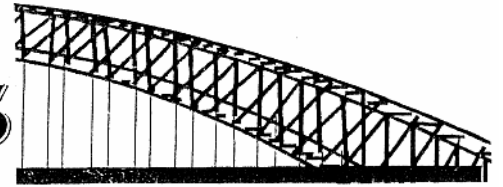


# BRIDGES



A NEWSLETTER OF THE CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM NETWORK

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

Number 34

June 2006

## EDITORIAL

I wonder if you experience the same vacillation between optimism and pessimism about the future of interfaith relations as do many of those for whom promoting closer relationships with other faiths is their 'day job'. On the one hand there is so much going on in interreligious dialogue at local levels in terms of conferences, the establishment of Centres and Institutes, interfaith sharing groups, and so on, as well as at the loftier levels of international theological research and discussion. On the other hand, we know that both locally and internationally, religious differences are an aggravating element in creating misunderstandings, disputes, even open conflict, hatred and war.

There are times when one wonders if it is all worth the effort – are we achieving anything? And then something happens! It may be a phone call from someone almost ecstatic about a chance event which brought new understanding and then opened up a whole new relationship of friendship with a couple of another faith. Or you meet with a delegation of Indonesian Muslims on a friendship exchange visit to Australia as we did here at the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations a couple of weeks ago. This was a visit of two young Muslim men, Imam Malik who is the Research Coordinator at a Centre of Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies at Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta and Munajat who teaches at a Centre for Religion and Local Wisdom Studies in Salatiga, Central Java. In experiences like this the enthusiasm of the other(s) is infectious and leaves one with a feeling of renewed energy, optimism and the sense that the Spirit is at work in ways and places we would never guess.

And sometimes you simply come across an article or a speech, or read a book or a Newsletter and something leaps out at you. It may be a new insight or simply a reminder of something you have thought about before. A moment of serendipity.

Perhaps this issue of *Bridges* will be something like that for you. It contains excerpts from two Papers presented at the Asian Colloquium on *Harmony through Reconciliation* held in Thailand in January, 2006. The presenters, Chandra Muzaffar and Cardinal Renato Martino, are recognized leaders in their respective faiths and are working at the promotion of interfaith relations at the scholarly end of the spectrum. They are speaking of global issues, and the role of religion with its potential to



Sr Pauline, Munajat, Imam Malik, Yusuf and Carole

meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in "Joy and Hope Amidst Grief and Anguish". Discovering these two papers can be yet another example of "something happening", taking us from a feeling of "is it all worth it?" to one of new energy and enthusiasm.

There is a common theme to these papers. Both address the centrality and sacredness of the human person under God which must be recognised in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century. There are marked parallels in the Muslim and Christian proposals as to how we can work together towards bringing this to be - and work together we must, not just Christians and Muslims, but people of all faiths. And when it looks as if our efforts are futile we remember Christ's words, "The Kingdom of God is at hand." or recall Chandra Muzaffar's final words:

*...I do not despair, in spite of all the trials and tribulations that confront our age. For I know that a momentous transformation lies ahead. A just, compassionate, universal civilization founded upon faith in the Divine will be born.*

*Pauline Rae smsm*

### Introducing Islam

Winter School at the Catholic Institute of Sydney

10 - 14 July 2006

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## NEWS FROM THE CENTRE

### Asia-Pacific Centre for Inter-Religious Dialogue

The Columban Mission Institute has been invited by the Australian Catholic University as a partner in its establishment of the Asia-Pacific Centre for Inter-Religious Dialogue (APCIRD). The mission of the APCIRD will be to promote research, mutual understanding, respect and collaboration between Christians and the followers of other world religions. This Centre will be University-wide, but based at St Patrick's Campus, Melbourne, and the interim Executive Officer is Professor Raymond Canning.

### Colloquium with Dr David Thomas

On 28 April, Dr David Thomas, of the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, University of Birmingham, Selly Oak visited the Centre. This was followed by a colloquium among those involved in the establishment of the APCIRD with a few invited Christian and Muslim guests, and was held at ACU, Strathfield.

Dr. Thomas shared his experience in setting up the Centre at Selly Oak. The ensuing discussion revolved around what is

happening in Christian-Muslim Relations, both in Australia and the UK, and how demographics affect the evolution of Muslim communities.

