



BRIDGES



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Interreligious Dialogue – Affirmed at Three Meetings

The ongoing importance of interfaith dialogue, especially Christian-Muslim relations, has been highlighted in three significant Christian forums in recent weeks:

At the August meeting of the World Council of Churches Central Committee, its Moderator Aram I, Catholicos of Cilicia, called for "dialogue, relations and collaboration with other religions" to have a "high priority" in the life of the Churches.

Arguing for "a culture of mutual trust", he said that while religion provides a profound sense of identity and belonging, an exclusive self-understanding can also lead to isolationism, hatred and violence. "More and more, globalisation will create a profound crisis of identity. The only force strong enough to stand up to this threat and protect identity is religion. Through dialogue, people of faith must come to see their identity within one household of God and as part of one common identity in God."

Acknowledging the difficulties of setting acceptable boundaries of dialogue, Aram stressed that dialogue is more than simply exchanging views. Rather, it is "the experience of living together, reflecting together and working together."

Dialogue does not compromise the faith of believers although, according to the moderator, a proper theological perspective is vital. Rather than believing that all religions outside Christ are devoid of truth, we should accept that "Religious plurality is God's gift." As such, "An inclusive understanding of God's salvific act will lead the church to consider other religions as part of God's plan of salvation and not as mere 'mission fields'."

The author of *Orthodox Perspectives on Mission*, Aram suggested that the implication for missionary strategy is that, particularly in pluralistic environments, it is inappropriate to attempt to add new members. Instead, Aram said, quoting the Orthodox theologian Georges Khodr, metropolitan of Mount-Lebanon, "We should seek to identify the 'Christic values in other religions'".

He sees inter-religious collaboration as "indispensable" in three areas. Religious education must be re-shaped to

become "relevant and contextual", geared towards building pluralistic communities; religions must act as agents of healing and reconciliation, helping each other to defuse conflicts in situations of ethnic and political tension; and religions must move towards an active prophetic role, "engaging in spiritual combat against evil forces" - for example religious fundamentalism - "the greatest enemy of religion and the most dangerous force of our times".

In early September Muslim-Christian relations were also high on the agenda at two Vatican meetings. Pope John Paul II, speaking to the Catholic bishops of Egypt on their five-yearly visit to the Holy See, said "The dialogue with Islam is particularly important in your country. It assumes an exemplary character for the dialogue between the great religions of the world ... (especially) after the tragic events connected to terrorism which have marked the beginning of the third millennium".

In the Philippines more than 100 Catholic bishops held a meeting with leaders of other Christian churches and Muslim scholars in Pasay City in which they analyzed the ways believers can contribute to peace. Archbishop Fitzgerald, President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, who attended, said later on Vatican Radio, "Religion is not the cause of conflicts or war but rather a factor of conflict. It enters a conflict and aggravates it but, in general, it is not the cause. The causes are among other factors. They are political, economic or social. Difference of religion is a factor that strengthens this aspect of the conflict". He added the gathering in the Philippines was a sign of encouragement for Christian-Muslim Relations.

The items of interest and articles in this issue of 'Bridges' are an indication of how these aspirations concerning interreligious dialogue, expressed at international level, are also being lived out in a practical way in our Australian context and culture.

*Frish Madigan op
Guest Contributor*

Items of Interest

'FOOD AND FRIENDSHIP' GATHERING - SYDNEY

The Catholic Women's Network Sydney organised a "Food and Friendship" gathering on Saturday 14 June at St Joseph's Hospital, Auburn. It was an inter-faith event with Muslim and Christian women coming together to share our stories and hopes, as well as some of our favourite foods.

After initial greetings we broke up into 6's and 7's to talk and listen to each person's reason for coming to this day. We shared food and exchanged favourite recipes, not to mention joy, friendship and enthusiasm. Before the meal was over we paused for the usual (for the Catholic part of the group!!) raffle and a mini-auction of a recipe book of Muslim foods. There was a final sharing on being a woman in Australia today.

This simply wonderful event concluded with a closing ritual when we sat in an open circle, shared a brief reflection and then each person chose one other to pin a purple ribbon on, reminding her "you can make a difference".

