Interfaith Youth Pilgrimage

The “big event” for the Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission in 2008 was, without a doubt, the “Interfaith Youth Pilgrimage” on Sunday 13th July. To coincide with the visit to Melbourne of 25,000 international pilgrims en route to World Youth Day in Sydney, the youth of various religious communities in Melbourne came together “on pilgrimage to one another” in order to make a joint commitment to peace.

Twelve communities were represented in this event: Bahá’í, Christian (both Protestant and Catholic), Muslim (from both the Islamic Council of Victoria and the Australian Intercultural Society), Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Brahma Kumaris, Sathya Sai, Sikh and Indigenous. The event was jointly planned by the young people from these communities themselves.

Early in the afternoon, each community group met together in their own locations in various places around the city of Melbourne, in order to discuss together the themes of peace, pilgrimage and interfaith relations from their own faith perspective. The Catholic pilgrims gathered in St Patrick’s Cathedral where they were

From the Executive Officer’s Desk

Firstly let me offer apologies for the late publication of our Bulletin this year – 2008 was a year packed with events – among which the Days in the Diocese and World Youth Day were prominent. It was also a year in which our Memorandum of Agreement with the Australian Intercultural Society led to many engagements between Catholics and Muslims here in Melbourne. These events will continue to bear fruit in the year to come.

2008 was also a special year in the life of the Church internationally, which saw many events and discussions leading to a more intense ecumenical and interreligious engagement. We marked the anniversaries of the deaths of Popes Pius XII and Paul VI and the election of Popes John XXIII and John Paul II. 2008 was the 70th anniversary of Kristallnacht. Celebrations of the 150th anniversary of Lourdes and the 20th anniversary of the World’s Religions (3rd to 9th December 2009). The Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission will work for the Archdiocese of Melbourne in relation to our interreligious field will take place later this year in Melbourne: the Parliament of the World’s Religions (3rd to 9th December 2009). The Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission will work for the Archdiocese of Melbourne in representing Catholic interreligious dialogue at this event through a number of special contributions.

Of course, another major event in the interreligious field will take place later this year in Melbourne: the Parliament of the World’s Religions (3rd to 9th December 2009). The Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission will work for the Archdiocese of Melbourne in representing Catholic interreligious dialogue at this event through a number of special contributions.

On behalf of the Commission, may I wish a very happy new year to all our readers and friends for 2009!

David Schütz, Executive Officer and Editor

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addressed by Bishop Christopher Prowse (see story on page 8).

Each group then journeyed “on pilgrimage” to Federation Square, walking behind specially made banners which, upon arrival at the square, were used as the backdrop for the gathering space. In all, about five hundred young people were gathered for the event. A break in the weather meant that plenty of passers-by were also attracted to participate in the event.

As we came together, we walked through smoking eucalyptus leaves – a local indigenous ceremony of purification and welcome – to the sound of didgeridoo playing. Before the event itself began, a film by Buddhist participant, Freeman Trebilcock, was played on the overhead screen. The film explored the ways youth of different religious backgrounds could work together for peace.

Our MCs Br Gautam Chaitanya of the Hindu faith and Ms Inaz Janif of the Muslim faith then welcomed the crowd and handed over to local indigenous elder, Aunty Di Kerr, to do the “welcome to land” and Catholic Indigenous Ambassador to Days in the Diocese Tristan Mungatopi.

The first section of the program consisted of chants in original languages from the sacred writings of four groups relevant to the theme of peace. Deepna Benoit chanted in Sanskrit from the Hindu tradition, Freeman Trebilcock chanted the Buddhist “Four immeasurables” in Tibetan, Caroline Mense and Ms Lipson read the “Sim Shalom” and other prayers from the Jewish prayer book, and Hafiz Muhammed Sezgin chanted from the Koran.

We were then addressed by our guest speaker, Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez, the Catholic Archbishop of Tegucigalpa in the Honduras and the president of Caritas International. He was enthusiastically welcomed by the crowd - cheered on by a large group of Honduran youth in the front row! Following the Cardinal’s address, Shyamini Naidu, a Hindu high school student, sang “You Raise Me Up”. Many of the pilgrims in the assembly joined in singing this well known and stirring song.

The second half of the program consisted in the presentation of four “intentions for Peace”. Jag Shergill, from the Sikh community, presented an “Intentions for Love”, Amelia Ghofrany and Kylie Payman from the Baha’i community presented an “Intentions for Unity”, Anish Philip from the Mar Thoma Christian community presented an “Intentions for Forgiveness”, and Tristan Mungatopi of the Indigenous community presented an “Intentions for Reconciliation”. In response to each intention, the Crowd responded enthusiastically with the refrain “For the Sake of Peace!”

The event concluded with the speakers and readers taking branches of gum leaves into the crowd, where everyone took a leaf as a reminder of their involvement in the pilgrimage and of their own commitment to peace.

INTENTIONS FOR PEACE

**Intention for Love — Jag Shergill (Sikh)**

In a world, filled with differences: differences in language; differences in race; differences in lifestyle and in belief, we must surrender our prejudices in order to learn how to love one another.

Loving another, without regard to his or her traits is definitely a challenge. When you open up your heart to those who are different, those closest to you are usually the first to criticise your behaviour. In this new age, an age of diversity, we must learn to love one another to make progress both worldly and spiritual.

**Let us be people who live in Love. FOR THE SAKE OF PEACE!**

**Intention for Unity — Amelia Ghofrany & Kylie Payman (Baha’i)**

In a world where challenges of security; resources and the environment can only be solved if we all work together, the overriding need is for Unity.

The well-being of humanity, its peace and security are unattainable unless and until its unity is established. We will treat all people as members of one human family. We will see the gifts in differences and refuse to join in when others express prejudice. We will solve conflicts through listening and finding common ground. We will care for the earth and all living things.

**Let us be people who live Unity. FOR THE SAKE OF PEACE!**

**Intention for Forgiveness — Anish Philip (Mar Thoma Christian)**

In a world of struggles and turmoil we need to learn how to forgive those who have hurt us. There can be no peace without justice, and there can be no justice without forgiveness.

True forgiveness can heal and rebuild troubled human relationships from their foundations. Genuine forgiveness is never easy, yet as we receive forgiveness we are drawn to forgive those who have sinned against us and restore relationships that have been broken. The forgiven are empowered to forgive.

**Let us be people who live Forgiveness. FOR THE SAKE OF PEACE!**

**Intention for Reconciliation — Tristan Mungatopi (Catholic Aboriginal Ministry)**

In a world of division between nations and tribes we need to learn reconciliation. This year the Australian Prime Minister took a great step toward achieving reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians by apologising for an injustice done to Aboriginal Australians in the past.

In every nation we need to address past and current injustices confronting our relationship with Indigenous peoples. I invite you all to take action to improve the quality of life of indigenous peoples, to “Make Indigenous Poverty History” and to achieve social justice and peace in solidarity with your Indigenous brothers and sisters wherever you live.

**Let us be people who live Reconciliation. FOR THE SAKE OF PEACE!**
During the Days in the Diocese, in July this year, the ‘School of Prayer’ within the Archbishop’s Office for Evangelisation, conducted prayer sessions in St Augustine’s Bourke St. Over the three days many forms of prayer were conducted which were attended by large groups of pilgrims.

One of the events was called ‘From Sound to silence’, an interfaith prayer activity. Four people, from the Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and Aboriginal traditions, played music – cello, didgeridoo, sitar, chanting – from their traditions and then, in the echoing beauty of the music, participants entered into silent meditation.

