DISCUSSION OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF GOOD MANNERS, TRIUNITY SPECULATION, AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES TO THE DIALOGUE OF THE WORLD RELIGIONS

Presentations:

NAVJYOTI SINGH:	The Role of Good Manners as a Bridge between the World Religions in the *Sanātana* Tradition (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism)
SHEN-CHON LAI:	The Speculative Philosophy of the Triunity in Chinese Universism (Taoism) and Buddhism: Its Philosophical-Religious Significance and its Contribution to the Taoist-Buddhist-Christian Dialogue
MICHAEL VON BRÜCK:	The Contribution of Religious Studies to the Dialogue of the World Religions
Moderator:	PETER KOSLOWSKI
Summary:	LUCA DI BLASI

VON BRÜCK discussed Chinese Buddhism and LAI's paper: Nâgârjuna formulated the theory of the two truths in the second century in India. He took as his starting point the epistemological question of how one can make any statement at all. The world is perceptible in its diversity; one can ascertain relationships between things, form concepts, etc. That creates the possibility of a relative, relationally operative language of terms. That is the lower truth. Apart from this diversity, consciousness starts from a fundamental unity of reason and the demand to regard reality as a unity. This unity of reality is its emptiness (*śūnyatā*), for nothing that we can name has its own existence; everything is relational, and that is the same as *śūnyatā*. Emptiness as *śūnyatā* does not mean emptiness in the sense of an empty glass, but is derived from the hollow body, which is indeed empty inside, but in the sense of a filled space. This emptiness forms the inner side of phenomenal reality. When Nâgârjuna's emptiness was translated into Chinese, it was reified or ontologized and misunderstood as a theory of two different worlds: a world of relative form and one of absolute reality. Conse-

quently, T'ien-t'ai Buddhism said that one needed a principle of mediation. This principle, which one can compare to the focus between the near and the far with a mirror-reflex camera, is the *Ch'i.*

Lai's comparison between triads and trinity is too general. There are, for example, many different kinds of trinity in the Indian tradition (Brahman, Viṣṇu, etc.). Therefore, there is no reason to compare the various triadic ideas directly with Christianity. (SINGH)

Historically the personal concept of the Trinity stemmed from the Greek word *hypostasis.* In Latin translation this became *persona.* Augustine said in *De trinitate* that he was uneasy about using the term *persona,* because it could lead to misunderstandings in the sense of individuality, etc. The word *relatio* would be better. But that is to abstract. The Trinity refers to relationships within the One. (VON BRÜCK)

The dialectic schema is a basic structure, but not an establishment of the doctrine of the Trinity. There is a danger here of leveling out the differences. The Son is not the sublation of the Father and the Spirit is not the synthesis of the Father and the Son. The Trinity denotes a personal relationship. Triads, such the one of heaven, earth, and humanity are relationships between ontic or ontological entities. Is that not an essential difference? (KOSLOWSKI)

Being (*Sein*) and existence (*Seiendes*) are ontologically different. But being and existence also belong together. The differentiation between being and existence differentiates itself, and that means clearing (*Lichtung*). The clearing is, on one hand, the ontological difference between being and existence, on the other hand, it is an unfounded reason of the principle of activity. In the tradition of Zen Buddhism there is a theory of the position-less person, and this is the principle of activity in the salvation experience of clearing. Therefore, there is no contradiction between the theological concept of the personal God and the theory of clearing in the Buddhist tradition. (LAI)

It is worth asking whether this understanding of "clearing" is a productive misunderstanding in the Japanese and Chinese reception of Heidegger. According to Heidegger, philosophy and theology themselves have nothing to do with one another. The mainstream tradition of Western thought criticized this as ontotheology, as a mingling of theology and ontology. This interpretation of Heidegger is questionable. The theological tradition has always stressed the difference between God and the world. The Heideggerian statement that ontotheology is the sign of the Christian tradition cannot be used as an ontological interpretation of religion. (KOSLOWSKI)

Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche's "god is dead" theory is central in this context. It means, according to Heidegger, that the onto-theological god is dead. But it is also possible to develop a positive nihilism. Emptiness is not simply *nihil.* Emptiness is a principle of activity and as such it is primary. Active emptiness is the Buddha-nature. (LAI)

