

Josep-Oriol Guinovart-Pedescoll

When Fear becomes Peace

Transforming Interreligious Dialogue into a Social Movement
(World Conference on Religion and Peace / 1970 – 1973)

1 Introduction

1.1 First words

This article deals with one of the central turning points of what is referred to in this volume as the international interreligious dialogue (IRD) movement. It examines an episode that took place almost 80 years after the 1893 modern approach¹ that is now widely perceived as the beginning of the interreligious dialogue movement²: the 1970 World Conference on Religion and Peace.

The present paper argues that the first World Conference on Religion and Peace can be considered a turning point in the last 50 years of the interreligious dialogue movement. The foundation of Religions for Peace is still held in admiration by those who saw it born and is frequently a reference point at many multicultural interreligious dialogue conferences. Among its major achievements at that time was the fusion of secular and religious efforts by addressing social justice questions as well as the conscious use of the then more theologically based interreligious dialogue movement to tackle also social and political problems. This new activist approach gave the IRD movement a new impetus, especially because this conference led to the foundation of an international organizational organization of the same name: The World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP, as it was first known as; now it is referred to as ‘Religions for Peace’).

1 Leonard Swidler, “The History of Inter-religious Dialogue” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013): 3–19.

2 In the present-day literature, the terms inter-religious and interreligious vary in plenty of contexts. For the sake of consistency, I decided to use the “interreligious” version for IRD. At the same time, there is still an open debate around the word ‘interreligious’ as opposed to ‘inter-faith’, which is not the main topic in this text. Yet, I decided to use interreligious consistently throughout this chapter, even though I consider both terms to be totally interchangeable. For a more extended debate on this, see Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions* (London: SCM Press, 2010), 3–15.

The author holds that this case study has special meaning because, unlike other international IRD organizations existing at that time (i.e. IARF, WCF, TOU), WCRP originated in Japan, far from North Atlantic countries, in a land that had suffered one of the most extreme forms of warfare, the two atomic bomb attacks over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. This particular context helps to explain what in retrospect was a momentous decision: founding a permanent organization at the end of the (first) WCRP. WCRP's later fruits have only confirmed how significant that episode in 1970 was for the next period in the history of the IRD movement. Indeed, WCRP as an international IRD organization has become an outstanding moving force worldwide not only encouraging dialogue between religions and humankind, but also rising as an outstanding INGO that also plays an advising role at the United Nations.

This article first analyzes who took part in the establishment of the World Conference on Religion and Peace and how they influenced its creation and development, not exempt of problems that will also be discussed in the following pages. Secondly, the paper discusses the importance of the World Conference on Religion and Peace in the IRD movement. In order to offer a broader perspective and to bring more understanding to the previous points, this article focuses on three periods: 1) the late 1960s that preceded the formal establishment of the WCRP, with its particular social context; 2) the first conference that occurred in 1970; 3) the early follow-up years of the establishment of WCRP as a formal international IRD organization.

Research for this article was conducted in the Japanese headquarters of Religions for Peace (World Conference on Religions for Peace-Japan). Therefore, special emphasis is placed on aspects of the organization in that Asian context. In addition, a number of terminological clarifications are addressed immediately below

2 Basic Concepts and Socio-Cultural Context

2.1 Basic Concepts

This article follows the terminological considerations spelled out in the introduction. First, it does not start from a pre-determined definition of interreligious dialogue. Rather, it uses the self-description of the actors in the field as an indication of the extent to which a particular phenomenon can be described as linked to IRD or not. In the case of the 1970 World Conference on Religion and Peace,

the framing as an interreligious dialogue organization is so explicit that it certainly falls within the boundaries of the broadly defined concept of IRD.³

Second, the article supports the idea of an IRD Movement as a heuristic concept based upon the self-description of the protagonists in the field. The following analysis shows that the main actors involved in the 1970 World Conference on Religion and Peace saw themselves in line with other interreligious dialogue activities. They repeatedly referred to past events, such as the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions, as well as other major ones frequently associated with the history of the IRD movement. In this sense, it is inevitable to associate the 1970 event with this IRD movement.

Third, there is a need to clarify the terminology used to describe the main object of study – Religions for Peace, as it is now known. It must be noted that the World Conference on Religion and Peace started as the name for both its first assembly conference as well as the organization that was born officially on its closing day. Since the focus in this chapter covers the three periods of before, during, and after the conference, the third including both references to the event as such and to its emerging organization, there is a need to clarify both usages.

To make it easier to understand, the terms “World Conference on Religion and Peace”⁴ and the acronym WCRP are used indistinctively during the article when pointing to the event. If a specific assembly needs to be pointed out, then the term WCRP will be preceded by an ordinal number. (I.e. first WCRP assembly, the second WCRP assembly, etc.) Additionally, the organization that emerged out of this conference was also called, at first, World Conference on Religion and Peace.⁵ It was only in the 1990s that the name was officially changed

3 Marianne Moyaert “Interreligious Dialogue,” in *Understanding Interreligious Relations*, ed. David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt and David Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) explores the roots of Interreligious Dialogue.

4 *World Conference on Religion and Peace*, *World Conference for Religions and Peace* and *World Conference for Religions on Peace*. All these names for the event are considered correct and were used in different situations. Since the 3rd Conference the standardized name has become *World Conference for Religions on Peace*.

5 The original name of both the conference and the association was *World Conference on Religion and Peace*. However, due to some confusion with the initial event itself and its subsequent organisation, in the mid-1990s, WCRP was changed to *Religions for Peace (RfP)*. The Japanese name, however, still is registered as the original one since the translation into Japanese would make it really confusing. In this paper I will use the acronym WCRP as well, since the references are mainly to the period in which it was the official name. When required it will be stated as *Religions for Peace*. The Japanese name is stated as 世界宗教者平和会議日本委員会 (*Sekai Shukkyōsha Heiwa Kaigi Nihon Iinkai*).

to “Religions for Peace” (RfP). In order to avoid confusion, in this chapter, the acronym of RfP is used to refer to the organization that emerged after the WCRP conference and the more recent phase of this organization since the early 1990s.