Fr John Dupuche, the director of the School of Prayer, said: “It was very beautiful and very effective. If we cannot yet pray together we can nevertheless listen to each other and inter into silent communion with each other.”

Scenes from the jubilant Interfaith Youth Pilgrimage which attracted pilgrims representing many countries, cultures and religions from around the world.
Our World Youth Day

By Cathy Beaton and David Schütz

On a high from the Commissioning Mass at Telstra Dome on Friday 11th July (attended by 35 000), it was with some trepidation, along with a growing sense of anticipation, that we packed the car to the hilt and set off on our big adventure to Sydney for World Youth Day.

On arrival in Sydney Tuesday afternoon, we were delighted to meet our friendly and hospitable Homestay hosts, Sally and John, who put us up in great style in their Vaucluse home with spectacular views of Sydney Harbour. (Quite a contrast to other pilgrims we met who were sleeping on bitumen in a large shed at Olympic village or on the floor in parish halls). Much to Maddy & Mia’s delight they had a 10 year old daughter, Rachel, and a Burmese kitten, Toohey.

Our pilgrimage began in earnest on Wednesday morning, with catechesis by a visiting bishop followed by a mass in the local parish of Watson’s Bay (Bishop Anthony Fisher’s parish). It was absolutely wonderful to worship with pilgrims from South Africa, Wales, England, the US and Adelaide in such an intimate way and to experience such different and stirring music led by the South African Pilgrims. We then had a chance to talk together in a local Thai restaurant. Bliss!

Thursday afternoon we walked through the city, packed with thousands of other pilgrims, to Barangaroo (the old wharves near Darling Harbour) to see the Pope arrive. The atmosphere was electric with much singing and chanting. Maddy and Mia, keen to use their school-girl Italian, enthusiastically joined in the chants of “Benedetto” and “Viva il Papa!” And much to their delight we did see the Pope (although from a great distance)!

On Friday David went into the Stations of the Cross (while Cathy and the girls had rest day and went to the beach). He found a perch on a cliff above Barangaroo (with much better views than our allocated area of the day before) where he was able to see clearly the last five stations including the Crucifixion. He then went onto a HUGE and very impressive Vocations Expo, crowded with young people exploring the large number of opportunities on offer to serve in the life of the church.

Saturday Cathy and the girls took the ferry to the North Shore and walked across the Sydney Harbour Bridge with pilgrims stretched as far as the eye could see and flags and banners from all nations fluttering in the sunshine. Once again the atmosphere was contagious and the joy was palpable. Many were loaded down with sleeping bags and mats as they were waiting expectantly for the arrival of the Pope and the start of the WYD mass at 10am. The Popemobile did a lap of the race track before the Mass which enabled David, Maddy and Mia to get a glimpse of Benedict “up close”. Despite the highly professional orchestra and choirs, from where we were sitting (or lying back on our sleeping bags to listen to the Pope’s sermon) the Mass had the feel of a great big youth camp church service.

After it was all over, there was the long trek back home. We were caught in the crowds such that we couldn’t go forward or backward, and were funnelled out in a direction far away from where we were supposed to be, resulting in several hours of walking till we were able to catch a bus that would take us back to our Homestay. After a shower and change of clothes, we celebrated the end of the week by taking our hosts out to dinner of the week by taking our hosts out to dinner.

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We were glad to be a part of this experience. Both Mia and Maddy expressed how great it was to be with other Christians and “not feel like the only ones who go to church”. There was a strong sense of how great and vast is the people of God throughout the world, and an awareness of how powerful our witness can be when we cease to hide our lamp “under a bushel” and allow it to shine in the world. For us, it was probably our first and last World Youth Day, but Maddy and Mia are already counting the years until they will be old enough to attend their next one.
COMMISSION MEMBER FR FRANCO CAVARRA DIRECTS WYD STATIONS OF THE CROSS

There is almost universal agreement that the dramatic presentation of the Stations of the Cross (pictured above) in the streets of Sydney was a highlight of World Youth Day second only to the Vigil and Mass at Randwick Racecourse.

Nevertheless as soon as plans for this event were announced, expressions of concern came from the Jewish community. Was this going to be another episode of Mel Gibson’s “Passion of the Christ”?

They need not have worried, as the production was in the hands of none other than Melbourne priest Fr Franco Cavarra, a member of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission. Fr Franco's dedication to this project meant that he was largely absent from the Commission’s business in 2008 – yet his knowledge of interreligious sensibilities was almost as valuable as his expertise in dramatic production for this event.

Before the event, Bishop Anthony Fisher, director of WYD, said: “We’ve been in discussion with the Jewish community. We’re very conscious of the fear some people might have that enacting the Passion of Christ could incite anti-Semitic feelings and so we’ve had a long dialogue about how we can minimise any risk of that.

“We want to make it very clear to people that the Passion of Christ celebrated in the Stations of the Cross is not intended to be, is no excuse for being, an attack on anybody and certainly for nurturing any prejudices that people may have in their hearts.”

Rabbi Jeremy Lawrence, senior rabbi of the Great Synagogue, applauded the church’s attempts at positive dialogue between the two faiths, while Jewish Board of Deputies CEO Vic Alhadeff said that he was satisfied with the outcome and the “sensitive manner” in which the church had handled the re-enactment.

“We were especially moved by the reference in the commentary to the Church’s rejection of anti-Jewish teachings and by the recollection of the Good Friday prayer of the 1970 Roman Missal in the mention of ‘our Jewish brothers and sisters the first to hear the word of God’,” he said.

1. Maddy and Mia arrive at WYD
2. David and daughters with Director of the Russian Orthodox Youth Office from Moscow
4. Papal Mass at Randwick.
5. David with Commission Member Fr Denis Stanley at Vocations Exhibition.
Excerpts from addresses by Pope Benedict XVI at St Mary’s Cathedral

MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF OTHER RELIGIONS

Chapter Hall of St. Mary’s Cathedral, Sydney, Friday, 18 July 2008

Dear Friends,

I extend cordial greetings of peace and goodwill to all of you who are here representing various religious traditions in Australia. Grateful for this encounter, I thank Rabbi Jeremy Lawrence and Sheikh Mohamadu Saleem for the words of welcome which they expressed in their own name and on behalf of your respective communities.

…Motivated by charity, [the Church] approaches dialogue believing that the true source of freedom is found in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Christians believe it is he who fully discloses the human potential for virtue and goodness, and he who liberates us from sin and darkness. The universality of human experience, which transcends all geographical boundaries and cultural limitations, makes it possible for followers of religions to engage in dialogue so as to grapple with the mystery of life’s joys and sufferings.

In this regard, the Church eagerly seeks opportunities to listen to the spiritual experience of other religions. We could say that all religions aim to penetrate the profound meaning of human existence by linking it to an origin or principle outside itself. Religions offer an attempt to understand the cosmos as coming from and returning to this origin or principle. Christians believe that God has revealed this origin and principle in Jesus, whom the Bible refers to as the “Alpha and Omega” (cf. Rev 1:8; 22:1).

My dear friends, I have come to Australia as an ambassador of peace. For this reason, I feel blessed to meet you who likewise share this yearning and the desire to help the world attain it. …Our effort to bring about reconciliation between peoples springs from, and is directed to, that truth which gives purpose to life. Religion offers peace, but more importantly, it arouses within the human spirit a thirst for truth and a hunger for virtue. May we encourage everyone – especially the young – to marvel at the beauty of life, to seek its ultimate meaning, and to strive to realize its sublime potential!

