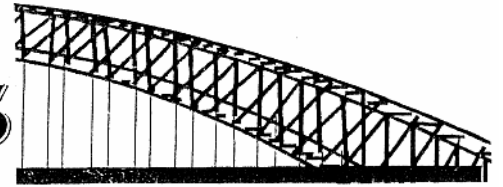


# BRIDGES



A NEWSLETTER OF THE CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM NETWORK

*Sponsored by the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations*

Number 31

August 2005

## EDITORIAL

In the weeks following the London and Egyptian bombings there has been much heartache and soul-searching, increased security measures, analysis of the causes of such atrocities and above all attempts to find solutions to what seems an escalating situation.

This issue of *Bridges* offers a Christian and a Muslim perspective on what may help us in our present situation of conflict. Dr. Abdal Hakim Murad sees the need for Muslims to address the growing influence of the Wahhabi school of theological interpretation within Islam, while Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare Movement sees enormous potential in the power of Interreligious cooperation and dialogue.

These tragedies appear to have marked a turning point in the willingness of Muslims to speak out against the voices of radicalism and those who promote violence in the name of Islam. It is not only the fact that some 500 imams and Muslim leaders gathered in London to issue a *fatwa* against the perpetrators of violence or that Australian Muslim leaders and organizations were very prompt to voice their horror at what had happened, but other voices are also being heard from within the Muslim community.

Among these are the voices of youth. An example of this appeared in a local Sydney newspaper, Inner-West Weekly, on July 28, 2005. The front-page headline read **Speak up for us. Young Muslims call for leadership.**

*Senior students at Strathfield's Noor Al Houda Islamic College have pleaded for Australia's Muslim leaders to do more in condemning terrorism*

It was, however, the final paragraph of the article, almost a *non sequitur* that impresses:

*"The school visited the Russian embassy to offer condolences after the Beslan massacre and did likewise this week at the British Embassy in Sydney."*

This spontaneous action speaks volumes. It was an offer of friendship in time of trouble and sadness. It is this reaching out in friendship and solidarity that is needed right now. One would hope that the same spontaneity is being shown by Christians when they meet Muslims. And if in showing this understanding and in offering the hand of friendship we run the risk of scandalizing some, it is probably a good sign. After all, Jesus wasn't above surprising his apostles when He conversed with the Woman at the Well.

*Bridges* presents some of the "good news" of what is happening in Christian-Muslim-Jewish relations. We should not underestimate the importance of what is being done at local levels and the impact it can eventually have in the wider world scene.

*Sr. Pauline Rae smsm*



### **4<sup>th</sup> International Interreligious Abraham Conference Speakers and Organisers**

Mr. Mehmet Saral, Mr. Mehmet Ozalp, Cardinal George Pell, Sr. Giovanni Farquer, Sheikh Fehmi Haji El-Imam, Rabbi John Levi, Mrs Josie Lacey, Sr Pauline Rae

## NEWS FROM THE CENTRE

### 4<sup>th</sup> International Inter-Religion Abraham Conference

The conference was held on 5 June at Sydney University and was extremely well attended with a significant number coming from the academic and teaching professions.

Exploration panels covered the following topics

- Religious and moral values in a consumer society
- Well-being of the individual in our society
- Inter-faith cooperation in education: dynamics of understanding the other

Rev Dr Francis Tiso, Deputy General of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, US Catholic Bishop's Conference delivered the Abraham Lecture entitled *The need and practical dynamics of inter-faith cooperation in action*.

The other main speakers were Cardinal George Pell, Rabbi John Levi & Sheikh Fehmi Haji El-Imam

### Jewish Christian Muslim Residential Conferences

The Centre is working with Jewish, Muslim and other Christian bodies to organise Jewish-Christian-Muslim residential conferences in Sydney beginning in 2006.

### University Updates

The Centre's work with the universities has started taking shape in UNSW with a series of study trips to various places of worship and with the possibility of a residential conference occurring over the coming months.

