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An Encounter with Change

Opening Perspectives beyond Europe and the US (The
International Association for Religious Freedom / 1969 – 1975)

“There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions and no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions (...).”¹

1 Introduction: Beyond Europe and the USA

The history of what is frequently perceived as the interreligious dialogue movement normally begins with the Parliament of the World's Religions as the main starting point for inclusive interreligious dialogue. The Parliament is perceived as a gathering “(...) celebrating the 400th anniversary of Columbus's discovery of America(...).”² at the Columbian World Exhibition, where Swami Vivekananda (devotee of Advaita Vedanta, a branch of Hinduism) spoke to a public of 7.000 people aiming to cultivate dialogical relationships among the participants of the event. The Parliament was a major event where other religious leaders – such as Virchand Gandhi (a scholar from India), Anagarika Dhamapala (representative of Theravada Buddhism) and D. T. Suzuki from Japan (representative of Zen Buddhism) – also presented themselves to a wider audience.

The article at hand, however, seeks to emphasize a different aspect of this history. It highlights that what is perceived as the interreligious dialogue move-

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1 Hans Küng, *The World's Religions: Common Ethical Values* (31 March 2005, speech at the opening of the Exhibit on the World's Religions at Santa Clara University).

2 Leonard Swidler, “The History of Inter-religious Dialogue”, in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2013): 3.

ment today was actually very much shaped by changes that took place during the increasing globalization from the 1960s onwards. Whereas the Parliament introduced a new perspective into the history of religions, the vision primarily associated with the Parliament came into practice in the context of the social developments of a worldwide counterculture. To make this point, the present contribution will focus on changes that took place in an organization founded on May 25, 1900, in Boston, Massachusetts, USA, at the 75th anniversary meeting of the American Unitarian Association³ – the “International Council of Unitarians and other Liberal Religious Thinkers and Workers”. In 1969 after three name changes, this organization emerged as the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF). IARF has become one of the central institutions of interreligious dialogue today.

IARF was granted consultative status in ECOSOC (United Nations Economic and Social Council) in 1972. It was also instrumental in the development of an NGO Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief (CoFroB)⁴, initiated in 1989. Furthermore, in 1992, CoFroB was granted formal status within ECOSOC. Since receiving this status, the representatives of IARF to the United Nations (UN) have intensely worked with CoFroB. Today IARF consists of 73 member organizations, scattered over 26 countries that include countries such as India, Bangladesh, Macedonia, Philippines, Kenya, Malawi, and Nigeria, with believers of Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Shintoism. It is a UK-based charity that works on five practical programmatic areas:

- Supporting affected communities
- Non-formal diplomacy
- Young adult programs
- Codes of conduct
- Preventive strategies⁵

This paper aims to show that the 20th IARF Congress, entitled “Religious Encounter with the Changing World”, hosted in Boston in 1969, represented a perspectival shift that stands for a more general shift in the history of the interreligious dialogue movement, namely from a theological to an activist focus. This is re-

³ Founded in 1825 by people united by the cause of the poor and the cause of peace in USA. Now named Unitarian Universalist Association, after its union in 1961 with the Universalist Church of America.

⁴ The International Association for Religious Freedom, *IARF at the United Nations*: <https://iarf.net/united-nations/> (accessed 24.05.2020).

⁵ The International Association for Religious Freedom, *Our Priorities*: [https://iarf.net/about/Our %20Priorities/](https://iarf.net/about/Our%20Priorities/) (accessed 24.05.2020).

flected in the name change of the organization that occurred in the same year. This change of name legitimated IARF by allowing believers of religions other than Christianity, as well as conservative Christians, to finally feel represented. It was public proof of the intention of this organization to be open to any group that wanted dialogue and to establish a more activist stance.

To show this paradigmatic shift, this paper comprises three sections. First, a general background of IARF and the 20th Congress at Boston, 1969 is discussed, while also giving a socio-cultural background that will help to contextualize and understand the importance of that specific event. Second, the materials and processes used in the analysis are outlined. Third, the main findings of the archival research on the 20th IARF Congress are presented.

2 Historical Background: Dynamics of the 1960s

The 1960s cannot be properly understood without taking the previous historical period marked by war and severe socio-political problems into consideration. World War II (WWII) (1939–1945) ended leaving large human losses and cities destroyed by bombing, a sense of insecurity and fragility in different societies that only intensified through the development of the Cold War (1947–1991).

Another event of great importance was the Vietnam War, which occupies almost 20 years of Vietnam's history and is marked with a large death toll to all parties involved. This protracted and bloody war resulted in an estimated 2 million civilians killed across North and South Vietnam and 1.1 million fighters on both sides.⁶

These events led to the emergence of various social movements that protested US involvement in the Vietnam War. One such group was the counter-culture movement consisting of different groups, the hippies being the more well-known. They developed slowly and peaked during the 1960's. Characterized as an anti-war culture, they

rejected established institutions. Calling them 'The Establishment', 'Big Brother', and 'The Man', hippies believed the dominant [sic] mainstream culture was corrupt and inherently flawed and sought to replace it with a Utopian society. Hippies rejected middle class values,

⁶ Ronald H. Spector, "Vietnam War," *Encyclopædia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War> (accessed: 24.5.2020).

opposed nuclear weapons and the Vietnam War. They embraced aspects of eastern philosophy and sought to find new meaning in life.⁷

New social groups not only emerged to protest US involvement in the Vietnam War, but also against unequal treatment of minorities exemplified by the Civil Rights movement as led by Martin Luther King in the United States in favor of civil rights for African Americans.

