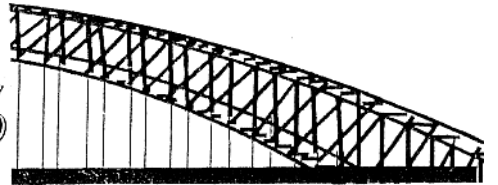


BRIDGES



A NEWSLETTER OF THE CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM NETWORK

Sponsored by the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations

Number 29

March 2005

Editorial

There has never been a time in history when Muslims and Christians the world over have been more aware of each other than they are today. For some of us this awareness comes through continuous news bulletins and TV coverage of events related to war, terrorism or disasters like the tsunami or the earthquake in Iran. One way or another, Christians and Muslims are connected in today's world in numbers never seen before. The vast majority of us are onlookers, voicing our respective opinions of the other within the safety of our communities. But while armies battle, and insurgents attack, while oppressive governments discriminate, and individuals harass, provoke and slander, there are other Muslims and Christians who are enduring great suffering. There are, however, also those whose awareness of the other is based on growing understanding, collaboration and friendship.

The readers of *Bridges* are in this category. We are a tiny part of a growing band of people of both faiths who say there must be an end to this illwill, and to this incredible human suffering. For faithful Muslims and Christians the way forward must be through understanding, cooperation and friendship because they realise this is what God wants.

In this issue, *Bridges* reprints a talk given by the Archbishop of Canterbury on *The One God*. It is a Christian statement of faith delivered to a Muslim audience in an atmosphere of friendship and solidarity - an example of the efforts being made to deepen understanding of the other. The Insert is the story of an inspiring Muslim "soldier" who dedicated his life to opposing oppression through non-violent resistance.

We need to share the good news of what is happening between Muslims and Christians to offset the constant portrayal of violence, to see each other with different eyes. After all, we share the One God, the one Earth, the one Humanity and the one Goal, Peace.

Sister Kathleen Collins SSPs



Sister Kathleen Collins, familiar to our readers as the Book Reviewer for *Bridges*, has resigned from the Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations and the Editorial Board. It is with the deepest regret on both

sides that this time has come. Sr. Kathleen has been a member of the Centre for Christian-Muslim relations for nearly seven years. She has played an indispensable role in the growth of the Centre, in the development of its networks and its outreach to both Christians and Muslims.

Her commitment to the promotion of interfaith relations has been an inspiration to so many people. Her contribution towards closer relationships especially between Christian and Muslim women, and particularly through the Women's Dialogue Network, is acknowledged by all. But she has also been largely responsible for the publishing of *Bridges*, the Book Reviews, and keeping the Centre operational on a day-to-day basis.

The Staff of Columban Mission Institute and particularly those at the Centre, will miss her in so many ways.

THANK YOU, Sr. Kathleen for the wonderful work you have done and we wish for you God's many blessings in the future.

Pauline Rae smsm

The Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations is relocating as of 29 March 2005.

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Items of Interest

NEWS FROM THE CENTRE

Relocation of the Centre

As noted in the box on the front page, the Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations has moved from 420 Bobbin Head Road, North Turrumurra to office space leased from the Australian Catholic University at 167 Albert Road, Strathfield. This is the new location of the Columban Mission Institute incorporating the *Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations*, the *Centre for Promoting Communion with the Churches in China* and the *Centre for Peace Ecology and Justice*, the Staff who teach Missiology at the Catholic Institute of Sydney.

Introducing Islam

The summer school "Introducing Islam", conducted for the second time at the Catholic Institute of Sydney 12 – 18 January 2005, attracted a registration of 31 students. Feedback from the students showed that it was well received and opened new vistas for them to engage in interfaith dialogue especially with Muslims. The main lecturers were Fr Patrick McInerney and Sr Pauline Rae, assisted by guest speakers: Sheikh Mansour Leghaei, Mr Ahmad Kilani, Mrs Faikah Behardien, Mrs Jamila Hussain, Mr David Ilham and Mrs Zuleyha Keskin.