In addition, it is necessary to reflect on the concept of ‘syncretism’.⁶ Whereas syncretism can be considered to be a positive concept in some cases (anthropologically speaking, when adopting different traits of different cultural groups), in the practice of IRD there has been a strong correlation between syncretism and ‘impurity’, given that the concept of ‘purity’ is associated directly to that of ‘authenticity’ in the overlapping fields of Religion and Theology. In other words, especially in some Muslim, Christian and Jewish contexts, to keep the ‘purity’ of a religion one remains suspicious of anything that might come across as ‘syncretistic’. These understandings can also be considered to be tools of power.⁷ On the same basis, Gort mentions that “as a rule, the mixing of religions is condemned [...] as violating the essence of the belief system’. But, since Christianity, at its earliest stages is also considered to have gone through a syncretic process this term has always been considered controversial.⁸

Finally, the present chapter uses the rather simple, binary opposition of ‘the religious’ and ‘the secular’ simply because that is how it can be found in the archival sources. In the last decades, the discussions on those categories have gained considerable momentum with the reconsideration of the supposed necessity to strongly separate the religious movement from the social and political spheres of life.⁹ Also, how different major religions have either accepted the postulations of modern secularism or still kept to a desire to influence the public

6 Different experts in religious studies, anthropology, history and sociology elaborate on this sensitive topic in the compendium by Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw entitled: *Syncretism/anti-syncretism: The Politics of religious Synthesis*. (European Association of Social Anthropologists London: Routledge, 1994). Also, on the field of religious syncretism, see: Jerald D. Gort, Hendrik Vroom, Rein Fernouth and Anton Wessels *Dialogue and Syncretism: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, (Michigan: Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1989).

7 Different experts in religious studies, anthropology, history and sociology elaborate on this sensitive topic in the compendium by Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw entitled: *Syncretism/anti-syncretism: The Politics of religious Synthesis*. (European Association of Social Anthropologists London: Routledge, 1994). Also, on the field of religious syncretism, see: Jerald D. Gort, Hendrik Vroom, Rein Fernouth and Anton Wessels *Dialogue and Syncretism: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, (Michigan: Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1989).

8 This thesis is fully developed in: Jerald D. Gort, *Dialogue and Syncretism: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1989).

9 David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory* (Aldershot / Burlington: Ashgate, 2005).

sphere, must be considered when it comes to the birth of the modern IRD movement as well as the birth of the WCRP in particular. The following chapter takes these discussions into consideration. They are, however, primarily based upon the terminology used in the source materials.

To discuss these developments, one must start with some analysis of the historical context during which WCRP emerged initially in the late 1960s and RfP got established during the year 1970 in particular.

2.2 The Counterculture Period and the Fear of another Global Conflict.

In what became the introductory package for the delegates, Dr. Homer A. Jack presents one question that summarizes the main problem that the conference tried to solve: “Why have organized religions been unable to give effective leadership for world peace and indeed why have they usually been unable to affect the policies of governments and their leaders?”¹⁰ In other words, how can religions have a positive influence in politics and try to become a beacon of hope in facing social problems?

Jack, an American Unitarian minister and theologian, took an active role in connecting the pieces that led towards the WCRP Conference. Right from the beginning, he moved from the US to India to help establish the different committees and initiatives that worked throughout 1968 and 1969 towards establishing the WCRP Conference in 1970. His devotion to this task made him the first General Secretary of WCRP and a pillar in the foundation and evolution of the organization renamed Religions for Peace (RfP) a few years after his retirement. This key leadership role also made him the target of some critics and attacks. Chapter 3 takes a closer look at Jack’s role.

The 1960’s and the early 1970’s were central to some of the biggest cultural changes in modern history. The political instabilities faced a cultural boom that was fed by a new form of globalization. The 1960’s saw the escalation of the Vietnam War, the start of US involvement in the conflict in a world divided into two by the Iron Curtain at the heart of the globalized Cold War, the fight for Civil Rights and the search for the end of racism.¹¹ Politically speaking, the 1960s and 1970s were dominated by the antagonism between the political blocks of

¹⁰ Oriental Package material, 1970, BOX-WCRP1, WCRP Japan Archives, Tokyo.

¹¹ James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,” *American Political Science Review* 97 (2003): 75 – 90.

the capitalist West, and the communist East. The race to get the first person to the moon marked the end of a decade of social movements and changes beyond human imagination.

These different socio-cultural strands were central and intertwined with political developments during these years. As the USSR and the USA engaged in the nuclear arms race, the rest of the world watched helplessly and feared the outbreak of a conflict bigger than ever before. The Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 and the lengthy Vietnam War (1955–1975) added to this fear and prompted the need for civil action on a global scale.

The above-mentioned tension between the two blocks of the Cold War had a strong religious dimension: on the one hand the falsely attributed words to Yuri Gagarin “I see no God in here”, illustrate the religious framing of the block controversy. Strong criticism can also be found regarding the way religion had influenced the upcoming of the events that brought Vietnam to War, and how Catholicism had played a major role in the first stages of the conflict.¹² Also, scholars have pointed out the influence of religion in political strategies (mainly supporting two main blocks – Catholicism and Protestantism).¹³

On the other hand, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, in his Inaugural Greetings for the WCRP in Kyoto, emphasized “it is true that many people today are negating or neglecting religion. But, no matter whether they believe in God or not, there are, deep in their hearts, ridden by serious doubts and are asking themselves, “Is this the right way for us to live?”¹⁴

This last quotation leads right into the main subject matter of this article – the development of the first WCRP. Before beginning the analysis, it is necessary to say something about the sources consulted.

2.3 The Japanese WCRP Archives

Since Japan played a leading role in the constitution of the WCRP, the Japanese branch of the WCRP (also key in setting up WCRP’s regional branch, the Asian

12 See on controversial criticism to the Catholic Church and the way it influenced the events of the first years of the Vietnam War by the hand of Ngô Đình Diệm: Avro Manhattan, *Vietnam... Why Did We Go?* (New York: Chick Pub., 1984).

13 Dianne Kirby, *Religion and the Cold War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), offers a selection of scholarly articles regarding the power that religion itself played in the Cold War and how it became a pillar of the different regimes.

14 Niwano’s Greetings. (Transcript) 1970. BOX-WCRP-1. WCRP Japan Archive, Tokyo. (The boxes are quoted according to the guidelines of the respective archives.)

Conference of *Religions for Peace* Japan – ACRP) was instrumental in putting together a series of books that focused on the history of the WCRP [*World Conference on Religions for Peace, 2000 & 2010*]. These books help build an understanding of WCRP/Religions for Peace's evolution. However, they only cover the beginning of the activities, have a greater focus on the periods following the end of the Cold War and, of course, the beginnings also of ACRP.

However, part of the data and materials stored in the archives were not included in these edited books, providing an excellent opportunity to analyze and put together essential data that had not yet been used in order to better understand the beginnings of WCRP/Religions for Peace.

