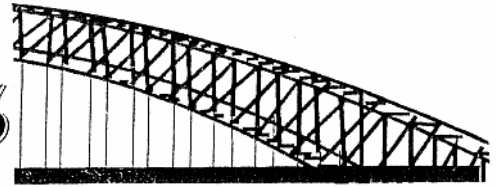


BRIDGES



A NEWSLETTER OF THE CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM NETWORK

Sponsored by the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations

Number 30

May 2005

EDITORIAL

Anyone who followed the news surrounding the death of Pope John Paul II and the election of Pope Benedict XVI could not have missed the many references made by commentators to interreligious dialogue and the speculation about future relations between the Vatican and world religions. We heard that John Paul II's pontificate broke new ground in a variety of areas e.g. his role in the fall of Soviet Communism, his global travels, the charisma he exercised over youth. But perhaps most often mentioned was his untiring promotion of dialogue among the world religions.

As Cardinal Ratzinger was introduced to the world as Pope Benedict XVI one of the first questions asked was related to what his position would be on this matter. His response was prompt, exemplified by his meeting with Muslim leaders within a day of becoming Pope. But it would be strange indeed if he failed to set this priority, since it is recognized by governments and communities world wide as crucial to any hope of peace in our world.

The proliferation of interfaith events, seminars, conferences, panel discussions, etc, particularly between Muslims and Christians points to interfaith relations being a high priority in Australia too. We are still very much at the information-sharing level. And so we need to be. The barriers of mutual ignorance are still very much in place. Until they are removed we cannot come together in any sort of comfortable space to address our common concerns on issues which affect our everyday lives, let

alone share on deeper matters relating to faith, prayer, and how we see, love and respond to God, and understand His Will for us.

The two articles in *Bridges* this month, one by a Christian, one by a Muslim, address Christian-Muslim relations at this deeper level. The story of Deir Mar Musa, a monastic community devoted to Interreligious communion proposes the possibility of creating a "shared culture based on peace, deep respect and both inter-personal and inter-community interaction" between Muslims and Christians. The second article by Tunisian-born Ahmed Merchegui, is a Muslim perspective on interfaith dialogue. As a student of Christianity and Judaism studying at a Pontifical University in Rome, he confirms the need for overcoming the barriers of ignorance, the need to go beyond dialogue on Christianity and Islam *per se*, and move towards the deeper level of sharing religious experience.

Is this ideal too high for us to aim for? Is "a shared culture" based on our respective faiths, different though they be, possible? Is it possible to come together as people of faith to witness to our belief in God in an increasingly secular culture?

We will only know if we hold the ideal before us and continue to work at what can be achieved now. And what is being done is very heartening indeed.

Sr. Pauline Rae smsm



Sr. Pauline Rae smsm and Carole Gan of the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations in their new office, housed at the Australian Catholic University, 167 Albert Road, Strathfield

✠ ☪ BRIDGES ✠ ☪

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NEWS FROM THE CENTRE

We Have Moved!!!

Yes, the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations has finally moved to our new offices on the Australian Catholic University Strathfield campus. Please note our new address on the cover of the newsletter.

Thank You

The staff of CCMR along with many other Catholics received messages of sympathy from friends of other faiths on the death of Pope John Paul II. We thank you for your thoughtfulness.

CCMR work expands to Universities

The CCMR has started working with various universities in Sydney and Wollongong to promote inter-faith dialogue. Activities in the planning stage for the coming months include seminars and joint projects.

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

Muslim Australians Denounce Sheikh's Rape Remarks

Australian Muslims have shown concern at the comments of Sheikh Feiz Muhammad, a Sydney religious teacher who told a public meeting that a rape victim had no one to blame but herself. Prior to the news breaking on national television and print media, Internet forums had been running hot with members of the Muslim community urging each other to publicly condemn the comments.

The Sheikh finally bowed to pressure from Muslim organisations to withdraw his statements when the story broke, and made what some would consider a half-hearted retraction.

Canterbury City Council Community Dialogue *Muslims and Christians: An open look at what brings us together*

The *Canterbury Council* in conjunction with the *Lebanese Moslems Association*, *Islamic Friendship Association*, local churches and citizens held a well attended inter-faith dialogue event. Guest speaker, Sheikh Khalid Yasin, together with Rev. Prof. James Haire, Sr. Giovanni Farquhar Mr. Keysar Trad, and Ms. Amina Elshafei presented a common view that despite key theological differences, there were many similarities between the two great faiths.

