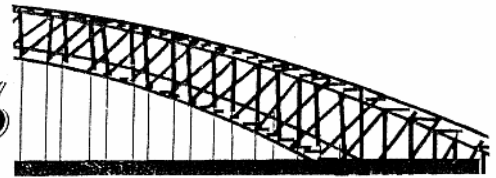


BRIDGES



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Sponsored by the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations

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Editorial

Solitudinem faciunt pacem appellant. (Tacitus)

War or Peace? Today this question is to the fore in many peoples' minds. Tragically, it hardly seems even a question of alternatives, but more likely a question of "when" war will commence.

The terrorist incidents in the USA on the 11th of September 2001 triggered deep feelings of revulsion, vulnerability and incomprehension. How could this happen? Why did they do this? Military intervention in Afghanistan ended the brutal regime of the Taliban who had been hosting al-Qaeda. But after more than twenty years of warring (first against the Soviet occupation, then among internal factions, and finally by the international coalition against terrorism) and with the civic infrastructure almost completely destroyed, Afghanistan remains de-stabilized and its citizens continue to suffer. Tacitus' observation on the Roman armies applies as much to us in our day. "They make a wilderness and call it peace."

Although many may deem the intervention "successful", it neither captured the top leadership of al-Qaeda nor put an end to terrorist activities, as testified by the vicious bombings in Bali on 12th October 2002.

It is evident that war cannot establish peace but only promotes war. Yet despite war's manifest ineptitude to resolve issues, war is being proposed against Iraq, and again it is the long-suffering civilian population who will bear the brunt of the violence that will be unleashed.

However, amidst all the militant posturing there are also voices for peace. In his message for the Jan 1st World Day of Peace Pope John Paul II reflects on the four pillars of peace: truth, justice, love, and freedom. He has consistently insisted that "war is a defeat for humanity" and has called on world leaders to find alternative solutions to the present impasse. He has declared Ash Wednesday a day of prayer and fasting for peace.

Muslim and Jewish leaders, both nationally and internationally, have echoed similar sentiments and called on Muslims and Jews to join in the prayer and fasting on Ash Wednesday. Bishops' Conferences around the world have issued public statements questioning the legitimacy of this war.

In the middle of February millions of ordinary citizens from all walks of life marched in the streets of every major city in the world to express their concern for peace. A former

incumbent of the White House once declared: "I think that people want peace so much that one of these days government had better get out of the way and let them have it." (Dwight D. Eisenhower, 31 August 1959)

This issue of Bridges contributes to this chorus for peace. The feature article is a brief theological reflection on peace as a core constituent of the faith identity and responsibility of both Christians and Muslims. The news items report some of the many efforts that religious and civic leaders locally and internationally are making to promote peace. The enclosed flyer advertises a joint interfaith conference of that will take place in Sydney on the 30th of March on the theme, "Abraham, A Symbol of Hope for Jews, Christians and Muslims."

I trust that these and the many other efforts will contribute to growing public support for the sentiment of Benjamin Franklin, one of the authors of the Declaration of Independence, writing on another September 11th (1783): "There never was a good war, or a bad peace."

It is my conviction that the world religions have a special responsibility in fostering peace. I quote from the final declaration of the January 16-18 Symposium on "Resources of the Religions for Peace" organised by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue:

"We recognize that in the interrelated context of our contemporary lives, interreligious cooperation is no longer an option but a necessity. One could say that to be religious today is to be interreligious. Religion will prosper in this century only to the extent that we can maintain a sense of community among people of different religious beliefs who work together as a human family to achieve a world of peace."

Patrick J. McInerney
Guest Contributor

Bridges

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Items of Interest

WELCOME TO NEW STAFF MEMBER

Fr Patrick McInerney, Columban priest, has joined the staff of the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations. He is a graduate of the Pontifical Institute for the Study of Arabic and Islamics, Rome, and has an M.Theol. from the University of Melbourne. He worked in Pakistan for twenty years.