Part of the documents produced during the initial phase (late 60's and early 70's) was moved from Japan to the US by Homer A. Jack, who put them together and edited later in a revised version of the WCRP procedures and the evolution towards RfP in 1993.¹⁵ Those documents related to the conferences are composed of different summaries that, sadly, are only published in Japanese.¹⁶ This situation raises an important point when deciding to do research in the Japanese archives where the originals are still located: these were written in Japanese and, thus, left in Japan. They were not much studied in the following years. Homer A. Jack did not know Japanese, so part of the archival documentation must have been, unintentionally, neglected.

Additionally, Homer A. Jack published a book entitled *WCRP: A History of the World Conference on Religion and Peace*¹⁷ broadly covering the first steps of the development of WCRP. This book, which has been discontinued, is also constructed around parts of the documents in the archives that the same Jack wrote right after the first WCRP was held.¹⁸ In spite of the quantity of interesting

15 Homer A. Jack, *WCRP: A history of the World Conference on Religion and Peace* (New York: World Conference on Religions for Peace, 1993).

16 Rev. Yoshitaka Hatakeyama, former Under Secretary of the Japanese branch of the WCRP (Religions for Peace Japan) and, since late 2014, Secretary General of the Asian Conference of *Religions for Peace* Japan-ACRP-, declared the intention of translating these materials into English so they could serve for further research purposes.

17 Homer A. Jack, *Religion for Peace. Proceedings of the Kyoto Conference on Religion and Peace* (New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1973).

18 Sadly, the main actors of the first act of this play passed away in recent years, such as the 'big 3' Dr. Homer A. Jack, Rev. Greeley and Rev. Nikkyō Niwano, who had tied the hearts of the first 300 people and made the first WCRP possible. However, a second generation, followers of the legacy of the founders are still reachable. Following in the steps of her grandfather Rev. Koshō Niwano, now stands as the president-elect of the Rishshō Kōsei-Kai. I had the chance to have a 30-minute meeting with her, during which we could exchange ideas and opinions on the work her grandfather had done in helping to build WCRP/Religions for Peace, both in

material, the focus was rather on the more recent history than the description of the origins of Religions for Peace.

Therefore, the subsequent analysis is primarily based upon material written in English and found in the Japanese archives, as well as material that was moved to the United States. This means there were some episodes and points left aside or found incomplete in earlier publications in English about the early development of WCRP/Religions for Peace, as well as points of view of other founding members that might not have been taken into account. The materials of these archives are truly important since they fill some blanks in the history of the establishment of the WCRP and help build a better understanding of its achievements and limitations. Therefore, it is necessary to use this information extracted from the archives to further analyze the events in question.

In a way, the history of the archival material mirrors the history of the early WCRP. The first WCRP was held in Kyoto. However, the coordination office had been established in Tokyo a year earlier, which explains why the vast majority of the organizing documents were kept in the facilities of the *Rissho Kōsei-Kai* (立正佼成会), in the WCRP Japan office. However, when it was decided to establish in New York City the headquarters for the newly founded WCRP organization right after the end of the first conference in 1970, the documents that were written in English, constituting a great percentage of the main papers for the founding and the organization of the overseas committees, were moved to the United States.

Japan and internationally. In addition, Prof. Sanada and Rev. Katsuyama, both part of the *Rissho Kōsei-Kai* and present at different assemblies of the World Conference on Religions for Peace, agreed to meet me and to answer some questions regarding the information I had gathered. Finally, I had the chance to talk to Ms. Wada and Rev. Hatakeyama. Both have been working for over two decades in the office and provided me with countless sources of information, opportunities and opinions in what had happened in the recent years and how it might have been connected to the past events of the WCRP. These publications present fascinating pieces of information on the constitution of the first committees and their antecedents. They list, for example, some of the central speeches and the addresses that were presented in the early days of the organization. They also provide the names of the main speakers and the members who acted as moderators of the sessions, showing that the present authorities were high-level scholars, not only important representatives of their respective faiths. As an example, the President of the International Court of Justice in The Hague between 1970 and 1973, Sir Zafrulla Khan (a Muslim leader from Pakistan); the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches in Geneva from 1966 to 1972, Dr. Eugene Carson Blake and the first Japanese Nobel laureate in Physics in 1949, Dr. Hideki Yukawa, all representatives of important political and social segments of the late 60's, were not only present but also speakers. For a more accurate list, see *Rissho Kōsei Kai*, *The Kyosei Times* 56 (October 1970) and Attendance List 1–3, 1970, BOX-Organizers, WCRP Japan Archive, Tokyo.

In the process of organizing the first conference, 90% of the materials kept in the office were written in Japanese. Therefore, some difficulties arose in terms of content. Some material had both copies in Japanese and English. To simplify, I chose the English version when there were two copies of the same text and translated fragments of the documents that were critical into English.

In terms of methods, this created a challenging situation where different types of data had to be read and compared with one another. The analysis contained in this chapter is primarily based upon this archival data. In addition, existing publications in English and the results of a few interviews were used. In sum, access to the materials stored in the Japanese branch of Religions for Peace provided this study with first-hand material not commonly used, which also helps create a more precise vantage point into what happened at the beginning of the World Conference on Religion and Peace.

3 The First World Conference on Religion and Peace

3.1 Main Actors in the 1970 Conference

The pre-history of the World Conference on Religion and Peace starts in 1969. Two different meetings took place with 32 members of an appointed committee¹⁹ that first met in Istanbul, Turkey, in January 1969, and in Tokyo, Japan, in October 1969, with the aim to establish the first assembly of WCRP. The protagonists of this process are as follows:

Archbishop Angelo Fernandes (1913–2000), Archbishop of Delhi and Secretary General of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of India, was the leader of the International Interreligious Symposium on Peace in New Delhi in 1968. He would later be one of the Presidents of the World Conference on Religions for Peace (Catholic).

Dr. Dana Mclean Greele (1908–1986) was the President of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF), and for 8 years, also President of the Unitarian Universalist Association of the US and Canada. He was the last President of the American Unitarian Association and the 1st President of the merged Unitarian Universalist denomination. He was also considered one of the main interlocutors in all the previous dialogues conferences (Unitarian).

¹⁹ Homer A. Jack, *WCRP: A History*, 34–46.

Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath (1902–1973) was the President of the organization of Reform Judaism in the USA as well as a well-known anti-war and civil right activist who worked with Martin L. King. He was the main link to Judaism in the early years of WCRP (Jewish).