### The Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations is on Yahoo!Groups

Logon to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ccmr> and click on the "join this group" button to be part of this e-community. Membership is required to help ensure the site is used only for its intended purpose, so if you have not used Yahoo!Groups before, you will need to register for a userID and password (instructions on the website will tell you how). Its simple and you can share your thoughts on Christian-Muslim dialogue with other friends of the Centre.

### Resources Available

The Centre holds relatively limited but quality resources on Islam and Interreligious Dialogue which are available onsite. To ensure staff availability, please contact the Centre prior to intended visit.

## ITEMS OF INTEREST

### Abraham Conference goes International

Mr Orhan Cicek of the Australian Intercultural Society (AIS) met with Brooklyn's Bishop Nicholas Di Marzio, Fr Francis Tiso and representatives from other New York and New Jersey based Muslim organisations and interfaith centres in New York to discuss a proposal to conduct the AIS flagship event, The International Abraham Conference in New York and Washington. AIS would provide the necessary logistical support.

### One Table Many Voices.

Hunger No More: An Interfaith Convocation was held on 6 June 2005. The historic event brought together more than 40 heads of religious communities representing more than 100 million people from numerous bodies including the Salvation Army, the Catholic Church, Evangelical and a number of the mainline Protestant denominations, as well as Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, and Native American leaders at the National Cathedral in Washington, DC.

<http://www.bread.org/nationalgathering/2005/convocation.htm>

### Muslims, Christians United Against Niger Famine Crisis

Muslims and Christians are united in their uphill effort to help millions of people in dire need of food aid in the famine-stricken West African country of Niger.

"We feed everyone without distinctions, religious or others," Abdelkak Azeroual, a coordinator of the Center for Muslims in Africa, told the Associated Press on

Tuesday, August 2. "Ask them," he said, pointing at a group of women sitting on the sand with their children...

IslamOnline.net 02/08/05

### Study finds young adults of all faiths have similar needs

A panel of young adult scholars in the USA have argued that Christian, Jewish and Muslim young adult professionals all want a faith community that makes them feel valued, a worship experience that moves them and learning opportunities that allow them to question.

Amongst other recommendations, the research team included attracting and retaining young adult congregants to facilitate interfaith and interdenominational exchange, with clergy setting a precedent of non-judgment by not disparaging other religious traditions or denominations.

CathNews 07/06/05

### Young Australian Muslims call for leadership

Senior students at Strathfield's Noor Houda Islamic College have pleaded for Australia's Muslim leaders to be more active and united in condemning terrorism.

"We need our community leaders to be united in clearly condemning this kind of behaviour" Doha Ayoubi, a year 12 student said, referring to the London bombings, "like the 22 imams in London who stood and spoke together"

Inner-West Weekly 28/07/05

## **Muslim Peacemaker Teams**

Fifteen Iraqi Shia Muslims from Karbala and Najaf travelled to Fallujah to pray with Sunni Muslims and help in cleanup efforts after a U.S. assault on the city in May. The group, called the Muslim Peacemaker Team, which grew out of the Iraqi Human Rights Watch, has been working closely with Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) in Iraq since February and joined CPTers for the action. "Members of MPT sought to counter the growing reports of Sunni/Shia sectarian violence and to demonstrate unity in a tense time," CPT reported. CPT, an organization based in the historic peace churches, has been sending teams of nonviolent peacemakers into places of conflict since 1993. MPT has existed now for four months.

Sojourners 15/06/05

## **Muslim Leader Backs Pope's Plea to Terrorists**

"God loves life, which he has created, not death. Stop, in the name of God!" the Holy Father exclaimed in his Angelus address.

The president of the Muslim League in Italy, Mario Scialoja described Benedict XVI's call to terrorists to give up violence as "noble" and "an appeal which we share". The Muslim leader added "Terrorism of Islamic origin is a political plan. We, Muslims, cannot kill either in the name of God. God, as the Holy Father said precisely, loves life, not death. Whoever invokes the name of God or religion, trying to hide behind religion to commit terrorist acts, in which innocent civilians lose their lives, blasphemes against his own religion and against the name of God".

