

The Alternative

Box 1405, Montauk NY, 11954; gm1405@aol.com

Vol. XXVII No.

I

Sept. 2000

Dear Reader,

Every other year we devote this first issue to international perspectives on education and religious education. Maria Harris sets the scene of the International Seminar on Religious Education and Values which met this summer in Jerusalem. We then have extracts from two papers at the Seminar. Peter Schreiner, a Dutch educator who heads the Comenius Institute in Munster, Germany, writes on ecumenical schools in Europe. Heon-Wook Park, a Korean educator who works in Japan, writes on Japanese peace education. The issue finishes with an essay by Gabriel Moran on an international perspective for the U.S. presidential campaign.

EDUCATION FOR SHALOM

By Maria Harris

The International Seminar on Religious Education and Values met last summer for its bi-annual gathering. It was the twelfth meeting for the gathering of scholars, researchers and teachers of an institution that has brought together participants from over twenty countries since 1978. This time, and for the first time, ISREV members gathered in Jerusalem at the Kiryat Anavim Kibbutz Hotel, and were convened by Professor Yaacov Katz, Director of the School of Education of Bar-Ilan University in Israel.

In the early years of ISREV, members from the United Kingdom, western Europe and North America formed the largest groups of participants. This time, however, the diversity of the group was significant: besides new members from Israel, there were scholars from New Zealand, Australia, Japan, Kenya, Turkey, Switzerland, and Namibia. The largest representation was made up of scholars from Germany.

The theme of Education for Shalom lent itself to a breadth and depth that honored the topic. Plenary sessions included papers on education for peace and the background of evolutionary ethics, Australian perspectives on education for Shalom, education for the righteous and good life through art, the movement from

educational management *of* shalom to management *for* shalom, and a peace education project for Israeli Jews and Muslims. Collegial papers, shared in smaller groups, rounded out the theme with presentations on peace and the healing of life's hurts; swords and pruning hooks that linked historical dance to a portal for peace; an African perspective for peace and reconciliation; a session entitled *There are no teachings from Auschwitz* (Elie Wiesel).

The great value of ISREV as I have encountered it over the years, however, lies in the way academic ideas and experiences are linked to what I would call *field* education. As usual, this year's gathering made this kind of education possible in three ways. First was the opportunity to visit Israel itself, and more particularly Jerusalem. Yad Vashem silenced us and spoke more powerfully than it is possible to say; the time in the old city, with its different *quarters* and time at the Wailing Wall was in conversation with *real* time since we came together at the same time that Ehud Barak, Yassir Arafat, and Bill Clinton were in conversation over peace; and the history of the land as we traversed it claimed our thoughts.

But so did the conversations we held with one another, over communal meals, at tea and coffee breaks during each day, in the conversations that followed the presentation of papers, and most deeply (and often hilariously) at the annual entertainment where we drew on our common humanity through dance, mime, skits, and song. To sing *Dona Nobis Pacem* in Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin provided an education for Shalom in its own eloquent way that enabled us to savor the time together.

ECUMENICAL SCHOOLS

By Peter Schreiner

Pluralism is a political and pedagogical challenge. The shape of societies in Europe becomes more and more pluralistic, and schools are central areas to deal with diversity, the search for identity, and the need for mutual understanding.

It seems that most of the education systems in Europe are not well prepared for dealing with pluralism. The increasing variety of pupils coming from different cultural and religious backgrounds did not change the constitution of the public school systems. They are mainly oriented on a harmonic national view which does not include pluralism of society.

Religiously affiliated schools in Europe are also challenged by a situation of increasing pluralism of cultures, religions and life-styles. The state school is the prevailing form of the school system (for example, only 5-6% of all pupils in Germany attend other than state schools) but the discussion of a special contribution of religiously affiliated schools is increasing. What kind of profile do

they offer? Do they provide better education? Do they challenge the public schools in being good/better models? In some countries religiously affiliated schools play a dominant role (for example, 2/3 of all Dutch schools are religiously affiliated. This is due to a specific process in the 18th and 19th centuries where a compromise in society concerning religious education in schools was made).

As a result of the radical changes in politics and society, religiously affiliated schools play an important role for the development of newly organized educational systems in some middle and eastern European countries (Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovak Republic). There seems to be a need to develop new ways of dealing with existing cultural and religious differences all over Europe. In some of these religiously affiliated schools the cooperation between different faith traditions is a decisive element of their constitution; these schools call themselves ecumenical.

The question is whether the schools which were founded as ecumenical schools or merged from a mono-religious setting to an inter-religious school provide better opportunities for education in a pluralistic world. One would expect that these schools are especially concerned about ways and methods of understanding and orientation toward religious differences, and the competence to solve conflicts in this area. We engaged in research to investigate the practical side of the ecumenical understanding of some of these schools.

Results: The following points were found to be key elements of an ecumenical school: the practice of tolerance, a dealing with differences, emphasis on pupil-oriented teaching, participation of pupils and parents, and projects in the area of justice and peace education.

The schools differ due to their specific context, the conditions of society and educational systems, as well as the relationship to churches and religious communities. Some of them are church schools, organized by the church, others are independent of the institution and based on the initiative of Christian parents and individuals. Despite existing difference we found some comparative issues and common challenges.