Bishops, clerics from both faiths and members of Parliament and local Council joined residents and guests as they gained insights from the speakers on how to move beyond tolerance towards reconciliation and inter-faith relationship.

Women's Interfaith Network *Paths to Peace through Friendship*

The Hon. Sandra Nori MP, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women hosted the "Paths of Peace Through Friendship" presentation and reception ceremony for the Women's Interfaith Network, at NSW Government House on 14 April 2005. To introduce the morning's proceedings, a 'Welcome to Land' dance, was performed by Aboriginal women from the world's

oldest religion. A short power-point presentation on the *Women's Interfaith Network*, its philosophy and goals was given by *Mrs Josie Lacey* and members of the Bahá'í, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish and Sikh faith traditions then each presented a short arrangement of religious songs, dance or chants. This was followed by a light luncheon where participants and guests took the opportunity to meet and foster the formation of new affiliated interfaith groups and so broaden the Network.

Affinity Intercultural Foundation *Women of Faith Dinner*

The Affinity Intercultural Foundation, a Muslim organisation established to focus on relationship building between cultures and faiths works closely with the CCMR. Their ladies' group hosted a "Women of Faith" dinner in Auburn (Sydney) on 13 March 2005. The event was well attended by women of various faiths, with Jewish, Christian and Muslim speakers addressing the topic "Virtues of Believing Women".

Muslims and Christian Symposium

About 100 Muslims from 33 countries, including the United States, Canada, Libya and Indonesia, participated in a symposium entitled "Who is God for Us?" at Castel Gandolfo, south of Rome. The symposium, organized by the Focolare Movement opened on Sunday, 24 April.

Pope Benedict XVI later greeted the participants of this symposium on Muslim-Christian Dialogue at his first general audience on 27 April.

Zenit 28/04/05

Australian Muslim Exchange Programme

The *Muslim Women's National Network of Australia* hosted a delegation of three Indonesian women during their visit to Sydney in April. Mrs Zubeda Raihman from the *MWNNNA* invited representatives of the *Women's Dialogue Network* (Christian) to meet them at Auburn on 23 April. The visitors were; Farinia Fianto who works for the International Centre for Islam and Pluralism in Jakarta;

Alifatul Lailiyah, a media trainer for Nahdlatul Ulama, the largest Islamic organisation in Indonesia with some 40 million members; and Julia Novrita Aceh who is a member of the Young Women's Islamic Community and the executive secretariat of the Centre for Public Policy Studies. Their visit is an example of the efforts being made by both Indonesia and Australia to increase understanding between our two countries. Australia in turn has sent a comparable delegation to Indonesia.

Seeking Common Ground

The centrality of the family in society was one of the shared points of dialogue between Catholics and Muslims in a recent series at the Lay Centre at Foyer Unitas, in Rome.

Among the topics presented by Sandra Keating of Providence College, in Rhode Island were the common causes and values shared between Catholicism and Islam; such as the importance of prayer, bioethical matters, the centrality of the family and secularisation as issues that are crucial to each faith; all of which can form a solid basis for working together.

Zenit 25/03/05

Holy Land Peace Run

Some 75 runners participated in the second annual West Bank six-mile peace run from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, which this year was dedicated to the memory of Pope John Paul II. "In this marathon we run on the legs of peace, bringing peace from Bethlehem to Jerusalem" said Msgr. Liberio Andreatta, administrator delegate of the "Opera Romana Pellegrinaggi" a church-sponsored pilgrimage agency.

Some 40 Italian athletes accompanied Msgr. Andreatta to the Holy Land for this year's run which he had noted as following the late pope's call for Catholics to visit the Holy Land.

The Georgia Bulletin, 28/04/05

No to fundamentalism, hope for a peaceful Arab world

An utter rejection of fundamentalism and hope for a peaceful and reconciled Arab world were the main contents of an apostolic letter "The 50th Day" written by the Greek-Melchite Patriarch, Gregory III Laham, of Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria.

The Patriarch exhorted the faithful of his Church to "show efforts worthy of their vocation in the Arab world" and to "reflect on the state of those baptized and redeemed by the cross of the Lord".

The Patriarch also expressed "full conviction" about the importance of dialogue – ecumenical and inter-religious – and showed "optimism and hope" in seeing a "reconciled and peaceful" Arab world as soon as possible. Gregory III also reiterated "with vigour" the "total rejection of all fundamentalism from whichever source it comes".

