



港 美 中 心
HONG KONG
A M E R I C A
C E N T E R

Tel.: (852) 2609-8748

Fax: (852) 2603-5797

Email: hkac@cuhk.edu.hk

Website: <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/hkac>

Mail: The Hong Kong-America Center Ltd.

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Shatin, N.T., Hong Kong

Hanoi, Vietnam

April 17, 2009

Tribute to Leonard Swidler

Visiting Vietnam is poignant for Americans, especially those of us who came of age on American campuses during the 1960s. I came to Temple as an undergraduate in the Religion Department where I was inspired by Leonard Swidler and his passionate scholarship on inter-religious dialogue and the ecumenical movement of the day. Vatican II gave us a sense of fresh possibilities for Christianity remaking itself in the modern world. By contrast, America's wrongful war in Vietnam sparked a moral outrage in the country that made the mission of dialogue ever more compelling.

Now sitting in the quiet sunny courtyard of an old French government house in Hanoi, ironically remade as the Museum of the Vietnam Revolution, I recall those highly charged days we lived in the televised shadow of the Vietnam war. I studied with Len Swidler and his spirited colleagues in religion at Temple. For Len, teaching and scholarship were about making a better world. Relevance of academe to the needs of a fast-changing, urban society was our byword. The Institute for Dialogue was a beacon of light in dark times. Reaching out to understand the other, Len would say, offers us clues to understanding and renewing ourselves. The energy in the man came from his rock solid faith in the value of dialogue. He was right then, declaring that we must learn to dialogue or we die, and he is right now.

Len Swidler reappeared in my life last year in Hong Kong while on a Fulbright consultancy. He was preparing for the Trialogue in Amman, Jordan and wanted Asian perspectives on the intersections between religion and business. When he returned from Jordan, my friend Po Chung said he was so impressed with Len and the work of the Institute that he offered to give first support for the next dialogue meeting to be held in Hong Kong. Such is the power of Len Swidler to draw people of good will together to do great things.

So we are planning a conference on religion, business and the global economic crisis for fall of 2010 as a joint effort of Temple's Institute for Dialogue and the Hong Kong America Center. We also had the great honor of having Len with us for the 80th birthday in January, just after he was denied entry to Burma, where he has inspired a new academic center devoted to inter-religious dialogue. May Len Swidler long inspire us all in his life of Dialogue!

Shalom,

Glenn Shive