Each school has an independent biography which has to be taken into account. The founding of the school, the developments and the current situation are part of this biography. It is influenced also by the society on the local, regional and national levels. The specific dimension of ecumenics can only be understood in this context.

Each school has an identity which is nurtured by a school concept and the praxis in the school. We found three different dimensions that were linked:

1)The world view dimension: different understandings of ecumenics can be found in ecumenical schools. A narrow understanding of cooperation between Protestants and Catholics and/or an inter-religious understanding of cooperation among different faith traditions.

2)The content dimension: Which contents are central in the classroom? It is an ongoing challenge for the schools to realize the concrete ecumenical orientation in the different school subjects. Increasingly, there are cross-curricular activities.

3)The pedagogical-organizational dimension: Is there an ecumenical orientation in didactics and methods? How can the teacher-pupil relationship be described? Is there an ecumenical dimension in the learning-teaching process as well as in contacts between the school and the context?

We also found these elements in the school: services and worship as an integrated part of school-life, meditative practices for the opening of the school day, and participation of parents in the school life through projects for pupils, school boards and joint activities.

JAPANESE PEACE EDUCATION

By Heon-Wook Park

As a strong economic power, Japan is not unaffected by internationalization and globalization. Nevertheless, because ethnically it remains 98% Japanese, it continues to understand itself as a racially homogeneous nation and it has difficulty freeing itself from an unaccepting attitude toward its resident aliens, especially those coming from Asian countries. Seen from a broad view the Korean minority (52% of the foreigners) represents the presence of Asia within Japan and suggests a way of relating Japan to Asia. The way Japan responds to this minority is a kind of touchstone by which we may judge how Japan is facing up to its past actions and present stance as a nation.

The problem of human rights for Japan's Korean minority needs to be practically and quickly addressed on the levels of law, society and politics. Beyond political efforts for improvement, it is even more important to address the question of how the average Japanese intends to live in relation to the heterogeneous other who is their neighbor.

An education that truly respects human rights should cultivate the character of a person who seeks to establish a peaceful society by means of mutual acceptance and giving between people of different races. This view of peace education is grounded on a concept of peace that treats individual human rights

and ethics within the comprehensive perspective of society, nation and world. From a Christian perspective, there is nothing as ethically significant as the aim of peace making in the world, for God is not a God of disorder but of peace (1 Cor. 14:33). Without such a comprehensive view of peace education, an ethically caring human rights education will miss its foundation and goal.

Unfortunately, such an inclusive peace pedagogy is virtually nonexistent in Japan. Perhaps this is because, while enjoying a peaceful era for the last 55 years, people have lost a sensitivity and responsibility vis-a-vis issues of peace and war. There has been no consciousness of the need for a broad, comprehensive perspective on education, namely, peace education

To date, peace education in Japan has mainly developed in relation to the movement to abolish nuclear weapons since two Japanese cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki were victimized by atomic bombs at the end of World War II. However, Japanese peace education is currently struggling to develop beyond a focus on the tragedy of atomic bomb victims. Such a broadened understanding would seek to shape the humanity of the person who understands him- or herself in relation to others. Such a peace education must move beyond the dichotomy of mutual retaliation of oppressed and oppressor, attacker and attacked.

Our view of peace education begins with the common affairs of daily life, centered for example within a small, ethnic community like the Korean minority in Japan. Here one may learn to reflect critically upon oneself and view the other as an indispensable partner in the cooperative effort to live together. If we as a long-oppressed minority in Japan can embody and exhibit such a peace education which comes out of our experience of pain, there will be a transforming effect that will invite the attention of the Japanese majority.

A nation that makes every effort to build the character of a person who can practice self-relativity and the acceptance of neighbor will foster justice over injustice, and will appeal to conscience over accusation. There is latent in this position a transformative power that helps to create an integrative culture in place of the antagonistic one, and a pluralistic society in place of the monolithic one.

Whereas the Korean minority in Japan has heretofore been no more than a passive symbol of the political and ideological opposition between Japan and North Korea or North Korea and South Korea, now we may play the role of reconciling bridge builders. In our existence and action we may indeed be a symbol pointing in the direction of world peace.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE WORLD

By Gabriel Moran

According to present opinion polls, about three-fourths of young people (18 to 24 years of age) do not intend to vote in the U.S. presidential election. When asked why they are not going to vote, the typical reply is "There is no difference between the two parties" or "Neither party is speaking to issues that interest me."

The first of these statements is demonstrably false but it has to be admitted that the range of issues discussed and the way of discussing them are remarkably similar for both parties. The second response can be seen as a variation on the first, that is, the range of political discussion in both parties seems irrelevant to the life that many young people experience.

The main response to these responses is to castigate the young for their parochialism, selfishness and cynicism. It is indeed irresponsible to expect a continuing flow of benefits from a political system if one is unwilling to perform the minimum act of citizenship, voting for the person who seems the better of two presidential candidates.

