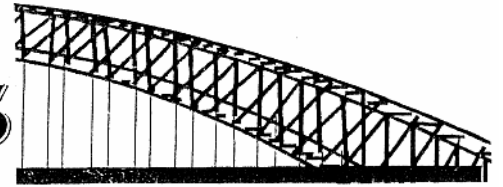


# BRIDGES



A NEWSLETTER OF THE CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM NETWORK

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

Number 33

March 2006

## EDITORIAL

It seems a long time ago since the last issue of Bridges was mailed out, and it has been awhile. We are now in the midst of Lent and before we know it, Easter will have arrived.

Much has happened in the last four months, with Pope Benedict XVI being in the midst of many of these events. The most recent is his temporary merger of The Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue (PCID) into the Pontifical Council for Culture (PCC). When Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald was given the new appointment of Apostolic Nuncio to Egypt and no replacement was named for the position of President of PCID, there was speculation on what the implications would be to current efforts in inter-religious dialogue.

However... we recognise the need for inculturation in our own Christian liturgies and it is well known that many of the practices of our Muslim brothers and sisters are cultural rather than religion based. It does seem then, that the merger of the PCID into the PCC, headed by Cardinal Poupard who has served in essentially the same position for over 25 years, is recognition that culture cannot be separated from interreligious dialogue.

The fact that the merger is termed 'temporary' could indicate that it is in a test phase. Frequent calls by the pontiff to Jews, Christians and Muslims to work together to promote peace and justice in the world, and a recent urge to religious leaders to lead the way by reconciling conflicts and divisions through "genuine dialogue and acts of human solidarity" leaves no doubt that the pontiff holds that interreligious dialogue is essential.

However, the voices of those concerned that we are taking too soft an approach towards Islam by not insisting on reciprocity in Muslim majority countries where minority Christians are persecuted, is getting louder. The bombings and burning of embassies and churches by parts of the Muslim world, largely seen as an overreaction to the infamous Danish cartoons has not helped. If there is a change in strategic direction in the approach to how the church relates to Islam, and a stronger push for reciprocity does come from the Vatican, tensions in the already delicate relationship between Christians and Muslims are bound to increase. Archbishop Fitzgerald's move from Rome to Cairo would then position him where he would be most effective in negotiating the tensions.

In this issue of *Bridges*, we look at pathways to peace

from the Christian perspective in the article *Reconciliation: The Path to Peace & Harmony* by Pascal Paulus OP and from the Muslim perspective in the article *Christian-Muslim Solidarity Against Empire* by *Chandra Muzafar*.

Another major event that occurred was the release of the Pope's much anticipated first encyclical, "Deus Caritas Est" or "God is Love". It is precisely the topic of love that needs to be reflected on and discussed in the current waves of hate and violence that seem to confront us from multiple sides, not least of which are those where the name of God is blasphemously used in the perpetration of these actions.

In his introduction, the pontiff reminds us that "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person which gives life a new horizon and a decisive decision" (§ 1).

Lent is a time of taking stock, of sacrifice, renewal and preparation. Many Catholics immediately think of fasting and abstinence at the mere mention of Lent even though the sacrifices made should not simply be based on a set of guidelines but ones that we have reflected upon and make with a 'decisive decision' driven by faith.

Many fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, and abstain from meat on Fridays during Lent, but they are a minority. Muslims, on the other hand, fast during the month of Ramadan, both as individuals and as a people. There are solid reasons for making one's own decision on what sacrifices to make, but I sometimes wonder whether something has been lost with us no longer making a marked common and collective action of sacrifice as the wider Christian community.

In the encyclical, the pontiff gives his interpretation of the words in 1 Jn 4:20 as 'love of neighbour is a path that leads to the encounter with God, and closing our eyes to our neighbour also blinds us to God' (§ 16).

It is easy to take the high moral ground and condemn senseless acts of violence against others, brushing off as misguided, the belief by some, that such acts can bring one closer to God. However, with a closer look at ourselves, we realise that our own lifestyle, desires and habits can themselves be acts of violence towards the marginalised. It may not take the same form but neither show love of neighbour...

