



## EDITORIAL



With this, the 45<sup>th</sup> issue of *Bridges*, I am marking the end of thirteen years as Coordinator of the Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations and Editor of its Newsletter. It seems appropriate in passing over the reins to look at how I have seen Christian-Muslim relations developing over the years in the Australian context from the perspective of the Columban Mission Institute.

There are three distinguishable but related phases in that development, each marked by a significant and defining event.

In 1997 the Centre was established and I accepted the leadership role. This was after many years lecturing in the area of Women's Role in Church, Society and Religions. The shift into the field of Christian-Muslim relations was then naturally made via relationships between Christian and Muslim women. But entering the field was a little like arriving at the sports ground when the other team

doesn't turn up. Where were the women? Where to look for them? Our first official act was a formal tour of the Gallipoli Mosque in Auburn, Sydney. And there it all began. I met a young woman whose friendly welcome to her sacred space not only set the pattern for what I have experienced in relating to Muslims ever since, but was a lesson to me in openness and hospitality to people of other faiths to be emulated..

The Centre will always remain indebted too, to Aziza Abdel Halim AM, founding President of the *Muslim Women's National Network of Australia* who introduced me to her organization, provided speakers for events and became in effect, our first dialogue partners. The Muslim Women's Association also welcomed a group of Catholic women and introduced them to Islam at the Lakemba Mosque. Another significant person was Fr. Bill Burt SVD who put us in touch with his Muslim contacts. As a result, after only five months, the Centre hosted a visit of Cardinal Francis Arinze, President of the *Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue* to meet and speak with about a hundred people, Christian, Muslim and other faiths. This event marked the real beginning of the Centre, putting us on the map, as it were, as the first official Catholic organization working specifically in Christian-Muslim relations in Australia.

The second phase was triggered in April 2001 with the visit to the Centre of Professor David Thomas from the University of Birmingham's Centre for Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations. He spoke on *Christian-Muslim Relations: Reality or Dream?* The

real significance of this visit was the conversation afterwards with one Mehmet Ozalp, who asked "But where was the Muslim speaker?" to which I replied, "Yes, where?" He asked for a year's grace and said there would be Muslim speakers in future. Within that year *Affinity Intercultural Foundation* was established and there opened up opportunities for collaboration, sharing the podium, and co-hosting events. What happened in New York on September 11 of that year precipitated such an upsurge in demand for information, talks, resources and speakers that we could barely keep pace. This led to the current situation where many other Muslim groups, too numerous to name, have entered into similar working relationships not only with our Centre but with an equally large number of Christian and other faith traditions.

Phase Three sees our Centre today as one of many organizations, some formal, some informal, working in Christian-Muslim relations and interfaith dialogue generally. We've asked ourselves what the next stage might be? What is yet to be done? What new approaches can take relations and dialogue to a deeper level? One way of doing this has been introducing academic courses on Islam and on Interreligious Dialogue through the *Sydney College of Divinity* at the *Catholic Institute of Sydney*, and we are looking to extend these through on-line courses at the *Broken Bay Institute*. Another has been publishing key Vatican documents on interreligious dialogue to make available a fuller understanding of Church teaching in this field.

The significant event characterizing this current period of Christian-Muslim relations was the initiative taken in 2007 by over two hundred Muslim scholars to send to the leaders of all Christian churches an open letter entitled *A Common Word Between Us and You*. It was significant because it represented a united Muslim voice reaching out to Christians to look together at what both believed and taught was central to their respective faiths – love of God and love of neighbour. The Centre published this letter in Arabic and English for wide distribution and has organized seminars and talks, together with Muslim speakers, to spread the

message. If our religions are to make the contribution to society and humanity to which they are called, we must go beyond polite conversation to the concerted and combined efforts needed to educate the members of our faith traditions and be seen to work together for the common good.

I believe we have come to this point in 2009. So much has been accomplished by Christians and Muslims of good will. And there is so much more to be done.