### Visit by Prof Edmund Chia & Dr Gemma Cruz

On 1 June, Prof Edmund Chia, who served for eight years as the executive secretary of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference's Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, spoke at the Centre on the "Asian Synod of Bishops and the challenges of Interreligious Dialogue from the Asian perspective". Prof. Chia specialises in Asian theologies and interfaith dialogue at the Catholic Theological Union, Chicago.

Participants got a two-for-one deal as he was accompanied by his wife Dr Gemma Cruz, a feminist theologian from the Philippines. Her work focuses on liberation ethics in migration theology, and she spoke to participants over morning tea. The couple who are both lecturing in the USA were in Sydney as part of the New Pentecost Forum, and had a number of speaking engagements in Australia including Melbourne and Sydney.

## ITEMS OF INTEREST

### Pope's Challenge Islam on religious freedom

Benedict XVI challenged Muslim leaders on religious freedom in Islamic countries and insisted that interreligious dialogue must be based on "reciprocity" and mutual respect. [The Pontiff has in the past also made specific appeals to Muslim leaders to respect the rights of Christians such as the plea to Afghanistan's President Abdul Rahman, on behalf of a Christian facing death for "apostasy" from Islam, and to the ambassador from Morocco to the Holy See].

The Holy Father said that the Church has "a growing awareness that interreligious dialogue is part of her commitment to serve mankind in the modern world." In discussions with other faiths, the faithful "are not renouncing" their commitment to spread the Gospel, which is an intrinsic aspect of the Christian identity, the Pope said. Rather, they are hoping to build up "relations of mutual knowledge and respect," which can overcome animosity.

"Christians must open their hearts especially to the poorest and neediest," the Pope said. He observed pointedly, "Obviously, we would hope that Christians who emigrate to countries with Muslim majorities will find a welcome there, and respect for their religious identity."

CathNews – 16 May 06

### Catholic Bishops and Islamic leaders meet together for lunch and dialogue

In a landmark meeting, the Catholic Bishops of Australia invited a group of Islamic leaders to their Plenary Meeting this week, to have lunch together, to engage in Interfaith Dialogue and to visit the tomb of Blessed Mary Mackillop.

Following the meal at Mary Mackillop Place, a group of bishops accompanied the Islamic leaders on a visit to the

tomb of Blessed Mary Mackillop, who is on the path to becoming Australia's first saint.

The Islamic delegation then met with the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations for a dialogue. The delegation included Sheikh Yahia Safi, Sheikh Kamal Mouselmani, Dr Moustapha Alameldin, Dr Khalil Moustapha, Mr Houssein Hajj and Mr Ahmad Kamaledine. They were received by both the outgoing President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Archbishop Francis Carroll and the incoming President, Archbishop Philip Wilson.

[www.acbc.catholic.org.au](http://www.acbc.catholic.org.au)

### Melkite Catholic Eparchy & Australian-Muslim Friendship Society hosts lectures

The Melkite Catholic Eparchy & Australian-Muslim Friendship Society co-hosted presentations by academics from the University of Sydney; Dr Nijmeh Hajjar, a lecturer at the School of Languages and Cultures and Prof. Ahmad Shboul, head of the School of Arabic and Islamic Studies.

Bishops Issam John Darwish and Kevin Manning attended the talks during which Dr Hajjar, a Christian spoke of her journey in Christian-Muslim encounter, and Prof Shboul, a Muslim spoke on moving beyond dialogue and mere tolerance towards acceptance.

### Pakistani Muslims against "Code"

Muslims parties in Pakistan launched a national demonstration against the "Code": they are "protesting the way in which the life of Jesus, a holy figure dear to all religions, is presented." Deputy Secretary General of the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA – an umbrella organization of Muslims from across the country), Liaquat Baloch said: "Films or cartoons that hurt the sentiments of any religion in

the name of culture should be rejected by the people.”

He continued: “Jesus is not as important as Muhammad for Islam, but he is a loved and respected prophet. The protest against the offences against him by the Da Vinci Code will start right after Friday prayers.”

Asia News – 23 May 06

### **Sydney Catholic schools' response to Sydney riots.**

Six months since the Cronulla riots in New South Wales, the town has become synonymous with racial intolerance and tension between people of different ethnic backgrounds. But a number of Catholic schools are working to change those perceptions and rebuild bridges between these different sectors of the Australian community.