*Carole Gan - Guest Editor*

## NEWS FROM THE CENTRE

### Centre hosts Graduate Certificate in Interfaith Relations students

The Centre will be hosting a group of young women from Canberra when they are in Sydney to visit various places of worship and attend lectures on the place of interfaith relations within the different faith traditions in the week 20-24 March.

The women are students are enrolled at the Signadou campus of the Australian Catholic University in the Graduate Certificate in Interfaith Relations which is an integral part of the Young Catholic Women's Interfaith Fellowship established by The Commission of Australian Catholic Women

### Our Website is finally up!

After a number of false starts, our website is finally up. We are still adding material to the site, but upcoming events and previous issues of Bridges are available on

[www.columban.org.au/cmr](http://www.columban.org.au/cmr)

### Resources Available

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

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

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

## ITEMS OF INTEREST

### Women of Faith dinner Draws Crowd of over 250

The fourth annual Women of Faith dinner organised by the Affinity Intercultural Foundation Ladies' group drew a crowd of over 250 women, primarily, but not exclusively from, the three Abrahamic faiths. The theme for the evening was "*The need for Leadership by Women of Faith in the Modern World*" and the speakers for the evening were Ms. Kirrily McDermott, Dr. Orna Lansky and Mrs. Zuleha Keskin. Presented with awards for their contribution to the promotion of interfaith were Mrs. Silma Ihram, Sr. Giovanni Farquer rsj and Rabbi Elizabeth Ban.

### Catholic and Evangelical students join Muslims in RU-486 fight

The Australian Catholic Students Association has issued a joint statement together with the Muslim Students Association of Australia and the Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students, urging the nation's political leaders to oppose current reforms before the Commonwealth Parliament of Australia articulated in The Therapeutic Goods Amendment (Repeal of Ministerial Responsibility of RU-486) Bill 2005.

Cathnews - 09/02/06

### Australian Muslim Exchange Program

The *Muslim Women's National Network of Australia* hosted a delegation of four Indonesian women during their visit to Melbourne, the ACT and Sydney in March. The visitors were; Lanny Octavia who works for the Liberal Islam Network; Luluk Nur Hamidah, who works with Nahdlatul Ulama, the largest Islamic organisation in Indonesia with some 40 million members; Feby Indirani from the Youth Islamic Study Club and Waode Asmawati

from the Muhammadiyah Students Association. Their visit is part of an ongoing exchange program which 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 comparable delegations to Indonesia.

### Muslim Youth Group raises funds for Auburn Uniting Church hall

The Auburn Gallipoli Mosque's Girls' youth group collectively raised funds to help with repairs to the Auburn Uniting Church hall which had been set on fire after the Cronulla riots. Ms. Nazli Akyil presented the \$500 donation on behalf of the youth group to Rev Mele Fakahua-Ratcliffe.

Affinity Intercultural Foundation Jan- Mar newsletter

### Pope urges leaders to lead the way in fixing religious conflicts

Pope Benedict XVI urged Jews, Christians and Muslims religious leaders to lead the way in promoting peace and justice in the world, by reconciling conflicts and divisions through dialogue and solidarity. He emphasised the importance of religious leaders spearheading such efforts since they "have a responsibility to work for reconciliation through genuine dialogue and acts of human solidarity." The pope said such cooperation is especially urgent today because greater attention needs to be given to "teaching respect for God, for religions and their symbols, and for holy sites and places of worship."

The American Jewish Committee's international director of inter-religious affairs, Rabbi David Rosen, said although the group has "lots of bilateral contacts" with Muslim groups, the level of dialogue and exchange is "low key

and behind the scenes" because Muslim leaders risk being criticised for associating with Jews.

In meetings with Vatican officials, committee members asked the Vatican to take the lead in creating a trilateral commission of Jews, Christians and Muslims. The rabbi said if such a committee became a Vatican initiative that Jewish and Muslim leaders could join, then "no one in the Muslim world would think of accusing (the Muslims engaged in dialogue) of being part of a Jewish conspiracy."