Such social movements were not restricted to the USA. Social discontent occurred in different countries in Europe, generating social upheavals, such as May 1968 in France, where strikes took place in different sectors of society led by workers and students demonstrating their general discontent, with unemployment and crisis as the main causes of these protests.⁸ Recently, it has been argued that the 1968 events in France “escalate[d] as a general strike spreads to factories and industries across the country, shutting down newspaper distribution, air transport, and two major railroads. By the end of the month, millions of workers were on strike, and France seemed to be on the brink of radical leftist revolution.”⁸

This time of change and reform could even be seen in Catholicism, with the Second Vatican Council. The Church had to find a new way to deal with political, social, economic, and technological changes. That is why Pope John XXIII convokes the Second Vatican Council with the idea of opening the church to the devoted and that they, in turn, could open themselves to the church.⁹

Although this did not seem the best time to call a council due to the complicated global situation, the Pope at that time believed that the church should help solve the problems of the modern age, to put the world in contact with the Gospel and open the church to this new world. This council was held from 1962–1965, after three years of preparation and the inclusion of observers from other religions. Unfortunately, during the development of the council, Pope John XXIII died and Pope Paul VI took over for the second stage of the same in 1963.¹⁰

7 Brian Haddock, “The Hippy Counter Culture Movement (1960s),” *Mortal Journey* (09.03.2011): <https://www.mortaljourney.com/2011/03/1960-trends/hippie-counter-culture-movement> (accessed 24.05.2020).

8 N.A., “This Day in History. Worker protests mount in France,” *History* (16.05.1968): <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/protests-mount-in-france> (accessed 24.05.2020).

9 “Concilio Vaticano II,” SCRIBD: <https://es.scribd.com/document/279825878/Concilio-Vaticano-II-Pbro-roberto-Gonzalez-Raeta> (accessed 24.05.2020).

10 “Concilio Vaticano II”

Among other things, the Council declared that religious freedom was a central part of Catholic teachings, also the Church encouraged Catholics to embrace dialogue with other Christians and non-Christians and to participate actively in ecumenical dialogue. Another point discussed was the relationship between Catholics and individuals of other religions. It was said that all humans were one community and that Catholics should respect the religions of others, their truths and everything they hold sacred, an objective that could be achieved through dialogue with them.¹¹

This decade marked by war and protests as well as social, political, economic, and technological changes, was undoubtedly a decade of social change. These changes were crucial for the developments that led to the processes of re-configuration that will be analyzed in the following sections, using an empirical approach that will be explained in the following section.

3 Empirical Approach: Archive Analysis Indebted to Anthropology

The present analysis follows an anthropological approach that provided the framework for the document selection and subsequent analysis of the event. Generally speaking, the empirical approach, indebted to concepts such as intertextuality and hypothetical deduction,¹² was used to guide the development of the research and to form the hypothesis established in this article.

The article revolves around the 20th IARF Congress held in Boston in 1969, for which archival research was conducted at the Hartley Library at the University of Southampton in England during July 2014. The research process examined documentation generated during the 1969 IARF meeting, related documents, as well as papers connected to important people from IARF and the Congress of 1969. The work with the selected documents of the archive was performed in such a way as to question the material at every step. The idea was to establish links between the texts, as well as to authenticate the information that could be verified.

Predominantly unpublished documents were found within the examined material. Examples of such unpublished material included General Assembly and Executive Committee Minutes, personal opinions about the event, resolutions submitted for approval to the General Assembly by various organizations,

¹¹ “Concilio Vaticano II”

¹² Gladys Dávila, “El Razonamiento Inductivo y Deductivo Dentro del Proceso Investigativo en Ciencias Experimentales y Sociales,” *Laurus. Revista de Educación* 12 (2006): 180–205.

letters to the IARF's Executive Committee in relation to the Congress, as well as drafts of the trials of the Commissions. Additional published documents that were consulted were two small books containing the Congress program, essays by the Commissions, speeches, a treasurer's report, a secretariat's report, and other similar material. Also, a cursory review of other IARF's congresses, specifically of the first 30 years, was made. Finding in the folders mostly unpublished documents like those reviewed for the year 1969. This examination allowed a slightly broader view of IARF's work beyond the event selected.

Most of the documents found were in excellent condition, allowing for reading without much trouble. Crossed out sentences and words were common due to their condition of drafts and unpublished documents; however, this revealed the corrections made to the documents before and after the Congress, which made clear which information IARF did not want to publish at the time.

The documents chosen for the analysis of the 1969 event were those that more broadly covered the events that transpired during the days of the Congress. These unpublished documents served as an important source of information, exhibiting elements not found in published documents, such as doubts and corrections which displayed a less refined, more in-depth face of the event, where more critical details are visible.