Principal of St Aloysius Primary School Cronulla Phillip Tax and his counterpart, Margaret Heslin from St Felix's Primary School in Bankstown, decided their kindergarten classes should meet to foster a better cultural understanding between the pupils. Another primary school in the Sutherland Shire, Our Lady of Fatima Caringbah, asked its students to create hand prints to display a giant symbol of harmony across its school on Harmony Day as a direct response to Cronulla's riots.

'These kids are an example to us. They have no pre-conditioning or bias, and they get along with everyone...A lot can be learned from the innocence of youth.' said NSW Police officer Lee Howell who assisted in the surveillance during the riots.

**The following articles are excerpts form papers presented at the *Asian Colloquium on Harmony through Reconciliation* organised by the Asian Bishop's Conferences – Office for Human Development, held in Pattaya, Thailand, January 2006**

## **A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE**

### **Joy and Hope Amidst Grief and Anguish: The New Gospel for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino

The document known as *Gaudium et Spes* (the Church in the Modern World) represents the first time that a Vatican Ecumenical Council, in a systematic manner and with great breadth, dealt with issues of social ethics, which include the broad themes of economic, development and work, democracy and peace.

The relationship between Christians and the political community is the question of social ethics that *Gaudium et Spes* deals with, devoting a lengthy and articulated discussion to this. The principal areas of this complex text of the Council concern the relations between Church and State and the concept of political democracy.

a) The Council sees the relations between Church and State in terms of a reciprocal autonomy. In the Council's perspective, this autonomy involves a healthy cooperation between civil society and religious society, without the Church being subjugated to the State, and without a manipulative use of the authority of the State for purposes of evangelization that are foreign to the State. In this regard, the great intuition of the Council was that of religious freedom as a necessary condition if the Church is fully to carry out her spiritual mission, to the point that, in this context, she must not hesitate to "give up the exercise of certain rights which

### **Interfaith Ceremony for Victims of the earthquake**

On 30 May, The Indonesian Embassy held an Interfaith Prayer Ceremony to remember the victims of the earthquake in Yogyakarta and Central Java which occurred on the morning of 27 May 2006, killing more than five-thousand people lwith many more left injured or homeless.

### **Muslim Business Network organises Multicultural Interfaith Fundraising Dinner**

The Muslim Business Network was part of a group that organised a fundraising dinner in aid of the victims of Cyclone Larry. The dinner which took place on Sunday 9 April 2006 was hosted at Michael's Oriental Restaurant in Eight Mile Plains, Brisbane.

The guest speaker for the night was General Peter Cosgrove, and a total sum of \$96000 was raised that night. The National Australia Bank has pledged to match the amount raised dollar for dollar and will also donate the money to the Cyclone Larry Relief fund.

### **Interfaith Gathering on Safe Foods**

On 18 June, the Faith Ecology Network organised an inter-faith gathering on the topic of genetically modified food. The group was challenged by Dr Judy Carman, and heard from Catholic, Muslim, Jewish, Bahai and Aboriginal respondents. Attendees were also treated to an informative display, viewed a new DVD entitled *Unjust Genes – Life and Death for Sale* and shared a smorgasbord prepared by the different faith groups.

have been legitimately acquired, if it becomes clear that their use will cast doubt on the sincerity of her witness or that new ways of life demand new methods" (No.76).

It was thus that, thanks to the Council, a definitive shape was given to the genuine concept of the secular State, which for a long time had been lost in the shadows of nineteenth century secularism. The Council considers the State as the home of all people, which means that the State respects the rights of individuals and of the different religious communities, and that the State makes of no one religious community, however deeply rooted it may be in the history of the country, a "State religion", but respects the different legitimate expressions of religiosity and ensures an equitable space of freedom for all believers.

