

GROWING Together

10th Anniversary Series

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM and The 1993 Parliament of World Religions

Six thousand religious leaders met in Chicago in September, 1993 to celebrate the centenary of the World Parliament of Religions. One hundred years earlier, the Chicago World's Fair, coinciding with the 400th anniversary of Columbus' arrival in America, had highlighted material progress. The question was raised, "Why not highlight spiritual progress as well?" So organizers convened a world parliament of religions, confident that the superiority of Christianity over other world religions would be evident and convincing. But the unexpected happened. An uninvited young Hindu swami, with visionary ideas and captivating personality, stole the show. The West awoke to the East, and the interfaith movement was born. Christianity is now challenged to think seriously about religious pluralism.

Challenge

The encounter with other faiths has caused the World Council of Churches to experience a shift in perspective. Their early debates had focused on the significance of the gospel for other faiths and cultures; now it is the significance of other faiths and cultures for the Christian faith. This shift is calling forth new questions, which in turn will call forth new insights, appreciations, and a fuller understanding of truth.

Early Church

Right at the beginning of Christian Church history, important theological shifts were taking place. In 44 A.D. the Council of Jerusalem was faced with a choice: continue with Jewish practices of circumcision and forbidden foods or open up to other cultures through accommodation to their customs. The choice was for openness, but in the understanding of the time this amounted to cultural pluralism, not religious pluralism. The missing ingredient was dialogue. Two thousand years later we are just beginning to confront the reality of religious pluralism.

Golden Rule

The 1993 Parliament produced a global ethic. Its basis is the golden rule, the expression of that good will which, if adhered to, would bring peace to our world. Its Christian expression is "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

The golden rule is found in many religions, some of which predate Christianity.

Can you match the following:

- | | |
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| 1. Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful. | ___ a. Taoism |
| 2. Do not unto others that you would not have them do unto you. | ___ b. Judaism |
| 3. What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellowmen. | ___ c. Confucianism |
| 4. Do naught unto others that which would cause you pain if done to you. | ___ d. Zoroastrianism |
| 5. Regard your neighbor's gain as your own gain, and his loss as your loss. | ___ e. Buddhism |
| 6. That nature alone is good which refrains doing unto another whatsoever is not food for itself. | ___ f. Hinduism |

In the Meantime...

The theology of religious pluralism is just now being worked out. For the first time in history we see ourselves as one world, we are aware of our interdependence, we are East and West meeting in daily life. We have not yet developed the vocabulary to describe our new situation. We do, however, share the conviction of St. Augustine:

*God has many the Church has not;
the Church has many God has not.*

"Ya-yah" and "Ha-hah"

In his book *God is Rice*, Masao Takenaka, an Asian theologian, uses "Ya-yah" and "ha-hah" to describe two theological approaches. Ya-yah confronts, debates, demolishes; ha-hah appreciates, dialogues, shares. Ya-yah is closed, focused on self; ha-hah is open, sensitive to "the other".

Our Christian past has strongly emphasized ya-yah, the seeking of Truth in order to convince. Our pluralistic present calls for ha-hah, seeking relationships, confident that because God is with us Truth will be the outcome.

Answers: 1=e; 2=c; 3=b; 4=f; 6=d

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For reflection and discussion

- *What are your hopes and fears concerning religious pluralism?*
- *Plurality is a reality. In what ways have you encountered religious pluralism in your community?*

GROWING TOGETHER is a series of five monthly Sunday bulletin inserts for the ecumenical education of Christ's faithful.



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