ECUMENICAL MEETING

Crypt of St. Mary’s Cathedral in Sydney, Friday, 18 July 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I give heartfelt thanks to God for this opportunity to meet and pray with all of you who have come here representing various Christian communities in Australia. Grateful for [Anglican] Bishop Forsyth’s and Cardinal Pell’s words of welcome, I joyfully greet you in the name of the Lord Jesus, the “cornerstone” of the “household of God” (Eph 2:19-20).

I would like to offer a particular greeting to Cardinal Edward Cassidy, former President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, who, due to ill health, could not be with us today. I recall with gratitude his steadfast dedication to improving mutual understanding among all Christians, and I would ask all of you to join me in praying for his speedy recovery.

…Dear friends in Christ, I think you would agree that the ecumenical movement has reached a critical juncture. To move forward, we must continually ask God to renew our minds with the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 12:2), who speaks to us through the scriptures and guides us into all truth (cf. 2 Pet 1:20-21; Jn 16:13). We must guard against any temptation to view doctrine as divisive and hence an impediment to the
seemingly more pressing and immediate task of improving the world in which we live. In fact, the history of the Church demonstrates that praxis is not only inseparable from, but actually flows out of didache or teaching. The more closely we strive for a deeper understanding of the divine mysteries, the more eloquently our works of charity will speak of God’s bountiful goodness and love towards all.

For this reason, ecumenical dialogue advances not only through an exchange of ideas but by a sharing in mutually enriching gifts (cf. Ut Unum Sint, 28; 57). An “idea” aims at truth; a “gift” expresses love. Both are essential to dialogue. Opening ourselves to accept spiritual gifts from other Christians quickens our ability to perceive the light of truth which comes from the Holy Spirit. Saint Paul teaches that it is within the koinonia of the Church that we have access to and the means of safeguarding the truth of the Gospel, for the Church is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets” with Jesus himself as the cornerstone (Eph 2:20).

Dear friends, your presence fills me with the ardent hope that as we pursue together the path to full unity, we will have the courage to give common witness to Christ. ■

Among the many events that took place in Sydney during World Youth Day was the public interfaith forum on Friday 18 July organised by the Sydney Archdiocese’s Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Commission (Executive Officer Sr Giovanni Farquar) which took place at the Bayside Auditorium, Darling Harbour. (I estimate that about 1500 pilgrims were present for this event.)

The theme of the forum was “Australian’s all – Face to Face and Faith to Faith – Multifaith communities heading in the right direction?” The main guest was Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, former president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialog and current Papal Nuncio to Cairo. The chair of the forum was ABC radio personality John Cleary, and respondents included Ikebal Patel (Australian President of the Federation of Islamic Councils) and David Knoll (President of the Jewish Board of Deputies). Following the speeches, an open panel including a wider range of young people from various religious traditions carried on a conversation about interfaith relations and then answered questions from the floor.

Writing in the journal AD2000, WYD pilgrim Catherine Sheehan of Melbourne’s Thomas More Centre reported that “It was questioned whether inter-faith dialogue was worthwhile, as those who believe strongly in their own faith as the ultimate form of truth are unlikely to benefit from such gatherings. However, many asserted that the aim of inter-faith dialogue was not to convert others, or to compromise one’s own faith, but to work together on those areas that the different faiths hold in common, in order to achieve a better society.”

The Australian Jewish News reported that Jewish youth representative Judith Levitan (who participated as a member of the panel and had also met Pope Benedict that morning at the Chapter Hall at St Mary’s Cathedral) said she felt the event was a “positive experience”. “Discussions from the forum were so successful that the groups – including Jewish, Islamic, Buddhist, Catholic and Hindu leaders – are in talks about starting up a new interfaith project. In terms of getting a better understanding of other faiths, [the event] did its job,” she said. ■
Address by Bishop Christopher Prowse (Auxiliary Bishop of Melbourne and Member of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue) to Young Catholics gathering in St Patrick’s Cathedral to prepare to participate in the Interfaith Youth Pilgrimage on 13th July 2008

The focus of World Youth Day, Sydney is the role and place of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians. True dialogue between different religions of the world is surely one of the surprises of the Holy Spirit in our times. Who would have thought, even a few decades ago, that the great world religions of today would be trying earnestly to heal ancient rifts and cleanse millennia of suspicion. Even just a brief survey of history will make us see that, on the one hand, when world religions lived in co-operation and trust of each other, there was peace. When, on the other hand, there was ignorance and mistrust of each other, hostility and even war resulted.

This great movement we are witnessing today of religions trying to live in peace together is propelled by many reasons. Three come to mind immediately. They would include: first, enormous mass migrations of people of different religions on a global scale.

For example, Australia has witnessed enormous waves of immigrants. Indeed, apart from our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who have been here for over 50,000 years, Australia is an island continent of immigrants. There were the English, Irish and Scottish only two hundred years ago, the Italians and Greeks after the Second World War and the world-wide immigration to Australia, especially from Asia, over thirty years ago. More recently we are welcoming Africans here, especially from Sudan and people from the Middle East – the Lebanese and Iraqis and so on. Many of these wonderful people bring with them the religions of the world and look for a hospitality from Australia to enable them to practise their different faith freely.

Secondly, the information of other religions given to us from all types of communication, education and the media has a big effect on us all. A popular Television program in Australia at present is called “Salem Cafe”. It showcases Muslims in Australia and is conducted by Muslims. It is a fun show and uses Australian humour to help dispel stereotypes and ignorance. Websites on all religions are plentiful. Most educational facilities offer courses on comparative religions. Some do this well, for others it is well intended but naïve.

Thirdly, the terrible wars and acts of barbaric terrorism arising from a lack of peace and true understanding among religions and of religion are daily portrayed in the mass media. Horrific events in New York on 11 September 2001 are still well remembered by the world as a turning point. How could people be so destructive of the innocent and justify their actions by employing religious justifications. It still shocks the world. Pope Benedict XVI recently visited Ground Zero (20th April 2008) and prayed: “O God of love, compassion and healing, look on us, people of different faiths and traditions who gather today at this site, the scene of incredible violence and pain...give us the wisdom and courage to work tirelessly for a world where true peace and love reign among nations and in the hearts of all.”

In this new melting pot of religions, modern humanity is, as expressed recently by Cardinal Tauran, President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, “condemned to dialogue”. Namely without a new type of interreligious friendship between religions, we are destined to peacelessness. In true dialogue, we have a chance to create lasting world peace.

The Catholic Church in these times has been making a formidable contribution to peace between religions. For example, a watershed moment was the Vatican II (1962-1965) document “Nostra Aetate” (1965). Referring to the great world religions, it stated: “The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ ‘the way, the truth, and the life’ [John 14:6]. The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions…they recognise, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as socio-cultural values found among these men” (n.2).

Another landmark contribution was Pope John Paul II’s initiative in inviting religious leaders to Assisi on 27th October 1986 for the World Day of Prayer for Peace. In the year before, 1985, Pope John Paul II made an unprecedented visit to a conference of Muslim youth in Morocco. He said to the enthusiastic crowd of Muslim young people: “In a world which desires unity and peace, which however experiences a thousand tensions and conflicts, should not believers favour friendship between the men and the peoples who form one single community on earth? We know that they have one and the same origin and one and the same final end: the God who made them and who waits for them because he will gather them together.”