Finally, over the years a number of wonderful people have worked in the Centre and made possible what has been accomplished. The original members were Columban Fathers particularly Trevor Trotter, Cyril Hally, Tom Rouse and Pat O'Shea. Many of you, long-time subscribers, will remember Sr. Kath Collins SSsP who gave nearly seven years to the Centre. In more recent times Sr. Trish Madigan OP and Carole Gan have been on the staff and since 2003, Fr. Patrick McInerney. I want to thank them all, and to wish Fr. Patrick, who will take over as Coordinator and Editor and the new staff members, Fr. Brian Vale and Amal Dardass, as much happiness, if not as many years, as I have enjoyed in the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations.

Finally, as I write it is Friday 27 November 2009. It is *Eid al-Adha*, the Feast on Sacrifice, on which Muslims commemorate the faith of Abraham in being willing to sacrifice his son ... and it is just short of a month to *Christmas*, when, as Christians believe, God's Son was born among us as human being, destined to be the sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. The nearness, yet distance, between our different faith approaches to these foundational events echoes the nearness, yet distance, between our different religions, and remind us of our complete dependence on God. I take this opportunity to wish all our readers, both Christian and Muslim, a very happy feast day, and God's blessings in the days and years ahead.

*Pauline Rae smsm*  
*Editor.*

On 29 June 2009 Pope Benedict published his third encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, on the theme of integral human development. Below are some extracts that refer to intercultural and interreligious dialogue:

#### **On the relation between charity and truth**

*Only in truth does charity shine forth*, only in truth can charity be authentically lived. Truth is the light that gives meaning and value to charity. That light is both the light of reason and the light of faith, through which the intellect attains to the natural and supernatural truth of charity: it grasps its meaning as gift, acceptance, and communion. Without truth, charity degenerates into sentimentality. Love becomes an empty shell, to be filled in an arbitrary way. In a culture without truth, this is the fatal risk facing love. It falls prey to contingent subjective emotions and opinions, the word “love” is abused and distorted, to the point where it comes to mean the opposite. Truth frees charity from the constraints of an emotionalism that deprives it of relational and social content, and of a fideism that deprives it of human and universal breathing-space. In the truth, charity reflects the personal yet public dimension of faith in the God of the Bible, who is both *Agápe* and *Lógos*: Charity and Truth, Love and Word. (CIV, 3)

#### **On the relation between truth and charity**

Because it is filled with truth, charity can be understood in the abundance of its values, it can be shared and communicated. *Truth*, in fact, is *lógos* which creates *diá-logos*, and hence communication and communion. Truth, by enabling men and women to let go of their subjective opinions and impressions, allows them to move beyond cultural and historical limitations and to come together in the assessment of the value and substance of things. Truth opens and unites our minds in the *lógos* of love: this is the Christian proclamation and testimony of charity. (CIV, 4)

#### **On God calling human beings to unity**

Because it is a gift received by everyone, charity in truth is a force that builds community, it brings all people together without imposing barriers or limits. The human community that we build by ourselves can never, purely by its own strength, be a fully fraternal community, nor can it overcome every division and become a truly universal community. The unity of the human race, a fraternal communion transcending every barrier, is called into being by the word of God-who-is-Love. In addressing this key question, we must make it clear, on the one hand, that the logic of gift does not exclude justice, nor does it merely sit alongside it as a second element added from without; on the other hand, economic, social and political development, if it is to be authentically human, needs to make room for the *principle of gratuitousness* as an expression of fraternity. (CIV, 34)

#### **On the unity of the human family**

Today humanity appears much more interactive than in the past: this shared sense of being close to one another

must be transformed into true communion. *The development of peoples depends, above all, on a recognition that the human race is a single family working together in true communion, not simply a group of subjects who happen to live side by side.* (CIV, 53)

#### **On the Trinity as the model of human relations**

The Trinity is absolute unity insofar as the three divine Persons are pure relationality. The reciprocal transparency among the divine Persons is total and the bond between each of them complete, since they constitute a unique and absolute unity. God desires to incorporate us into this reality of communion as well: “that they may be one even as we are one” (Jn 17:22). The Church is a sign and instrument of this unity. Relationships between human beings throughout history cannot but be enriched by reference to this divine model. In particular, *in the light of the revealed mystery of the Trinity*, we understand that true openness does not mean loss of individual identity but profound interpenetration. This also emerges from the common human experiences of love and truth. Just as the sacramental love of spouses unites them spiritually in “one flesh” (Gen 2:24; Mt 19:5; Eph 5:31) and makes out of the two a real and relational unity, so in an analogous way truth unites spirits and causes them to think in unison, attracting them as a unity to itself. (CIV, 54)