In Chinese thought, the opposing term to "emptiness" is not "fullness," but "non-emptiness," the negation of emptiness, the emptying of emptiness. Every emptiness that has become a concept is a position. The Chinese tradition has expressed this pictorially in the famous *Koh-an*: "open expanse, nothing holy." This means that every holiness that one can grasp conceptually is no longer holiness. The holy requires only a single attitude: open expanse. Something similar can be found in the mystical tradition of Christianity. (VON BRÜCK)

If, as von Brück maintains and which is not to be immediately denied, religions change through entry into interreligious dialogue, does not the danger exist that, just as in evolutionary theory the concept of species dissolves in favor of mere lines of descent of living beings, ultimately the identity of the religions, even the concept of religion itself, will also dissolve, because only momentary states of religious consciousness exist? If every dialogue is the new creation of religion, can the identity of religion still at all still be maintained? (Koslowski)

We can hold on to the identity by making the religions linguistically distinct (e.g. with the term "Christianity"). There is both a continual new creation with every dialogue and continuity, in so far as participating persons refer to a particular identity. (VON BRÜCK)

Is the concept of "religion" at all applicable across cultures? (SINGH)

Yes and no. In the Latin root there are already two origins of the concept of "religion." Cicero understood *religio* as diligence in the performance of rites, Laktanz as being tied back to the origin. In Sanskrit, *dharma* means something completely different. Nevertheless, the term "religion" seems usable, because it is used. Since American English dominates, "religion" is used worldwide. (VON BRÜCK)

The Western idea of a historicity of religions is not transferable without something additional to all other religions. For Indian religion, this is in a certain sense even a contradiction in itself. For example, it is also impossible to write a history of justice. (SINGH)

Historians do not attempt to write a history of justice, but a history of the concept of justice. (VON BRÜCK)

When justice reigns, the realities that one could investigate are lacking. There is only the ahistorical memory of justice. One can relate the injustice of the past with the help of histories. One can only relate the history of the periphery, not that of the core. In Western civilization there is the tendency to see the question of history as a totality. In Indian thought there are only chronologies. A part of reality is inaccessible to historical investigation. For methodological reasons, this is limited in its scope. (SINGH)

There is a transformation of concepts that is extremely important for the future. If the interreligious discourse hopes to be successful, it must also lead to political measures. The necessity that the different religions come closer together is a consequence of the splitting of humanity into public and private con-

victions that has found acceptance in the last two hundred years. Religion has settled in the private sphere. The public sphere is concerned with business matters. The private must again be supported in the public consciousness. Certainly, if private convictions could obtain dominance in the public sphere, the consequences would be catastrophic. How can this happen in a safe, universalistic way, without sectarian ideas gaining dominance over the public? (SINGH)

Buddhist emptiness is not emptiness devoid of content. It is a principle of activity. Through this emptiness we overcome the dualism of the absolute and the relative. This principle of activity is primary, because we experience only through the open totality. The personal God in Christianity and emptiness in Buddhism are both principles of activity; through them the ontodynamics of both is discussable: The three elements of the ontodynamics form a foundation for future interreligious conversations. (LAI)

The encounter between different religions is possible, difficult, laborious, and contains cognitive, emotional, existential, and political elements; they interact with perception and judgment; interreligious encounter is unavoidable for political and internal religious reasons, because what is one's own is always formed within what belongs to others. All religions must react within technological civilization to worldwide transformations in the image of humanity and of the world, and can do this only by struggling with one another toward answers. (VON BRÜCK)

The categories of description that have been identified are in need of enlargement at one point: There must be a statistical category or category of consciousness, which remedies the deficit in the sphere of the identity of religions. (Grözinger)

It is increasingly difficult for VON BRÜCK to talk about *the* Buddhism or *the* Christianity or to name such identities.

