

Religion, Medicine and Nuclear Disasters

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Opening Address for the Conference

"Effects of Nuclear Disasters on Natural Environment and Human Beings"

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Dear participants and speakers of this conference, honored guests,

Some of you may have wondered why such different organizations as IPPNW and the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau have cooperated in this project of a common conference. How does it fit together that a religious institution and a medical organization together organize a conference which mainly deals with medical, biological and physical problems? This question has to be treated in different respects.

First of all, on a very basic level, one can say that Christian churches – like any other religion – did and does care for the healing of body and soul. Jesus worked as healing physician; in tribal religions we find the healing shamans or medicine men; or in Buddhism is the Buddha for Medicine, Yakushi Nyorai in Japanese, to whom many Buddhist believers take refuge when suffering ailments.

Only modern times have cut the connection between healing and religion. However, even in spite of such separation, I think, religions should continue to pursue the task of healing in one way or another. The question of "How this could happen," naturally belongs to the theme of a different conference. – The reverse question to the physicians gathered here is, of course, whether you still need religion for your work, and if this should be the case, in which way?

Secondly, I would like to briefly explain how in concrete terms this conference of such heterogenous entities as Church and IPPNW came into being. Two years ago the Church invited the independent journalist UESUGI Takashi to a conference about the

TEPCO-nuclear disaster. When searching also for other locations to give lectures on this topic after the conference, a very good cooperation between the Church in Hesse and Nassau and IPPNW developed.

After this lecture tour, bad news from Japan continued; my Japanese wife informed me almost daily about the terrible effects of the nuclear disaster on the natural environment, the society and politics. Now I also learned about the cold-blooded behavior of the leading physician of Fukushima Prefecture, Dr. Yamashita, which reminded me of the contempt of human beings by the Nazi-physician Dr. Mengele. Ian Thomas Ash has documented Dr. Yamashita's words in his film which we shall see later in the evening.

In such a depressing situation of receiving continuously bad news from Japan via the internet, and with the background of the good cooperation with IPPNW members, one day I got the idea to bring together independent physicians from Japan, Belarus, and Europe and to provide the opportunity for exchange about the health situation and for sharing medical expertise. Since 1945, Japanese physicians for many years had gathered experience in the treatment of the patients, the *hibakusha*, who became sick and died too early due to the US-American nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Since the nuclear disaster in Chernobyl 1986, physicians in the Ukraine and in Belarus undertook physical examinations and further developed different methods of treatment. A number of engaged physicians from Western Europe attempted to support the native physicians in the Chernobyl region. – And then 2011, the TEPCO-nuclear disaster occurred in Japan.

Up to that time, *bilateral* relationships had developed between Chernobyl physicians with Japanese physicians on the one hand, and with European colleagues on the other hand. In my view, now time had come to develop *trilateral* exchanges and cooperation between Belarus, Japan and Germany, to share the medical expertise and to search for ways of practical cooperation in the future. What was to be envisaged was a *geographical* networking between physicians and between organizations.

Prof. Gottstein, in his opening address of this conference, quite clearly spoke about the

historical dimension of our theme, the impact of nuclear disasters, when naming Hiroshima & Nagasaki 1945, Chernobyl 1986, and now Fukushima 2011. Hereby he pointed out the historical connections of our problem today. These historical disasters are in no way isolated from each other, they are very much *interconnected* with each other. We human beings, in the end, must learn from significant historical events. In my speech I would like to develop further Prof. Gottstein's considerations about the *temporal interlinkings* to the idea of *spacial or organizational networking*.

I would like to illustrate this matter by the following anecdote from the beginning of my work in Japan. When I was on a study tour in southern Japan in 1990, incidentally I met a young man who worked in the publicity department of a major nuclear-energy company. When he heard that I was German, he told me enthusiastically about all what they had learned for their PR from German nuclear-power firms:

"Nuclear energy is cheap, safe and environmentally friendly!"