4 Empirical Analysis of the Changes in 1969

4.1 The IARF 20th Congress

The IARF 20th Congress was held in Boston between July 12–20, 1969. It addressed the theme “Religious Encounter with the Changing World”. This Congress was directly connected to the work of four commissions created in London in 1966, that represented the Association's concern regarding IARF's identity and purpose, which final reports were presented in Boston.¹³ Dana Greeley of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) extended the invitation to hold the congress as a joint gathering of both IARF and UUA, the latter for the occasion of its annual General Assembly.¹⁴ The discussions of this IARF meeting focused on four major areas:

¹³ Max Gaebler, “The IARF 1958–1927: A Personal Recollection,” in *Centennial Reflections. International Association for Religious Freedom, 1900–2000*, (Assen: van Gorcum, 2001): 152–140.

¹⁴ The goal or intention of making these two events together was to achieve mutual enrichment, which could be generated through this interaction. That is why the UUA offered the best possible hospitality to all the members of IARF who managed to participate in the congress.

- The Christian in the modern world
- The religious approach to the modern world
- Dialogue of world religions
- Peace, justice, and human rights.

To properly assess the changes that took place inside the IARF during the 1960s, it is important to underline four different aspects of these respective developments:

- The long history of change
- The commissions
- The central papers presented at the 1969 event
- The consequences from the 1969 event till today

4.1.1 A Long History of Change

Change has always been a central part of IARF's history. Right from the beginning, it can be seen how the need for change and inclusion began to manifest itself quite early in the history of this organization. According to Robert Traer the 1910 Congress, titled: "World Congress of Free Christianity and Religious Progress", alluded to discussions concerning the name of the Association:

The 5th Congress was held in Berlin in August 1910. In 'A Summary and Appreciation' Charles Wendte explained that the Executive Committee meeting in Berlin had decided that the original name of the Council should be changed to conform more closely to the participation of religious liberals in the meetings held in the first ten years of the twentieth century. Unitarians had been in the majority at first, but liberal or free Christians became more numerous by the middle of the decade, particularly in Europe. This fact was reflected in the names given the Congresses [sic] during the first decade of the century. In Berlin, Unitarians on the Executive Committee suggested the name of the Council no longer explicitly refer to Unitarians and proposed that the title of the Boston Congress be used for the Council. After two meetings of the Executive Committee unanimous support was achieved for the name, 'International Congress of Free Christians and Other Religious Liberals'.¹⁵

This reflects a rather passive attitude towards the "other", they are recognized, but only in a generic way, not reflective of the actual diversity of beliefs among the members and participants of the congresses. Indeed, as seen above, the majority of the participants, at that time, were believers in Christ.

¹⁵ Robert Traer, "A Short Story of the IARF," in *Centennial Reflections. International Association for Religious Freedom, 1900–2000*, ed. International Association for Religious Freedom (Assen: van Gorcum, 2001): 20.

They changed the name because of the existence of major participation of free Christians in the Congress (and not mostly Unitarians). Although reasonable, this change in name thus reflects a consequence more than a cause of change.

So, from 1910 onwards, the word Christian was included in IARF's new name. On August 14, 1932, in a speech at a conference in St. Gall¹⁶, Professor Dr. L. J. van Holk said that the future work of the Association should consist, among other things, in helping in the fight for freedom, democracy, and tolerance and the rights of oppressed minorities. It was also his desire that new Eastern movements representing various cultures and religions joined the organization, encouraging the rapprochement between East and West, between Christian and non-Christian religions – this approach was eventually fully achieved during the 1980's and 1990's.

In the meantime, by 1934, Americans wanted to eliminate the words “liberal” and “Christian” from the title. On the first of December 1950 in a letter sent to the IARF group's members, Dr. H. Faber¹⁷ (IARF's Secretary in 1969), explained that the International Unitarian Conference asked the American Unitarian Association (AUA) to intervene and aide in the name change and purpose of IARF since this would, in their opinion, restore the vision that the founders had for the Association, transforming it into an instrument for cooperation with any faith that strives for liberty. The resulting request was to change the name to ‘International Association for Religious Freedom and Liberal Religion’.

The AUA was convinced that the original objectives of Wendte, one of the founders and early leaders of IARF and an initiator of the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893, intended for a more inclusive organization than reflected in the name given at its inception. The problem may have been that at the time the religious situation in Europe regarding liberal Christian churches put its believers in a defensive mood and caused them to feel that they needed to assert their position. Placing the word Christian in the title may have created a more solid position for them in the eyes of different Christian churches/denominations given that an international association recognized them as important members.

Dr. Faber also claimed that a name change would not attract other illiberal religions for two reasons. First, in the past, the organization had attempted to get close to them without positive results, and second, because the liberal Christian

16 Harley Library, University of Southampton, MS 256 A986 4/2, Folder 1, Box 1. Speech from L. J. v. Holk “The Future of the Association for Liberal Christianity and Religious Freedom” at the St. Gall Conference, August 14, 1932.

17 Harley Library, University of Southampton, MS 256 A986 4/2, Folder 1, Box 1. Letter from H. Faber, Secretariat of the IARF, to IARF member groups, 1 December 1950.

denominations kept their liberal status quiet. In 1958 this issue was raised again in Chicago as well as in 1961 in Davos, and London in 1966. In spite of reoccurring discussion on this topic, it took IARF 35 years to finally come to the decision to change its name a third time. Although the name change was finally agreed upon, the decision was not unanimous since many still thought changing the organization's name was inappropriate.

