.

Because it is given such a broad meaning, ecumenism appears no longer as primarily an attempt at re-establishing unity or union among Christian churches but rather as a search for community among all men. "The real problem of ecumenism is the unity of mankind" (Rayan, p. 46). The goal of ecumenism is defined as "the construction of the true human community" (FS, p. 300). Such an understanding of ecumenism may be termed "transeclesial" ecumenism (Pieris, p. 155).

Traditional or classical ecumenism, i.e., "inter-ecclesial ecumenism," with its "theological and organizational (faith and order) pre-occupations" is regarded as a primarily Western problem (FS, p. 299f). In any case, such ecumenism is "functional to the dialogue of life," i.e., contact with Asian religions and sociopolitical reality (FS, p. 300). Some feel that traditional ecumenism has perhaps already achieved its goal (cf. Pieris, p. 155f, Rayan,

p. 47). (However, the country reports generally present a quite different picture.) Nevertheless, in the estimate of Nacpil (p. 70) and Hardowiryono (p. 88-92), efforts for establishing Christian unity remain essential as a presupposition for a credible Christian witness to non-Christians. In addition, Hardowiryono, who deals very realistically and concretely with the problem of Christian unity, puts strong emphasis on *local* initiatives, a point also made in some of the country reports.

While traditional ecumenism thinks in terms of unity, and even organic union, between the different Christian churches, such a goal seems hardly applicable to relations with non-Christian religions. Of course, one might imagine a quick incorporation of their members into the Christian churches through conversion. But sheer numbers and the weight of history seem to preclude such a possibility. Beyond that, the present book tells us that we have to acknowledge "the religions of peoples as God's provision for their wholeness" (Rayan p. 34). The theme of the positive role of Asian religions in God's salvific plan runs through almost all the papers and is clearly presupposed by FS.

Is it possible to visualize some unity, or better, community, with Asian religions? The question is taken up in several papers and given a positive answer in terms of the "complementarity of religious traditions and experiences" (the convergence of divergence, the concordance of the discordant). In more practical terms (e.g., Hardowiryono, pp. 111-114) this means: Christians do have much in common with Asian religions which can be discovered through sincere dialogue; we must acknowledge the values found in them; we can and must cooperate with them, especially for a better quality of human life.

The last observation points to another strong characteristic of Asian ecumenism. The Asian context of poverty and oppression demands that interfaith dialogue be not an end to itself but lead to service to the poor (cf. Hardowiryono, "ecumenism as service," p. 114). It can also be formulated in this way: "From now on ecumenical hopes will center on the human" (Rayan, p. 46). Inter-ecclesial and interreligious dialogue are "functional to . . . the construction of the true human community" (FS, p. 300). Ecumenism therefore means collaboration and common struggle with socialism, especially of the Marxist-Maoist kind, for the liberation of the Asian masses of peasants and workers (Pieris, p. 169 and *passim*; FS, p. 300).

The goal is a community of all men. But there can be no true community or "Oekumene," if people are unfree, unequal, oppressed. In the common struggle of Christians, non-Christians, Marxists, etc. for the liberation of people "a true and common humanity is in the process of shaping up" (Rayan, p. 47). In it and through it "the Kingdom of God becomes present in our midst" (FS, p. 300).

Such is the exalted goal which Asian ecumenism sets itself. How can it be

realized? The Congress sums up the many suggestions made in the phrase "dialogue of life" (FS, p. 299). In the mind of the Congress the "dialogue of life" is the most important means for achieving community among diverse groups; beyond that, it is already a form of community. Thus the expression serves as a fitting title for the book.

Two points are singled out to describe the dialogue of life: (a) It means "that work for unity and accompanying theological reflection must spring from and be directed to concrete contexts and genuine Asian 'human situations'" (FS, p. 299). It means giving priority to inculturation and contextualization; it means that the concrete people dialoguing are more important than the abstract ideas about which they dialogue. (b) It means "emphasis on orthopraxis, on the practice of unity and love and justice," both in religious and in secular actions. In this way, it is felt, community can be found beyond conceptual distinctions and doctrinal differences.

A first reading of the papers might create the impression that ecumenical effort in Asia consists in the struggle to change economic, social, political structures, which would result in a better quality of human life and true human community. This community seems to be looked upon as "the presence of the Kingdom of God in our midst," (FS, p. 301) or the "Asian face of Christ" (Pieris, p. 168). The question of God and truth seems bracketed; the Church is a mere fellow traveler with all others, searching for something beyond itself (Pieris, p. 158).

However, a more careful reading reveals that the "wholeness of man" contains many dimensions, including a properly religious one. Pieris thinks that Asia's future will mean a convergence of a spiritual movement, viz. the gnostic soteriology of Buddhism, and an activist secular movement, viz. socialist revolution. While letting itself be challenged to genuine commitment to the peasant masses, Christianity can also ask questions concerning "the dimensions of man, depths of the communitarian and the transcendence of the human" (Rayan, p. 40).

Most of the papers ask: Where is Christ in Asia today: They focus on the *hidden* Christ of Asia. But it seems to this reviewer — using a helpful distinction employed by C. Arévalo some time ago — that there is too little reference to the *revealed* Christ of the Gospel. Only a few papers focus on explicit faith in Christ, the uniqueness of the Gospel (e.g., Rigos in his response to Rayan, p. 50), the Church as a true anticipation of the Kingdom of God, the task of evangelization as sharing Christ as the Church's most precious gift to the man of Asia (cf., e.g., Peretti in his response to Hardowiryono, p. 128b).

All told, the book is most stimulating. It provides rich information on inter-ecclesial and transecclesial ecumenism, penetrating interpretations of what is moving in the heart of Asia and broad visions for the future of Christianity on the most populous continent of the world. The book is a

welcome addition to the growing literature on the Church in Asia coming from within the Asian Church.

Herbert M. Scholz

AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES (1898-1941). By Lewis E. Gleeck, Jr. Manila: Historical Conservation Society, 1976. xxii, 321 pages.

AMERICAN BUSINESS AND PHILIPPINE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. By Lewis E. Gleeck, Jr. Manila: Fil-Am Historical Studies, 1975. vii, 180 pages.

AMERICANS ON THE PHILIPPINE FRONTIERS. By Lewis E. Gleeck, Jr. (Fil-Am Historical Studies). Manila: Carmelo and Bauerman, Inc., 1974. xi, 229 pages.

The first of these books, *American Institutions in the Philippines* is a brief defending America's administration in the Philippines. It is meant as a refutation of statements made by organizers of the demonstrations against the Philippine government in January 1970. In a public manifesto, leaders of the demonstrations claimed that the evils afflicting Philippine society were to a great extent due to American institutions, constitutional traditions which were "artificially transplanted to Philippine soil, institutions and traditions irrelevant to Philippine history and culture, which fostered not the development of ideas but the building of personalities, thus engendering violence, intimidation and graft."

The author seeks to show what the American institutions were and the historical development of these institutions in the Philippines.

America brought to the Philippines, he says, political democracy, the presidential system, non-political civil service, private enterprise, and such traditions and concepts as public office being a public trust, that a government should be one of laws and not of men, that every citizen has a right to an education, the dignity of labor, one man, one vote, and the importance of thrift and sportsmanship.

Furthermore, according to Gleeck the Filipinos adopted these political and cultural institutions with alacrity. They accepted cultural values with surprisingly few alterations, but the political innovations they proceeded at once to modify substantially in order to exploit them on behalf of their own primary goal of independence.

The progress of acculturation he divides into certain chronological stages: 1901-1913, 1915-1921, 1921-1929, and 1930-1935. The ultimate results