This does not mean, however, that the Council is in favour of the social invisibility or insignificance of faith. On the contrary, the Church feels that she is part of civic life and intends to place herself at its service, whether by expressing her judgment "in those matters that regard public order" (No. 76), or by making her moral magisterium – starting with her social doctrine- available to all and, inserting into civic life men and women who are motivated and competent, and who are ready to practise the art of politics, something that is

difficult but at the same time also noble (cf.(No. 75).

b) On the basis of recognizing the genuine secular character of the State, we can understand the choice that the Council makes in favour of a Political democracy as the best form of government, even if the word "democracy" is not formally found in *Gaudium et Spes*. In fact, the definition for political community that is used in the text is substantially a definition of democracy, since a position is espoused that favours "juridico-political structures providing all citizens in an ever better fashion and without any discrimination the practical possibility of freely and actively taking part in the establishment of the juridical foundations of the political community and in the direction of public affairs, in fixing the terms of reference of the various public bodies and in the description of the political community, it is not difficult to see the fundamental characteristics of political democracy: the participation of citizens in civic life and in the free election of those who govern; the exclusion of all discrimination between citizens and the acceptance of the principle of equality, even with regard to religion; the limitation and control of power and the distinction between legislative, judicial and executive powers. All the distinctive characteristics of what political philosophy and political science indicates as democracy are clearly found in this description given by the Council;

Another problematic area to which *Gaudium et Spes* devotes special attention is that concerning the crucial question of peace. This text from the Council is at one and the same time both prophetic and realistic. In fact, there was a kind of confrontation between -on one hand -the prophetic concern of not just a few Council Fathers who would have liked a decisive and irreversible option for peace, and – on the other hand – the need to avoid abandoning the principle of legitimate defense. The attempt to reconcile these two tendencies can be seen in the famous passage from paragraph 79 of the conciliar Constitution, where it is affirmed that "as long as the danger of war remains and there is no competent and sufficiently powerful authority at the international level, governments cannot be denied the right to legitimate defence once every means of peaceful settlement has been exhausted". For the Council Fathers, however, war was seen as scandalously unacceptable to the Christian conscience; only the principle of legitimate defense remains the sole possibility for recognizing it. The prevalent orientation of *Gaudium et Spes* is that of a frank, systematic, consistent option for peace

The Council, however, does not limit itself to a condemnation of war and the inhumanity of war -an inhumanity owing above all to the terrible destructive potential of modern war -but works out a veritable programme for peace; articulated in three points: the strengthening of international agencies, to which are entrusted the task of safeguarding peace by the prevention of conflicts (cf. Nos. 83 and 84); the overcoming of economic inequalities between different areas of the threat to peace that these represent (cf. No.83); the condemnation of the arms race, held to be a: reason for which war is often not truly a last resort (cf. No.81 ).

In this context the Council does not fail to make a heartfelt appeal calling believers to be peacemakers above all in the area of education: those who dedicate themselves to educational activities "should consider it their most weighty task to instruct all in fresh sentiments of peace" (No. 82). Peace arises first of all from the heart and from the spirit, even if it must then be incarnated within structures. It is

therefore the task of believers to become peacemakers, above all providing to the younger generations formation in an authentic spirit of peace. More than seeking – in a negative sense – to prevent or hinder war, *Gaudium et Spes* seeks to promote – in a positive sense- a culture of peace.

The extraordinary and demanding legacy of the social teachings contained in the conciliar Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* has been wholly taken up in the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, which has updated and integrated the content of these teachings to make them more readily applicable to the needs of humanity in the twenty-first century. The Compendium was presented, to the press on 25 October 2004 and was put together by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace according to the will of the Servant of God John Paul II.

The Compendium is proposed as an instrument for fostering the ecumenical and interreligious dialogue of Catholics with all those who sincerely desire the good of mankind. This purpose, emphasized also in John Paul II's Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, is especially important for those involved in pastoral work on the immense continent of Asia. In fact, the Compendium affirms that "this document is proposed also to the brethren of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, to the followers of other religions, as well as to all people of good will who are committed to serving the common good" (No. 12). In addition to being addressed primarily and specifically to the sons and daughters of the Church, social doctrine has a universal destination. The light of the Gospel, which social doctrine brings to shine on society, illuminates all people every conscience and intellect is able to grasp the human depth of meanings and values expressed in it, and the burst of humanity and humanization contained in its guidelines for action.