Cathnews - 17/03/06

### **Dominican Sister on Downer's interfaith dialogue mission**

Dominican sister Trish Madigan participated in the second Dialogue on Regional Interfaith Cooperation for Peace, Development and Human Dignity held in Cebu, Philippines from 14-16 March.

Cardinal George Pell also attended the meeting, which was organised at the Australian end by the Foreign Affairs minister Alexander Downer. It is a follow up to the inaugural meeting held in Yogyakarta in December 2004.

The gathering aims to build mutual understanding and a harmonious relationship among people of difference faiths in the region.

### **Christian substitute for Principal at Muslim School**

Mrs Silma Ihram, principal at the Noor al-Houda Islamic College is taking a six month sabbatical to work on her post-graduate research project in sociology. The person filling the position of principal in her absence Mr Geoff Clarke, a Christian for whom this is not the first placement in a Muslim school. Mr. Clarke previously filled in for the principal at the King Abdul Aziz school at Rooty Hill.

### **TV ads warn of the dangers of extremism**

Dr Azahari Husin, the master bomb maker in the Bali attacks, was much like other terrorist masterminds since 11 Sep 2001. Even friends and family were unsuspecting and unable to understand the changes in his ideology that caused this Reading University PhD graduate to give up his promising academic career to make bombs.

Recognition of this danger has prompted the moderate Muslim government of Malaysia to sponsor television advertisements cautioning parents not to allow their children to grow up to become *jihad* warriors. Beginning with a cuddly baby being picked up by his father, the advertisement traces his growing years. Then graduating from university, he sports a little goatee, symbolic of his allegiance to the Prophet Muhammad. In the end, the young man is killed and a grieving father weeps.

Malaysian Muslims are able to understand that such sentiments could exist among Palestinians as a result of a life hardened by deprivation and who had nothing left to live for, but question how did dying for Islam suddenly become a badge of honour elsewhere in the world.

The Star - 18/11/05

### **"The Islamic concept of God" discussion at Castelgandolfo**

In the spring of 2005, when Cardinal Ratzinger was elected pope, his former students thought the annual meetings he had with them would come to an end. But that didn't happen and Benedict XVI told them that it was very important to him that they continue.

The first of these meetings were held when Ratzinger was a theology professor in Ratisbonne. When he became archbishop of Munich, his former students asked him to continue, and he accepted. The same thing happened when he moved to Rome as the prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The meetings lasted a weekend, and were usually held at a monastery. At the end of the meeting in 2004, the participants left with the topic for the following year already chosen: 'the Islamic concept of God'. The two experts who would introduce the discussion were Fr. Samir Khalil Samir an Egyptian and another Jesuit scholar of Islamic studies, Christian Troll, from Germany.

That meeting happened behind closed doors last September in Castelgandolfo. Some confusion, however, arose in January this year when Fr. Joseph Fessio, one of the attendees said that a radio interview in the USA that the pope was in the view that Islam and democracy were incompatible. A few hours later he retracted the statement when other attendees were contacted and gave a very different interpretation.

<http://www.chiesa.espressonline.it> – 26/01/06

### **Cardinal Ruini: Fr Santoro's martyrdom shows the need for recognition of religious freedom**

In his speech for the opening of a session of the Permanent Episcopal Council in Italy, Cardinal Camillo Ruini, President of the Italian Bishops' Conference, recalled Fr Andrea Santoro the Roman priest killed in Turkey. He said that only the full, reciprocal recognition of the right to religious freedom, together with the respect for faiths and their symbols, can prevent the creation of tensions like those that followed the publication of caricatures on Mohammad, the climate of which set the stage for the murder of Fr. Santoro, who went on mission to Turkey to "make Christ present in that land."

### **Harmony Day events**

21 March is Harmony Day, and is celebrated in various ways throughout Australia. One such event was that staged by the Fairfield City Council in collaboration with the Islamic Foundation for Education and Welfare, Parkside Church and various other supporters. A fair was held on 18 Mar culminating in the choral performance "Celebrating Diversity" by the Sydney Chamber Choir. The crowd turnout exceeded expectations with 2000-3000 people attending the various items presented.

