

The Sixth International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences - San Francisco

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The Sixth International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences (ICUS), lasting from November 25-27, 1977, was the largest and most international of the series of conferences begun by the International Cultural Foundation in 1972.

The 450 participants from over fifty countries had a beautiful setting for their discussions on the theme: "The Search for Absolute Values in a Changing World." The San Francisco weather, crystal-clear every day, never dipped below fifty degrees. Conference headquarters was the Fairmont Hotel, one of the few American hotels having an elegance and style more often found in Europe. Every detail of room registration, meeting set-up, air and ground transportation, meals, and paper publication had already been worked out by the ICUS staff. Unification Theological Seminary students and volunteers from the Bay area were available to

assist the staff and the participants as each need arose. The most frequently heard comment from the participants was: "This is the best organized conference that I have ever been to!"

Even the press must have been influenced by the embracing atmosphere and setting of the conference, for their coverage was surprisingly balanced.



Rev. Moon delivers the Founder's Address at the ICUS. Chairman Sir John Eccles is at left

The participants came from almost every imaginable background: they came from Israel and Egypt, from universities and social service agencies, from the developed and the underdeveloped countries, and from the free and Communist worlds. Included were a number of university presidents, professors from many academic disciplines, officers of scientific and social research agencies, a former head of state, and a former Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Although the conference did not officially open until Friday, November 25, many of the participants, having had to travel thousands of miles, arrived several days early. Many enjoyed the first planned event, a Thanksgiving turkey dinner. After the meal, the guests got an idea of what the forthcoming conference would be like by watching a film on the fourth ICUS in New York.

On Thanksgiving evening, the participants had an opportunity to meet Rev. and Mrs. Moon, as well as Chairman Sir John Eccles and his wife Lady Eccles at a welcoming reception.

The next morning's opening Plenary Session brought to all the participants speeches by Rev. Moon and Sir John Eccles as well as opening statements by each of the four committee chairmen. Michael Warder, Secretary-General of the International Cultural Foundation, opened the conference by noting the contemporary importance of the conference's theme, "The Search for Absolute Values in a Changing World."

The moderator for the morning session was Dr. R. V. Jones, formerly an aide to Winston Churchill and

currently professor of Natural Philosophy at Aberdeen University. "This great annual conference owes its origin to the foresight of Reverend Sun Myung Moon," opened Dr. Jones. "I am convinced that this series of conferences is thoroughly worthwhile." Relating to the theme of the conference, he cited the thought of Huxley, Albert North Whitehead, and Xenopen regarding the quest for scientific truth, the importance of the unity of science and religion, and the perpetual existence of values. He closed by saying, "Reverend Sun Myung Moon has thought deeply about the problems of the world and started the great movement to which we owe this conference."



Rev. and Mrs. Moon greet the participants of the 6th ICUS at the welcoming reception on November 24. To the right are Sir John Eccles and Lady Eccles; left (full face), Michael Warder

In his Founder's Address, Rev. Moon pointed to the need for science to ground itself in basic moral values and for religion in turn to concern itself with the practical problems of mankind. Beyond the concerns of both fields, he observed is the universal search for the Cause creating mankind and the world.

Sir John Eccles, Nobel Prize winner for his work in neurophysiology and Chairman of the conference, then delivered his address. He began by explaining that the conference included in its scope, in addition to the traditional science, social sciences, religion and philosophy, following a more inclusive definition of "science." He continued: "The restrictive materialist convention that has dominated natural science since Descartes has become outmoded.

A conceptual revolution is necessary, but its form and development are as yet unsure. Nevertheless, it will result in science coming to be much more oriented to man with his abilities in creative imagination, in conceptual thought, in moral decisions and in rational argument. All these are properties of the mysterious and wonderful self that is at the core of our being and they are central to the scientific endeavor to understand not only nature but also ourselves. This great theme of the human self will be implicit in much of the substance of our intellectual endeavors during this momentous conference.