This anecdote illustrates the international linkage of the nuclear industry, which we all know when thinking of AREVA, General Electric and Toshiba or Mitsubishi.

On the other hand, this story clearly shows at the same time that the local and national anti-nuclear groups are by far not so much interlinked internationally like the nuclear industry. The reasons are probably not so much lack of financial resources, I think, but the lack of visions for international strategies and the lacking ability of intercultural communication. If there are visions, the required financing may be found soon or later. Lacking ability of *intercultural communication* first of all means the lack of foreign language ability. Because the engaged & concerned persons mostly do not know sufficiently the required languages, too often interpreters have to be employed as linguistic mediators. Secondly, intercultural communication bridges the gaps between different culturally conditioned patterns of thinking and behavior which are mostly unconscious and /or nonverbal. These different culturally conditioned patterns of communication underlie the technical & scientific discussions on a rational level, and to a large they degree determine the outcome of the communication between people of different cultures. For many years I have experienced & observed this basic lack of intercultural communication skills in academic discussions particular between Japanese

and Europeans. If there are no intercultural mediators, unfortunately the best scientific contributions are not properly communicated.

The remarkable issue of this conference today is in my view that we succeeded to *interlink two separate networks* and thereby activate new vigor: IPPNW is already an international network organization and uses this effectively. This becomes clear when considering all the distinguished foreign experts gathering here today.

Also the Christian churches are internationally interlinked. This happens in the ecumenical movement. The word "*ecumene*" means "world(wide)" or "global". Thanks to such an international networking I received the opportunity to work in Japan for twenty-one years. And the Center for Ecumenical Work of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau takes care of the international network among churches worldwide.

Hence, what we have done with organizing this conference is nothing less than the *networking between two already existing international networks*, IPPNW and the Center for Ecumenical Work of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau.

When I returned from Japan to Germany, I had to learn some new German words which had become popular here in the meantime. One of these words was "synergy". Energy is some kind of power of a living being or a thing. Synergy is when different energies come together, reinforce each other and thereby exert considerably more power than only one form of energy. (I do not know whether this is physically correct, but in socially and psychologically such mechanism works.) This happened in the planning and execution of this conference: different expertise of the Center for Ecumenical Work and of IPPNW could be coordinated so that an important conference came into being.

Why do I emphasize this? I believe that the already existing international networks of churches and humanitarian volunteer-organization should work together more effectively. As one concrete step, e.g., the cooperation with the "Lawyers for Peace" should be envisaged. Why? Because the TEPCO-nuclear disaster caused numerous legal problems which have not been solved by the Japanese government or the courts, such as the question of compensation for the loss of property and work. [After having given this

speech I learned that IPPNW had cooperated already with the Lawyers' network IALANA.]

The networking between individual human beings and organizations over against the international nuclear lobby is important for yet another reason. After the Japanese anti-nuclear movement had become quite strong in 2012, as the huge demonstrations in Tokyo and other places showed, the Japanese government split the anti-nuclear movement in Japan, and thereby weakened it considerably according to the political principle *divide et impera*. To make the problem worse, the Japanese people seem to have a natural inclination for social splitting, as e.g. the continuous divisions in the political parties show. Recently, in the important elections of the Tokyo Gouverneur, a rightwing pro-nuclear politician won for the simple reason that two anti-nuclear politicians were unable to unite in order to find a common candidate! [The Japanese anti-nuclear movement presently is not as strong as a few political ideologists from Japan want us make to believe. Unfortunately, it is small, divided, and to a considerable degree frustrated. Therefore, it needs a lot of encouragement from abroad in various forms. This conference serves *also* this purpose.]

In my view, the development of effective networks belongs to the most important tasks of the anti-nuclear movement in Japan. In Germany a network such as "*ausgestrahlt*" can fulfill such important task to bring together nationwide such diverse and heterogenous groups together to big demonstrations and other actions. Networks have the advantage that they function without building up hierarchical power structures; i.e. they are without the mechanisms of social dominion or political hegemony. All the energies which get lost due to the frictions in power-struggles, can be used in networks more effectively for the goals set.