The Australian Women's Coalition held a 'Meet and Greet'. Women from the Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Bahai faiths spoke about the 'Role of Women in their cultures, with another speaking from the perspective of a typical Chinese girl growing up in 1960s and 70s.

## A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

### Reconciliation: The Path to Peace & Harmony

Pascal Paulus OP

Judaism, Christianity and Islam are all scriptural religions. They claim that they have the revealed truth in a written form: "The Sacred Writings," "The Scripture" or "The Book". This is the message of God for the right guidance of humanity, a path towards peace and harmony, a path towards reconciliation among religions or the believers of other faiths. This message of God is based upon love, peace, order and harmony in each and every aspect of the believer's life. "These revelations from on high represent God's intervention in history; and indeed, the same God: the Jews' Yahweh, the Christians God the Father who is in heaven and the Muslims' Allah is the one and the same deity, with the same history, the same attributes and, in fact, the same name." One of the beautiful names of God is that he is Peace. It means more than that: submission to the one God, and to live in peace and harmony with the Creator, with oneself, with other people and with the environment.

The golden rule of every religion is based upon love. The vitality and variety of different thoughts and faiths is a marvel which increases the beauty of creation. Now is the time to find achievable ways to build a positive relationship with others and especially with our Muslim brothers and sisters in today's pluralistic society. Living in a pluralistic society we need to take the time to understand each other and live in harmony because there is a great need for religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence among all the peoples of faith. It is hoped that my modest efforts in undertaking this topic will serve to inform the reader of the opinion that the religions are the great force to promote peace and harmony.

The Church is open for reconciliation and dialogue with the other faiths. "When people are drawing more closely together and the bonds of friendship between different peoples are being strengthened, the Church examines with greater care the relation which she has to non-Christian religions. All people form but one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to prepare the entire earth, and also because all share a common destiny, namely God."

If we believe in one who is Creator of us, then we will know that Love knows how to discover the sign of hope and reconciliation in this world. People must live together even if they are different from each other. They need to go beyond co-existence or tolerance with the spirit of reconciliation. God invites Muslims and Christians to draw the lessons from their history which will help them to realize that by following the path of reconciliation, dialogue, they will be able to give a better witness and to cooperate peaceably in service to God and humanity. One must think that dialogue is not so much about attempting to resolve immediate conflicts, but about building a "Community of conversation" a "community of heart and mind" across racial, ethnic and religious barriers where people learn to see differences among them not as threatening but as "natural" and "normal".

#### *World situation and the role of religions*

What do we see when we look at the world situation in these early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? The mass media shows us conflict everywhere - wars, confrontations, disasters both

man-made and natural, with Governments locked in power struggles ranging from attempts to dominate the world to small, localized disputes. The so-called 'war against terrorism' heads the political agenda, although an examination of the causes of terrorism is rarely an issue to be discussed.

Meanwhile, the world becomes ever more polarized, divided between the have and have-nots, the oppressors and oppressed.

#### *Role of religion*

The basic precepts of all religions are peace, love towards others, the practice of good deeds and the attainment of personal goodness. All religions teach ways, through prayer and meditation, of reaching spiritual union with the Almighty. They also provide sets of rules to live by which include peaceful coexistence with other beings sharing this mother earth. All religions share a belief that our behaviour or what we do in this world will determine what will happen to us in the next. If we do good, we will be rewarded, if we do evil, we will be punished.

Religion is an essential tool to achieve personal spirituality, and through this spirituality all awareness of good versus evil and a will to follow the path of righteousness. This is accompanied by a wish to understand others and live in love, peace and harmony with them. Of course as humans we all possess both positive and negative aspects. Our Christian religion teaches us the importance of individual choice in every action we take: it is we ourselves who have the power to choose whether to help our fellow creatures or whether to harm them.