#### **On natural law as a basis for dialogue**

In all cultures there are examples of ethical convergence, some isolated, some interrelated, as an expression of the one human nature, willed by the Creator; the tradition of ethical wisdom knows this as the natural law. This universal moral law provides a sound basis for all cultural, religious and political dialogue, and it ensures that the multi-faceted pluralism of cultural diversity does not detach itself from the common quest for truth, goodness and God. Thus adherence to the law etched on human hearts is the precondition for all constructive social cooperation. Every culture has burdens from which it must be freed and shadows from which it must emerge. The Christian faith, by becoming incarnate in cultures and at the same time transcending them, can help them grow in universal brotherhood and solidarity, for the advancement of global and community development. (CIV, 59)

#### **On the need for perseverance**

*God's love calls us to move beyond the limited and the ephemeral, it gives us the courage to continue seeking and working for the benefit of all, even if this cannot be achieved immediately and if what we are able to achieve, alongside political authorities and those working in the field of economics, is always less than we might wish. God gives us the strength to fight and to suffer for love of the common good, because he is our All, our greatest hope.* (CIV, 78)

The full text of the encyclical is available at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20090629\\_caritas-in-veritate\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate_en.html)

### **A common mission for believers**

In the Biblical Book of Genesis, the story of Abraham begins abruptly (Gen 12:1) with a look of surprise on Abraham's face as God commands him: "Leave your country and your people and go to the land I will show you." God is uprooting Abraham, sending him away from everything he knows, snatching him out of his comfortable nest, his community, his customary ways of doing things, and the beliefs of his father's house, and leading him to new challenges, a new language, culture, and way of living, new friendships and alliances. This image symbolizes the challenge of interreligious dialogue in coming years, which could be called the pilgrimage of the 21st Century. The time is past when we could each remain comfortably in our own spiritual homeland while we pick up second-hand facts and insights about other religions. When we personally meet persons of other faiths and come to know them, live and work with them, we are called to move out of our stereotypes and generalities and must admit that we have a lot to learn. Acknowledging that we don't have all the answers is a painful experience, just as the realization that we cannot solve all the problems ourselves is a humbling recognition.

To meet the problems of our world today means working together and learning from one another. That's why the concept of a "dialogue of civilizations" makes so much sense. But beyond this, as people of faith we have a common mission in this world, which is another unfamiliar concept with which we must work. The bishops at the Second Vatican Council intuited this common mission when they declared, in reference to Christian-Muslim relations, that "even though in the course of centuries not a few hostilities have arisen between Christians and Muslims, this sacred synod urges all to move beyond the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to promote together for the benefit of all, social justice, moral values, peace, and freedom (NA 3)." Notice that in four key areas of modern life these two faith communities, that together comprise over half the world's population, are called to cooperate: for justice, for moral values, for peace, and for true human freedom.

So dialogue is a new terrain on which we must live our respective religious commitments. Like our father Abraham, we have to trust that God is leading us into this new field of action. We are the heirs of God's words to Abraham: "I will make you a great nation (Gen 12:2)." We have the responsibility of greatness thrust upon us, that of letting the world see that we can live and work together, that religion need not be a source of conflict and war, but again as God said to Abraham, "All nations will be blessed through you." Together we are called to be, as the Qur'an says, "rahmat lil-'alamin, a blessing to the universe (Qur'an 21:107)."

### **Reconciliation and moving beyond the burdens of the past**

The final image that I want to offer is that of Abraham, dead and wrapped in a shroud. The scene that commands our attention is that of Ismail and Isaac,

reconciled at last, together laying their father to rest in Machpelah near Hebron (Genesis 25: 9). With this we come to one of the most intractable of human problems, and the one where perhaps religious groups can make their most powerful contribution to human society. This is the question of reconciliation and forgiveness.