Social doctrine invites Catholics to consider interreligious dialogue and cooperation as paths of strategic value for the future good of humanity. Looking at the events of the end of the twentieth century and of the start of the millennium just begun, we can identify at least two historical areas of primary importance for interreligious dialogue on social themes: these are the areas of peace and human rights. Everyone knows the many and heartfelt appeals of the great Pope John Paul II on these themes. It is sufficient here to recall the Message for the 2002 World Day of Peace, where the Pope wrote: "The various Christian confessions, as well as the world's great religions, need to work together to eliminate the social and cultural causes of terrorism. They can do this by teaching the greatness and dignity of the human person, and by spreading a clearer sense of the oneness of the human family. This is a specific area of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and cooperation, a pressing service which religion can offer to world peace". The Holy Father Benedict XVI too, in his first Message for the World Day of Peace (2006), turned once more to the need to promote and increase ecumenical and interreligious dialogue (cf. No. 11). The field of human rights, of peace, of social and economic justice, of development in the near future will always be more and more at the centre of interreligious dialogue, in which Catholics must participate with their social doctrine, understood as a "doctrinal corpus" that stimulates but is also nourished by the fruitful activity of many millions of people, who have sought to make that teaching the inspiration for their involvement in the world"

# A MUSLIM PERSPECTIVE

## Challenges to the Global Community in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Chandra Muzaffar

The global community is faced with numerous challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, if there is one challenge that encompasses all the other challenges it is hegemony or dominance and control. Hegemony is an affront to human dignity. It negates respect for the human person. It subverts justice. As an ideology and a system, hegemony expresses itself through various forms.

As a case in point, one of the greatest injustices in human history, one of the most tragic manifestations of the utter lack of respect for the human person, was the practice of slavery. Slavery is one of the starkest forms of hegemony. Millions and millions of human beings were stripped of each and every one of their inalienable rights as human beings and shackled to the whims and fancies of slave owners and slave masters.

Feudalism, patriarchy, the caste system, colonialism, racism, apartheid, fascism, nazism, communism and capitalism are all in one way or another hegemonic ideologies or social formations which had repudiated – and in many instances continue to repudiate – justice and respect for the human person as an individual and as a collectivity. Within all religions there are also hegemonic tendencies as I shall show later. There are of course significant variations in the hegemonic power of a particular ideology or religion as against another ideology or religion. This in turn is often conditioned by the age or epoch in which that particular form of hegemony is expressed. The hegemonic power of the colonial ruler in the heyday of Western colonialism or the hegemonic authority of the Brahmin in ancient Hindu society cannot be compared to the dominant role played by a captain of industry in contemporary capitalism or the control exercised by a Catholic priest in a modern Catholic community.

Indeed, certain forms of hegemony have all but disappeared. Slavery, colonialism, apartheid and nazism as understood in conventional terms are no longer with us. Justice and respect seem to have gained some ground in certain instances.

There is no doubt at all that education has been instrumental in bringing about this change. Economic progress, and the social mobility and social transformation that often accompany it, are also key factors. Decolonisation and the emergence of independent nation-states helped in the demise of one form of hegemony, at least in the formal sense. A more important reason for the gradual ascendancy of justice and respect is the democratisation of societies and the spread of human rights.

Nonetheless, in spite of all these changes, hegemony persists in patriarchal relationships, in racist attitudes and in authoritarian political systems of the Right and the Left. Most of the time, we recognise the hegemonic element in these relationships, attitudes and systems. We are therefore in a position to challenge the hegemonic threat that they pose.

Likewise, we are very much aware of the hegemonic pattern of power that obtains within many nation states today.

While we are cognisant of elite hegemony within the nation state and other contemporary forms of hegemony, not many of us understand the reality of global hegemony.

The second half of our essay which attempts to find out whether there are resources within religion which can be harnessed to combat global hegemony. Specifically, is it possible to achieve justice for humankind and respect for the human person through the values and ideals embodied in our different religions?

At their birth, many of the great faiths known to us inveighed against oppression and injustice. This was true for instance of Judaism. Illustrious Hebrew Prophets such as Isaiah spoke the language of liberation and emancipation. A pronounced commitment to justice, freedom and the dignity of all human beings is part and parcel of the Torah. Indeed, the Torah allows us to argue that certain aspects of Judaism are strongly critical of dominance and control or what we would call 'hegemonic power'.