Rev. Dr. Homer A. Jack (1916–1993) was the first Secretary General of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, as well as a peace activist, parish minister, denominational executive, and the Director of the Chicago Council against Racial and Religious discrimination. For several years, Jack studied Mahatma Gandhi, which explains why he was sent to India in the early phase of preparations for WCRP. His contributions to the Niwano Peace Foundation and the IARF (International Association for Religious Freedom) were also extremely valuable. He served on various WCRP and different UN committees until he retired from Religions for Peace in December 1983. His role in the conservation of the archives and the legacy of WCRP is outstanding, as well as the connections he kept after he retired from his work (Unitarian).

Rev. Nikkyō Niwano (1906–1999) was the President of the Rissho Kosei Kai, a Buddhist lay organization, he established in 1938. In 1963, he went to the West as a member of the Peace Delegation of Men of Religion for Protection against Nuclear weapons. He met Pope Paul VI and took part in the Second Vatican Council. This experience prepared him to serve on the preparatory council for the establishment of WCRP. He was also the Director of the Japan Religions League and Chairman of its Committee on International Affairs.

The above-mentioned individuals are the main faces who visibly took part in the creation of WCRP/Religions for Peace and who also assumed the main roles in developing and taking it further. Their names are also supported by all those who made the first conference possible, and whose names are also brought up in different sections of this article. These eminent figures dominated the history leading to the foundation of WCRP and all of them, as displayed above, were born in the first years of the 20th century, right before World War I or just at its beginning. Additionally, all of them were main representatives of faiths that had been struggling with the emergence of atheism at the beginning of the 20th century. They also felt an urge to address the main problems the world was facing and to apply religious and moral values in order to help solve them, in a search for a valid way to peace.²⁰

²⁰ First preparatory meetings: Istanbul and Tokyo, 1969, BOX-Letters1, WCRP Japan Archives, Tokyo.

The first traces of modern globalization were seen in those years, as a result, as these key religious figures travelled the world in order to join WCRP.²¹

3.2 Leading up to the Establishment of WCRP/Religions for Peace²²

To analyze the 1970 event, it is important to dig even deeper into its pre-history. The beginning of the first World Conference on Religion and Peace started with the meeting of four religious leaders who met in 1962 in the United States of America. Dr. Dana McLean Greeley, Bishop John Wesley Lord, Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath and Bishop John Wright were the main four among a group of several representatives who agreed to have two conferences in the U.S. (A first one in January, 1964 in New York and a Second National Interreligious Conference on Peace in Washington in March, 1968) before considering a bigger international adventure.²³

After these meetings, Homer A. Jack and H. Haalbert traveled to Asia to find the first partners interested in joining the preparation of a world conference. Following this trip, at the beginning of 1968, a larger group of members started a travelling peace mission to Geneva, Rome, Istanbul and Jerusalem to meet with the leaders of the four major religions of the world (since the 60's and without major change: Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism).²⁴ The trip also stopped in New Delhi for an International Inter-Religious Symposium (sponsored by the Gandhi Foundation) and a Japanese-American Interreligious Consultation on Peace in Kyoto. In the first part of the trip, it is really obvious that Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and Hindu faiths were strongly considered.

Dr. Dana McLean Greeley, Bishop John Wesley Lord and Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath became part of the Committee on Peace sent as Exploratory Mission

²¹ Homer A. Jack, *WCRP: A History*, 398–412.

²² There is a timeline section by Homer A. Jack “Brief chronology of events leading to the Kyoto conference and beyond” in *WCRP: A History of the World Conference on Religion and Peace* (New York: World Conference on Religions for Peace, 1993): 278–280, which provides complete information on all the IRD events and main meetings that led to the first WCRP.

²³ There is a timeline section entitled “Brief chronology of events leading to the Kyoto conference and beyond” in Homer A. Jack, *WCRP: A history*, 278–280 that presents all the IRD movement events and main meetings that led to the first WCRP.

²⁴ Statistics regarding the number of religious population in each period can be found in different books and internet references. An easily accessible one is from the Gordon-Cornwell Theological Seminary, ed. *Gordon-Cornwell Theological Seminary*: <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/> (accessed on 24.05.2020).

to North Africa and Asia, mainly to sound out the possibilities of having different religious leaders join a world event. Rev. Herschel Halbert, and Dr. Homer A. Jack spent four months searching for scholars and leaders who were ready to meet. The results were astonishing.²⁵ They found total readiness from different leaders of religious communities with the wish of joining forces. However, they discovered that some steps needed to be completed before getting into the next stage.

3.3 Planning the Conference

We must bear in mind that the technical limitations of the 1960s made some tasks difficult in comparison to what it would become in the 21st century. In practical terms, the Committee found that there was a need to answer several questions before starting with such a big event:

- Could they make leaders of different faiths to join and to talk at the same level regarding problems and peace? This Factor was one of the main hopes and something that would mark this event compared to other organizations and meetings held until that point in time. Having different representatives sit down and discuss in such a tense climate could be productive in order to help address and hopefully alleviate political issues.
- Would they find a neutral enough place in terms of religion and politics? Holding the Conference in a country that was taking part in the conflicts of the late 60s or with a clear predominant faith would not help create an appropriate climate for the assembly.²⁶
- Based on the sponsorship, could they find the balance and avoid a Judeo-Christian, Western (and US) domination in the symposium? This question would be also solved at the same time as the decision to be taken on a neutral place in which to hold the conference.
- And last but not least, would they have enough funds to have enough representatives attend the meeting? The Conference would be a 100% privately funded event (and by the donations of the different participating associations). In addition, the budget provisions for the establishment of the

²⁵ In the different letters regarding the preparation Committee Letters, 1970–2, BOX-ORGANIZERS, WCRP Japan Archive, Tokyo there are both the figures about the positive reception and the committees that lacked response.

²⁶ Jack & Committee search hall, 1969, BOX-LETTERS, 5, WCRP Japan Archive, Tokyo.

WCRP changed all along with the preparations, and affected the final outcome.²⁷

These first questions summarize the early difficulties encountered by the organizers. Their responses to those questions gave birth to the idea of having a preparatory meeting either in New Delhi or in Tokyo. Taking advantage of the centenary of the birth of Gandhi, the National Committee for the Centenary of Gandhi's birth in India suggested holding it there. It was then when Dr. Jack first stepped to the forefront, moving to New Delhi to organize the several meetings that came after moving to India.

