

An Annotated Report
of the “Public Meeting/Panel Discussions”
under an overall theme of
the “*Open Religions, the Key to Peace*”,
held in the City of Kwangju,
Cholla Pukdo Province of the Republic of Korea
on Thursday, 6 February 2014,
(18:00-20:30 hours)
in Observance of the
Fourth World Interfaith Harmony Week (WIHW)
under the auspices of
the Korea Society for UN Initiative for Peace
among Religions (KSUNIPAR) and
with the Active Support of YMCA, Kwangju

[Explanatory Note:]

The following background papers were distributed to all participants before the meeting:

1. “Collective Soul Searching and Actions in the Companion of Spiritual Collaborators – Contribution by Korean Religions to Interfaith Harmony and Peace World-Wide -” by Dr. Kyeongil Jung;

2. “A Study of UNGA resolutions on Interfaith” by Dr. Kyoung-Jae Kim, Professor Emeritus, Hanshin University, Korea and a reputed academician/theologian who also acted as Moderator for the Panel of Discussions

3. Additionally, 100 copies of the Booklet in Korean, “The Resolutions Adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations Relative to the Harmony and Peace Among World Religions” printed in Seoul in 2012 were also provided to the attendees.

The particular care was taken with the conviction that a basic educational background knowledge on the issue would enhance the accurate perception of the rationale for the creation of WIHW for which His Majesty King Abdullah II of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, had earlier on championed at the United Nations for the world-wide commitment of harmony, cooperation and peace, particularly among the world’s more prominent religions.

It is recalled that in Korea during 2012 and 2013 WIHW observance, KSUNIPAR placed a greater emphasis on “first ever in history” experimental dialogues among the three great world religions, i.e., Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. While the results were encouraging, it was felt that Korea’s uniquely omnipresent and voluble national religions were, by and large, left by the wayside. This year’s program, therefore, saw the beginning of a welcome inclusion of a few representative ethnic faiths¹ in the process of WIHW dialogue and harmonization process. We happily consider it the beginning of a new chapter in ensuring equality of all religions, another accomplishment of the WIHW initiative. ,

The 2014 WIHW Program consists of six parts as follows:

(A) **Opening:** Yoon-Yul Kim, Representative of UNIPAR, in opening the Meeting, observed with satisfaction that the quiet but persistent UN advocacy for worldwide interfaith harmony and tolerance through the

¹ “Korean National Religion Manual” 1992 lists a total of 52 organized Korean religions.

mechanism of WIHW continues to be a significant factor in the Korean religious circles as well as Korean society at large. He appealed full cooperation in diversifying programs so as to re-energize promotion of co-existence and development of all religions in peace. For the 2014 event, Kwangju was selected for its historical symbolism of accomplishment of political and social evolutions in Korea in the recent past.

(B) Key-note Address: A Key-note address was delivered by Dr. Kyeongil Jung², Director of the Seagil Christian Institute for Society and Culture in Korea. The more detailed title and sub-title of the address are: “Collective Soul Searching and Actions in the Companion of Spiritual Collaborators” – Contributions by Korean Religions to the Religious Harmony and Peace at large.-“

Returning recently to Korea after years of theological studies abroad, Dr. Jung briefed the recent international trends of interfaith studies and its theological and social underpinnings and challenges faced by the international community and civil service organizations worldwide.

One striking development is the rise and expansion of the new intellectual inroads into academic programs. Leading US academic institutions³, for instances, are offering new syllabuses on heretofore unfamiliar religions, such as Judaism, Islam, Buddhism,, etc. in what appears to be a meaningful step in the milieu of an open religious, which tie in neatly with the most pressing international concern of today, i.e., peaceful co-existence of all religions of the world. It is to be also noted that in Korea, to cite only a few concrete examples, the Hanshin University Theology Graduate School now has courses on “Christianity and World Religions”, while the Presbyterian and Methodist Theological Universities teach subjects including “Study of World Religions”, “Korea’s Religious Ideologies”, “Asian Religions and Theology”, “Inter-

² Dr. Jung is Ph.D in Systematic Theory and Interfaith Studies, Theological Seminary, New York, USA.