The Catholic Women's Network, Sydney is a group of representatives from a wide variety of women's groups active in the Sydney area. We are planning several other activities for later this year with the aim of enabling women to communicate on issues of importance to them.

Adapted from Newsletter of Commission for Australian Catholic Women, 21 July 2003

'GOD IS NOT OWNED BY US' - MELBOURNE SEMINAR

This was the title the Brigidines of Victoria gave to a seminar on Saturday 2nd of August. They gathered the Principals, members of the Stewardship Councils and key staff from their schools for a one day reflection on how education can better meet the challenges of the multi-faith reality of today's world. In the first session Fr Patrick McInerney, a staff member of the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations, presented a brief introduction to Islam. Mrs Bibi Grenade, a teacher, wife and mother, then shared her experiences as a Muslim woman in Australia following the events of 11th September 2001. In the final session of the morning Pat situated the present moment within the wider context of world history. In the afternoon the participants continued reflecting in the light of their own experience and hopes for their schools. The day proved very beneficial for all concerned.

GROWING PEACE LOCALLY

A Public Forum "Christians and Muslims - Growing Peace in North Sydney" was held at the Hutley Hall in the North Sydney Council Chambers on the evening of July 17th 2003.

It was organised by staff of the Columban Mission Institute's Centre for Peace Ecology and Justice, which has a current focus on promoting peace through active non-violence. They have recently been in contact with the Community and

Ethnic Affairs Officers of eight Sydney Councils with a proposal for creating a forum for dialogue between Muslims and Christians.

By having Christians and Muslims share a platform together the Forums aim to challenge the perception by many that religion causes violence and conflict, and to demonstrate that the authentic practice of religion should bring about reconciliation and peace. Two speakers from each tradition talked about how their respective faiths promote non-violence and contribute to social harmony through addressing social needs and building local community.

The Mayor, Genia McCaffery, opened the Forum in North Sydney commenting that "in tougher times. the themes for marking cultural diversity that demand our attention are the themes of tolerance, understanding and inclusiveness." Christian speakers were Columban missionary Brian Gore, Loreto sister Libby Rogerson, and from the Muslim side, Mehmet Ozalp, founding Director of Affinity Intercultural Foundation and Zuleyha Keskin, coordinator of the Women's Group.

Other local Councils in Sydney - at Leichhardt, Holroyd and Rockdale - are preparing to host similar events in their respective areas.

NEW GENERAL-SECRETARY FOR WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

The General Secretary-elect, Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia, brings an African touch to WCC.

Among the issues discussed at his first press conference, Dr Kobia said: "Inter-religious dialogue will be a theme in the years leading up to the WCC's 2006 assembly. The 20th century was dominated by the politics of ideology. It is likely that the 21st century will be dominated by the politics of identity. Many people define their identity in a religious way. If we are to overcome violence and create peace and justice, we need a multi-faith approach."

Excerpt from WCC Central Committee: Press Conference Sam Kobia

AUSTRALIAN 'JOURNEY OF PROMISE'

A project aimed at bringing together a group of young people from the three Abrahamic faiths in an intensive experience of sharing and exploring faith and culture has received the support of a Federal Government Living in Harmony Community Grant.

The project emerged out of the continuing development of inter-faith relations in Australia, and in particular the work of the Australian National Dialogue of Christians, Jews and Muslims launched in March 2003. It also flows out of the National Council of Churches recently launched initiative the Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace: to grow communities which value religious identity and plurality.

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Jihad in Islam

MEANING OF JIHAD

The word 'Jihad' is derived from the Arabic word 'Jahd' which means 'fatigue' or the word 'Juhd' which means 'effort'. A 'Mujahid' is one who strives in the cause of God and engages in efforts which result in fatigue. The word 'Jihad' means exerting effort to achieve a desired thing or prevent an undesired one. In other words, it is an effort that aims to bring about benefit and prevent harm.

Jihad can be observed through any means and in any field, whether material or moral. Among the types of Jihad are struggling against one's desires (Jihad an Nafs), the accursed Satan, poverty, illiteracy, disease, defending one's life, property or honour, or fighting evil forces in the world. Jihad is also associated with action to avert aggression or defend against aggression. Any disciplinary work for one's faith and behaviour and actions such as refraining from wrongdoing and avoiding satanic ways is also Jihad.