The 1968 encounter in Istanbul served as a pre-meeting once again to sort out some basics that would help prepare the meeting and the opening of an international office that was set up in Boston. On the way back from the first meeting in Boston, Rev. Nikkyō Niwano and Rev. Miyake together with some other Japanese organizers had the chance to meet the Bishop of Canterbury and have a private audience with Pope Paul VI in the Vatican (see section 3.4.3).

On this basis, the first World Conference on Religion and Peace, held in Kyoto, united about 250 delegates from ten major religions and from 39 different countries and nations to discuss three main points: disarmament, development and human rights. These three topics would subsequently become the pillars of the following conferences with a fourth topic added later that would keep changing, depending on the year and location the conference would be held (e. g. such topics included environmental protection and climate change).

3.4 Kyoto 1970

Based on the oldest documents that directly refer to the first WCRP (located in the headquarters of the *Asian Conference on Religions for Peace / ACRP* in Tokyo), the 1970 event was described as:

...a world-wide movement, consisting of men and women of faith who meet to share their concerns about the many factors and situations which threaten world peace and deny human dignity. While acknowledging that religious elements have aggravated rather than reconciled existing tensions and conflicts,

²⁷ The archives still kept the first estimations of the budget and how it changed during the building of the conference. Inviting and coordinating the guests would be the main focus of the entire budget. Budget estimations, 1970, Budget File, BOX-TRANSCRIPTS, WCRP Japan Archive, Tokyo.

yet we would work together as religious people and with all people of good-will for the realization of a world free of violence – a world in which all people may live in freedom, justice, and peace.²⁸

As far as the present argument is concerned, this document is of central importance. In addition to this initial self-description, this paper argues that *the focus of WCRP's attention at the time drifted from religion itself to religion applied to solving world problems*. That was a major change from all the previous inter-religious meetings that had been held in which reflection and exchange about religions was the main focus. At the end of this conference, however, there was a unanimous agreement that there should be a Conference Follow-Up Committee that would continue the task and make sure that the work of the WCRP would not be forgotten. To this end, an actual organization was established also to be called the World Conference of Religion and Peace.

To better understand this change, it is helpful to underline a number of particular aspects of the 1970 event that have been frequently neglected. One of these points is related to the participants of the conference and all the challenges linked to the attendance of the event and how the material in the archives illustrates this.

3.4.1 WCRP Participation

Even though it has been stated before that data regarding the participants on each part of the conference is rather scarce, it was possible to recover the lists and some detailed information on the participants that attended the event, in general terms. The following numbers give a better idea of the nationalities and religions present at the the first Assembly, as well as to help understand other limitations. First, the chart below displays the numbers of attendees and their formal functions, as well as whether they were Japanese (JP) or not (Non-JP):²⁹

²⁸ WCRP. World Conference on Religion and Peace. (brochure) WCRP, 1969.

²⁹ The complete attendance numbers can be found in: Expected Attendance Numbers 7/10, 1970 – 10, BOX-TRANSCRIPTS. WCRP Japan Archive, Tokyo.

Tab. 1: First WCRP assembly total attendance with category division

	Non-JP	JP	TOTAL
Delegates	156	54	210
F. Delegates	6	3	9
Observers	9	18	27
Speakers	2	1	3
Guests	6	14	20
Press	14	250	264
Visitors	10	190	200
Volunteers	–	150	150
Employees	–	100	100
Others	16	66	82
TOTAL	219	846	1065

In addition, the archives provide data on the religious and national affiliation of those participants that were perceived as formal delegates of religious traditions:

Tab. 2: Delegates divided by country and religion

	INDIA	JAPAN	US	USSR	OTHER
Buddhism	1	19	1	2	15
Christianity	6	12	27	8	44
Confucianism	–	–	–	–	1
Hinduism	–	–	–	–	3
Jainism	1	–	–	–	–
Judaism	–	–	3	–	–
Islam	2	–	–	2	14
Shintoism	2	–	–	–	1
Sikh	2	–	–	–	1
Zoroastrian	1	–	–	–	1
Others	–	7	2	–	1
TOTAL	35	31	31	12	92

What can be most easily deduced from this data is that the number of participants was high and relatively international. However, while the number of delegates was relatively balanced on the basis of the four main participating countries, the total number of participants reflects the facts that about one quarter were Japanese. The data on religious and national affiliations also reflects a preponderance of Christians and Buddhists, as well as the centrality of only three countries, Japan, the USA and India, which were the birthplaces of Dr. Jack, Rev. Niwano, and Archbishop Fernandes.

While not explicit in the available charts, the archival sources show that the vast majority of delegates and representatives were past their 40's³⁰, the youngest official representative being a 22-year-old Japanese Buddhist girl who came as a substitute for her superior who could not attend. As has been a frequent subject in the modern religion debates, more than 90% representatives were male delegates (Hindus and Christians had a somewhat lower ratio, but women were still in a clear minority).

Finally, it is interesting to observe that scholars were preferred over leaders of religious communities – who often had lower levels of official education. 80% of the delegates had a Ph.D. and all belonged to some religious studies branch or institution.³¹ Still, it was a meaningful step to have so many volunteers participating in the organizing of this event (without any clear information as to their religious background), which included more women. Plus, strictly speaking, focusing on socially-relevant themes created a time-sensitive need for fast action to tackle them. To avoid transcendental topics and a drift towards syncretism, no religious matters were discussed directly, focusing instead mostly on the three chosen themes as well as, to a much lesser extent, on the logistical procedures of each session (prayers, and rest time for praying³²) and towards the end on the organizational structure that would eventually turn this conference into an organization.

From different archival sources, the following challenges emerge: different letters point to uneasiness with regards to the unbalanced representation of different faiths. Letters from the Organizing Committee concluded that the Muslim

30 Expected Attendance Numbers 7/10, 1970–10, BOX-TRANSCRIPTS. WCRP Japan Archive, Tokyo.

31 The delegate's profiles are still conserved in the archive files of the WCRP, Tokyo. Delegates Profiles, 1970-Niwano. BOX-ORGANIZERS, WCRP Japanese Archive, Tokyo.

32 Minutes of Org Committee, 1969. BOX-TRANSCRIPTS-52, WCRP Japan Archive, Tokyo. The Committee made sure that the WCRP would focus on social problems rather than related religious matters. That is why the Conference itself sacrificed discussing religious matters in order to preserve a focus on social responses to charged content.

world did not then have enough organizations to allow them to invite a figure that could represent a large number of Muslims in a formal way.³³ In addition, the archives document a certain disappointment when it comes to the representation of women and young participants, too few in terms of representation (those who were 35 years or younger). In a letter from Jack to the Officers of the World Conference, there is a strong recommendation to find “more youth, more women, more Moslems, more Hindus, more Africans, more Latin Americans.”³⁴ This clearly reflects how aware organizers were of the challenges to find representatives from these groups.