"We are in the midst of the most critical period of mankind's long history of crises and revolutions. The world is changing with unprecedented speed and often in ways apparently beyond prediction and control. In the past, crises in human history were often catastrophic in their impact, but were regional. Now they are global. The situation is exacerbated by the confrontation of great power blocks. The impending threat of nuclear annihilation compounds these problems. We feel how insignificant our efforts can be when pitted against this threat of overwhelming disaster. And now in many countries there is threat from within by organized gangs of terrorists.

"Yet we have immense resources in the great cultural tradition of which we are the heirs. It is in this tradition that our conference is devoted to an analysis and evaluation of the factors responsible for our present crises and to an assessment of the many ways in which reason and sanity can eventually come to prevail. In the search for absolute values, we can achieve a wise appraisal of the problems in the light of the accumulated wisdom of mankind. And hopefully we can suggest principles that can give guidance in the attempts to solve or ameliorate the grave problems of the changing world in our times.

"What then are the preferred programs for the future? The exploration and development of such programs will be a large part of our creative and critical thinking at this conference. We must recognize that no one has a prerogative of truth. But we can be honest and courageous searchers."

Then each of the four committee chairmen gave a prospectus on the topic to be covered in the following two days. Dr. Kenneth Mellanby, Chairman of Committee III, the Life Sciences, pointed out that the participants had two opportunities: to address themselves to their fields of specialization in the committees, and to interact informally with experts in other fields. "In this way," he said, "this is the most important conference in the world because of its unique possibilities." Dr. Richard Rubenstein, chairman of Committee I, Religion and Philosophy, drew an analogy between the conference and the recent Sadat-Begin meeting. The press had asked him, he said, what he expected would come out of the conference. He

noted that it is a reflection of our consumer-oriented society that people are always looking for a "product." He spoke of the deep impact which the Sadat-Begin meeting had upon him, noting that the event itself, rather than any product, had a worldwide impact.



A typical committee scene

For the next day and a half, participants could join any of the four committees. In each session, a scholar would present his paper, another scholar would give a commentary, and the floor was opened for discussion. On Friday and Saturday nights, each committee had a group discussion on each of the two topics covered in the day's discussions.

The committee subjects ranged from the most abstract to the most immediate, from the classical to the controversial. For example, on Friday, Committee IV, the Physical Sciences, dealt with a paper, "Physics and the Search for the Absolute," which delved into the meanings and applications of the concept "absolute" through the history of physics, concluding with the reaffirmation of the importance of the absolute. That afternoon, the Life Sciences committee discussed "Health Care as a Global Problem: Social and Behavioral Aspects." The three speakers were involved in medical aid to non-Western or non-middle-class people. One speaker detailed ways in which Western medicine should accommodate itself to native health practices for maximum efficiency in underdeveloped countries. Another described the creation of a medical school in Indonesia especially planned to train its students in rural medicine.

On Saturday morning, Dr. Mary Catherine Bateson delivered an abstract yet interesting paper, "Metaphors of Kinship," to Committee I, Religion and Philosophy. We need a new way to think of the ideal relationship between people, she said, since the term "brotherhood of man" has become so vague. She reviewed the origin and connotation of using the term "brotherhood" and went on to discuss the possibility of using the term "marriage" instead.

"Although we cannot afford to reject any useful metaphor of relationship, especially one so hallowed by use as brotherhood is, we need to recognize that our increasing concern is with the world of the future -- with creating a viable environment for all of our children, born and unborn. We are not concerned with diverging from a common point but with converging and with a convergence that will be fruitful in new life. In that sense, the most vivid metaphor of kinship for the modern world would be not blood but marriage, not consanguinity but affinity: I meet the stranger as someone to whom I might become progressively closer in shared responsibility, to whom I am linked by the future, not by the past, by choice and not by accident."

Committee II, the Social Sciences, discussed a fascinating approach to world unity suggested by Dr. Georges Berthoin. Two primary factors which must be taken into consideration in the planning of an international organization, he said, are increasing global interdependence on the one hand and demands for the recognition of national sovereignty, especially on the part of emerging nations, on the other.