Religious Vilification

On the 17th of December 2004 Judge Michael Higgins of the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal handed down his decision in the case between the Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) and Catch the Fire Ministries. He ruled that Catch the Fire's seminar, newsletter and article had breached section 8 of Victoria's Religious and Racial Tolerance Act 2001. Full details of his decision are available at <http://www.vcat.vic.gov.au>. Fr Patrick McInerney, who accepted ICV's request to be an expert witness in the case, is a staff member of the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations.

OTHER NEWS

Dialogue on Interfaith Cooperation in Indonesia

A two-day "Dialogue on Interfaith Cooperation", co-sponsored by the Governments of Australia and Indonesia, was held in Yogyakarta, Indonesia on December 6-7, 2004. Over 120 religious leaders participated, coming from 13 countries in the Asian region.

This was a very significant initiative by the leaders of the Indonesian and Australian governments. It is the first time ever that an interfaith dialogue conference has been hosted by governments in the Asia-Pacific region, which shows recognition of the important part religion and spirituality play in the lives of many people. It was also significant that the terms of reference set out by the organizers stipulated that the participation of women was to be an important aspect of the Dialogue. Such initiatives can assist in building a more harmonious and peaceful future for the Asian region.

The ten-member delegation from Australia (three of whom were women) included religious leaders from the Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish and Christian communities. Among these delegates were, Dr Ameer Ali (President, Australian Federation of Islamic Councils), Sr

Trish Madigan OP (Roman Catholic, Bishops' Advisory Committee, Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations), and Cardinal George Pell (Catholic Archbishop of Sydney).

Caritas distributes Muslim prayer kits for Eid.

Caritas workers in Aceh distributed 2500 religious kits to enable families affected by the tsunami crisis to mark the Muslim feast of *Eid al Adha*, when Muslims remember the prophet Ibrahim and his son Ishmael,

Caritas team leader Pat Johns said: "We talked to our local staff and the community leaders in the area to ask them what they needed. Many people in Meulaboh and the surrounding area lost everything and the loss of items that are important for their Muslim faith was particularly distressing".

The kits were distributed among people in the camps in the Maulaboh region of Aceh. They contained a prayer mat used by Muslims as part of the requirement of Islam to pray five times a day in a clean area free from dust and insects. They also included a sarong, which is traditionally worn by men to attend the mosque, and a "mukena" or female Muslim outfit that covers their heads and bodies when they pray.

CathNews 24/01/05

Destiny Of Humankind

On Friday 10 December, through the efforts of al-Ghazzali Centre, the ANZ Theatre at Darling Harbour was the venue for an evening with international Muslim scholar Imam Zaid Shakir and Melbourne-based Dr. Tracey Rowland. Entitled "The Destiny of Humankind", the recurring message was of the need and importance for a spiritual reconnection and focus back to God. Dr. Rowland's focal point was "to realise the spiritual connection with the Divine", she concluded that in essence this spiritual connection must be sustained in both Christianity and Islam in order to build a future or a destiny for mankind. Imam Shakir highlighted the importance for Muslims of service to the society. He concluded: "We all should take responsibility ... in order to come together and build our harmonious and peaceful life so that Mankind's destiny of reconnecting with the Lord may be achieved."

Rumours of Proselytism in Aceh Dismissed

Seven Muslim and Christian leaders in Indonesia issued a joint statement to dispel fears that post-tsunami humanitarian aid being provided in the Indonesian province of Aceh is a means of proselytism. Articles in the American and Indonesian press suggested that evangelical Christian organizations who came to help had objectives that were more religious than humanitarian.

Responding energetically, Indonesia's Christian communities denounced all attempts to use the humanitarian mission to evangelize as this is in direct opposition to the spirit and teaching of true Christianity.

Moreover, the leaders urged the international Christian communities who want to help children affected by the tsunami to work in cooperation with the Muslim organizations as agreed by the Christian bishops and Muslim leaders.

GOD IS ONE

The following are extracts from a lecture delivered by the Most Revd Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, at al-Azhar al-Sharif Institute in Cairo, on 11 September 2004.

I am very deeply moved by the honour of being invited to address you in this place, as a guest and, I hope, as a friend.