It is through dialogue that we reach out and understand others of different faiths and convictions. Not dialogue in the sense of experts discussing theoretical questions of doctrine but ordinary people adopting an attitude of friendship and respect for people who hold different beliefs. Acceptance of others for what they are, a willingness to learn from different cultures, finding common ground and discussing differences in a peaceful manner, defusing tensions, this is the way forward for peaceful, harmonious co-existence.

#### *Harmony in Islam*

Islam is an Arabic word whose root is SLM which denotes peace and surrender. Islam means to give oneself unconditionally to Allah. Islam is said to be the religion of all the prophets from the time of Abraham. The word Islam means: submission, confidence, patience, serenity, peace, gratitude, obedience, harmony, order and committing oneself to be 'the servant of God. The word *ta'aluf* is used in Arabic for harmony. It means familiarity, intimacy, mutual understanding. The other word is *tawafuq* which means agreement and conformity and order: The Islamic religion is based upon harmony because everything which is created on earth by Almighty Allah is harmonized with the one who is creator of heaven and earth. Everything is submitted to the supreme reality who is Allah.

Islam is the universal order, the integral religion of harmony

and the unique system, which is able to harmonize the physical with the metaphysical, the rational with the ideal, the corporal with the spiritual. All dimensions of man's earthly life have particular places in Islam in such a way that he can attain peace with himself, his community and nature, and ultimately to gain happiness in both worlds. Muslim societies have their own values,

The Holy Qur'an states "We have ordained a law and assigned a path for each of you. Had God pleased, He would have made you one nation: but it is his wish to prove you by that which He has bestowed upon you, compete with each other in good works, for to God you shall all return and He will declare to you what you have disagreed about". The Islamic religion is based upon harmony because everything which is created on earth by Almighty Allah is harmonized with the one who is creator of heaven and earth. Everything is submitting itself to the supreme reality Allah.

*God is love*

This concept of God appears in the New Testament, where the love of God, agape, is revealed in the fact that the Word of God having put on human nature is to give his life for sinful man. He does not wait for man to turn towards him, but goes forth to seek him. His love is unconditional. The love of God is the principle and origin of all grace and all good. He reveals himself in the form of self-giving love. In this love he surrenders himself totally for us, to bring peace and harmony in the world. The love is the core of Christianity. So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. Our God says that "Return to me

with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning and rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the Lord, your God for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and repents of evil." (Joel 2: 12-13) Following Jesus Christ our aim and goal is to promote love and harmony among each other.

God is full of mercy for those who have strayed and who return to him in a spirit of humility and repentance. This is a message of Good News for those who are seeking a faith which can give meaning and direction to their life. Allah desires to guide us along the paths which are best for us.

To conclude, I would say that Muslims and Christians are united by faith in the one God, the creator of all men, before whom all men one day will have to account for their good and evil deeds. For both religions, God is a "God of Love". Whoever wants to serve Him must serve the cause of peace. If we go deep into our hearts and into our culture and religious tradition, we will find the good values of our religion, which will help us to understand humanity with love. We should see religion as providing guiding principles towards love, unity and respect for all humankind. We also need to be aware that religion is born from the free choice of individuals and communities. Therefore as followers of Allah, we should use religion as our driving force to love humanity. These are my hopes and expectations for the peaceful future of humanity: "O God, author of justice and peace, give us true joy and authentic love, and a lasting solidarity among people."

*[The use of exclusive language is lamentable – Editor]*

**A MUSLIM PERSPECTIVE**

**Christian-Muslim Solidarity Against Empire**

Summary of the keynote address delivered by *Chandra Muzaffar*, the JUST president at the First People's Forum on Peace for Life held at Davao City, Phillipines on 30 November 2004

There are groups within the Christian and Muslim communities today which constitute a threat to world peace.