From the above brief survey of the history of its name changes, it is no surprise that the change that would eventually occur in 1969 was not an unproblematic achievement. Both groups, against and for the change, developed good arguments. However, in the General Assembly of 1969, the Association declared its wishes to be inclusive at a global level, achieving finally the acceptance of this long-debated change of name.

One possible reason for the acceptance of the name change can be found in the subject treated by Commission I, "Christians in the world today". Discussion of this subject led many members to abide by the change for several reasons. First, the commission dealt with topics of interest to Christians. Secondly, they viewed themselves as represented in the Association through the Commission, despite the elimination of the word Christian from the Association's name. Finally, unlike what had been believed in the past, it was thought that the transformation of the name would bring with it a growing possibility for new groups to join IARF. In essence, what happened was a shift in perspective.

Despite the acceptance of this particular transformation, of the nine Resolutions submitted to the General Assembly, only three were adopted.¹⁸ The first was in regard to a congratulation to the UN on its upcoming 25th anniversary in 1970. The second resolution stated IARF support for the UN on its educational projects. The third and last resolution adopted dealt with admiration for technology and creativity inspired by the moon landing, which took place during the same week as the Congress. In addition, minor changes were made to sections 1–2 and 3 of Article N° 2 which concerned the redaction, in order to clarify the meaning of the article.

Moreover, among the rejected resolutions, in Resolution I¹⁹, the Unitarian Church in Czechoslovakia proposed certain changes in Article 2, "Aims and Purposes". They asked IARF to promote religious freedom and other human rights, tolerance and reverence for all religious expressions, a free and non-dogmatic

¹⁸ Harley Library, University of Southampton, MS 256 A986 1/10, Folder 1, Box 1. In the booklet of the XXth CONGRESS of IARF. Resolutions, 34.

¹⁹ Harley Library, University of Southampton, MS 256 A986 1/10, Folder 1, Box 1. Resolutions delivered to the General Assembly at the XXth CONGRESS of IARF.

approach to solving different social and ethical issues, as well as the spiritual union of humanity. Their purpose was to attract others to the association.

Such an article at the time stated that the aims and purposes of the Association were, among other things: to unite the historical Liberal Churches, unite the organized Liberal Movements, and free religious communities and workers for freedom, all three of which matched the aims of the organization.²⁰

The rejection of Resolution I appears to be due to a fear of change, or rather what change could have brought: instability, although temporary, the need to self-assess and reunite. Thus, although a major change occurred in IARF in the form of the name change, the decision not to alter the purposes of the organization reaffirmed the power that liberal Christians had in IARF.

4.1.2 The Commissions

The IARF commissions that were important for the 1969 Congress were formed in the London Congress in 1966. As far as the present analysis is concerned, these commissions are of particular interest because they were established as an immediate response to questions posed by members about the identity and purpose of the organization. Important figures in this organization, such as A. W. Cramer, the Executive Secretary in 1969, believed that these commissions could become the heart and soul of IARF since the secretariat could not be the only source of life for the organization.

The commissions provide us with a strong sense of the state of the discussions leading up to the 1969-event. The following sections will cover all three commissions while focusing particularly on the commission that explicitly dealt with the question of dialogue.

Commission I: 'The Ideology and the Church'²¹

The participants of this commission chose the topic "the Ideology and the Church". They considered it their task to discern where ideology had hardened in the Church and Christianity, without neglecting the possible existence of ideological trends in liberal Christianity and modern secular ideologies. To do this, they discussed the meaning of the word ideology, coming to the conclusion

²⁰ Harley Library, University of Southampton, MS 256 A986 1/10, Folder 4, Box 2. In the booklet of the XXth CONGRESS of IARF. Constitutions and Bylaws as proposed, 46–52.

²¹ Harley Library, University of Southampton, MS 256 A986 1/10, Folder 4, Box 2. In the booklet of the XXth CONGRESS of IARF. Report Commissions I, 5–13.

that in a general sense it is a combination of ideas that a man has about himself and the world.

They ended by clarifying that the opposite of a hardened ideology is not the abandonment of intellectual thought but the keeping of a constant critical eye towards doctrines, recognizing that theories are provisional, aiming for a most realistic possible interpretation of reality and admitting that there is no such thing as a new reality but rather a changing reality.

Commission II: "The Religious Approach to the Modern World"²²

This commission chose as its theme, "the Religious Approach to the Modern World". Its participants talked about religion in a secular world, in a demystified world where industrial civilization has depleted the individual and made him feel lonely and lost, where the attempt to give meaning to man through secular enterprises has failed. This world drained of meaning needs religion to guide it in its insatiable demand for meaning.

For them, the problem with religion is rooted in outdated concepts, values, and ways of life that are far from the scientific in this techno-cultural world. The gap that these outdated ideas leaves, makes people lean towards secular ideas. This shows the need for a religion that is willing to stand with today's scientific truths as an equal.

Although Commission I and II played a role in the research of this paper, it was Commission III that was of particular importance.

Commission III: "Dialogue"²³

The report on this commission distinguishes between different modes of dialogue and communication between individuals and groups. The first of these is the dialogue of imperialism. Most interreligious communication in the past was conducted through the mode of dialogue of imperialism. In this mode, the absolute superiority of one position and consequently the absolute inferiority of any other are assumed and this approach is normally linked to political supremacy. The second mode corresponds to witness dialogue. In witness dialogue, religions claim to have no desire to convert others but instead aim only to present their respective positions to others; however, the assumptions of dialogue of imperialism as noted above are still present. The third mode, the dialogue of confrontation, takes place when one side has political power and takes the form of a con-

²² Harley Library, University of Southampton, MS 256 A986 1/10, Folder 4, Box 2. In the booklet of the XXth CONGRESS of IARF. Report Commissions II, 13 – 27.