I am here as a Christian, to speak to you of some of those matters which both unite us and divide us. In the world as it is now developing, it is of the most central importance that we as Christians and Muslims understand one another better. I am delighted at the continuing commitment to this process that has been shown here, a commitment evident in these last few days. And better understanding means understanding our differences as well as our common vision. In these few remarks, I want to meditate a little on the greatest theme of both Muslim and Christian faith, the doctrine of God; and I want to suggest how, despite some of our differences, we can, in the light of our belief about Almighty God, together make certain affirmations to the world about the way to peace and justice for human beings.

If I understand the doctrine of Islam correctly, its most important conviction can be expressed in the word *tawhid*. God is one. No being is associated with God as a second reality deserving of worship and obedience. God has no need of any being outside his own eternal and self-sufficient life. In these words, I do no more than repeat some of the most luminous and uncompromising words of the Qur'an, which I give in the new translation by Muhammad Abdel Haleem.

'He is God the One, God the eternal. He fathered no one nor was he fathered. No one is comparable to Him.' (al 'Ikhlaas 1-4)

This last text reminds the Christian that this great affirmation of the uniqueness of God is what has always caused Muslims to look with suspicion at Christian doctrines of God. Christian belief about God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit appears at once to compromise the belief that God has no other being associated with him.

The belief that God could have a son is, for the faithful Muslim, a belief suggesting that God needs something other than himself and is subject to the processes of limited bodies by 'begetting' a child. How can such a God be truly free and sovereign? For we know that he is able to bring the world into being by his word alone.

Yet these anxieties do not belong only to Muslims. Egypt was, in the first centuries of the Christian era, the location of great debates on just such matters. Indeed, without the contribution of Egypt, Christian theology would have been infinitely poorer, for many of the greatest minds of that period were natives of Alexandria. And one of the great concerns of these thinkers and their successors was this: if Christians say that the eternal Word and power of God was fully present in Jesus, son of Mary, can we avoid saying this in such a way as to imply that God is subject to a physical

process, or that God has a second being alongside him? These Christian sages believed as strongly as any Muslim that God was self-sufficient and free, and that he could not be affected or limited by physical processes and did not act as a physical cause among others. They say quite explicitly that when we speak of the father 'begetting' the Son, we must put out of our minds any suggestion that this is a physical thing, a process like the processes of the world.

Those Christian thinkers and their successors developed a doctrine which tried to clarify this: they said that the name 'God' is not the name of a person like a human person, a limited being with a father and mother and a place that they inhabit within the world. 'God' is the name of a kind of life - eternal and self-sufficient life, always active, needing nothing. And that life is lived eternally in three ways which are made known to us in the history of God's revelation to the Hebrew people and in the life of Jesus. There is a source of life, an expression of life and a sharing of life. In human language we say, 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit', but we do not mean one God with two beings alongside him, or three gods of limited power. Just as we say, 'Here is my hand, and these are the actions my one hand performs', but it is not different from the actions of my five fingers, so with God: this is God, the One, the Living and Self-subsistent, but what God does is not different from the life which is eternally at the same time a source and an expression and a sharing of life. Since

God's life is always an intelligent and purposeful life, each of these dimensions of divine life can be thought of as a centre of mind and love; but this does not mean that God 'contains' three different individuals, separate from each other as human individuals are.

And Christians believe that this life enters into ours in a limited degree. When God takes away our evildoing and our guilt, when he forgives us and sets us free, he breathes new life into us, as he breathed life into Adam at the first. That breathing into us we call the 'Spirit'. As we become mature in our new life, we become more and more like the expression of divine life, the Word whom we encounter in Jesus. Because Jesus prayed to the source of his life as 'Father', we call the eternal expression of God's life the 'Son'. And so too we pray to the source of divine life in the way that Jesus taught us, and we say 'Father' to this divine reality.

But in no way does the true Christian say that the life and action of God could be divided into separate parts, as if it were a material thing. In no way does the true Christian say that there is more than one God or that God needs some other in order to act or that God promotes some other being to share his glory. There is one divine action, one divine will; yet (like the fingers of the hand) there are three ways in which that life is real, and it is only in those three ways that the divine life is real - as source and expression and sharing. It is because of those three ways in which divine life exists that Christians speak as they do about what it means to grow in holiness.

(Continued on page 4)

The Archbishop highlighted plans for practical solidarity between faith communities in the British context: "...we hope a Christian community will give support to local Muslims if a mosque is attacked, and Muslims may do the same for local Jews if a synagogue is attacked or a cemetery desecrated, and Muslims and Jews will stand alongside Christians when they are abused and attacked. We pray that this willingness to stand alongside each other will be shared in other nations."