INDONESIANS SPREAD MESSAGE OF HOPE

In the second week of February 2003 the Australia-Indonesia Institute's Muslim Exchange Program and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Special Visits Program sponsored a 6-day visit by a joint delegation of leading Christians and Muslims from Indonesia. Members of this group had visited Britain the week before, and then were received by Pope John Paul II the week after visiting Australia. The visitors included Mr Hasyim Muzadi, General Chairman Nahdlatul Ulama (founded in 1926, this is a national organization with about 60 million members, making it the largest ulama-led organization in the Islamic world), Mr. Rozy Munir, Chairman Nahdlatul Ulama, Mr Abdul Wahid Maktub, Special Assistant to the General Chairman, Cardinal Julius Rijadi Darmaatmadja, President of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Indonesia, and Professor Andreas Anangguru Yewangoe, Executive Member, Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI).

On Monday 10th of February the National Council of Churches hosted the delegation for a meeting with representatives of the Christian Churches in N.S.W. The visitors witnessed to the benefits of communication and mutual cooperation between Christians and Muslims, stressing that in times of conflict both parties must avoid hasty accusations. They also spoke against war in Iraq and pleaded for a peaceful solution to the present crisis. Columban Fr Patrick McInerney attended this meeting.

THE PEACEMAKER OF AMBON AND THE MOLUCCAS

On 20 November 2002, the Columban Mission Institute hosted a visit by Bishop Fransiskus Mandagi msc, Bishop of Ambon, Indonesia. In the Ambon – Moluccas region of Indonesia Catholics are a very small minority. The Christians involved in conflict with Muslims over the past few years were mainly Protestants. From what may be considered a position of negligible influence, Bishop Mandagi acted as intermediary for peace between the Muslims and Christians. In addition to negotiating locally with the leaders of the two faith traditions, he also negotiated with the Indonesian Army chiefs, and with the national government. He also visited the United Nations. His efforts in the end enabled peace to return to the two groups. In his meetings with those he hoped to influence and win over, he always stressed that they could only work from their common humanity. He quoted a local proverb which states; "We are all born from the one womb." The Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations organised the visit.

Among the guests at the conversation were other members of the staff of the Columban Mission Institute, as well as members of the Women's Dialogue Network, representatives of Affinity Intercultural Foundation, and

representatives of interfaith from the Uniting Church of Australia.

SOLIDARITY WITH VICTIMS OF DROUGHT

The Australian Federation of Islamic Councils in Sydney asked Muslims around the country to pray for rain. As a gesture of this solidarity, on 19 January a group of Muslims including Imams from Sydney's Arabic Turkish, Bosnian, Afghan, Indonesian, Malaysian, African, and Fijian communities, among others visited Muswellbrook in the drought stricken Hunter shire. In addition to presenting cheques for the Drought Relief Fund, the group met with community leaders and politicians, as well as members of the local community. The rain prayer was conducted on a farm property in Denman township.

ISLAMIC-CATHOLIC STATEMENT ON TERRORISM AND PEACE

The joint committee of the Al-Azhar committee for Dialogue with Monotheistic Religions and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue met in Cairo 24-25 February. This committee is composed of six members of each religion.

The main topic for discussion was the phenomenon of terrorism and the responsibility of religions to confront it, taking into special consideration the complex situations in the Middle East.

An extract from the statement reads:

In the present circumstances there is the added factor of increased tension between Muslims and Christians on account of the mistaken identification of some Western powers with Christianity, and of Iraq with Islam

We strongly affirm that double standards are to be avoided. Peace, which is inseparable from justice, requires the fulfillment of all international obligations. This principle applies generally and is therefore applicable to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The resolution of this conflict would contribute to resolving many of the outstanding problems of the Middle East.

The Muslim members of the Committee welcomed the clear policy and strenuous efforts of His Holiness Pope John Paul II in favour of peace. The Catholic members of the Committee expressed their appreciation for Muslim religious leaders, including the Grand Imam, Sheikh al-Azhar M. Sayyid Tantawi, who have raised their authoritative voices in defence of peace. [*Zenit: 02.03.2003*]

CANBERRA: WORKING TOGETHER FOR PEACE

On Sunday the 23rd of February the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture in Canberra hosted an Interfaith Programme "Working Together for Peace." The Governor-General opened the Conference. Three speakers shared from the Jewish, Christian and Muslim theological perspectives, respectively, Mr. Gary Fellman, Father Frank Jones and Mr Ahmed Yousaf. All the participants were then divided into three workshops on finding ways of working together for peace in the local, regional and national arenas. It

AL-SALAM^U ALAY-KUM – PEACE BE WITH YOU

In these days there is acute national and international anxiety concerning the imminent prospect of coalition forces engaging in a war against Iraq. This would inevitably result in many civilian casualties and much hardship for the long-suffering people of Iraq. Also it could possibly trigger violent retaliation in other parts of the world, and these in turn would certainly lead to greater animosity and resentment between Christians and Muslims for generations to come.