Understanding means, according to a member of the audience, the identification and transformation of that which one seeks to understand. Identification takes place through differentiation. That does not mean that the I *is based* on its identity from the very start, but that it *develops* through the discovery of the You. For in order to be able to differentiate myself from You, I must already exist as I, as the subject of the differentiation. An identity must be available, so that identification by differentiation and relationship in view of the other can at all take place. Therefore, what von Brück said can be understood only as a three-step process: 1. The original formation of an identity. 2. Self-relation to the other, going out of the original I and going over to the other. 3. Identifying with oneself in differentiation from the other. This third step is full identity. This leads to a first way of understanding what Lai intended to say with the trinity as a cyclical movement. 1. Original unity, which precedes all difference. 2. Going out of the unity by differentiation, opposition. In the Christian tradition, God the Father, as a stationary unity in himself, expresses himself in the

word and goes completely out of himself. The Son as expressed God is – like the creation – expressed in words according to Holy Scripture. 3. Return from the outside, unity in the sense of unification, reunion of the original unity and its expression in the Holy Spirit = Spirit of Unity. (comment from the audience)

Steps 2 and 3 are quite comprehensible. But whether an identity, something in itself, is conceivable, before it develops in relationship as such, seems questionable. The self-development would perhaps be sufficient. Reality is not formed from different existences secondarily into a network of relationships, but instead a "virtual network" of relationships (one can call it "love") is the prerequisite for constituting reality. Love is then prior to being. Relationship existed before reality originated. This is not demonstrable; the in-itself is not conceivable. Certainly, a unity arises in meditative experiences, which is pre-conceptual and much more essential than anything conceptual. This question forms the core of the 2,500-year debate between Buddhists and Hindus, between Buddhists and the philosophy of the Advaita Vedānta, as it was presented by Śaṅkara. It is at the same time a source of Western philosophy, namely of Plato's Parmenides. What is the relationship between 1 as 1 and 1 as the first of a series 1, 2, 3? (VON BRÜCK)

Is triunity at all conceivable and understandable? Is ultimately only quaternity understandable, because the constitution of our consciousness moves in oppositions and everything that goes above two is, so to speak, constructed from two times two oppositions? Then the Hegelian dialectic stands ultimately in the background of the omission of the fourth, which would logically arise. That would mean for the Christian doctrine of the Trinity that its meaning consists in making clear why God restricts himself to three and how he is open to a fourth, namely humanity in Jesus Christ. It appears that such an opening also exists in Eastern religions, since the triad of heaven, earth, and humanity needs the cycle of history, namely ontodynamics. (member of the audience)

Goethe said: One is human as many times as the number of languages one can speak. Is that also true of religions? (member of the audience)

One's mother tongue remains one's mother tongue, even if one has learned many other languages. The same is true of religions. (VON BRÜCK)

In the intercultural sphere understanding is difficult. But that is not an obstacle to loving other persons. At the lay level there exists the necessity of producing peace, before we can achieve complete understanding. What does von Brück think about that? (member of the audience)

Peace must in fact be possible before understanding of the other, but what is necessary for this is less love (too emotional), and instead respect for the integrity of the otherness of the other. This is the attitude that makes it possible to live with others as non-violently as possible, even in the absence of mutual understanding. (VON BRÜCK)

The statement that what Christianity is is decided within the discussion is a

Protestant definition. For Catholics, expressed opinions are subjective and are subordinate to the Magisterium of the Church. (member of the audience)

This is not a Protestant definition, but a descriptive one. The Magisterium is also the result of a communication process. (VON BRÜCK)

The Magisterium does not decide in the way a post office decides the postage rate. It is tied to Scripture, Tradition, and also the tradition of philosophical reflection. (KOSLOWSKI)

Globalization makes standards of appraising the world religions urgent. How many religions are unable to stand the test? (member of the audience)

Any process of understanding is a process of comparison. Appraisals must be made, but the method of making them may not be determined in advance by one of the competitors. In the intercultural discourse the method is itself a subject of the discourse. (VON BRÜCK)

The Highest can be understood impersonally (as in Yoga) or personally (as in Christianity). Can the kind of devotion also be the same? (member of the audience)

In practice, the practitioners themselves must decide and learn the difference between the personal and impersonal Highest. (SINGH)