Book Review

Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, Orbis Books, New York, 2000.

Gavin D'Costa brings an interesting challenge to the critique of theories of interreligious dialogue. The author, a Catholic, is Senior Lecturer in theology at the University of Bristol, and has been guest lecturer in various universities including the Gregorian, Rome. After defining the three typologies of approach to interreligious dialogue – inclusivist, pluralist and exclusionist – D'Costa proceeds for the first, and larger section of the book, (Whose God, Which Tradition?) to critique especially the pluralist approach through analysis of the writings of five proponents of pluralism: Protestant Christian, John Hick, Catholic Christian Paul Knitter, Jewish Dan Cohn-Sherbok, Hindu Sir Sarvapelli Radhakrishnan and Buddhist Dalai Lama. Hick and Knitter receive most attention.

Pluralism claims three qualities: openness, tolerance and equality, yet D'Costa considers that efforts of the proponents to show these three qualities are influenced in formulating their theory initially from within their own tradition-specific and ultimately tend to too much 'watering down' of the tradition in efforts to stress commonalities. Truth and Salvation are important in each theory. Hick's philosophical base coming from the modern face of Enlightenment and Knitter's eco-theological liberation approach both open the way for loss of the true value of religious belief. This is a solidly academic work, and readers will become aware of how much modern Western philosophy and liberation theology can influence our grasp of reality. An acquaintance with the works of Hick and Knitter in particular would enhance understanding of D'Costa's thesis.

For the second part of the book, (Trinitarian Theology and the Religions) the reader would also need to have a sound knowledge of Christian teaching on the doctrine of the triune God. D'Costa concludes his chapter on Trinitarian Theology by summing up its contribution to openness, tolerance and equality. "I hope I have been able to establish a Trinitarian orientation to the question of other religions which is neither pluralist nor inclusivist, but both open and faithfully committed to its tradition-specific way of narrating the world" (p. 138).

The final chapter, "Praying Together to the Triune God: Is Interreligious Prayer like Marital Fidelity", is basically a reflection on the nature of prayer, and amid some scholarly opinions, some practical ways to engage in interreligious prayer are suggested. "We are, thankfully, not God and cannot know the prudential meaning of religious diversity, if indeed there is any such meaning, but we do know that God's trinity calls Christians to seek to serve and worship this God in sometimes quite unpredictable ways." (p. 166)

I was reminded of a talk I heard a couple of years ago entitled "Differences Make all the Difference"

Sr Kathleen Collins SSpS

GOD IS ONE *continued from page 3*

And the Christian also says something which may again be a source of disagreement. God is a loving God, as we all agree; but, says the Christian, God does not love simply because he decides to love. He is always, eternally, loving. His very nature, his definition is love. And the interaction and relation between the three ways in which God lives, the source and the expression and the sharing, is eternally the way God exists. The three centres of divine action, which we call Father, Son and Spirit, pour out the divine life to each other for all eternity, a sort of perfect circle of giving and receiving. And the only word we can use for that relationship of pouring out and giving is love. So as we grow in holiness, we become closer and closer in our actions and thoughts to the complete self-giving that always exists perfectly in God's life. Towards this fullness we are all called to travel and grow.

Now these are difficult matters, and the greatest minds of the Christian Church have always found them hard to put into words. But what I wish to say to you today is simply that the disagreement between Christian and Muslim is not, I believe, a disagreement about the nature of God as One and Living and Self-subsistent.

For us as for you, it is essential to think of God as a life that has no limit, as a life that is free. God is never to be listed alongside other beings. All through the centuries that we call the Middle Ages, Christians, Muslims and

Jews thought alike about this, and our greatest philosophers, Thomas Aquinas, Ibn Sina, Maimonides and others, all worked to make this clear. They would all have agreed that only if God is alone and needs no other is he worthy of our complete worship and devotion. God is not a being who is like us, only greater and more powerful. If God were like us only much greater, we might worship him out of fear instead of giving him free obedience and love. But the true God's freedom is infinite and he can never be limited by any definition. When we have used up all the names that human language can find for him, we shall have spoken true things of him, but never expressed the whole truth which is hidden from created minds. And so we adore him in trust and thankfulness but we accept that we shall never have him in our grasp.