Many question the legitimacy and morality of military intervention to resolve this particular dispute, as witnessed by the millions of people in Australia and around the world who demonstrated for peace on the weekend of 15-16th of February 2003.

In such times of threat people (re-)discover values they hold dear and about which they feel passionately. Such clarity is a very good thing. However, the emotion of the moment can cloud our judgement of the perceived threat. Thus it is all too easy for both Christians and Muslims to be seduced by propaganda into being suspicious of or even “demonising” each other.

Christians may be duped into stereotypes that all Muslims are “terrorists” and “fanatics” and a threat to world peace. Muslims may be mis-led into believing that all Christians have fallen prey to “atheistic secularism” and are hostile aggressors intent on destroying Islam. Admittedly these negative attitudes are found in a tiny minority of adherents from both religions - but they certainly do not represent the vast majority of either Christians or Muslims around the world.

Rather than arguing my case for mutual respect between Christians and Muslims simply on the basis of statistics (as if “might makes right”), I prefer to make a theological point that we can readily verify in our daily experience and that is common to both religions.

Everyday experience: When we experience a conflict of interests – for example, a struggle between good and evil, a tug-of-war between right and wrong (not unlike the two sides of Gollum’s character in “The Lord of the Rings – The Two Towers” debating whether to steal the ‘precious’ ring for himself or whether to assist the young Hobbits in destroying it) – such a dilemma can only be resolved by giving our whole selves completely over to one or other of the mutually exclusive alternatives. And if we choose the right path, if we make the correct choice based on value rather than on biased interest, the cessation of conflict and of tension within ourselves and even more importantly, the assurance of having done what is right and proper, give us a deep-down sense of wholesomeness, of satisfaction, of peace.

For Muslims: In the Arabic language most words are constructed from a tri-lateral root. The series of words

on which I wish to reflect are built on the three letters S, L and M. The verb “aSLaMa” means “he submitted” or “he surrendered” (implicit in the context there is often the idea that the act of submission or of surrender is to God); the verbal noun “iSLaM” means “the act of submission or surrender”; the word “muSLiM” is the active participle and refers to the one who submits or surrenders; and the noun “SaLaM”¹ means “peace” and is the fruit of submission or surrendering to what is good and right and holy. All of these words express the core ideal of Muslims as those who are completely surrendered to God in all the circumstances of their daily lives - and the fruit of that total self-dedication is indeed peace.

For Christians: Jesus stated “My food is to do the will of him who sent me.” (Jn 4:34) He also taught: “Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mk 3:35) In different English translations of the Gospels the climax of Jesus’ faithfully fulfilling God’s will is variously expressed as he “breathed his last” (Mt 27:50, Mk 15:37, Lk 23:46) and ‘he gave up his spirit’ (Jn 19:30) (the Arabic translation of these texts reads “aSLaMa al-ruh”²) - and when he subsequently appears to his disciples his first word to them is “Peace” (“SaLaM”) (Lk 24:36, Jn 20:19, 21, 26). Now this surrender is the climax or high point of Jesus’ life on earth, sealing a complete and total self-dedication to God, one that Christians are called to embody in all the circumstances of their daily lives, the fruit of which is “the peace of God, which surpasses every understanding.” (Phil 4:7)

The fact that in Arabic the very same verb “aSLaMa” is used to express both the core ideal of Muslims and the core event for Christians shows that despite the many differences of belief and practice we are in fact intimately related by our common striving for and being drawn to follow God’s will. When we each truly enter into God’s will, the scales will fall from our eyes and we will recognize our common kinship, and will be led to behave towards each other as sisters and brothers, and true and lasting peace (“SaLaM”) will break out between us and among all nations.

Peace be with you. Al-Salaamu Alay-kum.

Patrick J. McInerney

¹ In Hebrew it is “shalom”.