Usually international organizations either leave national sovereignty intact and thus fail at achieving interdependence, or else they pursue interdependence at the cost of national sovereignty. Dr. Berthoin proposed the creation of "extra national" institutions to coordinate what he called the "objective" aspects of government decisions: those necessitating technical studies and which can be solved by expert opinion. The "subjective" level would include the whole realm of politics, ceremonies, elections, etc. and would remain under the control of sovereignty of each country. Mr. Berthoin sees "extra national" institutions as being a third, transcendental force uniting the existing world polarities:

"In conclusion, one could consider the extra national as the third factor which is needed where one wants to express a built-in unity between two conflicting elements which belong to the same government of man. After all, in the phenomenon of life itself the same permanent opposition exists between the individual who carries it awhile and the group, which through its globality, transcends it. Man's conscious reaction through his instinct, reason, or feeling, leads him to recognize the value of both the individual

and the group as compatible through a third element equally present in both: the God, the spirit, the morality, the ideology. Religion appears as one of the extra national institutional ways to discover or reveal to the individual, as well as to the group, their fundamental harmony.



Dr. Herman Wold leads a discussion Group

"The progress of mankind took place through this effort of revelation. It is the process of civilization itself, the one our present world is trying to discover. The compatibility of interdependence -- the group -- and the national sovereignty -- the individual -- exists in the concept of the fundamental unity of the world. In the past, it was the dream of the poet, the zeal of the religious, the faith of the scientist; today it is within the grasp of the most practical and realistic. Therefore, we are not very far from accepting implicitly that the real sovereignty is the sovereignty of the world. Isn't it more and more a fact that national governments can perform efficiently and with legitimacy as long as they represent this new fundamental world sovereignty? The extra national institution could be a way to accustom us and them progressively to recognize and master this reality. The extra national institution should be, then, a tool in this process of revelation which is the chance of our contemporary world."

The committees also got into numerous currently controversial issues. Those who sat in on Committee III's panel discussion on "The Ethics of Recombinant DNA Research" reported that the dialogue became very heated at times. Other popular subjects were: "The Brain-Mind Problem in Relation to the Physical Sciences," and "Biological Foundations of Altruism, Dedication, and Egoism," attracting those participants following the current upsurge of "sociobiology."



Dr. R. V. Jones and Sir John Eccles in informal conversation following the Opening Plenary Session

The fullest possible range of interests was covered in the Sunday morning discussion groups, unique to this year's conference. The most well-attended session was "On Death and Dying," in which an atheist, a Christian, and a Hindu presented their views on the afterlife. In other discussion, more practical matters were considered. "The Relationship of Government and Business to the Individual in Democratic and Totalitarian Systems" dealt with problems as the rising power of labor unions and inflation. Participants from around the world eagerly expressed their personal frustrations about biased press coverage in the group "Media Freedom and Responsibility."

At the Closing Plenary Session on Sunday afternoon, the participants heard summaries of the discussions in each of the four committees. Included in the session were also two excellent speeches. The first speech

was "The Search for the Factual in History," by the distinguished historian Dr. Oscar Handlin. He described how relativistic attitudes have affected the study of history in this century; such attitudes, he said, can easily begin to affect other disciplines unless scholars are watchful. "Truth is absolute. Truth is as absolute as the world is real," he said. "The threat to truth is from those who say that truth is relative to the knower. The danger to the discipline of history is significant. This threat is the erosion of the acceptance of the principle distinguishing fact from interpretation."



Dr. R. V. Jones engages the audience with his harmonica solos

Dr. Handlin outlined four steps which this process has taken:

1. Despair in one's ability to achieve objectivity. Some historians reasoned that since bias is inescapable, everyone could be his own historian.
2. Internal specialization. This has meant that scholars have become more insulated and less open to criticism from those outside their fields.
3. Decreasing autonomy of scientific enterprise. Scientists feel that their work needs external justification; knowledge, rather than being an end in itself, is becoming subservient to another purpose.
4. Decline in the faith of the scholar in his role as intellectual. Dr. Handlin concluded: "The assault upon the basic idea of the fact came first from the totalitarian regimes of the 1930s with the wholesale rewriting of history and with ruthless factual falsification by Stalinists, Nazis and Fascists. But more ominous has been the insidious acceptance of the permissive attitude toward factual manipulation in our own time and in free societies. Both the popular literature of 'fiction based on fact' and presumably scholarly works reveal a reckless abandonment of principle, often well-intentioned, yet based upon ignorance of the pros and the consequences of the sacrifice. A reaffirmation therefore is necessary of the worth of the absolute integrity of the factual record as a means of pursuing the truth."