When all is said and done, the biggest obstacle to interreligious harmony is not the "issue of the moment" but the burden of history that we all carry with us. Every religious community, every ethnic and linguistic group, can make a long list of the times and ways that they were mistreated by members of some other group. On the one hand, people's memories of wrongdoing and oppression are very long and events that happened a hundred or even thousand years ago can still color the way that people regard one another; on the other hand, recent experiences of violence and cruelty are like fresh wounds, and like physical wounds are apt to fester and infect the whole body.

Does this mean that we are all prisoners of the past, condemned to keep on repeating the same accusations and counter-charges and perpetuating the same cycle of resentment and reprisal? The late Pope John Paul II once made a very wise comment. He said that true peace is founded on two pillars: justice and forgiveness. Both are necessary, one without the other will not succeed in making real peace. Speaking about forgiveness where issues of justice are not faced and resolved will fall on deaf ears; no one is willing to forgive if he feels he is still being treated unjustly. On the other hand, correcting injustices is by itself insufficient to create peace because the anger, resentment, and very human craving for revenge will still be operative. For real peace we need both, and this is where the religions, each of which commands justice and urges forgiveness, can make a real difference in the world's progress.

Interreligious cooperation in the area of peacemaking and reconciliation will undoubtedly be a key priority for interreligious relations in coming years. Moving in this direction, the Asian Muslim Action Network and the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences have been cooperating for almost a decade on peace studies courses aimed at building up, in every Asian country, an interreligious collection of "peace activists" who can be called upon in situations of local tension and conflict. Trained in the techniques of conflict analysis and transformation, as well as in the teaching of the various religions on the obligation to work for forgiveness and reconciliation, these highly-motivated activists are provided with the capability to become, in turn, local peace educators.

Excerpts from *"Where to now? Ways Forward for Interreligious Dialogue: Images of Abraham as Models of Interreligious Encounter"*, a paper presented by Thomas Michel SJ at the conference *"From Dialogue to Collaboration: The Vision of Fethullah Gülen and Muslim-Christian Relations"* in Melbourne on 16 July 2009. The full text can be found at:

[http://www.intercultural.org.au/events\\_2009/Conference2009/gulen%20index/TOM%20MICHEL%20LECTURE.pdf](http://www.intercultural.org.au/events_2009/Conference2009/gulen%20index/TOM%20MICHEL%20LECTURE.pdf)

### Doctoral Graduation

29 September 2009 was a very happy occasion for the staff of the Centre. Sr Pauline Rae attended the Australian Catholic University's graduation ceremony held at the Bayside Auditorium, Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre, Darling Harbour to witness the conferral of the PhD on her Columban colleague, Fr Patrick McInerney. His doctoral thesis is entitled "Modelling the Method: A Lonergan Approach to Christian Responsibility in Interreligious Relations." In it he applies the method developed by Bernard Lonergan. He first summarises and develops Lonergan's analysis of the dynamics of consciousness. Then in key chapters he shows how these dynamics constitute and mediate human meaning, religious meaning, and interreligious meaning. He demonstrates how familiarity with these dynamics illuminates major themes in Christian theology. Finally he argues that since the dynamics underlying all of these achievements come to a particular personal clarity and intensity in Christian revelation, then Christians have a particular responsibility to give leadership in interreligious relations by modelling the method. The Columbans and the Columban Mission Institute duly celebrated the graduation with colleagues from Australian Catholic University and from the Catholic Institute of Sydney.

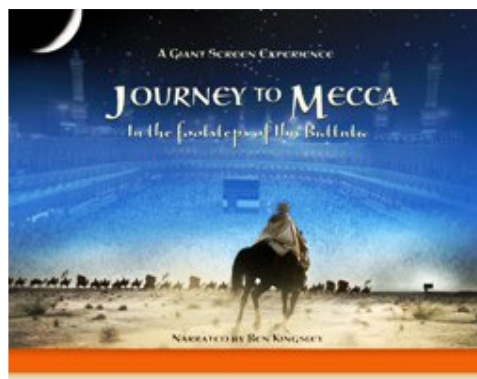


### International Conference

On 5 October there was an international seminar *Living Islam in the Contemporary Global Society* held at the University of Western Sydney. The conference was organized by the Islamic Foundation for Education and Welfare, the Multicultural Eid Fair and Festival, the Islamic Association of Western Sydney Suburbs, Scientology, the Islamic Forum for Australian Muslims.