AsiaNews 07/05/05

Observers predict revision in relations with Islam

Pope John Paul II applied a personal stamp to inter-faith relations by stepping into a mosque in Damascus, meeting with Muslim groups numerous times and visiting a synagogue in Rome and Jerusalem's Western Wall, but critics say the effort has brought almost no benefits to persecuted Catholic minorities in Muslim countries. Some cite churches that have been the targets of terrorist attacks and Christian communities under physical attack by Muslims, but many in the Muslim world, view the situation in reverse, believing that the Christian West, through movies and television, is reshaping the values of Islam and, through the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, taking over historically Muslim lands.

Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, President of the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, said that although he doesn't expect any fundamental changes, he said that the next pope might more emphatically demand rights for Christian minorities in Islamic countries and the freedom of all people to choose their faith.

Justo Lacunza Balda, who heads the Pontifical Institute for Arab and Islamic Studies, said criticism was focused on the lack of reciprocal goodwill gestures in many Muslim countries.

Fr Augustine DiNoia, the second-ranking official in the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which is in charge of safeguarding orthodoxy sees the fundamental problem as being how to value another religion without devaluing your own and De La Salle Brother David Carroll, undersecretary general of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association, said Catholic-Muslim relations today are marked by a mixture of very serious problems and hopeful openings that could augur major changes.

Sheikh Muhammad Nur Abdullah, president of the Islamic Society of North America, however, said that he hoped the new pope would "continue this heritage and build on this trust ... to enrich what we already have."

Sayyid M. Syyed, General Secretary of the Islamic Society of North America, said of Pope John Paul, "We have waited for a person of that stature for 1000 years... Under him Catholic-Muslim rapprochement made major advances and it will be critical that every new pope builds on those new foundations"

CathNews 18/04/05

Religion in Peace and Conflict: Responding to Fundamentalism and Militancy

UNESCO and International Outlook hosted this conference in Melbourne from the 12-14th April. About 60 delegates from Southeast Asia, Oceania and the Pacific attended, including eminent citizens, politicians, bureaucrats, religious leaders and activists. Patrick McInerney, a staff member of the Centre, represented the Holy See.

Deir Mar Musa : a Monastic Community Devoted to Inter-religious Communion

It was during a period of suffering in this region when, in 1982, a young Jesuit student of Arabic travelled to the ruins of Deir Mar Musa. Here in the mountains east of Nebek, Fr. Paolo remained for a ten-day spiritual retreat. During this time, through contemplation, he discovered three priorities, and one horizon.

In 1984, he was ordained a priest in the Syrian rite. On the basis of his three tenets, summer camps of work and prayer were established at the monastery. On the same basis, he, together with deacon Jacques Mourad, initiated a monastic community in 1991.

The first of his three priorities is the rediscovery of spiritual life as an absolute. Prayer and contemplation are not instruments or a means to an end, but are an end in themselves in full gratuity. From this point of view the ruined Syrian monastery offered a strong witness to the value of spiritual life in this region together with the risk of losing this value. It must be emphasised that the ancient oriental monastic life is an essential element of both the Christian local soul, and of the cultural, symbolic, and mystical world of Islam. Therefore the community of Deir Mar Musa must first and foremost create an ambience of silence and prayer for both the personal and social life of its monks and nuns. The second priority is that of evangelical simplicity, a way of living in harmony and full responsibility with Creation and the society around us. To accomplish this it is necessary to rediscover the value of manual work together with that of the body and of material things in an aesthetic of justice and gratuity.

The third priority is that of hospitality. Abrahamic hospitality was always considered by the ancient monks to be a sacred activity based on a virtue always considered divine in this region. So the monastery must be understood as a place of meeting in which specific identities are deepened and not forgotten. We are not seeking to closet ourselves in cultural ghettos but on the contrary we seek to give up a culture of separation in order to build gradually a culture of communion. This means also that the Christian community of Deir Mar Musa wishes to underline the ecumenical inter-Christian dimension, without losing the significance of the Syrian identity of the monastery and of its catholic links.

The perspective, then, is that of building a positive Christian-Islamic relationship. This relationship has not always been easy in the past and is often still difficult in many places, therefore it constitutes an essential aspect of the spiritual vocation of all monks and nuns at Deir Mar Musa. The choice of the Arabic language for the social and liturgical life of the monastic community is deeply tied to this vocation.