²³ Harley Library, University of Southampton, MS 256 A986 1/10, Folder 4, Box 2. In the booklet of the XXth CONGRESS of IARF. Report Commissions III, 28 – 39.

frontation of ideologies. It is a face to face encounter between ideologies in conflict. The fourth mode is the dialogue of mutual search. This mode unfolds when men admit that they do not possess all the truth and they meet to share, learn, change, and grow together.

This commission encouraged the adoption of the last type of dialogue between the members of any Church and the members of IARF, while admitting that this was not the popular dialogue at the time between religions and cultures.

It is necessary to emphasize that the analysis of the texts by the members of the commissions are important, taking into consideration the Association's aim to make them the future heart of IARF.

The first observation is that although the topics presented by the members of the first two commissions are important, conference participants mentioned that they were too intellectual and too professional, as explained by June D. Bell in his report on the commissions.²⁴ Thus it is important to note that if people who attended the event found these reports too abstract, then for people who do not have the same academic preparation it would prove even more complicated to understand.

The report submitted by the members of Commission III proved to be the most useful for IARF members and the people of the communities from where the participants were from. This is not an attempt to dismiss the contributions made by the members of Commission I and II but, considering that the aspirations for these are to become the heart of IARF, a higher effort to achieve pragmatic applications should be made, aiming towards a wider public, thus achieving a wider impact.

This did not occur with Commission III, precisely due to the pragmatic weight that this report possessed, allowing it to transcend, with relative simplicity, beyond the Congress and its immediate participants. This is a report that can be taken as it is to any community and be understood and implemented without major problems, since it explains how to approach the other and achieve mutual growth.

24 Harley Library, University of Southampton, MS 256 A986 1/10, Folder 1, Box 1. In the booklet of the XXth CONGRESS of IARF. D. Bell, June, report on the Commissions, 81.

4.2 The Central Papers from the 1969 Event: Ware Lectures

Based upon the reports of these three commissions, the discussions at 1969 event were clustered around three major lectures that stood for the changes that took place inside the organization, as well as for the wide spectrum of different approaches to those changes. There were three major lectures:

1. “The Christian in a Changing World” by Professor Doctor. B. Delfgaauw (Dutch).
2. “Religion in a Secularized World” by Professor Doctor Martin E. Marty (American).
3. “Universal Religion Universalist Religion” by Professor Doctor RJ Z Werblowsky (Israel).

The next sections will focus only on the first two lectures and leave out the third lecture, which was found to be on a topic too abstract and epistemological to be relevant to this article. Instead, as mentioned above, this article focuses on the less theoretical and more pragmatic objective that was to reach out to and draw in a greater number of people to heighten their interest and get involved in interreligious dialogue. This tied into the overarching goal during the time period, namely, to help people reach peace through dialogue.

4.2.1 “The Christian in a Changing World”

The initial title assigned to this speech was “The Church and the New Reality” but Delfgaauw wanted to change it because he was convinced that this title suggested:

In the first place that something of the nature of Church is necessary to Christianity. Now that is just the matter in question. Is it necessary? The next presumption is that we are living or are going to live in a new reality, as if this were standing ready to hand. There is no new reality replacing an old reality; we live in a reality which is continually changing and will continue to change. What we must do is to learn to live with change.²⁵

According to Delfgaauw, the old title suggested a degree of statism, implying that the Church is an impenetrable and solid force that faces a new reality, while the

²⁵ Harley Library, University of Southampton, MS 256 A986 1/10, Folder 1, Box 1. Paper by B. Delfgaauw, “The Christian in a Changing World” (paper presented at the XXth CONGRESS of IARF, Boston, Massachusetts, July 12–20, 2014), 35.

new title features Christianity -a set of beliefs- as something a little more flexible and the world is no longer presented as an enemy. The concept of change should be accepted as something natural. What Delfgaauw says is that the world is continuously changing and that the Christians should understand and accept this, since institutions or even a set of beliefs cannot survive if it remains impasse. And thus, denying change would be denying the world as it is.

It is interesting to highlight that Delfgaauw's lecture focuses on the idea of change, where it comes from, and how people are reacting to it. What remains clear after all this is that for Delfgaauw change must not go unnoticed and that the roots and cause of a conjuncture are vital to the better understanding of change.

4.2.2 "Religion in a Secularized World"

The second lecture at the 1969 event was given by the well-known theologian, Martin E. Marty. He talked about how the war between traditional religious forces and secular humanism was ending.

Religious theorists have recently undertaken to do an about-face a 180-degree turn in their attitude toward the secular. After hundreds of years of automatic and stereotyped opposition, they have tried to find ways to embrace and affirm the secular reality. [Meanwhile] (...) Secular leaders, particularly those of self-conscious humanist outlook (...) have found less reason to counter-attack and to oppose all forms of religion on automatic and a prioristic [sic] grounds.²⁶

Marty stated: "Western religionists have welcomed some dimensions of non-Western secularization more readily than they had been able to look with favor on non-Western religion."²⁷ Although it is apparent from Marty's statement that the approach to the East had been up to this point poor, it should be noted that the first major steps to get closer to the religions of the East had already been taken at the 1969 Congress. Further steps were taken, although intermittently, following the Congress and a reciprocal relationship had been fully established by the 1990s.