Zenit 13/07/05

## **Terrorists Not Attacking Christians, Assures Pope**

In response to whether the attacks that hit London, Turkey and Egypt could be considered "bombs against Christianity", Benedict XVI replied "I think that on the whole they are responding to a more general intention, and are not specifically against Christianity".

Asked if Islam can be regarded as a "religion of peace," Benedict XVI responded: "I wouldn't like to generalize. It certainly has elements that could make peace prevail; it also has other elements. We must always try to identify the best elements".

Zenit 27/07/05

## **600 Islamic fundamentalists rounded up in 7 days**

Almost 600 people have been arrested in just one week as part of a crackdown launched by Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf.

In a televised speech, the President announced stern actions against hate-mongers and closer scrutiny of Islamic extremist groups and religious schools—the latter are suspected of being favourable recruiting and training grounds for Islamic fighters.

AsiaNews 28/07/05

## **International Symposium**

The Multi-Faith Centre at Griffith University, Brisbane and

Pure Land Learning College, Toowoomba organised an international symposium on "Cultivating Wisdom, Harvesting Peace" from 10th-13th of August. About one hundred delegates from twenty seven different countries attended, including many from UNESCO offices and centres, faith, interfaith, multi-faith, and civil society organisations, and education and academic institutions. Fr. Patrick McInerney from the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations represented the Holy See. The papers and recommendations are available at <http://www.griffith.edu.au/centre/mfc/>

## **Third Catholic Interfaith Symposium**

The Archdiocese of Melbourne Catholic Interfaith Committee held its Third Catholic Interfaith Symposium on 26 June at the Yarra Theological Union (YTU) in Box Hill, Victoria. The theme for this year's Symposium was "Can we pray together?" and was opened by Bishop Christopher Prowse.

Speakers included Swami Shankarananda of the Mt Eliza Ashram, Mr Garrie O'Toole of the Kagyu E-Vam Buddhist Institute, Mrs Fulya Celik of the Religious Education Department, Isik College, Broadmeadows and Fr Trevor Trotter SSC - Columban Priest and Director of Columban Mission in Australia and New Zealand

## **The Pope wants to meet Jews and Muslims in Cologne**

Pope Benedict XVI has included meetings with Jewish and Muslim representatives in his trip to Cologne in the latest draft schedule of the programme.

The director of the Vatican press office, Joaquin Navarro Valls revealed that the Pope added the meetings because he believed that dialogue between the three religions was an element which has marked his pontificate from the start, and that it would be a very strong sign in the current context of terrorist attacks.

AsiaNews 24/07/05

## **Faiths combine to condemn hate books**

Christian, Muslim and Jewish leaders have launched a joint appeal for the withdrawal of hate literature from bookstores and an apology from the booksellers.

A statement by the Australian National Dialogue of Christians, Muslims and Jews has been released in response to the sale of racist and vilifying books at Islamic bookshops in Sydney and Melbourne. The statement read "All fair-minded people will be dismayed to learn that notorious racist and vilifying texts, printed overseas, have found their way to Australia and have been made available for sale at bookshops patronised by customers seeking knowledge of Islam and Muslim life."

AAP 21/07/05

## **Australian Christian Meditation Community**

The ACMC held a day of inter-faith sharing in Hurstville on 30 July 2005 in Hurstville. More than one hundred people attended the talks on the different aspects of meditation by Anthony Renshaw (Hindu), Michael Kelly (Benedictine) and Ridhuan Marriot (Sufi) and other activities.

### What future lies ahead for a multicultural, multiethnic and multifaith society after the terrorist attempts of London and Sharm el Sheik?

*The FOCOLARE Movement which promotes the ideals of unity and universal brotherhood was born in the midst of the hatred and violence of the Second World War. It is present in all continents and has the characteristics of a small 'people' of different races, cultures and languages, who are committed to bring about a world in which there is more solidarity, more unity.*

*While taking its inspiration from the Gospel, the spirituality of this movement which was founded in Trent, in 1943 by Chiara Lubich, also highlights values commonly shared by other faiths and cultures generating a new lifestyle which responds to the widespread need for a life of authenticity.*

*The Focolare Movement was first approved by the Holy See in 1962 and its successive developments approved in 1990. It is one of the ecclesial movements which Pope John Paul II described as "the Holy Spirit's response to the dramatic challenges of the close of this millennium".*

The Mariapolis is the annual meeting offered by the Focolare in various parts of the world aimed at expressing the common commitment of Christians of different denominations and followers of other religions to build a world of peace and unity in brotherhood through talks, reflections, life experiences, and artistic presentations.