The opposition to hegemony is perhaps even more evident in the life of Jesus Christ. His central-message of love and forgiveness was in stark contrast to the oppressive power of Imperial Rome and the rigid dogmatism of rabbinical authority in Palestine. It was not just his message that sought to liberate the human being from his inner shackles of selfishness and greed. His crucifixion, according to certain Christian philosophers, underscores the significance of selfless sacrifice in the struggle against all forms of tyranny, including the tyranny of hegemonic power. In Islam too some of its principal ideas suggest outright rejection of hegemony. The human being is vicegerent (khalifah) and his loyalty to God transcends all other loyalties. Neither power nor wealth has any claim upon his allegiance. What this means is that in Islam the two most powerful bases of hegemony in any society and in any epoch are subordinated to a Higher Truth. By submitting himself to God and only to God, the human being liberates himself from the fetters that temporal power imposes upon human life. In the process he commits himself

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to eternal, universal values such as justice, respect, compassion and dignity since loyalty to God is, in the ultimate analysis, fidelity to the better side of human nature as embodied in noble spiritual and moral principles. It is by ensuring the triumph of these values at the individual and collective level that the human being as khalifah fulfils God's trust (amanah). To reiterate, it is God's trust -not the wishes of some hegemonic power – that the human being is expected to discharge faithfully.

Like the three Abrahamic faiths that we have discussed, the two great Indic religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, also contain principles which can be interpreted as liberative rather than hegemonic. In the early Hindu Vedas for instance the emphasis was often upon egalitarian principles of living which visualised non-hegemonic social structures. Similarly, the Buddha's teachings gave prominence to equality, dignity, restraint and compassion as an antidote to the hegemonic caste ridden society which confronted him 2500 years ago.

Though the philosophical essence of most of the religions is non-hegemonic and positively inclined towards values such as justice and respect, all religions have become hegemonic in one way or another.

Even when a hierarchy of authority is not integral to a religion, religious elites and religious personalities in general may still be very powerful. This is the situation that prevails within the Muslim community today. In the formal sense, Islam has no religious hierarchy, no priesthood as such. And yet a priesthood of sorts has emerged in the course of the last few centuries which pontificates on all matters pertaining to the faith. Indeed, in various countries individuals who are regarded as Islamic scholars (Ulama) issue edicts (fatwas) regularly on female attire, gender interaction, entertainment, culture and indeed, on anything and everything linked to that vital question of what is permissible and what is prohibited for Muslims. The Ulama exercise more than hegemonic power; they often insist that they are the only ones who have the authority to speak on behalf of the religion. An Ulama monopoly over Islamic religious thought is very much in vogue.

On a whole gamut of other issues connected to global hegemony – arms control; nuclear disarmament; UN reform fair trade as part of an equitable international economic order debt forgiveness for the poorest nations of the world; and greater space for the expression of the world's cultural diversity – one will find that there are a number of Churches: and practising Christians who are in the forefront of local level and global networks and campaigns. Of course even before this, in the sixties and the seventies, there was an organised, articulate stream within Catholicism that rejected in toto American imperialism in all its manifestations. This

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was the liberation theology movement in Latin America. It shows that opposing hegemony and struggling for justice and respect for all human beings is integral to contemporary Christian thought and praxis.

The time has come for those of us who are struggling against global hegemony guided by spiritual and moral values rooted in religion to forge a closer relationship. Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and people of other faiths should come together and develop a common platform in the fight against hegemonic power. In the process they would be strengthening inter-faith ties and enhancing inter-civilisational interaction.

As they undertake this common struggle, they should adopt some guiding principles. The following may be worth considering.

- 1 Since most religious communities tend to be exclusive in their orientation, it is imperative for those who are forging this inter-faith bond to develop a truly inclusive, universal approach. It is one's status as a human being first and last that should take precedence over everything else.
- 2 With our common humanity as the foundation, we should draw out those universal values and principles in our respective religions which serve to buttress social justice and human dignity. Social justice and human dignity which encompasses respect should be emphasised as the two fundamental inter-related spiritual and moral principles that define our worldview – a worldview rooted in the Divine.
- 3 Guided by our alternative worldview we should formulate ideas pertaining to politics and administration, economics and finance, education and culture, science and technology, health and environment, security and welfare which would constitute the essence of policies and plans that would ensure social justice and human dignity.
- 4 Once alternative policies have been lucidly articulated, we should undertake a comprehensive critique of global hegemony as it presents itself today.
- 5 Armed with a comprehensive understanding of global hegemony and a clear vision of alternative policies, we should propose short-term and medium-term changes to the existing order which would in the long run contribute towards the demise of global hegemony.
- 6 At the same time people of different faiths conscious of their common humanity should pool their energies together to increase public awareness about the stark injustices inherent in an hegemonic global system and the unique opportunities available at the present time for the development of an alternative worldview and alternative ideas and policies aimed at creating a just,

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compassionate, universal civilisation.