The keynote speaker was Professor Leonard Swidler, the Professor of Catholic Thought and Interreligious Dialogue at Temple University, Philadelphia. Other speakers were from the United States, Iran, Malaysia, India, and Australia. Drawing on his doctoral research, Rev Dr Patrick McInerney presented a paper entitled "Values for Living Together in a Multi-Religious Society".

### Journey to Mecca



On Wednesday 21 October Frs Reg Howard and Patrick McInerney were guests of *al-Ghazzali Centre for Islamic Sciences and Human Development* for the IMAX screening of *Journey to Mecca: In the Footsteps of Ibn Battuta*. The short film (45 minutes) recounts the pilgrimage of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Moroccan, Ibn Battuta, to Mecca. The scenery was stunning, and gave a dramatic sense of the times and the places. The film presumes a lot for the uninitiated. For example, I knew the words and the translation of the pilgrimage prayer, something known only to those who have studied Islam, but there was no translation of it or subtitles for others who have not learned in detail. Ibn Battuta's arrival in Mecca is completed with very moving images showing the devotion of pilgrims from our day.

Ibn Battuta continued journeying for nearly 30 years in West Africa, Spain, India, China and the Maldives, observing the people and customs, covering some 120,000 kilometres (three times further than Marco Polo) before returning to Tangiers where he wrote up an account of his journey. For his meticulous observations he is considered the father of sociology.

The film is currently screening at IMAX theatre in Darling Harbour. To enhance your viewing, a preview, reviews and educational resources can be found at <http://www.journeytomeccagiantscreen.com/>

## Eid al-Fitr Celebration

The annual *Multicultural Eid Festival and Fair* (MEFF) was held at Fairfield on 11 October 2009. This year marked 25 years of MEFF, so was an occasion for acknowledging the founders, office holders, volunteers and all who had contributed to its development over the years. The morning was devoted to an evaluation of the International Conference held early in the week. After refreshments, the formalities began with speeches and religious and cultural performances on the main stage. The day concluded with a fireworks display in the evening. Fr Patrick McInerney was among the invited guests.

MEFF is the largest gathering of Muslims in Australia, where over 30,000 people come to celebrate Eid together, to watch the performances, to enjoy the rides, to browse through the stalls, and to sample the different foods. It is a wonderful occasion for celebrating diversity, where people of all religious and cultural backgrounds mix and socialise together.

## Awards Dinner

On 24 October 2009 Fr Patrick McInerney was an invited guest for the Universal Peace Federation's (UPF) *Living for Others Awards Dinner* at Dooley's Catholic Club, Lidcombe. Several cultural items were presented for entertainment, followed by the presentation of awards in various categories – service to the community, family values, interfaith harmony, arts and culture, inter-racial harmony. It is very encouraging to see so many people doing various works that enhance the quality of life for people in society, and it is great that UPF goes to the trouble to acknowledge and celebrate their achievements.

## Ecumenism and Interreligious Relations

The National Conference of Diocesan Commissions for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Relations was held in Brisbane from 30 October – 1 November to provide formation for people who are involved in diocesan commissions. The keynote speaker was Monsignor Juan Usma Gomez, a Columbian priest working for the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. He spoke on the Catholic dialogue with Pentecostals and Evangelicals. Bishop Christopher Prowse, a member of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and Bishop of Sale, spoke on interfaith relations. Fr John Dupuche, Fr Patrick McInerney and Sr Trish Madigan were the respondents. Archbishop Issam Darwish of the Melkite Church gave a presentation on the role of the Orthodox in promoting dialogue. As well as reports on national and international dialogues, the conference provided an opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, the issue at the core of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation.