"What future lies ahead for a multicultural, multiethnic and multifaith society?" was the theme for this year's Mariapolis conference in England which started on July 24 at Lake District Windermere, northern England which attracted 600 participants, including a group of Muslims.

The importance of this question is not only for England but the whole Europe and beyond, especially in the face of the tragedy that struck London on July 7 and Sharm el Sheik in Egypt on July 23. As part of this year's meetings at the various locations, the significant address made by Chiara Lubich at the English Mariapolis of 2004 is being shown through videotape.

On June 19, 2004, Lubich addressed the gathering of over 2300, including leading Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh and Hindu personalities on the topic "Imagine a world... where diversity is richness" at Westminster Central Hall. It was her answer to the question we are asking today.

The meeting hall itself was significant: the very beautiful Westminster Central Hall in the Heart of the most cosmopolitan capital of Europe and throughout Great Britain is famous for being the site of the first meeting of the United Nations after World War II and the speech given by Gandhi on the independence of India.

From the very first remarks the meeting spoke of the sufferings often hidden behind the faces of Africans, Asians, Latin Americans and showed what imagination and power of love can do to heal them.

In the afternoon the audience of Westminster Central Hall

was expanded to the rest of the world, thanks to the satellite link-ups of Telepace and internet. The horizon of experiences was also expanded: to fraternity between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland; to bishops of different Churches; to Catholic, Evangelical-Lutheran, Anglican and Orthodox Movements in Stuttgart committed to working together to give a soul to Europe; to dialogue between Christians and Muslims addressed by Prof. Mohammed Shomani and between Christians and Hindus by Mrs. Didi Athavale, leader of the large Swadhyaya Family Indian Movement.

Lubich addressed the widespread fears of increasing terrorism, of wars in the Middle East and in many parts of the world. She said: "Many people see signs of a possible clash of civilizations. They say that it is marked and even intensified by the different religious affiliations", but described this way of seeing things, triggered by extremists and fanaticism which distort the religions, as being "very partial".

She made a comparison between our times and those of Bishop Augustine of Hippo, who had seen the overthrowing of the Roman Empire under the pressure of the migration of peoples. She indicated dialogue as a preventive measure against terrorism, and the "golden rule," common to many religions, as the way to achieve it: "Do not do unto others what you wouldn't want others to do unto you." In other words: a love that knows how to be one with the other, to the point of "getting into the other's skin... understanding what it means for the other to be Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu." This is the way to practice reciprocal inculturation and build a society where "cultures are open to one another ... in a profound dialogue of reciprocal love". She invites the religions to take the strategy of fraternity in order to heal the gap between rich and poor and effect a turning point in international relations. We need to see it as Augustine did, "not the end of their world, but the birth of a new world".

She then went on to say that from this dialogue "a strategy of fraternity can start, a strategy capable of determining a turning point in international relationships".

For Lubich, the new world of the third millennium will be the fraternity of the human family enriched by the diversities, according to God's design. A vision shared by the leaders of the various religions who immediately expressed their agreement.

The response of hope from the various delegates was similar. Said Muslim leader Dr. Zaki Badawi, director of the Council of Imams and Mosques of Great Britain, "Yes, we are in a world that experiences disputes and desperate conflict. But I have always believed that peace in every part of the world is inevitable. Today I am full of new hope". The spiritual leader of a vast group of Sikhs in Great Britain and other parts of Europe, Mohinder Singh

of Birmingham said "I think that every person who lives by the divine Scriptures will agree with what Chiara said, with her vision".