There have been many regional and local initiatives over the years as well throughout the world. Even here, in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, we have been demonstrating local leadership in this area for some years.

Of course, we have just begun this long pilgrimage of global and local interreligious dialogue. To promote such initiatives, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue was established.

In recent weeks I have had the privilege of attending the Plenary Assembly of the Council in Rome as a Member. The theme was: “Dialogue in Truth and Love – Pastoral Orientations”.

Not surprisingly, the variety of different types of interreligious dialogue taking place throughout the world is breathtaking. In some parts of the world, this task seems almost impossible and highly dangerous. For example,
Catholics in some largely Islamic countries have an impossible time trying to establish parishes and Churches. The basic human right of religious freedom and association is not respected. It is like Christianity in its first centuries of existence. It is an “underground” movement and a dangerous thing to be a practising Catholic. In other parts of the world, however, interreligious dialogue and respect is an endeavour that is blossoming and vital. There is much in between these extremes as well.

It is a difficult dialogue and is fraught with dangers and challenges. It requires the greatest prudence and love. The Catholic principles of evangelisation must guide the way for Catholics. At this recent Assembly in Rome, Pope Benedict XVI restated a most important principle of evangelisation which must guide us in such dialogue. He said: “It is love that urges every believer to listen to the other and seek areas of collaboration. It encourages Christian partners in dialogue with the followers of other religions to propose, but not impose, faith in Christ who is ‘the way, the truth and the life’.”

How true this is. We Catholics are never to IMPOSE on others our faith but we can never stop PROPOSING Jesus to the world. As so many youth experience at World Youth Days, we experience Jesus as the love of our lives. By our actions, more than by our words, we want to share this beautiful friendship with everyone. We want to be just like Mary and the Apostles on Pentecost morning and go out in joy and hope to the world with Jesus alive in our hearts. In this year of St Paul, the great evangelist to the nations, we want to shout out in love and hope his words when he said, “I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord Christ Jesus has captured me” (cf. Phil 3:8-12). But this proclamation we gladly make to the world is always PROPOSED it is never IMPOSED. To impose is not to love.

To propose Jesus as Lord and Saviour today requires careful thought and reflection on how this is to be done. On the one hand, if we enter into dialogue and refuse to proclaim the truth of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, then we tend towards the precipice of relativism and syncretism.

Relativism, for example, is dangerous for true dialogue because it assumes that different propositions of faith and practices of various religions are all equally true. It says, “Oh well, religions are all true in their own way. It depends on where you are coming from and your particular perspective spoken in sincerity”. But this is not the case. Pope Benedict XVI is careful to point out that our efforts must be an “expression to that desire for encounter and collaboration in truth and freedom” (7 June 2008). We must use our reason and not just our hearts in interreligious dialogue. It is to be a dialogue based on truth and charity.

Syncretism, as another example, is also a danger to true dialogue. This is the old “vegetable soup” approach. By that I mean, we just put together several religious beliefs and practices in the same melting pot and say, “Oh well, you know, religions are all really the same. We do not need to focus on differences, let just focus on common things we share together”. This approach is untruthful and therefore not helpful. The specific character and genius of different religions are obscured. No religion is helped by such a naive approach.

On the other hand, if we proclaim without dialogue, then we tend towards the quicksand of proselytism. Here we try to convert someone by imposing my religion on them. It offends freedom. It does not rely on the initiative of God’s grace inviting someone to believe. If Catholicism is imposed on someone, it is no longer true Catholicism. It becomes indoctrination.

To propose Jesus as Lord and Saviour today requires careful thought and reflection on how this is to be done. On the one hand, if we enter into dialogue and refuse to proclaim the truth of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, then we tend towards the precipice of relativism and syncretism.

Relativism, for example, is dangerous for true dialogue because it assumes that different propositions of faith and practices of various religions are all equally true. It says, “Oh well, religions are all true in their own way. It depends on where you are coming from and your particular perspective spoken in sincerity”. But this is not the case. Pope Benedict XVI is careful to point out that our efforts must be an “expression to that desire for encounter and collaboration in truth and freedom” (7 June 2008). We must use our reason and not just our hearts in interreligious dialogue. It is to be a dialogue based on truth and charity.

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The mature Catholic response is a true synthesis between dialogue and proclamation, found in perfection in Jesus Christ. When we examine the Gospels, especially the Gospel of John, we find so many wonderful examples of Jesus drawing people into belief at different levels. There is both a dialogue but a loving proclamation of the truth.

Even with Jesus such a dialogue takes time and is not easy.

For example, the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman comes to mind (John 4:1-42), where slowly the woman comes to belief that Jesus is the Living Water. Another example is the encounter of Jesus with Nicodemus (John 3:1-21) where the religious leader comes to Jesus by night and struggles with coming to the light of faith. And there is the cure of the man born blind (John 9:1-41), where the blind see and those who “see” become “blind”.

Finally, our entering into interreligious dialogue is new to many of us. I think young people today are well placed to enter into this new field of evangelisation. They see so open to learn from others. They ask so many questions. They have a passion for justice and peace making in the world. We must, however, progress carefully and together. True dialogue helps us to become even better Catholics and more understanding of our own faith. We must study the Catholic faith more and more. The Catechism of the Catholic Church helps to answer so many of our basic questions. There are so many popular books and CDs and DVDs about our faith now available.

We must have our answer and testimony ready to offer to others. As 1 Peter 3:15 states: “Always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have”. For example, if a young Muslim person asked you today: “Why do you Christians believe that Jesus is the Son of God?” could you give an answer? We all must get to know our own Catholic faith better as we dialogue with the religions of the world.

Therefore, our best response is to be good listeners to the Holy Spirit, to move slowly but prudently, and to follow the evolving teaching of the Catholic Church on these matters, as articulated especially by our teaching Pope, Benedict XVI, together with the bishops. Such a pastoral stance could be seen as a privileged way of “winning the peace” in our troubled world today.
ECUMENICAL GUESTS JOIN ARCHBISHOP HART IN HOUR OF PRAYER FOR THE DEFEAT OF THE ABORTION LAW REFORM BILL

By David Schütz

On October 5th 2008, some 2500 people – Catholics mostly, but many others (I was in a pew entirely filled with Lutherans) – gathered together with Archbishop Hart, the auxiliary bishops of Melbourne, and Christian ministers of other denominations (see photos below) to lift their voices in prayer for the defeat of the Abortion Law Reform Bill.

Archbishop Hart’s homily reiterated his clear statements in his pastoral letter in which he called Catholics and indeed all Christian people and people of goodwill to give witness to the demands of justice and human dignity and to pray that this bill be defeated.

“We are here as brothers and sisters,” Archbishop Hart told the congregation of over 2,500, “because we value the great gift of life...we testify to the unique value of each human without distinction from conception to natural death.”

The Prayer service was in no way intended to be a political protest rally. Our voices were directed toward God and not toward the State. This was emphasised by the choice of the Gospel for the occasion, from John 14, in which Jesus promised us “another Advocate”, the Holy Spirit.

The event had a powerful effect on all who attended. It was a quiet and hopeful gathering of Christians from many different communities praying with one voice to their One Father.

ROME WELCOMES NEW DIRECTOR FOR ANGLICAN CENTRE: MELBOURNE ANGLICAN DAVID RICHARDSON

Source: ACNS, Rome

The Very Revd David Richardson, former Dean of Melbourne, was installed and blessed as the new Director of the Anglican Centre in Rome (ACR) on 7 May 2008. He also will serve as the Archbishop of Canterbury’s personal representative to the Holy See (The Vatican and the Pope).