Despite the awareness about the above-unbalanced figures, there is yet another dimension of the first conference that has to be mentioned – the polarization of the event that can be seen in certain important episodes, demonstrating the fragility and the complications of coordinating many faiths as well as avoiding putting one in front of the other.

3.4.2 Polarization of the Event

The archival materials suggest a two-fold polarization. The first was linked to the concept of ‘syncretism’.³⁵ Even nowadays, syncretism remains a fear, especially among numerically smaller religions since they can easily fuse and blend into another big one. Even though in terms of theoretical thinking, Unitarians tend towards a syncretistic position³⁶, the protagonists of the WCRP tried to propose a balanced approach. On the one hand, the first WCRP did not look to include syncretism. “We are not trying to find a common religion [...] This objective has even been rejected,”³⁷ stated Homer A. Jack in one of his letters when planning the event. On the other hand, the archival materials suggest that there was a need to show the participants that through seeing different religious worship

33 Org to Jack (letter), 1969. BOX-LETTERS, WCRP Japan Archive, Tokyo.

34 Jack to Org-2 (letter), 1970. BOX-LETTERS, WCRP Japan Archive, Tokyo.

35 Helmer Ringgren in *The Problems of Syncretism* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1966) points out that syncretism tends to appear ‘on interreligious encounter’. I would like to point out that, coming from the base that Unitarians themselves were on the top of this assembly, this could have been supposed as an objective of the conference by the detractors.

36 Different fonts consider the actual UUA (Universal Unitarian Association) a syncretic religion. The official webpage, as well as other studies, consider it a borrower of different religions that tend to “create a common faith by abstracting and putting together universal elements believed to underlie the outward forms of religion”. For an extended explanation see Jan Garret, *Universal Religion and Religious Diversity*: <http://people.wku.edu/jan.garrett/urrd.htm>.

37 Jack to Committee-8. 1970. BOX -LETTERS. WCRP Japanese Archives, Tokyo.

every day, one could learn from different approaches as well as learn what each of the major religions say to the world about world peace in a liturgical dimension.

The second polarization was linked to the tensions between the capitalist and the communist blocs. Some of Homer A. Jack's strategic decisions were criticized along political lines. His attempt to meet both sides without politically aligning himself to either created huge problems. For example, when the *Nihon Shukyo-sha Heiwa Kyogi-kai* accused him of being a communist (also by some of his American fellows) and, conversely, when the USSR and China accused him of being a "splitter"; he stated "I am called an anti-communist and "splitter"³⁸ by the communists, both the Peking and the Moscow variety, and I am called a "communist" by the rightists both in America and around the World."³⁹

These discussions and at times polarized positions affected the early WCRP activities. For example, Beheiren (anti-Vietnam war group supported by the US) was not perceived as an appropriate partner by the Japanese Committee (which was the main organizer), and therefore not invited.⁴⁰ The Minutes show that this decision was not only due to a reluctance by the Japanese members but also linked to an anti-campaign by the US. Thus not only social matters, but, unavoidably, also political matters had also to be addressed.

In retrospect, Homer Jack referred to a criticism affirming that the conference was too secular. At some point, delegates felt that the debate lacked enough religious depth and that the language used regarding religious matters was not sophisticated enough and, thus, not adequate for the conference. Some also noted that the conference had too many similarities with the secular peace congresses that the UN had been organizing. As Jack pointed out, "only by the titles or dresses of delegates, or the official name of the conference, could one be sure that it was a religious gathering."⁴¹

38 "Splitter" is a concept that was used during the high tension periods of the Cold War (mid 60's until 1971) to refer to a person who wishes or supports the division between China and the USSR in the communist bloc. This concept appears when the relations between the two communist giants started deteriorating during the mid 60's, which is called the "Sino-Soviet split". These terms were used in a variety of textbooks and articles referring to the 'Sino-Soviet tensions'. For further reference, see Lorenz M. Luthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton / Oxford: Princeton University Press).

39 Accusations to Jack (letter) 1970. BOX-LETTERS. WCRP Japan Archive, Tokyo.

40 Minutes-Committee-1-1970. BOX-TRANSCRIPTS. WCRP Japan Archive, Tokyo.

41 Homer A. Jack, *WCRP: A history*, 247.

This close link between religious and secular readings of the situation can also be shown with regards to the proposal to invite the Pope to the WCRP in 1970.

3.4.3 Invitation by the Pope

The archives of Religions for Peace reveal the fact that its protagonists were very much aware of a trip the Pope had planned around Asia and that there was an extended rumor that he really wanted to visit Japan.⁴² Internally, the people inside the emerging organization repeatedly raised the point that holding a religious event would be the perfect occasion for his Holiness to join. There would be a no better time for the Pope to visit Japan than when a religious meeting was happening.

The archives reveal how the expectations of a Papal visit increased and to what an extent the Pope himself showed some enthusiasm for having a meeting with these characteristics held for the first time, assuring to Rev. Niwano that he would be in Japan joining the WCRP.⁴³ Rev. Niwano, advised by the Apostolic Pronuncio to Japan, Reverend Bruno Wuestenberg, convinced the Organizing Committee to change the planned conference from September to October⁴⁴ so the Pope would be able to attend.

The hopes were initially high, but a letter written in perfect and polite English⁴⁵ confirmed a reversal in the situation. Its contents reveal that Rev. Niwano politely showed his disappointment towards Paul Cardinal Marella, representative of the Pope:

The Most Reverent Bruno Wuestenberg recently informed [...to the Committee...] that the Pope will not come to Japan and nothing more. As mentioned above, I have believed his

42 The same Niwano states in two different letters that ‘His Holiness showed his interest in visiting Japan [...] it would be a fantastic opportunity’ (Niwano to Committee 1970 – 2, BOX-ORGANIZATION, WCRP Japan Archive, Tokyo).

43 There are two full versions of Rev. Niwano’s meeting with His Holiness. One can be found in Masuo Nezu, *Kaizo Zuimonki* (Tokyo: Rissho-Kōsei Kai, 2009), 162–183. The second one is in: Nikkyō Niwano, *Lifetime Beginner* (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Company, 1989), 174.