Baroness Kathleen Richardson, former head of the Methodist Church in England and current member of the House of Lords, president of an interreligious governmental commission said "Chiara, today you expressed your vision. Now it is up to us to make it become a reality in the communities, in various localities, wherever we are", and Cardinal Murphy O'Connor, Archbishop of Westminster: "I think that today we are really in a sense all "focolarini", because we are in great unity with what Chiara said, with her desire and mission for unity, peace and justice".

A large number of echoes have arrived via e-mail from different countries as well, from Christians, Muslims and faithful of other religions who participated in the various Mariapolis meetings. Here is what they write from Los Angeles, where a group of Muslim friends: "Listening to

this message of universal brotherhood together, right after hearing the news of the London terrorist attack, was really a sign of hope. Everyone was strongly impressed to see that among us, universal brotherhood was already a reality." From Belgium, where 18 different nationalities were represented, they wrote: "What struck the Muslims most was the experience of God's presence in the midst of the community through mutual love." The same experience was made in Amman (Jordan), where a group from Iraq was also present, and in Istanbul. A Muslim ex-military man, now a professor, commented: "Here I have seen brotherhood assume another dimension. All that we've heard reminds me of the thoughts of Mevlana (a noted Turkish Muslim mystic)." A Muslim woman remarked: "Here diversity has been transformed into unity. We have experienced the rainbow of peace, coloured by love."

*Pro Dialogo* Bulletin 118, 2005/1 and  
<http://www.focolare.org.au/>

## A MUSLIM PERSPECTIVE

The following are excerpts from the article **Islam's 'heart of darkness'** by **Abdal Hakim Murad** published in "The Tablet" 23/07/05

Reaction in Britain's Muslim community to the 7 July bombings was swift and seemingly unanimous. "These killings had absolutely no sanction in Islam," said a conference of imams convened at the London Central Mosque, while the British Muslim Forum delivered a *fatwa* that classified the London bombings as *hiraba*, an Islamic legal term denoting aggravated violence against the innocent. All implicated in the crimes were to be "excluded from the Muslim community and places of worship until their repentance has become manifest".

The loud unanimity of the leadership has done much to assuage the fears of other communities but the arguments are not at an end. The leadership has issued a decree that is the nearest thing Islam has to excommunication. Yet it has not so clearly given an answer to a pressing question: why should some apparently devout young men regard their terroristic acts as sanctioned by religion?

Some explanations are seen as inadequate, for example "It is a backlash in response to Western crimes against Islam, as in Iraq" or "It is not the only religion with a lunatic fringe", etc.

While Muslim leaders may often reach for a language of

self-exoneration in public, behind the scenes, and in publications and conferences intended for insiders alone, there is a growing disquiet and a passionate debate.

This debate juggles two intimately related themes. First, the established leaders of the religion are aware that the radicals are not listening to them. Each Muslim country has its authoritative scholars, often led by a mufti, who will rule on controversial issues. To become a mufti, a scholar must have received an *ijaza*, an elaborate certification of teaching competence, from a comparably certified figure.

The radicals, like the London bombers, and Osama bin Laden, have no such qualifications. According to the traditional system they should be bound by the rulings of the muftis; yet they refuse to submit.

The classically authorised scholars denounce terrorist acts, which they generally stigmatise as *hiraba*. However over the past decade, these men have been increasingly denounced by the radicals as weaklings and stooges. From al-Qaida's perspective, the religion's leaders have failed to realise that America's "evil empire" can only be halted when Western civilians, terrified by urban mayhem, vote against their governments' expansionist policies.