Cardinal Walter Kaspar, head of the Pontifical Council for Church Unity, participated in the liturgy and gave a warm welcome to the new director. He was accompanied by the Revd Canon Monsignor Donald Bolen. Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams gave the homily and the lesson was read by Mrs Fung Yi Wong, a member of the ACR Board representing the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC).

In his charge to Father Richardson, Archbishop Williams said, “to serve the cause of Christian unity is to serve the mission and ministry of the whole church. It is a privilege and a joy, and in our unhappy divisions it is an urgent responsibility.”

ARCHBISHOP FRANK LITTLE’S FUNERAL

Emeritus Archbishop of Melbourne, Frank Little, was laid to rest in the Crypt of the St Patrick’s Cathedral on Tuesday April 15, 2008. The mass was celebrated by Archbishop Denis Hart, and concelebrated by Cardinal Pell, Cardinal Clancy, the Papal Nuncio, and many other bishops and priests from around Australia.

The Cathedral was filled with those who came to pay their last respects and pray for the soul of the Archbishop. The service was also attended by guests from the Anglican Church (including Archbishop Philip Freier), the Jewish community and the Council of Christians and Jews, the Muslim community (Australian Intercultural society), and the Hindu community.
Synod on the Word

RABBI SHEAR YASHUV COHEN’S ADDRESS TO THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

(Excerpts, October 6, 2008)

Holy Father, Dear Cardinals and Bishops, Members of the Synod of Bishops, Dear Friends!

It is indeed a privilege and a rare honor to be invited to this Assembly as a special guest, representing the Jewish Faith and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel. I believe this is the first time a Jewish Rabbi is invited to address a plenary session of the Synod of Bishops. We certainly very much appreciate what this gesture implies: There is a long, hard and painful history of the relationship between our people, our faith, and the Catholic Church leadership and followers – a history of blood and tears. I deeply feel that my standing here before you is very meaningful. It brings with it a signal of hope and a message of love, co-existence, and peace for our generation, and for generations to come.

Indeed, this continues the approach, initiated by the late Pope John XXIII that reached a climax in the life and work of the late Pope John Paul the II – during his historic visit to the Holy Land. We see in your invitation to me, to lecture here today, a declaration that you intend to continue this policy and doctrine that refers to us as “Our Older Brothers” and “G-d’s Chosen People,” with whom He entered into an everlasting covenant. We deeply appreciate this declaration.

May I add that, personally, my friends, leaders and members of the Catholic community of Saint Edigio introduced me to this new Ecumenical spirit? I have had the privilege of participating regularly in their International Meetings inspired by the spirit of the famous prayer of Asissi. Also, for the past several years, I serve as the co-chairman of the Bilateral Commission of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and the Holy See that is doing wonderful work.

I thank G-d that has kept us alive to be together and work for a future of peace and co-existence, the world over, Amen.

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW I ADDRESSES THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

(Excerpts from address given in the Sistine Chapel, October 18, 2008)

Your Holiness, Synodal Fathers, it is at once humbling and inspiring to be graciously invited by Your Holiness to address the XII Ordinary General Assembly of this auspicious Synod of Bishops, an historical meeting of Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church from throughout the world, gathered in one place to meditate on “the Word of God” and deliberate on the experience and expression of this Word “in the Life and Mission of the Church.”

This gracious invitation of Your Holiness to our Modesty is a gesture full of meaning and significance – we dare say an historic event in itself. For it is the first time in history that an Ecumenical Patriarch is offered the opportunity to address a Synod of the Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church, and thus be part of the life of this sister Church at such a high level. We regard this as a manifestation of the work of the Holy Spirit leading our Churches to a closer and deeper relationship with each other, an important step towards the restoration of our full communion.

It is well known that the Orthodox Church attaches to the Synodical system fundamental ecclesiological importance. Together with primacy synodality constitutes the backbone of the Church’s government and organisation. As our Joint International Commission on the Theological Dialogue between our Churches expressed it in the Ravenna document, this interdependence between synodality and primacy runs through all the levels of the Church’s life: local, regional and universal. Therefore, in having today the privilege to address Your Synod our hopes are raised that the day will come when our two Churches will fully converge on the role of primacy and synodality in the Church’s life, to which our common Theological Commission is devoting its study at the present time.

The theme to which this episcopal synod devotes its work is of crucial significance not only for the Roman Catholic Church but also for all those who are called to witness to Christ in our time. Mission and evangelization remain a permanent duty of the Church at all times and places, indeed they form part of the Church’s nature, since she is called “Apostolic” both in the sense of her faithfulness to the original teaching of the Apostles and in that of proclaiming the Word of God in every cultural context every time. The Church needs, therefore, to rediscover the Word of God in every generation and make it head with a renewed vigour and persuasion also in our contemporary world, which deep in its heart thirsts for God’s message of peace, hope and charity.
The Imam and the Pastor

Sr Heather Weedon, YTU News

The other day I had the wonderful opportunity to hear two extraordinary Nigerians share their story. They were originally mortal enemies of each other, and spoke of how they came to be the best of friends: Muhammad Ashafa, and Pastor James Wuye.

In the 1990s these two men led opposing armed groups in Northern Nigeria – Christian versus Muslim. Hundreds of thousands had been killed and families broken up, many more destroyed, and hatred and fear reigned in the villages. One day, James, who used to frequent the Christian church “to wink at the young girls,” stayed longer than usual, and started listening to the sermon. He felt as though the sermon was specifically addressed to him. He even at one stage hid under the seat because he thought the preacher was pointing to him. This experience changed his life. He realized God was speaking to him, and he turned his life around. After months of struggle trying to forgive his ‘enemies’, he accepted God’s guidance in his life.

Ashafa had a similar experience. One day during a sermon in a mosque, the Imam was speaking about the Prophet Muhammad’s total forgiveness of the people who had stoned him, leaving him badly injured and bloodied. The Imam continued: “we therefore must forgive those who are fighting against us.” Ashafa felt that this sermon was directed to him, and he realized he had to forgive the Christians. He started visiting Christians who had suffered, offering assistance, and even visited James’ mother who was ill. James was very suspicious at first, thinking that the Muslims were just looking for him to kill him.

Eventually James came to realize that Ashafa was genuinely seeking peace and reconciliation, and they began to work together. They prayed together at the mass graves, together visited families from both faiths. You can imagine the confusion this would have caused in their community! They had a lot of explaining to do. Together they began a centre for interfaith dialogue, the Muslim-Christian Interfaith Mediation Centre. They also travel to various towns and countries sharing their story and showing the real possibility of true dialogue between religions and ethnic groups. They also speak on conflict resolution and development at world gatherings. Now a DVD has been made of these two men’s experiences and their work, and it is well worth viewing, or even buying for parish groups, schools, etc. It is only 40 minutes long, and shows some of the results of their efforts. There have been gatherings for apologies, reconciliation, and then celebrations.

Their lives are a witness to the great love of God – a power for love and peace, for the ability to live together fruitfully. They have been working together now for ten years, spreading their message: “we need peace to worship; let us embrace it.”

DVD available from Grosvenor Books, 226 Kooyong Road, Toorak 3142; Tel 9822 1218; email: grosvenorbooks@optusnet.com.au

“TAKE OFF YOUR SHOES: GOD AND THE JUST LIFE”

This was the theme of the 2008 JCMA (Jewish Christian Muslim Association of Australia) Conference, held from 26-29 May at Pallotti College, Millgrove.