While this irresponsibility cannot be justified or excused, political and educational leaders would do well to search for the basis of a seeming apathy among the young. Some of the young nonvoters are astoundingly narrow in their world view which does not extend as far as their neighborhood, let alone the nation. But for some young people the problem is just the opposite. They are made cynical in large part by the self-centeredness and parochialism of their elders.

Anyone outside the United States, who could bear to listen to the convention speeches of both parties, had to be dismayed and frightened by the myopia and introversion of United States politics. One theme dominated both conventions: How shall we divide up the loot? My plan is better than the other guy's because you the voter are going to get a bigger piece of the one, two, three...trillion dollars. A few voices can be heard warning that the big bucks may not materialize but that point does not change the range of discussion.

The outsider to the United States can only ask in bewilderment: Don't those people realize that for this moment they have an obscenely disproportionate share of the world's wealth and military power? Don't they have anything to talk about except how to make more money for themselves? Don't they understand that even for their own country's good they have to acknowledge the existence of other countries and make their country become a responsible world citizen?

In one paragraph of his fifty minute speech, Vice President Gore did name Europe, Africa and Asia. Acknowledging that they exist is a start but couldn't

something be said about our relation to other continents and countries? For example, couldn't Gore have had a paragraph such as: Africa is suffering the worst health crisis that the world has seen since the middle ages. Why doesn't this great country of ours commit its technical resources to support African countries and African peoples in their medical plight and resulting social dislocation? Billions of dollars are needed but not as a loan that will worsen their debt problem. Work on an AIDS vaccine has never been a top concern because it is not profitable for drug companies. Why don't we face that problem and try to change the situation?@

Would such a paragraph have lost Al Gore votes? A few perhaps but it might also have awakened some genuine compassion in a few other people, both young and old. More important it would begin to situate the United States in the actual world where every president -- after some rough on-the-job training -- has to act. Just when a U.S. president has begun to get enough experience to work with other world leaders he gets replaced by someone whose concerns have been prescription drugs, reading test scores and whether to privatize social security. I am not so naive as to suggest that a presidential candidate should always be discussing foreign affairs.@ The issue is whether anything in U.S. domestic policy can realistically be discussed without grasping that the destiny of the United States is interlocked with the other nations of the world.

Africa, of course, is a distant example, despite the fact that the AIDS virus apparently entered human beings in Central Africa and then traveled by plane to the United States. With our short memories we are able to imagine that Africa's health problems do not touch us. And indeed Africa's devastation is so great that the United States and other nations may succeed in simply isolating and writing off a whole continent. But a Russia on the verge of total collapse, an Indonesia that is terribly volatile or an India-Pakistan conflict will not be so casually and callously dismissed.

If someone wants to be the education president,@he could begin to educate the public about our relations to other countries. As it is, we periodically have it declared that some terrible person (Fidel, Khomeini, Gadhafi, Saddam, Milosevic...) is a threat to our existence and must be stopped immediately and totally. It seems likely that none of these men is a very nice person; but whether each or any of them is a new Hitler@who threatens the whole world is impossible to determine from suddenly apocalyptic rhetoric.

For placing the United States in the family of nations, one might at least expect some acknowledgment of Canada and Mexico that border the United States. The new president-elect of Mexico managed to get a few moments of television and political time. But is the United States ready to pay serious and

continuing attention. Shouldn't we expect that one or both candidates would have said: The United States applauds Mexico's progress toward real democratization. The United States accepts some of the responsibility for the uneasy and at times hostile relation between our two countries for 150 years. But now we have the opportunity to bring about significant change for the better. The United States is ready to help Mexico in its economic development. Peace, hope and stability in Mexico are far more relevant to education in Texas than reading scores.

How is it that United States politicians and their television commentators can exclude from awareness not only Russia and Indonesia but - especially- Mexico and Canada, our first and second trading partners? The answer lies buried in the mythological language that is our standard political currency. Both parties endlessly exult in the Greatness of America. But America is not the name of any nation. America is an idea, one that is great by definition. America is a name for future prosperity. America is equivalent to wealth and freedom. However, America does not enter into any bilateral covenants. America is especially hard on Mexico, Canada and other countries that on a map seem to be on the American continent but which disappear in the dream named America. The dream and the power of America are exclusively claimed by the people between the Mexican and Canadian borders.

One would not guess it from campaign rhetoric but there is no president of America; there is a president of the United States. America is a place of freedom; but the United States is a country obsessed with some freedoms and terribly neglectful of others. America is a place of fabulous wealth for everyone; but the United States is a country where, despite incredible wealth, one out of five children live in poverty. America is the peaceful mediator of every world conflict; but the United States spends 300 billion dollars on armaments to defend itself (against whom?) and supplies arms to anyone with the cash to buy.

By most standards the United States is a pretty good country; it could be worse and it could be a lot better. It is for now the most envied and the most hated country on earth. The envy and some of the hatred are an inescapable result of its current wealth and power. But some of the hatred is generated by the arrogance of the United States which refuses to accept that it is one nation-state among many, that its international responsibility goes beyond dropping bombs in periodic displays of overwhelming air power. No nation-state is altruistic but today more than ever before the well-being of any nation is tied to its recognition of the need for cooperation with other nations.