This perspective of deepening intercultural and inter-religious collaboration has received the help of the European Commission, the Orseri Foundation of Rome, the Solidarité-Orient of Brussels and others. A growing library has been established at the monastery, featuring not only classical texts on Christianity and Islam, but also works of psychology, sociology, philosophy and anthropology in order to deepen our understanding of an inter-religious human context. A special section is dedicated to Louis Massignon, a major scholar in oriental studies whose meditation and exemplary life continue to provide inspiration to our monastic community. The monastery is also engaged in organising workshops and seminars, which will facilitate the exchange of experiences and ideas. By the same token the monks and nuns of Deir Mar Musa have recently assumed responsibility for the monastery of Mar Elian in Qaryatein, 50km north-east of here. Their hopes and dreams are far-reaching and open lines of communion to numerous parts of the Islamic world. A virtual monastery is being built in cyberspace. It soon became apparent that we did not have sufficient space in the monastery. It has been necessary to build some rooms in a traditional manner to house both monks and male guests. These have been built north of the monastery utilising a number of ancient caves.

An important new building is being constructed with old, recycled materials, south of the monastery in order to have more space for cultural activities, spiritual retreats and more rooms for nuns and female guests. This will leave the old monastery for communal life and to welcome tourists.

The presence of the Other as other in front of me has been perceived through centuries as an insoluble and stainless fact and a source of anguish, tensions and wars. To overcome this as believers we want to scrutinise attentively the mystery of "otherness". This is in order to prime and develop processes able to create a shared culture based on values such as peace, deep respect and both inter-personal and inter-community interaction. This will facilitate the diffusion and strengthening of important conquests of contemporary global civil society.

We mean for example the significance of the dignity of individual conscience, the enormous impact of the emancipation of women on both anthropological and social levels, the inviolability of human rights as individuals and groups and finally the fertility of cultural pluralism in itself.

A monastery in the desert is also all this.

<http://www.deirmarmusa.org/page/english.htm>
accessed 09/05/05

Testimony by Ahmed MERCHERGUI (a Muslim from Tunisia)

My experience with interreligious dialogue began during the 95/96 school year, hence nine years ago, when I won a scholarship from the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue to study at the Pontifical Gregorian University, and so those responsible for the Council proposed that I could live in the White Father's "main convent" in Rome. They invited me to consider myself one of them in both rights and my duties. With the exception of my religious freedom, I in fact shared daily events with my new friends, such as food, entertainment, the library, excursion, meetings, etc. The only thing that divided us was the chapel, and this kind of life was a rare opportunity for getting to know Christianity from a different point of view, hence a practical, spontaneous one in which beliefs were experienced and expressed with spontaneity.

This experience provided me with a chance to change many of my opinions with regard to Christianity, but also confirmed others.

I discovered many different religious and political opinions by living with the White Fathers, and was surprised that the Fathers never concealed their diversities. This diversity within the community represented an important element for my experience, allowing me to establish a dialogue in different ways with all the members of this community:

- An intellectual dialogue with the better educated people, especially the younger priests who studied at the Pontifical Universities in Rome.
- A dialogue concerning life, a practical one, with the Fathers not addressing intellectual issues
- And at times the dialogue assumed another form in which Islam and Christianity were no longer the subject of this dialogue, replaced instead by our personal religious experiences.

My relations with the priests were usually based on reciprocal respect, but with some priests it evolved to the extent that it became possible to discuss themes considered "controversial" such as the Trinity, the mission, celibacy of priests, and the prophet Mohammed's polygamy, etc.

I once discussed Qur'anic and Biblical anthropology with an elderly priest. I spoke of man as God's vicar in the Qur'an while he spoke of man as God's likeness, in the Bible, and at a certain point we discovered that we were expressing the same concept of humankind and the same human condition both in the Qur'an and in the Bible.

This occasion was the first of many discussions in which reciprocal ignorance diminished and understanding increasingly improved, and our cohabitation became more peaceful in spite of, or perhaps thanks to, the ongoing differences between us.

As far as my Christian colleagues' attitude at the Gregorian University towards a Moslem studying

Christianity and Judaism was generally positive although strange, and this I believe explains the existing image of Muslims and Islam in the West, where at times Muslims are seen as the symbol of violence, fanaticism and intolerance.