The conference explored the holiness of God in the three Abrahamic traditions:
- what it means for us a believers,
- how it affects and changes lives,
- as individuals and faith communities, and
- how we live out our encounter with the Holy God in a secular world.

This year’s conference presented less material and gave more time to process and reflect on presentations. Each morning began with a Spiritual Reflection presented by a member of each faith tradition, which gave participants an opportunity to present and discuss topics from their own interest and expertise.

In 2008, JCMA also held the second annual Women’s JCMA Conference at the end of January, and two public forums on “Paths to Peace: the Theory and the Practice”.

The 2009 Conference will be held again at Millgrove from 6th to 9th July. For more details and registration of interest contact David at the Commission Office.
COMMEMORATION OF THE NOBLE BIRTH OF THE PROPHET

The coincidence of major events in the Muslim and Catholic calendars made the joint event at the Cardinal Knox Centre on Saturday 15 March a memorable and significant event.

For the first time, Catholics hosted Muslims to commemorate the Noble Birth of their Prophet Mohammed (pbuh). The evening coincided with the beginning of Holy Week for the Catholics.

The theme for the evening was “The Servanthood and Submission of Jesus and the Prophet”. The program was in two parts, each part containing a reading from the sacred text, a presentation on the theme, and some music and singing from that religious tradition.

The speaker for the Muslims was Professor Ismail Albayrak, the new Fethullah Gulen Chair in the Study of Islam and Muslim-Catholic Relations from the Asia-Pacific Centre for Inter-religious Dialogue at Australian Catholic University. The speaker for the Catholics was David Schütz, the Executive Officer of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission.

More than a hundred people attended the event, at the end of which commitments were made regarding the ways in which we would serve God and one another in the future.

VII INTERNATIONAL ABRAHAM CONFERENCE

Theme: AFTER SORROW: Reconciliation, Responsibility and the Abrahamic Tradition

Sunday 19 October 2008

About 100 people from the Christian, Jewish, Muslim and other religious communities of Melbourne attended the seventh Abraham Conference at the Australian Catholic University’s Central Hall in Fitzroy on Sunday 19th October, 2008. This event was co-sponsored by The Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission, the Australian Intercultural Society, The Australian Catholic University, Monash University, The Selimiye Foundation, The Anti-Defamation Commission, and B’nai B’rith Victoria.

The keynote speaker was well known Australian interfaith activist, Mr Pat Dodson, currently chairperson of the Kimberly Development Commission and of the Lingiari Foundation. Earlier this year, the Australian Government declared an apology to the “stolen generation” of Aboriginal Australians on behalf of Australia. Pat’s paper acknowledged how much still needs to be done even after this landmark event. His paper highlighted the significant connections between the issue of reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples of our nation and the reconciliation which the interfaith movement is seeking to encourage between the Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

As Pat is a member of the Catholic community, the two respondents spoke from the perspectives of the Jewish and Muslim communities. They were Dr Mark Leibler AC, the Co-Chair of Reconciliation Australia, and Mrs Zuleyha Keskin, Vice-President and Team Executive Manager of Affinity Intercultural Foundation in Sydney.

The entire event was chaired by Professor Raymond Canning of the Australian Catholic University.

CATHOLIC MUSLIM YOUTH FRIENDSHIP NIGHT

It might not be the snappiest name for an event, but that’s what is was: a night for Catholic and Muslim youth to come together in friendship.

On 9th March 2008, 16 Catholic young people from around Melbourne and 16 members of the Turkish Muslim Youth Group “Selimye Youth”, gathered at the Cardinal Knox Centre over a meal of delicious Turkish food.

The theme for the evening was “Living my Faith in Contemporary Society”—something that both Catholics and Muslims could identify with.

The event took place as part of a special Memorandum of Understanding that the Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission of the Archdiocese has with the parent body of the Selimye Youth, the Australian Intercultural Society.

It was an exciting first step in bringing the dialogue to a new generation.
we continue to practice and profess our own religious beliefs.

A friend of mine told me that the indelible image left upon his imagination by World Youth Day was the sight of young American pilgrims emerging to catch public transport in Sydney with the ubiquitous red and yellow backpacks on their shoulders, once he noticed that they were coming from a Muslim school where they had been billeted. This hospitality is an indication of the possibilities that are real in Australia and not so real in some other countries, for Catholics and Muslims, or Christians and Muslims, to collaborate and to support each other.

In his address to the representatives of other World Religions at World Youth Day in the Chapter Hall of St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, on Friday, July 18, Pope Benedict XVI, having thanked Rabbi Jeremy Lawrence and Sheikh Mohamadu Saleem for their words of welcome and their own addresses, said as follows:

"Australia is renowned for the congeniality of its people towards neighbour and visitor alike. It is a nation that holds freedom of religion in high regard. Your country recognises that a respect for this fundamental right gives men and women the latitude to worship God according to their conscience, to nurture their spirits, and to act upon the ethical convictions that stem from their beliefs.

"A harmonious relationship between religion and public life is all the more important at a time when some people have come to consider religion as a cause of division rather than a force for unity."

With this last point he might well have been speaking about people such as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens and many other secularists and atheists who see religion as the cause of all the world's problems, rather than the great force to heal divisions and pain in the world, and a cause of a better and more peaceful future for all of us.

As, for example, Pope Benedict himself went on to say:

"In a world threatened by sinister and indiscriminate forms of violence, the unified voice of religious people urges nations and communities to resolve conflicts through peaceful means and with full regard for human dignity."

It is a truism now in inter-religious relations that there can be no peace in the world unless there is peace between the World Religions. Unless we religious people have harmonious relationships, and I would argue unless we have real friendship between us and not just tolerance and respect, other forces, political and economic, will be able to use us to further their own causes which bring division and pain to our world.

At the end of June I was speaking at a conference organised by the Australian Catholic Embassy in Manila entitled "The Role of Youth in Peace Building". I was accompanying Dr Jamal Rifi from the Lakemba Sports and Recreation Club and indeed from the Lakemba Mosque. We were joined by a young Catholic woman from Parramatta, Chantelle Ogilvie, who had been a participant in the first "Young Women's Inter-Religious Fellowship" sponsored by the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference.

The major focus for our discussion was the tension and even conflict in Mindanao. We listened enthralled as young people talked about the workshops they had participated in, which had empowered them to become peacemakers in their own villages and communities. We heard how Catholic, Protestant and Muslim leaders meet regularly in Mindanao to deal with any places of tension and any issues that arise so that they can work together to prevent violence and to bring about understanding.

This is a very good example of the role of religious people who, precisely because of their beliefs, can contribute to overcoming tensions and divisions in our world, and furthering harmony and peace among all peoples. It is interesting that the Australian Government chose to invite Dr Rifi and myself, and also a young Catholic woman from Australia to speak at this Filipino gathering in the Australian Embassy. Presumably, they saw us as being able to showcase good relations for the Filipino participants.

Pope Benedict went on in his address in Sydney to say:

"One of the many ways religion stands at the service of mankind is by offering a vision of the person that highlights our innate aspiration to live generously, forging bonds of friendship with our neighbours. At their core, human relationships cannot be defined in terms of power, domination and self-interest. Rather, they reflect and perfect man's natural inclination to live in communion and accord with others."
opportunities to listen to the spiritual. In this regard, the Church eagerly seeks with the mystery of life’s joy and suffering. 