44 Adjusting the dates (letter), BOX-ORGANIZATION, 1970. WCRP Japan Archive, Tokyo. This points out “in order to adapt the schedule of His Holiness we had to promptly cancel and book again the rooms at [...] moving the schedule from mid-September to late-October”.

45 Disappointment regarding the non-coming of the Pope (letter), 1970, BOX-TRANSCRIPTS-2, WCRP Japan Archive, Tokyo.

expectation of the Pope's visit to Japan. Contrary to my expectation, I feel it very regrettable to receive Archbishop Wuestenberg's [information that the Pope will not attend].⁴⁶

What was probably even more surprising to the protagonists of the first WCRP was that the Pope visited other Asian countries and finally ended his tour in Manila, Philippines, in November.⁴⁷

Besides, [...], he [Archbishop Wuestenberg] has been positively promoting the preparation to invite the Pope to quite another conference to be held in May, 1971, in Japan. [...] I hear the announcement of the Pope's visit to the Philippines and Australia this coming November has been made public.⁴⁸

It is most telling at the time that the same Niwano considered the Pope's rationale to reflect world politics rather than religious considerations. He suggested that the visit could have provoked apathy by some states regarding the Pope moving towards the American-led block and leaving behind further chances of dialogue between representatives of both sides. WCRP would have to wait until its 6th Assembly in Italy in 1994 for a direct participation of His Holiness.⁴⁹

In the years after the 1970 event, WCRP tried to address some of the issues outlined above (attendance, polarization or relation with the established powers...) primarily by introducing a stronger programmatic focus into its work.

3.5 Stronger Programmatic Focus after 1970

The first years of the WCRP were backed by the support of a small number of religious organizations based in Japan and the United States. In particular, after Rev. Niwano had been able to gather a great number of volunteers and Japanese religious leaders to attend the first World Conference, he tried to maintain

⁴⁶ Niwano to Marella-2 (letter). BOX-LETTERS, 1969. WCRP Japan Archive. Tokyo.

⁴⁷ Pope Paul VI visited 9 countries in his last international tour. He promoted Christianity in Eastern Asia and Oceania. More information on these travels can be found in the Vatican archives. <http://w2.vatican.va/content/vatican/it.html> (accessed 24.05.2020). Japan was finally not included in that trip, which supports the theory stated above.

⁴⁸ Niwano to Marella-2 (letter). BOX-LETTERS, 1969. WCRP Japan Archive. Tokyo.

⁴⁹ Pope John Paul II finally attended the opening ceremony of the 6th Assembly of the WCRP which took place in Rome in 1994. More information on the attendance of His Holiness and His address: Religions for Peace, ed. *Sixth World Assembly*: <http://religionsforpeaceinternational.org/sites/default/files/publications/Sixth%20World%20Assembly.pdf> (accessed 24.05.2020).

the momentum of the first WCRP. Slowly but steadily, regional and national committees began their activities and spread around the world. After the European Office was established, the Singapore office that served as the Asian Secretariat opened. By 1980, there were 17 offices and many more prepared to open around the globe.

Since the establishment of the WCRP, there have been eight follow-up world assemblies, the next one being scheduled for August 2019 in Berlin, Germany. There has been a steady increase in the number of participants from a growing number of countries (from 50 in the 2nd conference up to more than 120 in the last one held in Vienna in 2013).⁵⁰ Additionally, the topics have shifted to allow these assemblies to become more of a working space than the 1st assembly with more time spent in four simultaneous commissions (disarmament and security, economic development and human liberation, human rights and fundamental freedoms, and environment and survival), as well as in working parties and panel discussions.

In addition to holding assemblies of religious leaders on average every six years, WCRP was involved in several education/action/service programs. This made WCRP an outstanding organizational representative of the secular rights at a time when the religious world still was only linked to those who were religionists.

The first of these projects was the Boat People Project in 1976–1977, established by the Asian Conference on Religion and Peace and the World Conference on Religion and Peace early in December 1976. Thich Nhat Hanh was the initial Director of the Project but was relieved of responsibility in mid-February 1977, when the two ships at sea (chartered by WCRP) – with a total of 555 refugees on board – found it extremely difficult to find permanent homes for these “boat people.” The Board of the Boat People Project announced in March that the Project would terminate when passengers from both ships were given permanent asylum. It was not until September 1977 that all passengers had disembarked, and many were still living in refugee camps awaiting permanent resettlement. Substantial donations were received from all religions and all continents to meet the costs of this Project. As Rev. Katsuyama stated in one of his declarations, “this was one of the moments where we could really see the power of the WCRP. We were faster and more efficient than any other organization when it came to help the refugees [...]”⁵¹

⁵⁰ More data regarding the countries and the members in: Attendance Final Lists-2–3. 1970. BOX-ORGANIZERS. WCRP Japan Archive, Tokyo.

⁵¹ Katsuyama-Guinovart, audio file, August 17th 2014. WCRP Japan Archive, Tokyo.

A second attempt to help victims of a country affected directly by war came in the form of the WCRP Khmer Fund (October 1979 – May 1980) and the WCRP Khmer Program (May 1980 – May 1981). The project started in parallel to the 3rd assembly when the Board of Directors asked the Secretary-General to explore possibilities for a project related to Kampuchea (Cambodia). Both Homer Jack and Howard Schomer (seconded by the United Church Board of World Ministries to serve WCRP as Associate Secretary for Kampuchean Issues) visited the Bangkok border to seek ways of helping the Khmer people.

Since the establishment of its headquarters near the United Nations in New York City, WCRP has been a close observer of United Nations discussions and activities, particularly in the areas of disarmament, development, and human rights. After being granted consultative status with ECOSOC⁵² in 1973, the WCRP and its representatives were allowed, as any other organization with such a status, to submit communications to a variety of UN bodies, thereby participating in a small way in the shaping of certain United Nations policies. Homer Jack wrote many memos, articles and reports on issues collaborating with the United Nations' delegates and to representatives of other non-governmental organizations. Since 1973, WCRP/Religions for Peace has been working closely with other NGOs, both in *ad hoc* committees and in ongoing organizations working at the United Nations Headquarters or closely related to its mission.

4 Conclusions

This article tried to demonstrate how a number of religious leaders and experts came to collaborate closely together not only to establish the first World Conference on Religion and Peace in 1970, but to transform this one-time event into an on-going international interreligious organization that has been acting as a mediator between religious thinking and social action.

⁵² The UN Economic and Social Council is one of the UN main organs and focuses on social development. One of its main features is that it allows NGO's to be part of it. United Nations, ed. *About ECOSOC*: <http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/about/index.shtml> (accessed 24.05.2020).