In this situation I found myself having to explain what for me was obvious: Islam is not a synonym for terrorism neither in its language, its faith, its history nor in its geography and that terrorism has no religion, no citizenship, no nation and that Muslims have human values.

Hence I discovered how distorted the image of Muslims is in western and also in Christian opinions and this confusion caused me great pain.

For myself and for my Christian friends, the importance of this experience was in its practical aspect, in which dialogue became a "daily event" throughout the year, and religious references were at times in conflict and at times in harmony, with dialogue greatly enriched because founded on experience, cohabitation and spontaneity, hence of honesty with oneself and others.

This experience initially provided us with the capability to tolerate the differences, and also later to respect these differences, and turn them into an opportunity for this experience when saying goodbye to me: "Thank you my friend for spending all this time with us... together we have learned many things".

At the end of my stay with the White Fathers we had understood together that difference is never an obstacle for cohabitation and communication, and that the real obstacle is mutual ignorance and prejudice.

Thanks to this experience another aspect of dialogue became clear, that of 'life' in which it is religious experience that becomes the object of dialogue; this dialogue of life could become the ideal means for peaceful cohabitation among people, civilisations and religions.

My idea of interreligious dialogue is in fact rooted in the experience of my country, Tunisia, once crossroads of dialogue between civilisations, cultures and religions for three thousand years, and also the land of St. Cyprian (3rd century) and Saint Augustine (4th century).

After the country had been Islamised (7th century), Muslims lived in peace with Christians and Jews.

In today's Tunisia, intellectuals and politicians agree on the importance of dialogue among cultures, civilisations, religions and peoples.

In my country, politicians try to consolidate this value in Tunisian society through education, television, the radio and legislation. In these times of globalisation, in which relations between peoples and cultures are threatened, the Tunisian authorities have supported the idea of dialogue by founding Institutes. Their mission is to

promote and spread the culture of dialogue. These are institutions such as:

- The Ben Ali Chair for dialogue between civilisations and religions.
- The National Centre for Dialogue between Civilisations.
- The Chair of Comparative Religions at the University in cooperation with UNESCO.

One could also add the efforts made by university and scientific institutions through the organisations of conferences and by inviting experts to reflect on the issue of dialogue.

Among these institutions there is of course the famous University I too attend, the Ezzitouna, which has entered agreements with many foreign universities as well as Italian scientific institutions such as:

- The Pontifical Gregorian University
- The Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies

- The Faculty of Theology in Sicily.

We are now working with our Christian friends on embodying the values of dialogue and peace.

In this context I would like to mention the proposal presented to the United Nations by our President of the Republic, Zein El Abidin Ben Ali, for creating a world fund for fighting poverty, economic and social injustice all over the world, a proposal welcomed by the United Nations.

In Tunisia we believe that the solution to the problems of violence, terrorism and conflict between people, between cultures, is for religions to start to correct the roots of these phenomena, which are poverty, injustice, alienation and all that the powerful impose on the weak.

My experience in the field of dialogue has taught me that the so-called conflict between civilisations is in reality a conflict of ignorance.

(Courtesy: *Pro Dialogo* Bulletin 116-117, 2004/2-3)

BOOK REVIEW

Our book review for this issue of *Bridges* was contributed by Emeritus Professor Anthony H Johns, the Visiting Fellow in the Division of Pacific and Asian History of the Research School of Asian and Pacific studies at the Australian National University.

Anthony O'Mahony, Wulstan Peterburs and Mohammad Ali Shomali (eds.), *Catholics and Shi'a in Dialogue: Studies in Theology and Spirituality*, (London: Melisende, 2004)

This volume is based on papers given at the conference 'A Catholic-Shi'a Engagement: Sharing our Spiritual and Theological Resources in the Face of Contemporary Challenges', held at Heythrop College (University of London) and Ampleforth Abbey in July, 2003, a meeting inspired by contacts between the Benedictine monks of Ampleforth Abbey, and scholars at the Imam Khomeini Education and Research Institute at Qum. It comprises essays contributed by twelve Catholic and thirteen Shi'a scholars. Perhaps it is coincidental that the number of prophets named in the Qur'an is also twenty five!

These essays are grouped in divisions according to three perceived contexts of Catholic-Shi'a encounter: the theological and historical within which an encounter between the two has occurred, prayer and spirituality in Catholicism and Shi'ism, and the experience of both communities in facing the challenges of contemporary society.