One could say that Jihad basically refers to the unceasing effort an individual must make towards self-improvement and self-purification throughout one's life. It also refers to the duty on Muslims at both individual and collective level, to struggle against all forms of evil, corruption, injustice, tyranny and oppression whether this injustice is committed against Muslims or non-Muslims

Islam does not call for violence; rather, it abhors all forms of violence and terrorism, whether against Muslims or non-Muslims. Islam moreover calls for peace, cooperation, and maintaining justice, and provides for the happiness and welfare of humanity as a whole. This fact is declared in the Qur'an when Allah says:

Allah commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion: Allah instructs you, that you may receive admonition (An-Nahl: 90).

Islam makes it obligatory upon Muslims to stand by the oppressed regardless of their race, colour, religion or affiliation and to say NO to oppressors, asking them to respond to the voice of reason and justice.

JIHAD IS NOT 'HOLY WAR'

Jihad is one of the most misunderstood and abused aspects of Islam particularly in the current political climate. There are some Muslims who exploit and misuse this concept for their own political objectives. There are many non-Muslims who misunderstand it. There are others who misinterpret it to discredit Islam and Muslims. Jihad is never a tool for waging war and it is never a means of flexing muscles or bullying the weak and oppressed for hegemony.

Jihad does not mean 'Holy War'. The word for war in the Qur'an is '*Harb*' or '*Qital*'. Jihad means serious and sincere struggle on the personal as well as on the social

level. It is a struggle to do good and remove injustice, oppression and evil from society. This struggle should be spiritual as well as social, economic and political. Jihad is to work hard to do right things. It often comes with other Qur'anic concepts such as faith, repentance and righteous deeds. It is always to be 'in the way of God'.

The concept of Jihad in Islam is primarily about protecting one's faith and one's human rights. It is rarely about war though it can take the form of war. In situations of legitimate war of defence Islam teaches proper ethics and rules in its conduct. War is permissible in Islam, but only when other peaceful means such as dialogue, negotiations and treaties fail. It is to be the last resort. Muslims are not permitted to allow themselves or others to become or remain the passive victims of others' injustice or aggression. God says in the Holy Qur'an:

For if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another (all) monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques in all of which God's name is abundantly extolled would surely have been destroyed (22:40).

Linked with the advice of the noble Prophet, we can see that the Muslim is thus not only required to give assistance to the victim of tyranny but to stop the one who is committing it, in order to bring about the rule of righteousness, freedom and justice for all people.

There is also no such thing as religious war to force Islam on non-Muslims, because if Islam does not emerge from deep convictions, from within, it is not acceptable to God, nor can it help those who profess it. To this point the Qur'an refers as follows:

Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error; whoever rejects Evil and believes in God has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that never breaks. And God hears and knows all things (2:256).

JIHAD IS NOT TERRORISM

It is to be emphasized that attacks against innocent civilians, whether through aggression or suicidal means, is under no circumstances permissible in Islam. Terrorism is not Jihad; it is *fasad* (mischief) and is against the teachings of Islam. There are some that use arguments to justify terrorism for their causes, but it has no justification.

Allah says:

When it is said to them: 'Make not mischief on the earth', they say: 'Why, we only want to correct things'. Indeed they are the mischief doers, but they realise (it) not (Al-Baqarah: 11-12).

Islam promotes the establishment of a society where all

Book Review

Kirk, J, Andrew, *What is Mission? Theological Explorations*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2000.

What is mission? In this book, with its sub-title of theological exploration, a definite thrust is given, and the operative word is 'explorations'. The first three chapters Andrew Kirk, of Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, devotes to laying the foundation for the later chapters of the book. Since the word 'mission' means being sent, mission in this book is seen primarily as a sending from God, to fulfill God's plan for all of creation. Jesus has set a pattern for this in his life and mission, and to continue this is the call to the Church.

What are the calls coming from God at this time? Where is God sending believers? The second part of the book "Contemporary Issues in Mission" lists areas of concern for today. Announcing the Good News; The Gospel in the Midst of Cultures; Justice for the Poor; Encounter with Religions of the World; Overcoming Violence and Building Peace; Care of the Environment; Sharing in Partnership.