Dr. Charles Malik, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, swept the audience away with his very emotional delivery of "The Search for Absolute Values." He opened his speech: "How much the relativists of this brave new age think relativism in metaphysical and moral matters is their own invention or discovery, I do not know. But some of them at least affect to believe that they are the first to put forward the arguments they urge and even those of them who are quite conscious of the fact that they are only reviving certain elements in the relativist tradition hardly pay attention to the counterarguments that we already find in abundance in the great traditions which refute their position... The moral is that people either talk from ignorance or from willful disregard for the past."

He then detailed how Socrates and the founders of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were fervent believers in absolute values, giving their followers a heritage living down to this day.

Nevertheless, numerous modern forces have led to a decline in the belief in the absolute. Among them, Dr. Malik noted, were technological civilization, the decline in esteem put on moral character, the rise of atheism and nihilism, and the destruction of history.

He concluded: "But there are absolute values. If you do not see them, they are nevertheless there. Courage, manliness, self-mastery, justice, friendship, truthfulness, magnanimity, integrity, neighborly love, mutual trust, self-denial, humility of the spirit, forgiveness, endurance, patience, suffering.... Values are there. They may be concealed but they can be unconcealed. They can then be perfectly described. They have been unconcealed and described. History moves under their lure. Nothing moves by nothing. Values are the cement of all community. All social existence lives and moves and has its being under their wings. They wing history on."

Sir John Eccles then brought the formal sessions of the conference to a close, "This has been a great

conference and you have made it so," he said. "What is our 'product'? In the future we will have the published record of the proceedings. The second result is immeasurable. That is the educational influence these surroundings have had on each of us. We have all changed and developed."

The Sixth ICUS concluded with a Farewell Banquet hosted by Rev. and Mrs. Moon. Every seat in the huge Grand Ballroom was taken. After an outstanding meal, the guests were treated to an unusual entertainment program. In addition to performances by the New Hope Singers International, the Korean Folk Ballet and Sunburst, the unique evening included contributions from a participant and a participant's wife. Dr. R.V. Jones, moderator of the Opening Plenary session, played Scottish folk songs on the harmonica. When played by Dr. Jones, the harmonica acquired a dignity not usually associated with it in this country.

Azie Mortimer, wife of Dr. Morton Kaplan, and a truly professional entertainer, was another unexpected treat. With magnificent stage presence, she did polished renditions of "On a Clear Day You Can See Forever," and "He's My Brother."



Mr. Salonen introducing Rev. Moon before his closing remarks at the Farewell Banquet

The climax of the entertainment was the performance of the Go-World Brass Band. The audience, many of whom had been hoping that the New York City Symphony would perform again, didn't know what to think at first. But, by surprise, they found themselves loving the music: themes from "West Side Story," some thirties jazz, and a vibrant "Stars and Stripes Forever." The unexpectedness of their joy clearly added to its intensity.

Then Mr. Salonen, President of the International Cultural Foundation, introduced Reverend Moon, stressing his will to accomplish many concrete results. Sensing the warm atmosphere in the room, Rev. Moon started by singing "Arirang," to the delight of many guests. He then expressed his congratulations to the participants for a successful conference. He encouraged them in their upholding excellence in their fields in the face of a rising anti-intellectualism, and concluded by inviting them to the Seventh International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences, to be held on Thanksgiving weekend in Boston.

Thus concluded the Sixth International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences. While there may be as many evaluations of the value of the conference as there were participants, perhaps the most meaningful came from its founder when, on December 4, Rev. Moon termed the conference "a total success."