Anglican Communion News Service, London
13 September 2004

Dates for your diary

05 June 2005
Fourth International Inter-Religion
ABRAHAMIC CONFERENCE

Theme: Beyond Dialogue: Interfaith
Cooperation in Action

Venue: TBA
Time: TBA

BADSHAH KHAN

A NON-VIOLENT MUSLIM SOLDIER

Little has been heard in the West of this giant of a man called Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan who formed the first non-violent army in history to free the Pashtun people of what is now Afghanistan and Pakistan from the colonial rule of the British. Articles published on the Internet during the height of the focus on Afghanistan in 2001 reveal the story about this man some refer to as “The Frontier Ghandi”. The following is a summary of the story of Badshah Khan, based on some of those articles.

Born in 1890 into an aristocratic family, it was hoped that Abdul Ghaffar would become a feudal lord and continue the often brutal role of influential families. Instead he lived most of his 98 years fighting against oppression, intolerance and violence, even spending 30 of those years in prison. When he died in 1988, respect for him was so great, that those fighting in the Soviet-Afghan war permitted a cease-fire in order for his funeral to take place.

A devout Muslim, his education in Peshawar in a school run by Christian missionaries and later in Britain, led him to the realisation that education was the key to the social transformation of the illiterate Pathan (Pashtun) people who were repressed by the feudal system and British imperial rule. One of his initial programs was to form village schools funded by small contributions of *zakat* (a tax given by Muslims for the poor). He continued his work by convincing tribal communities that ending intertribal fighting and starting non-violent resistance would eventually lead to independence. “Pashtuna by nature are peace lovers,” says biographer Murtza Khan Shaheen. Through his deep commitment to the message of the Qur’an he appealed to the people’s desire for peace and freedom. He was able to gather an army together, persuade them to put aside their guns, train as a disciplined group and take an extraordinary oath of non-violence that they would serve creation and humanity in the name of God. The name of this group was Khudi Khidmatgar or “Servants of God”. Anyone could join this army, including women. Eknath Easwaran says “They armed themselves with only their discipline, their faith and their native mettle.”

“To me non-violence has come to represent a panacea for all the evils that surround my people. Therefore I am devoting all my energies towards the establishment of a society that would be based on its principles of truth and peace,” said Abdul Ghaffar Khan.

Badshah Khan (the name meaning King of Khans was given to him by the people) became a friend and colleague of Gandhi. He urged resistance by calling on his followers to return British medals, withdraw from British universities and stop practising in British courts. The Khudi Khidmatgar eventually grew to number 100,000. Their social reforms and non-violent resistance to severe repression caused the British to see them and their leader as a threat. Cruel punishment was met with patience and restraint. The Pathans experienced mass shootings, torture and the destruction of their homes and crops but they did not respond with violence. In 1931 in Peshawar, crowds in the street were run over by armoured cars full of soldiers. The soldiers began shooting at the crowd, but the people remained calm. The killing continued until one group of Indian soldiers refused to shoot any more unarmed people. By the end of the onslaught, 200 people had died. This massacre demonstrated the brutality of violence and the power of non-violent response. Eventually the British withdrew from the Pathan lands, but Badshah Khan had to endure imprisonment for his non-violent stance during the political turmoil over the establishment of Pakistan. Right to the end of his long life he promoted human rights, justice and peace.

In times of stereotyping of people, example, by associating the words *Muslim* and *terrorist*, the story of Badshah Khan is the one that should be read and told by as many people as possible. In this way one-sided perspectives can be challenged. Badshah Khan is a powerful role model of non-violent action.

Today's world is travelling in some strange direction. You see that the world is going toward destruction and violence. And the speciality of violence is to create hatred among people and to create fear. I am a believer in non-violence and say that no peace and tranquillity will descend upon the people of the world until non-violence is practised because non-violence is love and it stirs courage in people".

Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan to an interviewer in 1985.

Further Reading:

Non-violent Soldier of Islam, Badshah Khan, A Man to Match His Mountains,

Ekhnath Easwaran, Nilgiri Press, California, 1999

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