In keeping with the thrust of this newsletter, this review will focus on Chapter Seven, "Encounter with the Religions of the World". "Of all the topics encompassed by the study of mission none is more fundamental and controversial than the relations between Christian and non-Christian faiths" [18] Kirk does not hand out answers, but explores the various theologies that are significant in interreligious dialogue. Often the same words or similar words may be used, but there can be vast differences in the meaning they have for the individual traditions. In the light of this, it is important to start from understanding the other's starting point. In any case, whatever point of difference or apparent similarity is under discussion, the environment, history and cultures of each side of the discussion have relevant insights to offer.

Terms often used in scholarship on interreligious dialogue are inclusivist, exclusivist and pluralist, each of which chooses a stance towards the other traditions. Kirk has replaced them by the terms: particularity, generality and universality, as he considers these terms to have the same meaning, but to offer a less negative approach. In his presentation of these approaches, Kirk does not choose one above another, but critiques each, showing its positive and its negative approaches.

Whenever people enter into interreligious dialogue, they need to start from where they are knowledgeable about and committed to their own faith tradition, whether it be Christian or non-Christian. From this position, they are then able to know the differences, respect them, and grow in awareness that each faith tradition points to the sacred ultimate accepted in many various ways by humanity.

This book is written from a Christian point of view of the theology of mission. For the Christian reader it presents a basic and challenging approach to mission – perhaps different from the concept that was predominant before Vatican II. For the non-Christian reader, it can offer new areas where interreligious dialogue can become a journey of greater understanding of the other, and an invitation to cooperation where our world today sadly needs such.

Items of Interest *[continued from Page 2]*

Journey of Promise will bring together 10-12 young people (ages 18 - 30) from each of the Christian, Jewish and Muslim faiths in Sydney over a course of 6 to 12 months in a journey (or pilgrimage) of encounter and understanding. Activities will include a week long residential experience, inter-faith visits, participation in diverse religious festivals and a day of reflection.

The objectives are to enable a creative space for deeper inter-faith and cross-cultural understanding among Australian young people, to empower young people in community leadership and to offer a positive model of exploration and insight for interfaith and cross-cultural understanding.

FORUM ON AUSTRALIA'S ISLAMIC RELATIONS (FAIR)

This is an independent, grass roots public relations group aimed specifically at promoting a positive and harmonious relationship between Muslims and the wider community through interaction with the media, government, other faiths and education. It is hoped through their newspaper, Australia Fair to promote involvement and active participation of Muslim Australians within the broader spectrum of Australian society. FAIR has issued a Press

Release (Aug 22) condemning the attacks on the UN and in Jerusalem.

Cf. Kurands Seyit, Letter of Introduction, May 2003

Jihad in Islam *[continued from Page 3]*

human beings – Muslims and non-Muslims – can live with justice in peace, harmony and good will. Islam not only gives its followers full guidelines to find peace in their personal and social lives, but it also tells them how to extend goodwill on the basis of human relations towards others. Muslims worked under these principles for centuries. People of many faiths lived with them and among them. Islamic societies were known for their tolerance, generosity and humanity. To maintain this peace and harmony is our Jihad today.

Mr Amjad Mehboob

Chief Executive Officer

*The Australian Federation of Islamic Councils
(Abbreviated with permission from a presentation given at the Australian
National Dialogue of Jews, Christians and Muslims, Sydney, May 2003)*

A SELECTION OF WEBSITES
SUITABLE FOR STUDENT RESEARCH ON WORLD RELIGIONS.

Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions: www.cpwr.org

This website invites us to “explore ways in which we, as people of spirit, faith and good will, can work together to transform the world into a more peaceful, just and sustainable place for all”. It contains a history of the World Parliament of Religions from its origins in 1893 and gives a Summary Report of the 1999 Parliament of World's Religions held in Cape Town, South Africa. It includes information about the next Parliament with the theme “Pathways to Peace: the Wisdom of Listening, the Pain of Commitment” to be held in July 2004 in Barcelona, Spain.