³ e.g. Claremont Lincoln University, Hartford Seminary, Harvard Divinity School. Claremont Union Theological Seminary, etc.

religious Dialogues”, and Ideologies”, “Study on Buddhism”, “Islam and Christianity”, etc.

One can only surmise that these refreshing and desperate turnarounds could well be the outcome of the precarious future of mankind felt around the globe requiring shift of the direction so as to be least affected by the World’s failures. In this connection, one is justified in taking the hint that the UN’s persistent concerns expressed through its numerous resolutions have had a critical impact.

Related to it is another murky area of “double/multiple religious belongings (or practice)” on which Dr. Jung explains his personal experiences as a “Buddhist-Christian”, and offers an interesting interjection of his religious DNA” as a factor and deals with the concept of “homo religious”..

Dr. Jung devotes a chapter to the issue of “Cooperation for the Benefit of Our Neighbors in Pain” in which he, as a modern man of the old religions, offers refreshing commentaries on such issues as: “Diapaxis” and “March 1st Independence People’s uprising of 1919 against Japanese rule of Korea.

He ends his address with the importance of collaborating with men and women of the cloth, his spiritual associates around the world to find ways to be guided by wisdom and divine nature in their respective religions. His challenges: Korean religious audiences to be a living model for religious tolerance and openness through which international peaceful co-existence can be embraced.

(C) Interfaith Chorus: Presentation by an amateur, but well practiced, interfaith chorus. The three special songs selected for the appropriateness of the occasion, i.e., “With Love”, “A Beautiful World” and “Links”, had popular, uplifting and moving qualities. The audience unabashedly chipped in to the singing to give it a resounding effect to every one’s delight.

(D) Panel Discussions: Panel Discussions that followed were moderated by Dr. Kyoung-Jae Kim, Professor Emeritus, Hanshin

University, Korea. Panelists were pre-selected and their statements were extemporaneous , candid and to the point. They were:

Missionary Woo Won Lee (Chondo Gyo)⁴

Minister Sung Moon (Won Buddhism)⁵

Ven. Bup In (Buddhism)

Rev. Kwan Chul Chang, Protestantism

Dr. Kyeongil Jung, (Systematic Theory and Interfaith Studies), a “Buddhist-Protestantist” who gave the key-note address.

(A local Catholic priest who was invited to the occasion declined and a suitable local Islamic representative was unavailable for the meeting)

The following is an unofficial translation of a précis provided by the moderator, Dr. Kyoung-Jae Kim

Moderator: We were greatly benefitted by Dr. Jung’s thoughtful address and a stimulating performance by the interfaith chorus. Let me start off with Minister Moon Won Suh of Won Buddhism which continues to make an active and effective contribution to the processes of interfaith dialogues in Korea.

Minister Suh: I am happy to support the aims of the WHIW and find Dr. Jung’s dissertation convincing. In a nutshell, Chapter 2 of the Won Buddhism Doctrine concludes that religions of the world are fundamentally one. We are not unmindful of the differences and occasional disputes among the religions, and sectarian strife within the particular religion itself. This, in a nutshell, is because the fundamental truth about the religions or their denominations do get lost. Won Buddhism has, right from the beginning, advocated for openness and

⁴ Often described as the national religion of the cosmos that blossomed in Korea since the mid 1860.

⁵ A modernized form of Buddhism founded in Korea that seeks to make enlightenment possible for everyone and applicable to regular life, founded in 1916.

cooperation with neighboring religions. To us, therefore, the UNGA resolutions are somewhat like our own basic principles, and therefore we are at peace with them.

The moderator: I remember visiting Won Buddhist radio station (“Circle Logics”) for an interview sometime ago and was struck by the unique style of the Won Buddhist public mass communication operation. Unlike radio stations owned by Catholic, Protestantism and Buddhist stations which invariably promote their own religious bents, the Won Buddhist station was least concerned with their own identity and concentrated only on the matters at issue.