Later in his address Pope Benedict spoke of religion reminding us of human finitude and weakness, and therefore enjoining us not to place our ultimate hope in this world. He went on to say: “The universality of human experience, which transcends all geographical boundaries and cultural limitations, makes it possible for followers of religion to engage in dialogue, so as to grapple with the mystery of life’s joy and suffering. In this regard, the Church eagerly seeks opportunities to listen to the spiritual experience of other religions. We could say that all religions aim to penetrate the profound meaning of human existence by linking it to an origin or principle outside itself. Religions offer an attempt to understand the cosmos as coming from and returning to this origin or principle.”

While pointing out that Christians find this origin and principle in Jesus Christ, they and all religions find their origin and principle in God. So it is that he could say that the Church “eagerly seeks opportunities to listen to the spiritual experience of other religions.” From these words of Pope Benedict it is clear that the challenge confronting us is not just to know about each other, and not only as I have argued to become friends. It is not enough to engage in a dialogue that allows us eventually to share a common understanding of the world around us, and a common commitment to alleviating social distress and spreading a culture of justice and peace, and to defending the dignity of the human being and human sexuality and of human life itself. Our dialogue should enable us to share an account of our religious or spiritual life with each other. By this we can learn from and be inspired by the faithfulness of each other in response to the God who is our creator and who calls us to a committed way of life.

One of the possible contributions to such a dialogue would be the recent international document “A Common Word Between Us and You: An Open Letter and Call from Muslim Religious Leaders” which has been published in English and Arabic in Australia by the Columbian Mission Institute in Strathfield. One of my hopes is that we might eventually be able as Catholics, and perhaps with other Christians, to enter into a dialogue with representatives of the various Muslim communities in Australia about this document.

Already in Australia many things are happening that bring our two communities together in order to understand each other, to grow in friendship and to engage in dialogue. One very good illustration is the Joint Catholic-Muslim Pilgrimage to Istanbul and Rome in April next year that is being sponsored both by your own Turkish Muslim community and the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne. It will make possible an encounter with Islam and the Muslim community in Turkey, and also an experience of the international Catholic community in Rome. The pilgrimage is being led on the Catholic side by Bishop Christopher Prowse.

Much of the contact between Muslims and Catholics occurs on a local level. Even in Townsville, I always attend the celebrations to mark the end of Ramadan if I am in town. The Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference has begun an exchange of visits with leaders of the Muslim community in Sydney. We welcomed some sheikhs to lunch at the Bishops’ Conference two years ago and then last year a group of bishops went to the Shia Centre in Sydney with Sheikh Mouslemani as our host, and only two weeks ago, that same group of bishops went to the Lakemba mosque where we were welcomed by Sheikh al-Hilaly and others.

The efforts made in Melbourne by the Australian Intercultural Society to enter into a multi-faceted relationship with the Catholic community and the funding of the Fethullah Gülen Chair at Australian Catholic University are setting a standard for the rest of the country to imitate.

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, President of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, said in May this year when speaking about dialogue between Muslims and Catholics: “Believers are prophets of hope. They do not believe in fate. They know that -- gifted by God with a heart and intelligence -- they can, with his help, change the course of history in order to orientate their lives according to the project of the creator: that is to say, make of humanity an authentic family of which each one of us is a member.”

If I can return to the point with which I began this brief address, we have something very special to offer, something crucial, fundamental and vital to offer our society, which arises precisely because we are believers in God. But we cannot offer our particular gifts such as our commitment to peace and justice and indeed love in our world unless we model such ideals by our own relationships. We must come to know each other, we must come to be friends, and at least some must engage in a dialogue about our world and the tasks that confront us, the social issues that have to be dealt with, and eventually our own understanding of what God is asking, and what it means to be a believer in God in a secular culture like our own.
ACU National Appoints Two New Professors of Inter-Religious Dialogue

ACU Press Release, 3 March 2008

Australian Catholic University (ACU National) has appointed Rabbi John Levi AM and Dr Daniel Madigan SJ as Adjunct Professors to the Asia-Pacific Centre for Inter-religious Dialogue (APCID) based at the University’s Melbourne Campus (St. Patrick’s).

“We are proud to welcome Rabbi Levi and Dr Madigan to ACU National,” said Pro-Vice-Chancellor Professor Gabrielle McMullen. “Rabbi Levi’s background in history and community leadership and Dr Madigan’s expertise in inter-religious dialogue will allow ACU National to develop further co-operative inter-faith projects and stimulate continuing research.”

Rabbi Levi has a distinguished academic record in both rabbinic and secular scholarship. His passion for inter-religious relations led him to help found the Victorian Council of Christians and Jews, and later, the Australian Council of Christians and Jews, of which he is a Patron.

Rabbi Levi is delighted with his new appointment and sees his work with ACU National as an opportunity to “build even stronger bonds between the University and the Australian Jewish community”. Rabbi Levi’s immediate links will be with the Melbourne Campus (St. Patrick’s).

Dr Madigan was founding director of the Institute for the Study of Religions and Cultures at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, where he taught Islamic Studies and inter-religious dialogue.

A widely published specialist on the Qur’an, Dr Madigan advises the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue on religious relations with Muslims. From his base at Georgetown University, Washington D.C., Dr Madigan will liaise with ACU National’s Asia-Pacific Centre for Inter-religious Dialogue (APCID) in Melbourne.

National Council of Churches in Australia Passes Resolutions on the Holy Land

Media release from the NCCA, 11 March 2008

At a national meeting last week, the National Council of Churches in Australia passed a series of resolutions on the situation in the Holy Land. It is the first time the Council has taken such a stand. It follows a visit to the region last year by a delegation of Church leaders, as well as international ecumenical developments, such as the new Palestine-Israel Ecumenical Forum. By passing these resolutions the Council wants to take a Christian perspective on a land and its peoples who have endured longstanding and intense suffering – on both sides.

During their 2007 visit the Australian Church leaders spent time with Christian leaders from Jerusalem and the West Bank who are experiencing a mass exodus from their communities. “People are exhausted by the intimidation and daily restrictions on their personal and commercial activities. Christians are emigrating in larger numbers, not because of religious persecution, but because life has become intolerable as they are caught between harsh Israeli policies on the one hand and those who engage in terrorist acts on the other,” said the Revd John Henderson, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches, and a participant in the visit. “People have had their fill of violence and threats, and they see no future for themselves or their children, so they leave. If this trend continues, within a decade or two these communities, which have been there for millennia, will have been driven out of the region.”

“As Christians in Australia, who live comfortable lives some distance away, we are not trying to propose armchair solutions,” said Mr Henderson. “Collectively, however, the Churches feel that they must respond to the call of their fellow believers who have worshipped in that area since the time of Christ. They asked us not to be silent, but to speak out when we arrived home. That is what we are now doing. We are not choosing ‘sides’ between Israel or the Palestinians, because there is right and wrong on both sides, just as there is in every human situation, especially in such a polarised place as the holy land. Above all we want to pray and work for a just and lasting peace for everyone, so that this holy place be blessed for the rest of the world, showing us how people can live together in the way God intended. While the conflict is very complex with many layers, and there is no simple solution, there is hope, and it is important that the international community supports the current peace efforts as much as it can,” said Mr Henderson.

Bishop Christopher Prowse Attends First Meeting as Member of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue

Our own Melbourne auxiliary Bishop Chris Prowse attended his first meeting as a newly appointed member of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) in the Holy See on June 7-9, 2008.

He was not the only newcomer to the meeting. This was also the first meeting for the President of the Council himself, French Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran.