## Charles Sturt University and Affinity Intercultural Foundation sign Agreement

On 24 November the Governor General, Her Excellency, Ms Quentin Bryce AC, was the chief guest for the signing of an agreement between Charles Sturt University and Affinity Intercultural Foundation. The ceremony was held at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture in Canberra. Fr Patrick McInerney was one of the invited guests. The occasion was also the official launch of The Islamic Sciences and Research Academy of Australia, the body who will work to implement the agreement between the two organisations.

## ITEMS OF INTEREST

### Fifth Regional Interfaith Dialogue

PERTH, 30 Oct 2009: Participants at the Fifth Regional Interfaith Dialogue released the Perth Declaration today, which focuses on building religious leaders committed to interfaith collaboration for the common good of humanity.

The declaration has 14 recommendations, including meeting the needs of marginalised youth who might be targets of radicalisation, promoting peace-making strategies found in different faiths and indigenous traditions, and for future dialogues to reflect gender and other diversity.

In his closing speech, Australian Foreign Affairs Minister Stephen Smith said given Australia's diversity as a result of successive waves of immigration, it recognised the importance of tolerance, peace and multiculturalism.

New Zealand's Ethnic Affairs Minister, Pansy Wong, said the dialogue was important and required ongoing commitment from governments around the region. "Social harmony and peace do not come naturally, we must work at it," she said.

The governments of New Zealand and Australia are co-sponsors of the dialogue, along with the Philippines and Indonesia. The theme of this year's dialogue, held from 28 to 30 Oct, was *Future Faith Leaders: Regional Challenges and Cooperation*.

Excerpts from the Nut Graph:

<http://www.thenutgraph.com/call-for-more-regional-interfaith-collaborations>

### The Perth Declaration

Participants from Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Vietnam are gathered in Perth for the 2009 Regional Interfaith Dialogue on 'Future Faith Leaders: Regional Challenges and Cooperation'.

Considerable progress has been made in the economic and political integration of our region. Religious diversity is a national asset that creates and enhances multilateral relations between our nations. This Dialogue has focused on the next generation of faith leaders who will develop a network linking communities around the region for ongoing interfaith activities.

We thank the Government of Australia for hosting the Fifth Regional Interfaith Dialogue. We also express our appreciation to the Co-sponsors – Indonesia, New Zealand and the Philippines – for their continuing commitment and contribution to the Dialogue process.

While the Interfaith Dialogues are important for the opportunity they provide to establish contacts and engage in discussions, we recognise that their true value is measured by the success with which our words are translated into action. As delegates of this Dialogue, we undertake to take messages of peace and understanding to our respective communities and to work together with those from our own faiths and with others to implement these proposals.

No declaration can capture the range of partnerships and relationships between faiths and across the region that have been created at this event. The full value of the Dialogue will be realised by the implementation of the following recommendations.

We unanimously make the following recommendations for action:

1. We call upon our respective governments to continue their support for this Regional Interfaith Dialogue.
2. We commit to the establishment of an interfaith social network facility with an online forum, which integrates existing networks.
3. We commit to fostering regional project-driven activities across faith communities that focus on community service and development, environmental challenges and social justice.
4. We call upon governments and faith communities to invest in the development of future interfaith leaders.
5. We commit to supporting the development of resources for teaching youth about other faiths that are acceptable to the relevant religious communities and to educators.
6. We note the importance of, and commit to, the collection and dissemination of best practice educational interfaith resources and activities in the region.
7. We encourage faith communities to meet the needs of marginalised youth as a response to the dangers of radicalisation.
8. We call for government and community support for faith leaders to be trained in mediation for peace building and conflict resolution.
9. We call upon governments and faith communities to promote the traditions of peace making and conflict resolution found within the different faith and indigenous traditions.
10. We call upon government and civil society, including faith based groups, to strengthen collaboration in peace building and conflict prevention.
11. We acknowledge the value of the freedom of the media in the promotion of communal and regional harmony, and we call on religious leaders and national and international media to recognise that this right entails the responsibility for accurate and balanced reporting.