Anthony O'Mahony contributes two essays to the first division. 'Interreligious Dialogue' (pp 70 –103) explores the challenges of inter-relational dynamics between self-defined identities (pp 71-71). 'Catholic Encounters with Shia Islam', offers a case study of the scholar-visionary Louis Massignon's response to a personal encounter with Shi'ism, situating himself as an appreciative guest within that patrimony.

Michael Fitzgerald and Chris Clohessy, with Misbah Yazdi and Ali Shomali, from individual perspectives,

present points of meeting and separation between Catholics and Shi'a in their understanding of the roles of Jesus and Mary, Fatima and Husayn in the economy of their religious life. Lacunza Balda's sensitive 'Contemporary Challenges' (pp. 62-69) is a reminder that mutual respect at a human level - essential to genuine dialogue - requires a sensitive use of language in speaking of the beliefs and values of the other. Behind the Christian and Muslim Faiths he observes, are men and women who draw from them inspiration and comfort, and show the human face of their religion on the screen of the colour and conventions of their every day lives (p.65),

The second division, 'Prayer and Spirituality' is the core of the book. It consists of 11 chapters, 6 by Muslims and 5 by Catholics. Two are on 'Abraham, Man of Faith', (Mary Mills (pp.308-320) and Morteza Senei & Mohammed Soori pp.300-307), two on 'The Word of God' (Michael Kirwan and Jafar Elmi), and one, 'In Christ We Die' (John McDade pp.290-299) - a reflection on the suffering endured by the central icons of both traditions illumined by reference to Bach's musical symbolism. Six are devoted to prayer and the remembrance of God as such. Of these, especially moving are the contributions of Faneel Shkedi 'Prayer and Contemplation in Islamic Spirituality' (pp 256-262) both for the opening sentence 'The Heart of Spiritual Practice is Prayer' (p.256) and his meditation on the Our Father, and al-Fatiha (p.258), and that of Ian Latham, 'Christian Prayer' beginning, 'Prayer is so simple and so profound! It is the breath of life: if we cease to pray, we die' (p.249).

The third division has to do with Catholicism and Shi'ism 'in the world', their experience of history, the ambiguities in their encounters with contemporary society, and what they can learn from each other's experience. From these essays, it is clear how different is the Catholic experience of modernity post 1950 to that of the Shi'a. Catherine Cowley, among the Catholics, for example, takes as a basic premise for her 'Christian Reflection on Work, Culture and Society' (pp.378-391) that the Christian social heritage [in Western Europe] is now so attenuated that 'the common Christian horizon has more or less vanished in many areas' (p.378). The Shi'a contributors to this segment, with the confidence of a homogenous and religiously vibrant society behind them, have no need for such lucubrations. While acknowledging external threats to religion, they do not have to confront the spectre of a post-Muslim society, in which even the names of its prophets are unknown.

The book is a wonderful achievement. It demonstrates that the Sunni and Shi'a traditions of Islam are coeval, gives a sense of the fragrance, spirituality, and authenticity of Shi'ism, and of elements in it to which Catholics can respond, and by which each can discover profound spiritual symbolisms and significances parallel to its own.

Nevertheless, there are a number of concerns that merit reflection. Among them is that the Catholics and Shi'a have different modes of discourse. This is in part a result of the historical baggage each carries, and their different experiences of modernity. The intellectual and spiritual world of the Shi'a still maintains a historical consistency, continuity and integrity, under an assurance of guidance from the Imams, hidden though they be. The Catholics on the other hand, come from a world fractured many times over: by the Reformation, the French revolution, two world wars, and the loss of colonial territories. In addition, they have had to accept laicite, and find their way in a world in which Foucault and Derrida are intellectual gurus, and in which post-modernism assumes at times the role of quasi orthodoxy.

Experience in colloquy at this level is relatively new.

Thus not all the Catholics have a perception of where their Shi'a partners are from, and what it is to be a Muslim. (Indeed, the introductory 'Visiting Iran' (pp.20-35), could have been written in Yorkshire). The contribution of Wulstan Peterburs' 'The Remembrance of God' (pp. 225-239), a superb account of monastic life and prayer for western Christians, might equally have appeared in The Ampleforth Journal. Ian Latham, on the other hand, with his experience of the Muslim world and prayer among Muslims, speaks of prayer in a language intelligible to Muslims, and to which they can respond. His essay is crafted to the occasion. Not every contributor has recognized the need for such 'crafting'.