The international networks for peace, justice and protection of the nature must extend also among religions. All too often in history up to the present, religions have fought with each other for dominion over each other. Over against such an attitude, the contemporary endeavors for interreligious dialogue develop alternative patterns of behavior among different religions. Dialogue means to remove misunderstandings and

prejudices in order to build up trust. On the basis of such trust, interreligious dialogue can move forward to interreligious cooperation in social and other issues.

My work at the Center for Ecumenical Work is to pursue interreligious dialogue with members and representatives of Asian religions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism. From my work I would like to tell you another story which illustrates the possible contribution of religions to the problem of nuclear energy. About two years ago I had invited the European representative of the big Japanese Buddhist lay organization Rissho Kosei-kai into my class at Heidelberg University to give a lecture. After the lecture we both talked for a longer time and I asked him what Rissho Kosei-kai's official attitude to the problem of nuclear energy in Japan was. My Buddhist friend, himself being personally very critical of nuclear energy, had to admit that his organization had not such a clear-cut attitude – for the simple reason that many members worked in the nuclear industry. One year later I was asked by Rissho Kosei-kai in Tokyo to contribute an article to the question of nuclear energy from an interreligious (Christian & Buddhist) perspective, which should appear in a special issue of their English journal *Dharma World* on the nuclear problem. This story shows that within a year the attitude of a big Buddhist organization towards the Japanese nuclear politics had changed fundamentally! This gives hope that religious organizations, which until now have acted not clearly against any nuclear dangers, bear the possibility that they take a clear stance in this important issue. – In case of Japan there are other Buddhist organizations which earlier already took a clear stance against the Japanese nuclear politics. However, what is lacking in Japan is a network among such religious groups. If they were effectively linked among each other and would cooperate with anti-nuclear citizens groups, according my personal estimation, the Japanese nuclear lobby would be finished soon!

Now let me turn to the question of contents: What can religions contribute to our problem? When IPPNW members contribute their medical expertise, what can religions contribute to the abolition of nuclear power? Since there is no sufficient time and the subject is not on the agenda of our conference today, I cannot treat this problem here sufficiently. I have treated some of the important issues in my aforementioned article in *Dharma World* from a Buddhist and Christian perspective. Here I would like to mention

only two issues.

First, religions provide the *ethical basis* for our human life in society and nature. Prof. Gottstein already mentioned in his speech that all religions endeavor to protect earth, animals, plants and human beings. Religions teach a fundamentally different value system than that of the nuclear lobby which knows only of the economic profit which can be taken out of nature, human beings and society. In the whole span, beginning with the digging of uranium, the brutal exploitation of nature and human beings, up to the incompetent crisis management of nuclear disasters, in all their actions the nuclear energy managers express their contempt for the dignity of nature and human beings. Religions teach that economic profit on the expense of nature and human beings is utterly evil. They teach that we should foster respect for the earth, plants, animals and fellow human beings. The well-known physician and theologian Albert Schweitzer called this attitude the "reverence for all living beings" (*Die Ehrfurcht vor dem Lebendigen*). Hence, religions first of all provide us human beings with an ethical orientation in this our world.