² As the active subject of the verb “aSLaMa”, linguistically speaking Jesus is a “muSLiM” - not in the sociological sense of professed membership in the historical Islamic community, but in the theological sense of being wholly surrendered to God.

Book Review

Farid Esack: *On Being A Muslim: finding a religious path in the world today*, Oxford, Oneworld Publications, 1999

Esack is a black South African Muslim Scholar of international repute. As I read this book, I enjoyed accompanying him on a spiritual journey, which touched into basic issues of the life of a believer. His writing was grounded in humanity – and this is the area where all real interreligious dialogue begins. Esack has gift for expressing profound thoughts and reflection in language that is easy to read, without losing any of its value. As in his previous book, his irrepressible sense of humour and willingness to 'dub himself in', gives increased humanness to the message he is sharing. Rather than speak of this as a book of theology, I would classify it as spirituality – the lived response in faith from a person's deepest integrity to the events and experiences of daily human life.

The chapter titles give an insight into the approach he takes to integrity in the life of a Muslim.

"On Being with Allah": This first chapter sets the tone for the person's deep, interior relation with Allah, the basis of all faith commitment.

"On Being with Myself": Throughout the book in addition to his exegesis and hermeneutics of relevant Sura of the Holy Qur'an, there is a very good sprinkling of practical psychology as well of suggestions for its everyday application in relation to being at ease with "who I am".

"On Being with You": Here the author enters into the question of interpersonal relations, and, again quoting the relevant Sura, challenges to a mode of relating to other co-religionists.

"On Being a Social Being": Esack has a very strong social conscience, and his life practice, an embodiment of his responsibilities as a member of the wider society, come through clearly in this chapter.

"On Being with the Gendered Other": Esack was the first Imam in South Africa to have a woman – another international Muslim scholar – speak at Friday prayers in his mosque. This raised a lot of ire in various circles. As in my own faith, the role of women is a question that has come to the forefront of discussion in recent decades.

"On a Self in the World of Otherness": This chapter, which touches into the reality of interfaith dialogue and relations, is a down to earth and challenging call to respect the value of the other, and challenges also to examine the real causes of our negative attitudes.

The final chapter is for the "New South African Muslim" but nevertheless is broad enough in its approach to cause the readers to reflect on their own lived faith commitment in their own culture and situation.

The conclusion to the book is typically Esack, and he writes two letters to himself. However unique this may seem for a conclusion, the content is a scholarly presentation of questions that have been addressed to him regarding the faith stance he is living, to which he responds objectively in these two letters. It is a crowning statement of his deep love of Islam and of his struggle for spiritual and personal integrity.

Challenging, coming from an extensive background of scholarship and international, intercultural experience – *On Being a Muslim Today* is a good read.

Kathleen Collins SSps

Items of Interest *[continued from Page 2]*

is hoped that the many fruitful ideas shared in the groups will be implemented. There was also a clear call for further interfaith conferences of this nature.

MELBOURNE CIID AND ICV MEETING.

Interfaith relations has as many acronyms as any other network in our world today. In February this year there was a meeting between a sub-group of the Catholic Archdiocesan Committee on Ecumenism and Interfaith Relations called Catholics Interested in Inter-faith Dialogue [CIID] and representatives of the Islamic Council of Victoria [ICV].

It was my first visit to the offices and mosque in West Melbourne. Our purpose was to explore ways Catholics and Muslims in Melbourne could engage in dialogue more concretely. Those present included Mr Yasser Soliman, Bilal Cleland, Fr John Dupuche and Stewart Sharlow. This group were quite enthusiastic about working together.

Projects proposed included developing a Common Statement on Peace between Muslim and Christian religious leaders in Melbourne and having a meeting between representatives of the ICV and the St Vincent de Paul Society to look at cooperation at the various op-shops in Melbourne. Some Muslims in Melbourne have clothing they wish to donate to the poor. They would also like to learn how to run similar services themselves. Both of these suggestions were pursued after the meeting.

An interesting theological discussion broke out at the meeting around the question of whether Muslims could go into a Christian church that has statues. There was a lively discussion. It reminded me of most theological discussions – plenty of erudition together with real passion. I am still not sure of the outcome.

The current world situation calls for much more dialogue and working together between Muslims and Christians. I enjoyed this particular meeting.

Fr Trevor Trotter ssc