Help us spread the news about the Centre and BRIDGES and send us the name and address of someone else whom you think may be interested. (Please complete details overleaf)



There are no subscription fees for BRIDGES, but a kind donation would be appreciated as it would help with the cost of production

**Please accept my donation of \$** ..... (Please complete details overleaf)



You could also help us save on costs by opting to receive BRIDGES via email.  
Email your details and request to [cmr.cmi@columban.org.au](mailto:cmr.cmi@columban.org.au)



There is a second crisis that is now distressing the traditional leadership. This takes the form of a profound doctrinal disjuncture. Al-Qaida sympathisers regard the traditional Sunni muftis and imams, not only as politically spineless, but as heretical. Mainstream imams, including those trained in the UK's 16 Muslim seminaries follow traditional Sunnism, while al-Qaida is rooted in Wahhabism, the eighteenth-century reform movement of central Arabia. Strict Wahhabis consider the theology and piety of mainline Sunnism to be *kufr* (disbelief). Hence Wahhabi radicals have not hesitated to kill Muslims, including senior scholars; indeed, Muslims have always been al-Qaida's principal victims.

Wahhabism represents a sort of Islamic Reformation: scripturalist, literal-minded, hostile to the veneration of saints and to philosophical theology. Hence Wahhabi zealots are no more likely to heed the voice of the muftis than, say, Cromwell would have been responsive to the entreaties of the Pope as his Puritan armies laid waste to Ireland.

Muslim leaders have often been coy about publicly acknowledging the role of this schism in the current crisis. Sometimes this is because of physical threats: in Pakistan or Iraq, it is now possible to be murdered for criticising Wahhabism. Sometimes, more innocently, it is because of squeamishness about recognising that the seamless garment of Islam has been so disastrously torn. On other occasions, institutions and states may be nervous of publicly venting their anger at Wahhabism for fear that the cornucopia of Saudi donations might suddenly end.

It is in the context of Wahhabi theology that Osama bin Laden and his admirers operate. Saudi Arabia thus finds itself in the difficult position of maintaining a moderate, pro-Western international profile, while simultaneously supporting a doctrinal system that is easily seized upon by the angry and disaffected as a justification for mass murder. After the 11 September attacks, the Saudi authorities worked hard to rein in and monitor their missionary infrastructure, even banning Saudi charities from operating abroad. Saudi Arabia is struggling to temper its Wahhabi inheritance; but it is still quietly regarded by the Muslim leaders of my acquaintance as the heart of darkness in the current crisis. Even more revealing is the case of Indonesia. This large Muslim democracy offers little comfort to theorists of

fundamentalism. Yet a recent conference at the Islamic University in Jakarta heard detailed accounts of how Saudi-backed groups were crucial in shaping the ideology of the terrorists charged with the Bali bombing of October 2002.

Among alienated and confused young Muslims in the United Kingdom, there is also a Wahhabi influence. One Muslim bookseller tells me that mainstream Islamic bookshops cannot compete with the radical alternative, since Saudi organisations supply the radical shops with books free of charge. No less troubling to established mosque leaders is the tendency of some young British Muslims to study in new Wahhabi colleges in Pakistan and elsewhere.

The picture is complex, but it does suggest that the medicine for terrorism must be supplied from within the Muslim community, and within the theological resources of Islam. Legislation, and any other form of government interference, are unlikely to put an end to the problem; and may make it worse. It is clear that only Muslims can heal this wound.

Fortunately, serious moves are under way to challenge the extremists on religious grounds. The most recent was an ecumenical conference in Jordan, held between 4 and 6 of July, at which the assembled leaders of Sunni and Shia Islam issued a joint statement banning the key Wahhabi practice of considering other Muslims to be unbelievers. The immediate context for the conference was Wahhabi violence against Shia and other non-Wahhabi communities in Iraq; but the problem was acknowledged to be global.

In the United Kingdom, an increasingly educated Muslim community is now developing a religious identity that has little time for zealotry. Perhaps this maturation will be accelerated by the recent horrors, and in our lifetime we will see orthodox British Muslims travelling to Saudi Arabia and other troubled lands, offering not only formal theological advice, but an alternative and more convivial style of engaging with modernity.

*Abdal Hakim Murad teaches Islamic Studies in the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge, is imam of the Cambridge Mosque, and chair of the Muslim Academic Trust.*

✂ .....

## Would you like to receive BRIDGES regularly? Have you moved?

(Please send us your contact details)



Your Name: .....

Address: .....

Old Address (if you've moved): .....

Telephone: (W)..... (H) ..... (M) .....