The *second* important point which religions may contribute to the realization of a more just and peaceful world is that it can give hope, *courage and strength* when facing difficult situations. In the Old Testament we find the story of the little man David who fought the big and strong hero Goliath. David achieved victory because he used his brain. This story provides hope that the overly mighty evil might be overcome even with less strength if we use our intelligence and wisdom. In the New Testament, Jesus taught the sentence: "Be clever like snakes, and honest like doves!" - For our situation today this means, in my view: we should employ cleverly our intellect and develop strategies to stop the influence of the life-destroying nuclear lobby. At the same time, Jesus suggests an ethical attitude which is honest and upright. Such an attitude is in my view fundamental also for building up effective international networks. Let me add an impressive example from Japan: Skilled Japanese gardeners can move a big rock without much strength by just placing the lever at a certain place of it. They know such crucial points by much learning from their teachers and then from own experience. Most religions teach values such as respect for the dignity of nature and humankind, and

they give hope and courage in seemingly desperate situations. This seems to me to be important particularly for the following reason: The nuclear disasters in Chernobyl and Fukushima showed very clearly that the nuclear industry triggers *totalitarian developments in society and state*: The miserable crisis-managements of state and nuclear companies works with information bans (blackout), calculated misinformation, fabricated information for manipulation of the citizens, financial bribery of physicists, physicians and other scientists as well as of institutes, abolition of the free media, subversion of juridical systems and even abolition of democracy. Such tendency towards a totalitarian development of a state through the nuclear industry became apparent in December 2013 when the Japanese government issued a new tough law for state secrets which will abolish most democratic fundamental rights, such as voicing one's opinion freely, freedom of the press, fair and transparent court procedures, etc. When this law will come into force, the question arises as to how Japan will develop in the near future. In this case again we clearly detect again the huge influence of nuclear companies and the military.

Many fundamental rights, such as protection of the private sphere and the freedom of the press, are today curtailed in the name of "fighting terror" to a considerable degree as well as globally, also in Germany. However, governments are blind on one eye: In the case of Japan, the government permits TEPCO to terrorize a whole prefecture and much more, unchecked and without punishment! TEPCO displaces numerous people and animals out of their home. And then vice versa, the government encourages or forces the victims of the nuclear contamination to stay in their homes or return there in order not to deplete Fukushima prefecture of its citizens. The government encourages or forces the people to stay in contaminated areas and endure terrible medical and social conditions, and to eat and sell contaminated food. The documentary film by Ian Thomas Ash clearly illustrates such terror of citizens by a nuclear company and the government.

We hold this conference in a conference center which bears the name of Martin Niemöller. Niemöller belonged to those pastors in the Third Reich who had the courage out of their religious faith to stand up openly against Hitler's totalitarian regime and its terror. For his behavior and actions he was thrown into prison. After World War II, he

became the first Church President (a kind of bishop) of the Church in Hesse and Nassau. Also today we need much courage to engage ourselves for a more just and peaceful world, as well as much wisdom for our actions. For this purpose, we must fully employ our intellect. For this purpose we have come together today, I believe.

Before concluding my speech, I would like to suggest a linguistic convention which a Fukushima citizen once pointed out: we should not speak of the "Fukushima nuclear disaster" since this discredits his beloved home-prefecture. Instead we should speak of the "*TEPCO nuclear disaster* in Fukushima" because it clearly names the responsible culprit.

Now, finally coming to an end, I am very glad that the cooperation between IPPNW and church could proceed without reservations and that we were able to overcome a number of hurdles. Especially I would like to thank the following persons for helping to organize this conference:

My colleagues Wolfgang Buff and Friedhelm Pieper, our secretary Martina Schreiber who bore a very heavy workload, and particularly the Director of the Center for Ecumenical Work, Rev. Detlev Knoche, who provided much funding and other back up; Next, I would like to thank the representatives and members of IPPNW: Dr. Dörte Siedentopf, Dr. Angelika Claussen, Mr. Frank Uhe and Ms. Angelika Wilmen, as well as Dr. Pflugbeil, who unfortunately could not attend.

Then my "old" friend Prof. Detlev Schauwecker, my wife, Markus Nau for the sound technology, Ms. Reitz of the Martin Niemöller Haus, and many other persons who helped in various ways for the preparation and execution of this conference.

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I do hope very much that the communication made possible at this conference will develop further into various practical forms of trilateral cooperation in the near future!
Thank you very much for your attention!