The question might be put as to whether the word 'Catholic' in the title is too closely (if unconsciously) associated with Catholic Europe? Could space have been left to accommodate the role of the Eastern churches, and of the Orthodox who have equally a claim to membership of the Body of Christ. It is as though an unacknowledged and invisible cultural barrier dividing West from East lies between the collocutors.

One might also ask whether general statements on religious tolerance taken from the documents *Lumen Gentium* and *Nostra Aetate* are still appropriate. They were formulated 'in club' almost forty years ago. Then, they were daring, revolutionary even. Today, addressed to partners in dialogue on equal terms, they are patronising. Cardinal Ratzinger's remark (cited p. 13), 'Among religions we encounter people who through their religion have heard of God... ', even making allowances for 'curia-speak', sounds distressingly complacent. True, Catholics and Shi'a each perceive themselves as a centre towards which all others should be drawn. Yet both have equally the need to define a theological space for an open attitude to other religions. The problem is multifaceted, and needs 'geological patience' on both sides to resolve. It also requires, (as Balda reminds us) the sensitivity to avoid a use of language that may be hurtful.

A. H. Johns

Emeritus Professor, Australian National University

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MOVING HOUSE? (Please send us your new contact details)



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MEETING POINT

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

Contact the CCMR on (02) 9352 8010 or 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 CCMR if you are not sure where to look, and we'll try to find out more for you.



The Council of the City of Ryde is in the process of setting up an inter-faith group. Contact the council Community Services Department for further details.



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

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



Musicafe is a non profit, fully independent music and variety forum dedicated to the support of performing arts and multicultural communities.

Details on: <http://society4good-feeling.editme.com>
(Disclaimer : Not verified by the CCMR)

WHAT'S COMING UP

MAY

- 18** Spirituality at the Pub
"Respecting Differences"
Engadine RSL
7.30 pm – 9.00 pm
- 19** Buddha meets Mohammed on their Birthdays
Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre and Liverpool Regional Museum

4th International Inter-Religion Abraham Conference Melbourne

"The Legacy of Abraham – Health for Body and Soul"

When: 7.00 – 9.30 pm Saturday, 28 May 2005
8.45 am – 4.00 pm, 29 May 2005

Where: Victorian College of Pharmacy,
Monash University

Cost: \$10 Saturday & \$15 Sunday

Keynote Speaker: H.E. Abdurrahman Wahid

Guest Speakers: Emeritus Prof. Louis Waller

Prof. Zeki Saritoprak

Prof. Gary Bouma

Contact: Conference Hotline on (03) 9326 2177 or register online at www.intercultural.org.au

- 29** Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP)
Interfaith Workshop, Sydney
Enquiries:
www.fair.org.au/interfaith/works/index.htm

JUNE

4th International Inter-Religion Abraham Conference Sydney

"Beyond Dialogue: Interfaith Cooperation in Action"

When: 10 am – 4.30 pm, Sunday, 5 June 2005

Where: McLauren Hall, Sydney University

Cost: \$25 per person (\$15 for concession holders)

Keynote Speaker: Rev Dr Francis Tiso

Guest Speakers: George Cardinal Pell

Rabbi John Levi

Sheik Fehmi Haji El-Imam

Contact: Conference Hotline on (02) 9702 0789 or register online at www.affinity.org.au

- 5** AVP Interfaith Workshop, Sydney
- 5-6** AVP Interfaith Workshop, Perth
- 12-13** AVP Interfaith Workshop, Melbourne
- 17** Peace Forum "Growing Peace in Hornsby Shire"
Pennant Hills Community Centre
Ramsay Rd (cnr Yarrara Rd)
7.00 – 9.00 pm

JULY

- 4-7** 2nd Jewish-Christian-Muslim Residential Conference
Details: www.lbc.org.au/jmca.
- 14** St Francis and Islam
"St Francis of Assisi and Malek al-Kamil"
Public Lecture by Prof. Friar Bill Short ofm
Cardinal Knox Lecture Theatre
383 Albert Street, East Melbourne
7.30 pm
- 27** St Francis and Islam
Kedron Parish Hall
Cnr Turner Road & Wayland St, Kedron
7.30 pm
- 30-31** AVP Interfaith Workshop, Brisbane

AUGUST

- 4** St Francis and Islam
St Joseph Parish Centre
10 Albert Street, Edgecliff
7.30 pm

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*