4.1 Summary of the Main Findings

First, the present analysis tried to show to what an extent the initial idea of the WCRP was a direct reaction to the conflicts that arose in a triple context: The Cold War, the loss of direct influence of religion on politics in many countries, and the necessity to help solve social, political and moral problems that arose in the 60's. The WCRP established interreligious/interfaith dialogue as a tool that would try to positively influence the way the leaders acted at that time. Accordingly, there was a new eagerness to collaborate among many politicians and people of different religious groups and social strata. The WCRP group lead mostly by Homer A. Jack and Rev. Niwano tried to carve a unique space, separate from the main line of traditional religious actions, to establish a new kind of basis for the IRD movement as we know it nowadays, with a focus on addressing contemporary social and political challenges, which had not yet emerged within other interreligious/interfaith efforts existing at the time of WCRP's inception in 1970.

Jack considered the World Conference on Religion and Peace “a first—a trial, a model. Like a baby. If it were given too much responsibility, too fast, the baby could perish, no matter how heralded the birth.”⁵³ Seen in a global perspective today, after 45 years of existence, the WCRP clearly succeeded in a time in which political difficulties and different encounters marked the instability of its first two decades in particular. To tackle social issues arising in the 60's, WCRP started building peace and understanding through dialogue, while opening its doors first not only to members of major world religions, but little by little to all sort of volunteers and secular members.⁵⁴ The founders created an environment in which those who were neither religious leaders nor religious experts in any of the proposed areas would be able to openly hold discussions, propose ideas, learn about and work together across religions and also at times including agnostics and atheists for peace through humanitarian and social action.

Religions for Peace acts as a catalyst and a rendez-vous point in which dialogue and identity stand before everything else, working both locally and globally in building projects around the world, in which faiths do not act as moralizers but as a help to address and do something concrete about different social

⁵³ Jack to Niwano-15 (letter). BOX-LETTERS, 1969. WCRP Japan Archive. Tokyo.

⁵⁴ The work of the institution can be primarily seen in the five edited volumes that followed the original one (a total of 10 main Assemblies that have been held in all the main continents except South America, with the next to last one held in 2013 in Vienna) and the last one held in Lindau, Germany, in collaboration with Ring for Peace and various German governmental levels. All the volumes are edited by *Religions for Peace*.

problems. To spread peace using these projects and dialogue as a tool has become one of the main objectives of Religions for Peace.

More recently, through holding its 7th Assembly in Jordan in 2013, Religions for Peace has addressed more directly the long term Israel-Palestine conflict as well as the recent rise of various forms of violent extremism done falsely in the name of religion.⁵⁵ RfP has hundreds of volunteers and workers working on a variety of on-going projects, although often on a small scale.⁵⁶ There is more local aid to be offered. In addition, there is a bigger need to carefully choose the topics for each assembly. Thus, the evolution of the media, the communication systems and the coordination of the different offices has made somehow, unnecessary, to organize such big events every three years, even though it was one of the first wishes of the organizing committee.⁵⁷ The budget problems that the WCRP had to face at first, plus the difficulties that it had to face in organizing such a big event every three years (we are talking about the end of the 70's and the 80's) made such a proposal more like an idealistic target. Over almost half a century since its inception, the intervals between each WCRP assembly has now reached an average of 6 years.

Probably the biggest achievements of the first WCRP, in retrospect, is that through its transformation into an organization with international outreach, its impact has lasted now for almost half a century. Moreover, it has been able to create a space for a fairly neutral dialogue between the followers of the major religions worldwide, that come together to try to address and respond constructively to the biggest current issues. It is worthwhile to remember that the most commonly used words in all the speeches of the first WCRP were “fear”, “war” and “nuclear power”.⁵⁸ Those words were triggers for establishing such a historic event. It was then the first time that humankind saw a real chance

55 Treated in various seminars and texts by RfP. The Seventh World Assembly took place in Jordan. More information: Religions for Peace, ed. *Seventh World Assembly*: <https://rfp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Seventh-World-Assembly.pdf> (accessed 24.05.2020).

56 In terms of local aid, and as a noted example, Religions for Peace-Japan has been working in the Sendai-Fukushima area in order to assist those affected by the results of the great Tohoku earthquake and the following tsunami from March 11th, 2011. The Fukushima Aid Program and the humanitarian activities regarding major natural disasters are listed in <http://saas01.netcommons.net/wcrp/htdocs/fukkoushien/> (accessed 24.05.2020).

57 Homer A. Jack, “Declaration of the First Assembly,” in *Religion for Peace. Proceedings of the Kyoto Conference on Religion and Peace* (New Delhi: Ghandi Peace Foundation, 1973): 130–134.

58 The main opening addresses and speeches from Kōshō Otani, Rev. Niwano, Dr. Greeley and Angelo Fernandes all of them include “fear”, “threat”, “atomic bomb” in their contents. It is for sure that it was one of the triggers, to avoid that conflict. Opening Speeches-Conference-Drafts. BOX-TRANSCRIPTS-2. 1970, WCRP Japan Archive, Tokyo.

of being annihilated if one of the major powers had made a move towards a nuclear war. There was a necessity to talk about these issues and find what people of religion could do in order to avoid the outburst of any kind of conflict.

4.2 A Final Consideration

To make sure that the first WCRP assembly would succeed and be free from any kind of conflict (neither political implications nor social demonstrations, as shown in the concerns by some organizers regarding the student demonstrations of Kyoto and Tokyo⁵⁹), it took eight years of preparation to build towards this first event, with plenty of drafts and failed attempts. This path was long and full of hardships.

This paper has attempted to show the eagerness, doubt and even polarization of the first WCRP assembly and the establishment of the following organization that was received with mixed hopes in different religious sectors. Since 1870, assembly after assembly, fears like syncretism and non-inclusivity, as well as nationalism, were set slowly apart.

Rev. Niwano, Rev. Jack, and their fellows encountered plenty of limitations: reduced number of attendances small coverage, not a great acceptance in the international community, initially, and the disproportionate representation of the religions. Nevertheless, the first WCRP became a stepping-stone for the creation of WCRP/Religions for Peace and, what is more, a mirror through which one can also look at one of its most active creation, the Asian Conference on Religions for Peace. This regional WCRP/Religions for Peace branch has become one of its most active. Born in the middle of the conflict era of the Cold War, it grew worldwide to help heal through IRD and collaboration the wounds inflicted to society by war, discrimination and various forms of social dangers that humanity has been facing in more recent history.

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