In the Christian community, there are elements within the Christian Right who support the perpetration of war and violence by Washington in pursuit of its goal of a global empire, thus their endorsement of the Iraq war in March 2003. These elements regard Washington's hegemony over the Middle East as a necessary condition for Israel's security and supremacy which in turn is vital for 'the return of the Messiah' - a return which in their reckoning would signal the universal triumph of Christianity. The Muslims who are the overwhelming majority in the Middle East are a stumbling block to this apocalyptic vision of the future and will therefore have to be subjugated or converted to Christianity. Of course, when the Messiah returns, according to the

doctrine of the Christian Right, the Jews will also be brought into the Christian fold - except that for the time being the Christian Right has decided to forge a tactical alliance with the Zionist Right in both Washington and Tel Aviv! It is this link with the Zionist Right which has enhanced the influence of the Christian Right upon the ruling elite in Washington in recent years. The Christian Right itself, it should be acknowledged, has also become increasingly powerful in Washington since the ascendancy of President George W. Bush, himself a Christian Rightist. Since the Christian Right was undoubtedly the single most important factor in Bush's re-election on 2 November 2004, one can expect this new force in American politics to play a critical role in US foreign policies in the next four years.

There are other powerful interests connected to oil and arms



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which are also seeking to reshape the Middle East - a goal which is in line with the Christian Right's own agenda. Even Washington's larger, all encompassing goal of ensuring that neo-liberal capitalism remains the dominant global credo has the wholehearted support of the Christian Right which has banished issues of social justice to the margins of society. And, like sections of the Christian community in the colonial epoch, elements in the Christian Right today too bear deep seated prejudices against Islam and Muslims.

A fringe within the Muslim community has deliberately chosen to respond to Washington's hegemony, and the Zionist Right and the Christian Right which are intertwined in this pattern of global power, by resorting to acts of mindless senseless violence. In a situation where no other Muslim group seems to be capable of offering any effective resistance to global hegemony, the likes of Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda appear to have developed a constituency among the disenfranchised and disadvantaged segment of the community. By reacting to state terror with privatized terror, both the global hegemon and its allies, on the one hand, and militant Muslim groups, on the other, have made the world a much more dangerous place to live in.

As Muslim militants attempt to combat global hegemonic power in their own reckless manner, it is becoming clearer and clearer that they too desire to exercise dominance and control over other Muslims and humankind in general. Like the global hegemon, they too believe in the efficacy of violence in their quest for power. Like the Christian Right, they too subscribe to a Manichean worldview, of good versus evil, of the people of faith (in their case, Muslims) pitted against the infidels. Their approach and worldview, in other words, are not dissimilar to that of their adversary. Both are inimical to peace and justice.

Confronted with this situation, peace loving, justice-seeking Christians and Muslims have no choice but to take a clear, unambiguous stand against their respective co-religionists. They must be prepared to do battle against the hatred, bigotry and hegemonic attitudes of their fellow Christians and Muslims. At the same time, sincere, upright Christians and Muslims should join hands, hearts and heads in the noble struggle to create a just world which protects and enhances the dignity of each and every human life.

Christians for instance should not show any hesitation in opposing hegemony and imperial power. After all, Jesus (May peace be upon him) refused to yield to hegemonic political and religious power even though he was forced to pay the ultimate price for his unflinching faith in God and God's goodness. This is why colonialism in the past, like hegemony in the present, constitutes a betrayal of Christ's powerful message of universal love and compassion. It follows from this that insofar as the Christian Right endorses

hegemony and the war and violence that accompany it, it is making a mockery of Christ's teachings.

Similarly, Muslims should have no compunctions about condemning the violence and terrorism committed by the militant fringe within the community. It is morally repugnant to a religion whose principal source of guidance - the Noble Qur'ān - gives so much emphasis to not only justice and equality but also to peace, mercy and compassion. Besides, a simplistic dichotomization of the world into Muslims and infidels is an affront to both the Qur'ānic concept of the unity of the human family and the bond that it aspires to establish among all human beings through faith in God and the performance of good deeds.