12. We call on faith communities to seek media training and for media outlets to train reporters in religious issues.

13. We call on media and religious leaders to take responsibility for the resolution of disputes over misrepresentations and other conflicts.

14. We encourage delegations at future Dialogues to reflect gender and other diversity.

Participating countries will report back on the implementation of these recommendations at the Sixth Regional Interfaith Dialogue. 30 October 2009

From the website of the Buddhist Council of Western Australia:

<http://www.wa.buddhistcouncil.org.au/home/5th-regional-interfaith-dialogue-perth-2009/>

### **African Bishops Discuss Islam**

VATICAN CITY, OCT. 23, 2009 (Zenit.org).

The bishops who spoke at the Synod for Africa sometimes used different and divergent tones when speaking of Islam, but they agreed on need for dialogue and religious liberty.

Two issues were specifically addressed, namely the different realities of Islam in Africa and the expansion of Islam.

Bishop Maroun Elias Lahham of Tunis, Tunisia, pointed out that "almost 80% of the 350 million Muslim Arabs live in Northern African countries," which means that "Islamic-Christian relations in North Africa are different from those in Europe and sub-Saharan Africa, and even from the Arab countries in the Middle East."

The bishop of Tunis called for "a discussion about Islam in Africa that bears in mind the variety of African experiences, from Tunis to Johannesburg."

In speaking of the expansion of Islam, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, said that in Africa "Islam advances constantly due to three means: brotherhoods, Quran schools and mosques."

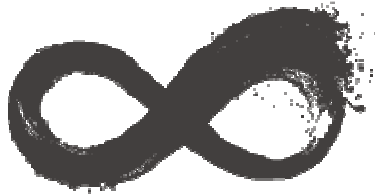
Archbishop Norbert Wendelin Mtega of Songea, Tanzania, said to the synodal assembly: "We love Muslims. It is our history and culture to live with them. But the danger which threatens Africa's freedom, sovereignty, democracy and human rights is first the Islamic political factor, in other words, the intended plan and the clear process of 'identifying Islam with politics and vice versa' in each of our African countries."

Secondly, he added, "it is the Islamic monetary factor whereby huge sums of money from outside countries are being poured in our countries to destabilize peace in our countries and to eradicate Christianity."

It was reported in a working group conclusion that although the reality of Islam is different throughout Africa, the attitude that Christians should promote is the same: "a dialogue of life and a social dialogue."

The group added, "It has been strongly emphasized that we must always seek liberty of conscience and the reciprocity of worship."

<http://www.zenit.org/article-27319?l=english>



# Charter for Compassion

*The Charter for Compassion was launched on 12 November 2009. It was drafted by a multi-faith, multi-national council. It is a cooperative effort to restore not only compassionate thinking but, more importantly, compassionate action to the center of religious, moral and political life. Compassion is the principled determination to put ourselves in the shoes of the other, and lies at the heart of all religious and ethical systems. One of the most urgent tasks of our generation is to build a global community where men and women of all races, nations and ideologies can live together in peace. In our globalized world, everybody has become our neighbor, and the Golden Rule has become an urgent necessity.*

**The principle of compassion** lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put another there, and to honour the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.

**It is also necessary** in both public and private life to refrain consistently and empathically from inflicting pain. To act or speak violently out of spite, chauvinism, or self-interest, to impoverish, exploit or deny basic rights to anybody, and to incite hatred by denigrating others—even our enemies—is a denial of our common humanity. We acknowledge that we have failed to live compassionately and that some have even increased the sum of human misery in the name of religion.

**We therefore call upon all men and women** ~ to restore compassion to the centre of morality and religion ~ to return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate ~ to ensure that youth are given accurate and respectful information about other traditions, religions and cultures ~ to encourage a positive appreciation of cultural and religious diversity ~ to cultivate an informed empathy with the suffering of all human beings—even those regarded as enemies.

**We urgently need** to make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in our polarized world. Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological and religious boundaries. Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is the path to enlightenment, and indispensable to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community.

For further information on the origins, history, development and supporters of the Charter for Compassion see <http://charterforcompassion.org>

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