I now turn to Chondogyo that led in 1919 a national uprising against the Japanese rule of Korea (1919-1945). What does Chondogyo have to say about the trends of interfaith dialogue and cooperation? I now give the floor to Missionary Woo Won Lee.

⌈Missionary Lee gave a long and convoluted history of the persecution of the Chondogyo through the “Farmers’ Revolution”, Japanese colonialism, Japanese surrender, division of Korea, the Korean war “First and foremost, let me say that the 120 years history of Chondogyo was a history of persecution and hardship.” *Turning to the latest concern of the Chondogyo, Missionary, Lee explained the Chondogyo as a religion that is devoted to cooperate with other religions in the establishment of “a just and peaceful world” in cooperation with other religions. The areas of ecological concern and environmental protection and reverence to all living creatures are specific concern of the Chundogyo as borne out by the principle of “In Nai Chun” (Humans are Gods). “We would much like to see a permanent ecological park in the Demilitarized Military Zone where religious leaders of the world would come for meditation and prayer...”, said Missionary Lee*”

Moderator: I pray that the people of Korea and elsewhere would better understand the Chondogyo teachings and that it will fare better for the future. Where would Buddhism stand in our discussion? For the

last 1600 years, Buddhism has contributed so much by way of religious virtues, arts, culture, accommodating spirits, *et al* in Korea. There is, therefore, much in the way of quickening the process of Korean society towards religious pluralism. Would you enlighten us on your views about Buddhist contribution to the development of Korean society?

Ven. Bup In: The basic tenet of Buddhism is the law of dependent origination and causal relation. We do not believe that a religion can survive on its own. If one falls into any of the three poisonous (avarice, anger, ignorance) situations, the worst tragedy, unhappiness and friction would ensue. For long, Buddhism has been a victim of dogmatic and self-righteous religionists (particularly, conservative Christians). Numerous cases of physical defamations against Buddhist compounds were frequent. Former President Lee Myung-Bak went as far as to proclaim his wishes to see Seoul as a holy city of a Christian nation.

I was delighted to hear today Dr. Jung's emphasis on religious education that is based on the principle of mutual welcome and learning processes. The Temple Stay programs now available in several temples in Korea, for instance, corroborate Buddhism's contribution to interfaith educational processes.

Moderator: Minister Bup In's candid expose on some of the wanton attacks mounted by some extreme Christians and his offerings of ways to put an end to them are much appreciated. I wish to echo his observation that most of the shameful acts perpetuated by religions extremists are, in most part, "fundamentalists". Unfortunately, early foreign missionaries who set their feet on Korea already had fundamentalist bent in their perception when they set their feet on Korea, which, in turn, was passed on to their local counterparts misrepresenting them. Recently, we watched those who were opposed to the holding of WCC conference in Pusan last year, for instance, were motivated by die-hard fundamentalists. But, not every Christian in Korea subscribes to the fundamentalism. There are many in the Christian camps who believe in unfettered cooperation with other religions on such matters as reconciliation, harmony, respect to others,

peace, and human rights in today's world. We are happy to have one practicing Christian pastor, Rev.. Kwan Chul Chang whose views we would love to hear.

Rev. Chang: The Church I serve, Mujin Church, has a Buddhist neighbor temple nearby, Mugak Sa. On the Christmas eve in 2009, the Head Monk of the Temple along with 20 Buddhist women in the splendor of colorful Korean traditional costumes, joined in the Christmas-eve service. The women, members of the temple chorus, joined in singing a beautiful Christian song, "Together with our Lord" and the carols. The following year, I led a Church delegation to the temple for birthday celebrations of the Buddha. This feature was only the beginning. Since then and until now, these reciprocal visits continue as a regular feature of peace and harmony between the two popular religions. My Church has since initiated gifting of 10 sacks of rice to the Temple every year in a gesture of consolidating our friendly mutual relations much to the delight of both religious groups. These events gave both groups a precious lesson of peace and affection that go beyond the religious line.