Equally important, Christians and Muslims who are committed to a peace founded upon justice should begin to transcend their religious affiliations and evolve a response to the imperial challenge rooted in their common humanity. While this has been happening within pockets of Christians and Muslims here and there, the majority within both communities have yet to move in this direction. It demands a transformation from exclusivist to inclusivist thinking on matters pertaining to religion. It calls for a metamorphosis from a deep attachment to a particularistic religious tradition to an all embracing devotion to a truly universal spiritual heritage. The rituals and symbols which distinguish a specific religious identity will have to be subordinated to those eternal values and principles of life which unite all women and men of faith regardless of their formal religious affiliation. In a nutshell, a profound faith based consciousness of our common humanity which has a transcendent love for God as its pivotal center, is only possible if we are prepared for a fundamental paradigm shift in our understanding of, and approach towards, religion

Are we capable of such a paradigm shift? Some of the re-thinking that is taking place within the different religions today may lead to the transformation that we envisage. But the real impetus for change, I suspect, will come from outside religion. As more and more societies become heterogeneous in an increasingly globalize world, the reality of living cheek by jowl with the 'religious other' is bound to impact upon people's perceptions of religions other than their own. Besides, since globalization has already penetrated geographical, economic and cultural barriers, there is no doubt at all that it will also eventually breach religious barricades. More than anything else, it is perhaps the empire itself, in an ironical sense that may 'succeed' in uniting Christians and Muslims and people of other faiths. If the empire continues in its present arrogant drive to dominate and control the world through war and violence resulting in the perpetual slaughter of tens of thousands of human beings, we can expect millions and millions of more people to come together to oppose Washington's

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hegemonic global power. The mammoth worldwide protests against the Anglo-American war on Iraq last year which united thousands of Christians and Muslims in a common cause gave us a glimpse of the potential for inter-faith solidarity.

That was a sign of hope. It restores our faith in the future - a

future in which Christians and Muslims and all women and men who cherish peace will strive together as one human family to create a just and compassionate civilization guided by the Divine.

Commentary: International Movement for a Just World  
Vol 6, No.1 2006

## BOOK REVIEW

Dupuis, Jacques. *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue*. Translated by Phillip Berryman. New York: Orbis Books, 2002. xii + 276

Jacques Dupuis' previous work, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Orbis Books, 1997) attracted the attention of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), resulting in their 2001 Notification that it contained "notable ambiguities" regarding eight theses. The previous year the CDF had issued the Declaration *Dominus Iesus* which addressed similar issues.

The first question the reader will ask is: in this latest book does Dupuis answer the accusations levelled against his earlier work? The formal answer has to be "No", because the manuscript of this work was completed six months before *Dominus Iesus* and eighteen months before the Notification were published. However, it is clear that this latest book does engage the theological controversies in which the author had become involved.

Dupuis clearly and deliberately affirms traditional Christian doctrines about the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ's role and identity as "constitutive" Saviour (p 157); and also affirms a positive role of other religions not only in the salvation of their individual members but also in the providential plan of God.

Dupuis' thesis is carefully constructed. In the first three chapters he lays a positive foundation in the practice of Jesus and the Apostolic Church, the era of the Second Vatican Council, and the recent teaching of the magisterium.

In the next chapters he presents a "synthetic" treatment including God's covenants, the "many and various ways" (Heb 1:1-2) God is revealed, various participations in the one mediation of Christ, the Reign of God as broader than the Church, the foundations and fruits of interreligious dialogue, and praying together. In each chapter he uses scripture, tradition and church doctrine to establish his case.

The end result is a carefully constructed edifice which Dupuis calls "inclusive pluralism" (p 87) – meaning that Christians can learn truth and grace from other religions (which inclusivists and exclusivists would both deny), but

refutes the idea that other revelations and saviours are unrelated to Jesus (which pluralists would claim) – or in more theological terms, a "Trinitarian Christology" (p 90). Throughout he maintains the paradox of God being active everywhere through God's Word and God's Spirit, and yet all God's saving activities being in and through the particularity of the Christ event.

Dupuis' carefully constructed edifice stands (or falls) on his understanding of the role and identity of Jesus Christ and the latter's relationships within the Trinity, and in particular on the distinction, though not separation, between the humanity and divinity of Jesus. Dupuis repeatedly insists on the personal identity of the Word of God and Jesus Christ (p 140, 158, 163) as foundational. Yet he asserts that because Jesus' human consciousness is limited his revelation of God is not absolute (p 130) nor can it exhaust the divine mystery (p 159), which is universally present and operative through the Word (p 159ff) and through the Spirit (p 178ff); yet God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ is "decisive, unsurpassed, and unsurpassable" (p 130).