- 7 As we raise social consciousness about justice, dignity and respect in a future civilisation, we should also make it abundantly clear that in our struggle against global hegemony we eschew violence in all its manifestations.

The seven principles outlined here merely provide a framework of sorts for forging a bond among people of different faiths committed to combating global hegemony and creating a world where justice and respect reign supreme.

Even as it is, such inter-faith ties are being forged on behalf of noble causes in different parts of the world. Issues related to social justice and human dignity at local, national, regional and international levels are bringing together men and women from different religious backgrounds.

Of course, inter-faith bonding of this kind rooted in some understanding of our common humanity is still the exception rather than the rule. But it is a bond that will grow in the decades ahead. For all the great demographic, economic and technological changes that are taking place today are forcing the different faith communities to reach out to one another, to know one another, to respect one another, as they learn to appreciate their mutual need for justice and dignity.

This is why I do not despair -in spite of all the trials and tribulations that confront our age. For I know that a momentous transformation lies ahead. A just, compassionate, universal civilisation founded upon faith in the Divine will be born.

## BOOK REVIEW

Fethullah M. Gulen, *The Statue of Our Souls: Revival in Islamic Thought and Activism* (New Jersey: The Light, Inc., 2005).

Muhammed Fethullah Gulen is a well-known Islamic scholar and thinker, and is one of the most interesting examples of liberal Islamist thinking in the Middle East. He is the founder of the Turkish Islamist Movement which puts a strong emphasis on education and interfaith dialogue. In a meeting with Pope John Paul II in 1998, Gulen presented a proposal to take firm steps to stop the conflict in the Middle East via collaborative work in this place where all three religions originated. In his proposal, he also underlined the fact that science and religion are in fact two different aspects that emanate from the same truth.

Gulen has written widely, and *The Statue of Our Souls* presents us with an overview of what he has preached over the last 15-20 years. He echoes the great teacher Rumi in telling us not to sit around waiting for God's favour, but to participate in the work of transforming this broken world into a world of peace and justice. The book first gives us an overall view of the development and the condition of the Muslim world today. The central theme is the encouragement of self-improvement and action in contemporary society based on the revival of Islamic thought. Gulen, like Rumi, points out that it is only in our willing submission to the Will of God that true freedom is found.

In the chaos of politics today, the author sees a great need for dialogue and tolerance, knowledge, morality and virtue. He strongly urges the Muslim to protect his/her nation through consciousness and responsibility; and in his words "it is time for us to open our eyes and see the reality, to use our insight and stand as the protector..." (p100).

The struggle for religious and spiritual revival is happening almost everywhere, evident in the fact that in spite of the depression, weakness, selfishness, ignorance and superstition, people in general are still turning to God. Gulen hopes this revival will embrace all aspects of life and is able to meet the needs of all classes of people.

To Gulen, humanity, life and the universe should be approached from an Islamic perspective. As such, those Muslim societies that have pushed aside Islamic logic, thought and concepts are obliged to renew Islamic thought and action in all its depths.

The author also tells us about the action and thought of some Muslim heroes such as Mustafa Sabri Bey, Muhammed Hamid Yazir, Suleyman Efendi, Beduizzaman Said Nursi, etc. (p68); people who were deeply concerned with bringing peace in our world, and who were able to shift between action and thought with their will and reason.

Gulen reminds us of the value of patience and the number of times the Qura'n urges us to be patient and to endure. He does not advocate the use of violence to attain political ends but tells us that "The days of getting things done by brute force are over", and suggests that the renewal of society starts from within the heart.

Although Gulen's understanding of "nation" which occurs throughout the book refers particularly to the Turkish nation and Muslim world, it is applicable to all nations in the striving for global peace. He does not turn his back on modernity but rather, exhorts Muslims to educate themselves, control themselves and to use their resources to regain and restore their culture, identity and the observance of their religion. Today many people are experiencing a spiritual struggle for knowledge, morality, truth and justice, a struggle which Gulen calls *Jihad*. He talks about the principle of three loves: a love of faith, a love of our fellow human being, and a love of freedom (p103) which can prepare the ground and nurture the seed.