²⁶ Harley Library, University of Southampton, MS 256 A986 1/10, Folder 1, Box 1. Paper by Martin E. Marty. "Religion in a Secularized World" (paper presented at the XXth CONGRESS of IARF, Boston, Massachusetts, July 12–20, 2014), 2.

²⁷ Harley Library, University of Southampton, MS 256 A986 1/10, Folder 1, Box 1. Paper by Martin E. Marty. "Religion in a Secularized World" (paper presented at the XXth CONGRESS of IARF, Boston, Massachusetts, July 12–20, 2014), 2.

He also states that the various issues that were happening in the world at that time led religious and secular leaders to connect and to question themselves. The message is to respond to an era of openness and not to blind opposition, information that IARF put into practice at 1969 in changing its name to reflect a more open organization.

After reading these approaches it is important to ask whether these two speeches accurately responded to the interreligious dialogue needs of the time, which were supposed to reach a large group of people through the further dissemination of information by participants of the Congress. It should be recognized that these speeches took into account the changes occurring during the 1960s, events such as the student protests, anti-war protests, growing secularization, religious self-reflection and globalization. Within these speeches, recurring themes appear: Change, respect, and openness to others, the secular and religious other- not only of West but also of East. These themes advocate for a higher degree of religious flexibility.

All the above indicates that these lectures indeed seem to reflect what became a dominant insider perspective within IARF. This new emphasis looked towards open dialogue with the other, promoting, by means of their words, the generation of positive social impact by fostering the overcoming of interreligious conflicts and trying to achieve social justice by helping others. This change became even more obvious in the years immediately following the 1969 congress.

4.3 The Consequences of the 1969 Event: Meeting with Change

What began to grow in 1969 with the simple change of two words in the Association's name allowed for a vast number of later developments. The first little steps that were taken by IARF that year were the incorporation of the founder and president of Rishsho Kosei Kai Nikkyo Niwano in the Executive Committee of the Association and the inclusion of the Buddhist group Rishsho Kosei Kai and the Shinto group Kyo Izuo Konko Church – both from Japan – as members of IARF. The latter addition was presented to the organization by the president of the 'Japan Free Religious Association' Shinichiro Imaoka. This allowed for an IARF tour to Japan in 1970.

4.3.1 Expansion of Membership Organizations

The change in name sent the message to the world that IARF was open to non-Christian groups who wanted to engage in a dialogue. This yielded results in a relatively short amount of time. From the 1969 Congress onwards, Japanese member groups were more and more involved in IARF's work. The organization would continue to expand. Indian groups, from the subcontinent of India, became involved in the 1980's and 1990's and played more important roles in the Association. By 2015, IARF had members of various faiths such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Shinto, and Zoroastrianism. This diversification proves that the more active attitude towards the other that was taken in 1969 worked in bringing more faiths together in dialogue.

More changes continued to occur in subsequent congresses, like IARF's 22nd Congress held in Montreal in 1975 under the title "Our Unity in Diversity". For the first time, students from Gakurin, the Rissho Kosei Kai seminary in Tokyo, attended an IARF Congress, where ten of these students introduced their organizations at a session entitled "Meet Rissho Kosei Kai".

The work of the Japanese groups in the Association concluded with a congress held in Tokyo. It was the 25th IARF Congress, held from July 23 to August 10, 1984, under the title "Religious Path to Peace: Eastern Initiative, Western Response." According to Robert Traer, it was not only the first time that an IARF congress was held in Asia; it was also the congress with the largest number of participants since the congress held before WWI.²⁸ Additionally, home visits were offered for the first time and 240 people experienced Japanese everyday life by visiting homes of Rissho Kosei Kai members in Tokyo. Another first for IARF during this Congress was the making of a film of the 25th Congress by Rissho Kosei Kai and the IARF Japan Liaison Committee.

This Congress was a success given that, as its title and the history of IARF suggests, the East reached for IARF and the Association answered. Masuo Nezu stated that:

[During this] Congress participants enthusiastically discussed their views and exchanged ideas each day. Their dialogue helped people of different faiths from both East and West to deepen their understanding of each other and reflected one aspect of the IARF spirit, 'learning from one another'. At the Congress service in the Great Sacred Hall, some 7,000, people prayed and rededicated themselves to the one single purpose common to

²⁸ Robert Traer, "A Short Story of the IARF," in *Centennial Reflections. International Association for Religious Freedom, 1900–2000*, ed. International Association for Religious Freedom (Assen: van Gorcum, 2001): 27.

all – world peace. A Buddhist sutra was chanted, and devotions were offered by Hindu, Christian, Shinto, Islamic, and Sikh representatives.²⁹

The next step was the organization of the Japan Chapter in that Congress and its subsequent establishment in 1985, having an annual conference every year since then. It is so that from the

1990's regional IARF programs (...) permitted diverse religious and cultural interest within IARF (...) India IARF members from Brahmo, Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Unitarian and the Ramakrishna Mission groups have promoted interfaith harmony in South Asia through local programs and community development projects. Lay Buddhist and shrine Shinto members of the IARF have continued to support interfaith activities in Japan (...) IARF activities in the Philippines have reached beyond the traditional Christian and Unitarian member groups to include Chinese Buddhists in Manila as well as indigenous communities and Muslims in Mindanao.³⁰

It is clear that IARF changed its structure sufficiently to accommodate a great deal of new member groups. The Association transformed from an organization mostly for free or liberal Christianity during its first 30 years (although the aspirations were to expand its frontiers), to one that promoted liberal religion in general by the 1940's, and finally starting a great change in its focus in 1969 to focus purely on religious freedom.