Dupuis' book is intended to be a popular version of the earlier work - footnotes and references have been kept to a minimum; only references are made to some of the previous material; and some new, more closely argued material has been added - but as the examples I have given show it is still far from being 'light reading'.

Whether or not Dupuis answers satisfactorily the "ambiguities" that were alleged in his earlier work I leave to serious scholars to decide. But of this I am certain, that no one can present an adequate Christian theology of religions without taking into account the arguments that Dupuis has carefully laid out in this book. It has become Dupuis' last legacy to the Church, as he died in Rome on the 28th of December 2004. May he rest in peace.

*Patrick McInerney*

## MEETING POINT

The Centre is working with Jewish, Muslim and other Christian bodies to organise a Jewish-Christian-Muslim residential conference in Sydney later this year. Contact the Centre if you would like to be part of this



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

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



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



The focus of the *Women's Dialogue Network* (WDN), an outreach of the Centre, is the expansion of the network, via the setting up of affiliated groups in and around Sydney. Contact the Centre if you would like to be part of this movement



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

A group also meets at Pyrmont on the 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday evenings of the month. The group is especially looking for Muslim and

Buddhist members though all faith traditions are welcome. Contact Shehara Viswanathan on 0402 890 046 for further details.



'Salam Cafe' is a panel discussion/talk show type featuring a panel of young Aussie Muslims who interview people, make jokes, and talk light heartedly about issues to do with Islam - a combination of entertaining and informative.

Air times

Sydney Community Station (TVS) Sat 5.30pm, Tues 8.30am (repeat) and Thurs 2.00pm (repeat)

Melbourne - Channel 31 - Mon 9pm, Wed 4.30pm (repeat)

Brisbane - Briz 31 TV - Thursdays 9.30pm

Adelaide - c31 Adelaide - Mondays 8.00pm



Mission of Hope is a group run by volunteer professionals in the area of health (medical/mental/allied) and community welfare. It is a monthly discussion forum for people dealing with Muslims clients. Discuss issues surrounding Muslims in health and welfare, share professional experiences in dealing with Muslim patients/clients and develop strategies to address the needs of Muslims in Sydney to both Muslim and non-Muslim service providers.

If you are working in the profession of health and community welfare and would like to participate, please either email Mission of Hope [info@missionofhope.org.au](mailto:info@missionofhope.org.au) or you can contact Hanan Dover 0422 908 323 [h.dover@missionofhope.org.au](mailto:h.dover@missionofhope.org.au) or Nourredine Bader 0404 806 767 for more information.

## WHAT'S COMING UP

### MARCH

- 21** Harmony Day  
Check with your local council for events or <http://www.harmony.gov.au/whats-on/index.htm> as these tend to be run outside of Harmony Day itself
- 26** Deer Park Mosque Open Day  
Bosnian Islamic Centre, 285 Station Rd, Deer Park  
2.30 - 4.30 pm
- 30** Interfaith Symposium  
Library Seminar Room, Uni. of Sunshine Coast  
10.30am to 12.30pm or so,  
Enquiries: [webmaster@queenslandmuslimtimes.org](mailto:webmaster@queenslandmuslimtimes.org)

### APRIL

- 1** Interfaith Choral Concert,  
St. Francis of Assisi, 463 Oxford Street, Paddington  
7.30 pm. Tickets: \$15 from 0431 457 441

- 12** Universal Compassion of Divine Messengers Conference  
7 pm, Ivanhoe Anglican Grammar School, Ivanhoe. TBC  
Enquiries: Emre Celik 0412 984 142

### JUNE

- 18** An afternoon of Jewish, Christian and Muslim Poetry  
2.30pm, Sydney Writers Centre, Rozelle, Sydney  
Enquiries : Sr. Marianne Dacy, Tel: 9351 4162  
[mdacy@library.usyd.edu.au](mailto:mdacy@library.usyd.edu.au)

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*

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  
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