Global Dialogue Institute: <http://global-dialogue.com>

This is the website of Leonard Swidler and the Global Dialogue Institute originating at Temple University. It contains on-line copies of many of his books and some worthwhile links to other websites with an interest in global issues e.g. website of Centre for Global Ethics. A special feature is its record of dialogue initiatives in Indonesia and Bosnia. A related site is <http://astro.temple.edu~dialogue/geth.htm>

Global Ethic Foundation: www.weltethos.org/dat_eng/index_e.htm

The website is the work of a research team under the direction of German theologian Hans Kung and contains statements from Congresses and Conferences on global ethics as well as Kung's own teaching, including 12 theses for an ethic of peace.

Interfaith Encounter Association: www.interfaith-encounter.org

The Interfaith Encounter Association is an association of Jewish, Muslim and Christian leaders dedicated to promoting peace in the Middle East. The website contains history of the organisation which was established in Israel in the 1950's and its current project, the Women's Interfaith Encounter (launched in 2001) and Youth Interfaith Encounter (begun in 2002). It could be useful as a source of ideas for those planning their own interfaith encounters as it contains news about upcoming events as well as reports on past activities. You can also subscribe to the IEA newsletter.

Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations – Presbyterian Church of USA:

www.peusa.org/peusa.wmd.eir

This is the ecumenical and interfaith page of the Worldwide Ministries Division of the Presbyterian Church (USA). In the section on interfaith resources there are some helpful sections on Interfaith Celebrations, Prayer and Worship, Interfaith Marriage and Presbyterian Principles for Interfaith Dialogue.

Jesuits (USA): <http://puffin.creighton.edu/jesuit/dialogue>

This page is devoted to documentation, reports and interconnections on interreligious dialogue in the ministries of the Jesuits of the United States. It notes that concrete steps in dialogue were once seen as a specialisation for some, but now Jesuits working in all areas are touched by it. The site includes an archive of the publication *Jesuits in Dialogue*, access to extensive documentation and a list of (mainly American) interfaith links. Other areas of interest are Resources for Interfaith Marriage and a link with a Muslim-Christian Marriage Support Group. There are also resources and contacts for interreligious education in schools and reports from interfaith conferences, events particularly from Jesuit institutions.

Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (MID): www.monasticdialog.com/index.htm

The website of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue is sponsored by the North American Benedictine and Cistercian monasteries of men and women. From this site you can find out about the history of MID, beginning with interfaith encounters between East and West in the 1060's. Resources include back copies of MID bulletins, book reviews, and links to a multitude of interreligious resources (monasteries, institutions and dialogues) with a monastic flavour. The 'News' section contains information about interreligious events and new publications.

Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID):

www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/index.htm

This is the website of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. It contains most significant letters and statements issuing from the Vatican, from *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991) to greetings sent annually to the various faith communities.

Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, US Conference of Catholic Bishops: www.usccb.org/seia/index.html

Although its main focus is inter-Christian relationships this website contains some useful general articles on Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations and outlines some results of recent Christian-Muslim dialogues and meetings held in the United States. It lists some international renewal courses which incorporate an interfaith dimension and it has a good general bibliography for interreligious dialogue and Christian-Muslim relations.

World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP):

www.wcrp.org/RforP/TEXT_INDEXPAGE.htm

This is the site of the World Conference of Religions for Peace, founded in Japan in 1970. The WCRP belief is that when religious leaders transcend mono-denominational affiliations and ethnicities that keep communities apart they can assist in rebuilding peaceful societies in the aftermath of violence. Progress reports are available from places such as Bosnia and Kosovo where WCRP has been instrumental in helping to resolve violent situations. The site contains reports from the seven World Assemblies of WCRP held 1970 – 1999 and its Global Directory of Religious Women's Interfaith Organisations.

World Council of Churches (WCC):

<http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/index-e.html>

This excellent site gives an interfaith rationale for interreligious dialogue while noting some biblical resources. An e-zine "Current Dialogue" contains a wealth of articles on interreligious dialogue, news about interreligious events and related WCC consultation reports. It contains many useful links to other interfaith organizations.

Worldwide Holiday and Festival Site: www.holidayfestival.com and
Interfaith Calendar: www.interfaithcalendar.org

Both are useful for information about the dates and significance of important religious festivals in the main religious traditions.