What all this shows is that the 20th IARF Congress of 1969 indeed generated a change in the Association, enlarging its frontiers, opening its doors to any religion in the world that wanted to get in touch with other faiths, learning through the process more about themselves and others. It took a couple of years, as well as the active presence of Asian groups, but it is clear that the 1969 Congress is a transformation point for the Association as exemplified by the title of the 20th Congress booklet, "An Encounter with Change".

The exceptional work of this growing Association continues till today. It held its 34th Congress in August 2014 in Birmingham, the United Kingdom, on the theme of: "Challenges for Religious Freedom in the Digital Age". It focused on the challenges and opportunities to religious freedom that comes from today's advanced technological capabilities in communication.

²⁹ Masuo Nezu, "IARF's Recent 30 Years: East and West," in *Centennial Reflections. International Association for Religious Freedom, 1900–2000*, ed. International Association for Religious Freedom (Assen: van Gorcum, 2001): 210.

³⁰ Robert Traer, "A Short Story of the IARF," in *Centennial Reflections. International Association for Religious Freedom, 1900–2000*, ed. International Association for Religious Freedom (Assen: van Gorcum, 2001): 33.

Additionally, it is possible to trace a much more fundamental change in terms of the internal social diversity inside the IARF – in terms of both religious and sexual diversity.

4.3.2 Expansion of Social and Religious Diversity

Of IARF's member groups in 1969, most of the 26 groups were formed by believers from unitary and liberal religions and although Japanese and Indian groups were members, they were a small minority. Of those 26 groups, fifteen were formed by people from European countries. The IARF Executive Committee elected that same year showed the same limits in variety; members were mostly of the same European nationalities. There was also a total of five women amongst the 24 members that formed the Executive Committee. And all the members were highly educated.³¹

A similar phenomenon can be observed in the panels where women did not participate and hardly any person younger than 35 years. Additionally, there was no African-American. At that time, there was a preponderance of highly educated male participants and people from European countries. Therefore, it can be said that, in the 1969 IARF's Congress, there was not much religious variety. It would even be difficult to claim that the 1969 Congress was an interreligious gathering. The public in attendance was not particularly diverse.³²

Comparatively, the 34th Congress exhibited much more member and participant variety regarding sex, religion, and country of origin, reflecting the impact of the changes IARF had made since 1969.

There were 39 speakers of diverse origins and several women among them. Rev. Dr. Wytse Dijkstra was elected as president of the Association (2014–2018). Birmingham was chosen as the site for the Congress due to its cultural diversity, as well as it being the location for a Stupa which contains the funerary remains of Gautama Buddha, a large Indian statue, a great number of churches, museums and much more. The choice of location for the congress in Birmingham was meant to showcase IARF as an international interreligious association, continuously reaching out to a greater number of countries and religions.

It is important to say that it was, to a large degree, the East that reached out to the West in IARF. At this point, it is imperative to return a moment to 1969 to

³¹ Harley Library, University of Southampton, MS 256 A986 1/10, Folder 1, Box 1. List of the new Executive Committee selected Boston during the XXth CONGRESS of IARF, July 1969.

³² Harley Library, University of Southampton, MS 256 A986 1/10, Folder 1, Box 1. List of participants (continental) CHARTERFLIGHT PANAM, Boston XXth CONGRESS of IARF, July 1969.

exemplify this last statement. A letter sent by the president of the Japan Free Religious Association, Shinichiro Imaoka – IARF’s first Japanese member – to the Director of IARF’s office Mrs. B. van Gennep³³ states that he persuaded the Rishso Kosei Kai to apply for membership in IARF and asked the Executive Committee to approve the application. Declaring that the Rishso Kosei Kai was a newly created organization with thirty years of existence and was “... aiming at a new interpretation of Mahayana Buddhism and its applications to daily life [has] succeeded in responding to the ardent needs of the mass of people in Japan during and after World War 2.”³²

Returning to the present analysis it can be seen that IARF rose to the opportunity of meeting the East by first selecting Nikkyo Niwano, founder and president of Rishso Kosei Kai, as a member of the Executive Committee,³⁴ organizing and promoting a tour and a conference in Japan in 1970, and later naming him President of IARF from 1981 to 1984. This conference, which aimed at fostering dialogue between IARF members from overseas and the Japanese groups, resulted from the joining of the two Japanese groups above mentioned to the Association.