This book, and especially the section on the Devout: the Architect of our soul, is very helpful to those who are spiritually thirsty. The message of hope that it brings to the person in need of inner peace which is ultimately found in God, is that he/she is blessed and given graces.

It is also an encouragement for those interested in the area of interreligious dialogue, as are many of the author's other writings. This man of vision who is able to hold in balance, the benefits and trials of modernity with the roots of Islamic spirituality, challenges us all to live in the spirit of the Beatitudes.

*Suporna Rozario smsm*

## MEETING POINT

Are you interested in meeting people of other faiths? Maybe even hosting a gathering? There are various groups of women from different faiths who meet monthly.

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 to find one.



Interfaith Meditation – Friday's 7.00pm at St Francis Xavier Centre, Lavender Bay



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



*Creators of Peace Circles* are groups of 6-12 women from different cultural backgrounds and faiths who meet weekly or fortnightly to explore their own peace-creating ability to generate peace in their homes and wider community.

For further information, contact Trish McDonald Harrison on 0417 273 176 or Salam Deeb on (02) 8725 4038

## WHAT'S COMING UP

### JUNE

- 29 Goodness and Kindness Project - Jewish, Muslim and Christian together....  
7.30 – 9 pm, Mosman Art Gallery & Community Centre  
cnr Myahgah & Short Streets

### JULY

- 3-6 Jewish-Christian-Muslim Conference of Australia  
Pallotti Conference Centre, Warburton, Victoria  
Contact: [jcmavic@yahoo.com.au](mailto:jcmavic@yahoo.com.au)
- 7 Interfaith Youth Exchange Program Convention  
6:30 pm, Melkite Centre at 80 Waterloo Rd., Greenacre  
Contact: Jacqueline on 9750 5514 or  
[melwel@bigpond.net.au](mailto:melwel@bigpond.net.au)
- 10-14 **INTRODUCING ISLAM**  
**Winter School at the Catholic Institute of Sydney**  
**Contact: CIS Registry on 97529500**
- 23 AIS Inaugural Ladies Only Interfaith Dinner,  
5 – 7.30 pm, Laila Receptions, 451 Sydney Rd, Brunswick  
Contact: Orhan: 0409 879 817
- 27 Quaker Interfaith Panel Discussions – Kabala  
59 Boundary Street, Wahroonga, NSW  
7.15 pm for 7.30 pm start  
For all Quaker Interfaith Panel discussions  
Contact Acey on 9868 4431 or Monika on 9868 7841

### AUG

- 3 Luncheon Club  
12.30pm at the Sydney Great Synagogue,

166 Castlereagh Street, Sydney

"Perspectives on Suffering; Ecclesiastes"

Details: <http://www.aceir.cathcomm.org/aceir/events.html>

### 5th International Interreligious Abraham Conference

Melbourne

"Multiculturalism, Secularism and Interfaith Relations"

When: 10:00am - 3:00pm; Sunday 13 August 2006

Where: Leonda By The Yarra, 2 Wallen Rd, Hawthorn

Cost: \$15 General, \$10 Conc.

Contact : Orhan: 0409 879 817

Sydney

"Interfaith Relations in Confronting Cultural Conflict"

When: 10 am – 4.30 pm, Sunday, 27 August 2006

Where: McLauren Hall, Sydney University

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

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

### SEPT

- 7 Quaker Interfaith Panel Discussions  
"Celebrating Faith through Music"
- 19 Inter-Faith Dialogue with Women  
5.30pm for a 6pm start - 8.30pm  
NSW Parliament House, Macquarie Street Sydney  
Details:  
<http://www.ncca.org.au/departments/gender/programmes>
- 29 'Is Being Religious un-Australian? Conversations with  
Cardinal Pell, A/Prof Kamaruzaman, Prof Kalantzis  
Details: <http://www.ncec2006.com>

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

We often find out about events closer to the intended date, so if you would like to be notified by email of events as we find out about them, sent your request to [cmr.cmi@columban.org.au](mailto:cmr.cmi@columban.org.au)

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



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