Another important discovery from the experience was that interfaith dialogue and interactions do not weaken the prerogatives of the religions concerned; in fact they clearly see their own selves more constructively and richly than before the dialogue.

Moderator: This was truly a moving true story. This ends the presentations of all four religious resources. May I now request today's key-note giver, Dr. Jung's contribution?

Dr. Jung: It was my privilege at this public meeting to offer testimonials on how the modern religionists and scholars fare in today's world of religions, and particularly when they deal with the delicate subject of inter-religious characteristics. What I have found out, however, is the maturity and intensity with which the interfaith communication is in progress to an amazing degree in a real world. I saw the demonstration of love and mercy among the religious activists in dealing with human sufferings through the combined efforts of

religions. Another discovery having been a part of this memorable event is the power of arts and music, in particular, can unite us in more ways than one.

[Quite unexpectedly, as the at this point audience reactions came forth.

(E) Audience Reactions: Quite unexpectedly, at this point, impromptu substantive comments were introduced from three participants in the audience. The first observation made by a local Protestantism pastor and his comment was related to St. John 14:6⁶ in the New Testament and more specifically, how can a true Christian subscribe to religious pluralism or affirm equality of all religions in the face seemingly of the bible's overriding stipulation in question.

The second observation was made by another Christian who had been agonizing over the fate of his deceased families who had been destined to the pit of hell because they had not known Jesus Christ before Christianity was introduced to Korea This, despite their having lived virtuously and morally under Buddhism, Confucianism or Chundogyo. However, he luckily came across a book, "Nameless God" by Professor/Dr. Kyoung-Jae Kim, who, he was happy to see today, as the moderator of the Panel. The book helped deliver me from affliction for a long time. I commend this book to any anguishing souls. I am now convinced that the "God is a larger being than Christianity as a religion or its tenets. "

The third and last person who spoke spontaneously was so moved by the impressive way the meeting has turned out that, it should be appropriately known as a citizens' festival. He proposed that a "statement" be issued in the name of the meeting articulating our positive views on interfaith harmony around the world.

Dr. Kim, the moderator, thanked all the speakers for their honesty and candor in bringing out some of the crucial issues on many minds and offered the following observation on the first speaker on St.

⁶ "Jesus told him. I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father expect through me" (Holy Bible St. John 14:6)

John, 14:6.

In discussing the bible stipulation in question, we owe it to ourselves to keep the following conditions in mind. Firstly, the “I” and “Me”, should not connote to egotism or self-righteousness as they often turn out today, i.e., “I” who is captive to hasty judgments, obsessions, attachments, etc.. Secondly, in the absence of common definition by other religions of “What is salvation?”, there is danger of becoming self-righteousness about other religions’ absence of salvation. Buddhism, Christianity, Chundogyo, Won Buddhism, and Islam all have peculiarities in the definition of salvation, but they are worthy of our respects. What is needed, therefore, is an agreement on indispensable factors thereof, keeping the following essentials in mind: (i) freedom from one’s selfish existence; (ii) redefinition of the essence of life and death so as to be free of the fear of death; (iii) Consolation of neighboring religionists’ pains with mercy and love. Short of the above, the humans, irrespective of their religious beliefs, will be trapped in a cavern carrying the burdens of yoke.

The moderator, Dr. Kyoung-Jae Kim, taking up the last comments, agreed to draft the “statement” and after individual clearances will be issued as proposed. KSUNIPAR will be in touch with Dr. Kim to see this important matter through, and a copy of the message will be separately mailed to the media and to all those concerned.

(F) Closing Remark:

We do hope readers will agree that our Kwangju get-together merited a lengthier than normal report which this one turned out to be. There was a unanimous view locally that the meeting was well worth it as an example of an un-mitigated success evaluated from all known perspectives.

It is worth repeating here that the design of WIHW, as per UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/65/20, proved itself to be a dynamic instrument to transform worthy ideals to effective implementation, as the philosophy of inter-religious harmony is well on

its way to becoming a major precept of international behavior.

Submitted by:

Yoon Yul Kim, Representative

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(6 February 2014)