The examples described above affirm the claim that the 1969 Congress was the transition point, at which change was finally accepted. Rev. Joost W. Wery, in the preface of the book devoted to the 20th IARF Congress held in Boston in 1969, reaffirms that the purpose of the name change was:

to open as wide as possible the door of the Association for groups and individuals of different persuasions and to invite them to come in and to share in the quest for mutual understanding and tolerance and the service for a more human world. No religious association or religious human being should be afraid of change. In the process of becoming we are summoned to find ever deeper meaning in our existence and greater opportunities to serve.³⁵

5 Conclusion: New Urgency for Change

IARF, post-1969, was able to increase the scope of its activities and become a truly interreligious dialogue organization. From the 1970s onwards, its congresses

³³ Harley Library, University of Southampton, MS 256 A986 1/10, Folder 1, Box 1. Letter from Shinichiro Imaoka, to Mrs B. van Gennep, 7 February 1969.

³⁴ Harley Library, University of Southampton, MS 256 A986 1/10, Folder 1, Box 1. Minutes of the Meeting of the General Assembly at the XXth CONGRESS of IARF, July 18, 1969.

³⁵ Harley Library, University of Southampton, MS 256 A986 1/10, Folder 1, Box 1. Joost W. Wery, Preface to the booklet of the XXth CONGRESS of IARF (IARF The Hague Holland, 1970), 3–4.

were able to reach, like never before, a wider public thanks to the union of more Asian groups to IARF. This greater reach allowed for the sharing of information, beliefs, worldviews, and practices from two different sides of the world and diverse religions. This has become the norm for IARF thanks to the wider perspective and active attitude regarding the inclusion of other religions to the Association accepted during the 1969 Congress.

Regarding the interreligious dialogue movement, this episode of IARF's history stands for the trend to open interreligious dialogue organizations up to new frontiers by actively seeking a wider religious diversity. In this respect, the interreligious dialogue movement can be seen as a part of a changing world filled with diversity that needs to be embraced and acknowledged to fully create a world where people no longer fear the other because they understand them. With understanding comes empathy, a value that enables peace and that could make the world a better place. This was displayed in IARF's opening up to religious diversity from 1969 onwards in response to invitations from the East. The resulting open dialogue nurtured new chapters in its history with other religious beliefs.

Equality of importance regarding someone's religion and sex is something else that can be learned from this episode. One can find a call for self-reflection when looking at the large difference in numbers between women and men that constituted the Executive Committee in 1969 and the small number of non-Christian and non-western member groups present and affiliated to IARF at that time. Interreligious dialogue is not for some but for all, no matter gender, sex, religion, social class, or place of origin; it must be cultivated in all corners of the earth so it can be beneficial to humankind as a whole.

All of this can be linked to the more general discussions on the notion of interreligious dialogue itself. Paul F. Knitter defines interreligious dialogue as "the interaction of mutual presence (...) speaking and listening (...) and witnessing the commitments, the values, and the rituals of others."³⁶ While John Taylor says that: "Inter-religious dialogue is a sustained conversation between parties who are not saying the same thing and who recognize and respect contradictions and mutual exclusions between their various ways of thinking."³⁷

It requires a receptive and open mind without losing a critical view of the other and oneself. This attitude enables the participating parties to improve their mutual understanding. It is not about agreeing with everything that the

³⁶ Zoran Brajovic, "The Potential of Inter-Religious Dialogue," in *Peacebuilding and civil society in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ten Years after Dayton*, ed. Martina Fischer (Münster: Lit-Verlag, 2007): 186.

³⁷ Zoran Brajovic, "The Potential of Inter-Religious Dialogue," 187.

other says but to understand their beliefs and respect them without losing one's own identity. In the meantime, they also get to know themselves better through the others. Or as Hendrik Kraemer says: "inter-religious fellowships [leads] (...) to a better-founded mutual respect, a deeper self-knowledge and a sincere desire and readiness for self-revision."³⁸

That is why the critics regarding the over abstract nature of the content of the papers submitted by two of the three commissions are also important since a congress is supposed to reach to more than the few that could afford participation in it. The information generated should reach beyond the gathering to benefit more people. That is why the program and contents of it should seek to be less technical so that the participants can reproduce the knowledge acquired, thus interreligious dialogue could reach more people.

Moreover, learning to be less proud and more open to change proved to be the key to this meeting with change, and as said above, it is indispensable to interreligious dialogue. It does not have to be a complete change; baby steps are equally valuable to achieve aims. Additionally, as it was beneficial for IARF it can be beneficial for interreligious dialogue as well.

In general, the change that came in those years for IARF and interreligious dialogue revolves around the more active presence of Eastern religious groups in both religious gatherings and interreligious institutions.

This finally adds yet another interesting aspect to the present analysis. It is curious that the Association has not yet reached to South America where its work could do so much good. This is, after all, a time of a religious increase in that part of the world, especially since the election of the Argentine Pope Francis and the sentiment of international religious recognition that this has triggered in South America.

Such regional expansion can also be rewarding for the Association itself due to the religious and cultural diversity that characterizes this part of the world. Isn't the aim of IARF to open its doors to other believers? Maybe, just maybe, the political, economic, and social problems that characterized today's South America can be lightened by the peace, faith, self-knowledge, and hope that an interreligious encounter leaves behind: "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed."³⁹

³⁸ Hendrik Kraemer, "The Role and Responsibility of the Christian Mission," in *Philosophy, Religion, and the Coming World Civilization*, ed. Leroy S. Rouner (Netherlands: The Hague Martinus Nijhoff, 1966): 249.

³⁹ UNESCO, *UNESCO Constitution*: http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=15244&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html (accessed 24.05.2020).

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