Email:..... No. of copies of Bridges required: .....

## BOOK REVIEW

Our book review for this issue of *Bridges* was contributed by Michael Sibert, a student who completed the unit *Introducing Islam* at the Catholic Institute of Sydney, Strathfield, in January 2005

Ziauddin Sardar, *Desperately Seeking Paradise – Journeys of a Sceptical Muslim* (London: Granta Publications, 2004)

The above detailed book by Ziauddin Sardar provides an insightful, engaging and very readable journey into the contemporary Islamic world. Sardar's own life experiences provide a 'living bridge', over which the reader is invited to transverse, back and forwards between the worlds of western culture and intellectual tradition and various aspects and dimensions of modern day Islam. Having been born into and raised within the Islamic culture of Pakistan, but subsequently educated and enculturated in Britain, Sardar lives in the tensions that arise between these sometimes conflicting worldviews. As such he is well positioned to take the reader on a journey that combines personal autobiographical insight and experience with an exposition of the basic tenants and significant schools of thought that occur within Islam.

As Sardar unfolds the story of his own 'desperate search' for paradise within Islam the reader is in turn taken on a journey that both carefully explains fundamental Islamic beliefs, spiritual insights and religious practices and at the same time provides a critique of the manner in which these spiritual insights have been lived in practice. With his inherent grasp of human psychology, Sardar exposes the very human tendency to turn spiritual insight into simplistic reductions and one-sided idolatry, evident in all religious traditions, as he personally explores and engages with Muslims attempting to live out their faith in today's world.

In summarising the contents of this book, it needs to be recognised that it is not a systematic treatment but rather the story of a lifetime encounter. As such the order is not typical. Nonetheless Sardar manages to cover all of the basic teachings and practices of Islam and also incorporate significant knowledge of Islamic history, notable scholars such as Al-Ghazali and Nasruddin Hoca, Mystics such as Al-Junayd and Fari ud-Din Attar, schools of thought such as Wahhabism and the sectarian divisions of Sunni and Shia into his exposition. To begin with we encounter a pious strand of Islam known as Tablighi, which is akin to what Christians might label charismatic evangelism. From there we move to an encounter with Muslim activism in the form of organisational Brotherhoods aimed at improving the lot of Muslims through political advocacy and lobbying in the 'west'. Then perhaps not unexpectedly suffering from a degree of burnout, we turn to examine his quest for greater spiritual depth in Sufi mysticism. By this time Sardar's pattern of

sceptical engagement has been well established and as we continue with him on his life journey in search of paradise, we are invited to explore: the yearnings, idealism and disillusionment of the Iranian revolution with its focus on the Shariah; then beyond this, an exposition of and reflection on the key rituals and sacred sites of the Haj pilgrimage; the fundamentalist inclinations of Madrasahs in Pakistan; the contrasting and insistent instalment of a secular order in modern day Turkey; then ending with an assessment of the challenges confronting Islam in adapting to multicultural contexts.

Sardar's book plays a valuable role in informing the public about Islam. As his subtitle, 'Journeys of a Sceptical Muslim', suggests this is not a one sided apologetic text. The value of his book lies in its genesis, that is: the real dilemma's and questions arising from the lived experience of a thoughtful, well educated and articulate Muslim who is fully engaged in the act of making sense of his faith within our contemporary context. As such we are provided with a critical assessment of both the light and dark sides of contemporary Islam. One is inclined to accept the validity of his observations because they arise within the context of a heartfelt and well-travelled search for authenticity amidst everything Islam has to offer.<sup>1</sup>

As a practising Muslim, Sardar is an insider not an outsider, a fact that sits very well with his sceptical perspective and adds to the value of this book. In particular the combination of his personal 'inside' experience and critical standpoint 'sits well' with the perspective of a non-Muslim reader, as Sardar can be given a degree of credibility that would perhaps be unattainable to a non-Muslim author.

Perhaps a criticism that could be levied against Sardar's book is that if one is primarily interested in an exposition of the basic beliefs and practices of Islam, one has to read many more words than necessary. On the other side however, this extra reading is well worth the effort, as it delivers a depth of insight and critique that can only arise from a lifetime of personal struggle, reflection and engagement that is simply not possible in a standard textbook treatment of Islam.

Overall I found reading Sardar's book to be a very worthwhile, entertaining and educative.

Michael Sibert

## MEETING POINT

Are you interested in meeting people of other faiths? Maybe even hosting a gathering?

Contact the Centre on (02) 9352 8010 or [cmr.cmi@columban.org.au](mailto:cmr.cmi@columban.org.au) for assistance or more information



Some mosques are open to visitors. Try finding out where the local mosque in your area is, and see if they run guided tours. Contact the Centre if you are not sure where to look, and we'll try to help you find one.

The focus of the *Women's Dialogue Network* (WDN), an outreach of the Centre, is the expansion of the network, via the setting up of affiliated groups in and around Sydney.

Contact the Centre if you would like to be part of this movement



A group of women from different faiths meet in Hurstville on the 4<sup>th</sup> Monday morning of each month. Contact Lorraine Watson on (02) 9579 2653 for further details.

## WHAT'S COMING UP

### AUGUST

**15** **Young Catholic Women's Interfaith Fellowship**  
for Catholic women aged between 25-35 interested in Interfaith relations.  
10 Fellowships available for 16-week live in course in Canberra, Semester 1 2006.  
Enquiries: (02) 6201 9864

**28** Auburn Gallipoli Mosque Open Day  
North Parade, Auburn, 10am-4pm  
Enquiries: [info@gallipolimosque.org.au](mailto:info@gallipolimosque.org.au)

**29** "The Death of Jesus Christian-Jewish Relations: Redeeming Our Sacred Story from Sacrilegious Uses" lecture at Sydney University  
Enquires: (02) 9394 5201

### SEPTEMBER

Local city councils will be holding their various Cultural Awareness week events in September & October, some with specific inter-faith events.  
Enquires: your local council

**2-4** Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP)  
Interfaith Workshop, Melbourne  
Enquiries:  
[www.fair.org.au/interfaith/works/index.htm](http://www.fair.org.au/interfaith/works/index.htm)

**9** *Christians and Muslims growing peace in Griffith*  
Griffith Regional Theatre  
7 – 9 pm  
Enquiries: Anne Lanyon (02) 9352 8021

**9** Fundamentalism: A Contemplative Response  
Australian Christian Meditation Community  
280 Pitt Street (1<sup>st</sup> Floor Auditorium)  
Enquiries: Janet O'Sullivan: 9314 6386

**10** Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP)  
Interfaith Workshop, Sydney

**11** Interfaith 9/11 Tribute and Mosque Open Day  
Carlton Mosque,  
765 Drummond Street, Carlton, 2.30 pm  
Enquires: (03) 9347 6505

**29 Sep** "Unity: Light for the World"  
**to** Focolare Mariapolis Event, Perth  
**2 Oct** Venue: Fairbridge Village, Pinjarra  
Enquiries: [info@focolare.org.au](mailto:info@focolare.org.au)

### OCTOBER

**2-3** Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP)  
Interfaith Workshop, Sydney

**4** Christian-Muslim Dialogue  
Holy Family Church  
10 Highfield Road, Lindfield  
Enquires: 9416 3702

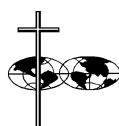
### NOVEMBER

Liverpool Council will be holding their Refugee Week events in November.  
Enquires: Liverpool Council

**13** Holroyd Inter-faith Carnivale  
Holroyd Gardens  
Enquiries: Lucy Maquire: (02) 9840 9948

If you have a group or know of upcoming events in your local area, let us know about it and we will include in our future issues of *Bridges*

Postal address: Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations  
Columban Mission Institute  
C/- Australian Catholic University  
Locked Bag 2002  
Strathfield NSW 2135



Phone: 9352-8011/8012  
Fax : 9746-8033  
Email : [cmr.cmi@columban.org.au](mailto:cmr.cmi@columban.org.au)  
Website: [www.columban.org.au](http://www.columban.org.au)