The PCID is currently developing new guidelines for the clergy and people of the Church on relating to other religions.

At the end of the three-day meeting, Benedict XVI met with and addressed the participants. He was keen for the guidelines to be completed because of what he called “the great proliferation of interreligious meetings in today’s world” which, he said, “requires discernment.”

At the beginning of the meeting, in his address to the Council, Cardinal Tauran said:

“We know that the Holy Spirit works in every man and every woman, independently of his religious or spiritual creed. But on the other hand, we must proclaim that Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. God has revealed to us the truth about God and the truth about man, and for us this is the Good News. We cannot hide this truth under a bushel basket.”

While at the meeting, Bishop Prowse presented a report on the great variety of interreligious encounters and projects which the Australian Church has initiated and involved herself in.
what is the JaNsseN CeNtre?

Well, for a start, the full name (at the moment) is “The Janssen Spirituality Centre for Inter Religious and Cross Cultural Relations”. You will find it at 22 Woodvale Road, Boronia, behind St Joseph’s Church. Via the new freeway, it is about 40 minutes from the City of Melbourne.

The property was originally the home of the Contemplative Sisters of the Good Shepherd – so there is a “good spirit” there! Today the property is owned by the Divine Word Fathers, which brings to it a dimension of cross-cultural mission.

Since the beginning of 2008 it has been set aside as a place of recollection and silence, an environment for taking time out for spiritual relaxation and reflection.

It is also a good place to meet with friends and to reach out to neighbours. The Centre is well equipped for ecumenical and interfaith meetings, retreats, workshops and seminars. There are eighteen comfortable bedrooms plus a hermitage, for participants wishing to stay overnight. Private Quiet Days are available when residential programs are not being held.

The Director of the Centre is Fr Frank Gerry SVD. Contact details are as follows: Phone 03 9762 6625 or email: manager@janssencentre.com. Check out the programmes on the website at: www.janssencentre.com

Open Day At the Janssen Centre

By Sr Mary La Bruna sjbp

On Sunday 3rd August 2008, we had the pleasure of attending the Opening of the Janssen Spirituality Centre for Inter Religious and Cross-cultural Relations in Boronia (Melbourne). The Centre is dedicated to mutual understanding and enrichment, respect and collaboration, between the followers of various cultures and faith traditions.

Special guests at the Opening were representatives from various faith traditions. Everyone present had the opportunity of taking part in a presentation/prayer, led by the special guests, to help them gain new insights into the particular faith-tradition of their choice. Sessions that people could choose from were:

- Introduction to Buddhist Meditation;
- “God is great ‘As if’: A Radical Reading of the Revelation at Mt. Sinai”
- Brni Nivedita Yoga (Hindu) Meditation;
- Taize Prayer;
- Introduction to Islamic Zikhr (Remembrance of God) and
- TRIKA-Experience of living in an interfaith household.

The afternoon included cultural presentations with Filipino and Vietnamese dancing and Tongan singing of local songs. It was a wonderful opportunity to catch up with old friends and meet new people.

WHAT IS THE JANSSEN CENTRE?

Well, for a start, the full name (at the moment) is “The Janssen Spirituality Centre for Inter Religious and Cross Cultural Relations”. You will find it at 22 Woodvale Road, Boronia, behind St Joseph’s Church. Via the new freeway, it is about 40 minutes from the City of Melbourne.

The property was originally the home of the Contemplative Sisters of the Good Shepherd – so there is a “good spirit” there! Today the property is owned by the Divine Word Fathers, which brings to it a dimension of cross-cultural mission.

Since the beginning of 2008 it has been set aside as a place
Travels in Israel

Martin Chatfield is a member of the Commission’s Catholic Interfaith Committee and the Sub-Committee for Relations with Jews. This is his account of his journey to Israel (via Bangkok) this year.

During a visit to family in Israel from April to June, my wife Agnes, our friend Ellen and I passed through Bangkok on Songkram, the Thai Buddhist New Year.

We joined the throngs of locals to visit the shrine of the Emerald Buddha in the grounds of the Grand Palace established in 1782 CE. The Statue of the Jade Buddha was discovered in 1434 CE. As photos are not allowed to be taken in the shrine the photo shows putting ones shoes on after visiting the Shrine.

We arrived in Israel to stay with our daughter and her family just prior to Pesach (Passover) as due to it being a Jewish leap year it was a month later than Easter.

During Pesach week we joined the Jewish pilgrims in visiting the Western Wall (HaKotel) for prayer and celebration of the 40th year of Israel’s establishment in 1948. For us Christians we were following in Our Lord’s footsteps as he visited the temple for Passover.

We had the good fortune to get an invitation to the unveiling of the Australian Light Horse Memorial on 28th April at Be’er-Sheeva. The Governor General of Australia, Major General Jeffrey, and the President of Israel, Shimon Perez, unveiled the Memorial, after which Rabbi Apple of Sydney and Chaplain Langron blessed the Memorial.

Another poignant day was Yom haShoah when we went to our grandsons’ primary school to commemorate the deaths of 6 million Jews between 1933 and 1945 praying “Never Again”.

We had some time with Sr Mary Reaburn NDS in the Notre Dame sisters’ convent of Ecce Homo on the Via Dolorosa. We had previously met a few days earlier when President Bush passed by the café we were sitting in, but he didn’t stop to say hello.

There is much else to tell, but for now Shalom and Salaam.

1. Shrine of the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok.
2. Pesach in Jerusalem.
3. Refuse collection blocking the path of pilgrims leaving the Kotel area to return to the Jaffa Gate.
4 & 5. The unveiling of the Australian Light Horse Memorial on 28th April at Be’er-Sheeva.
6. A Shoah Survivor and grandchildren commemorating Yom haShoah.
7. Sr Mary Reaburn catches up with Martin Chatfield in Jerusalem.
**LETTER FROM JERUSALEM**

Sr Mary Reaburn NDS writes from Ecce Homo Convent, Via Dolorosa, Jerusalem on Holy Saturday

_Sr Mary teaches biblical theology at Yarra Theological Union. She is a member of the Commission and the Catholic Interfaith Committee. Along with Monsignor Peter Kenny, she is also a member of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Advisory Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations._

Dear Friends,

It has been a joy to hold you all, at different times, in my heart here in Jerusalem. This city is amazing. It is noisy, filled with people, cramped, dry, dusty, and so very beautiful. It is filled with the pain of separation and division. The Old City has four quarters and yet it is not much more than a square mile. The quarters are not physically divided but they do have a different feel to each one. Our large house is in the Moslem quarter. There are always soldiers and police around as security is a major concern for the authorities and yet I feel safe here and find the soldiers more of a nuisance than a protection. Not far from us, just up on the top of the Mt of Olives, is the wall that divides the West Bank and Israel. This wall is about thirty feet high (10 metres) and is made of huge concrete slabs. In many places it has graffiti and when we prayed near it two weeks ago I saw where someone had written GOD on the wall and someone else had added IS LOVE and a third person had added IF YOU LOVE SOMEONE YOU CARE FOR THEM. Thus the wall is a place of theological ‘conversation’. The painful reality makes people reflect on the meaning of life and of God in our lives.

Yesterday, I sat in the Lophostotos, (an area of Roman pavement from Jesus’ time where we remember Jesus before Pilate) which is under our house of Ecce Homo. I saw Issa (his name is the Arabic equivalent of Jesus) bring down the large wooden cross which is placed on the Lophostotos for the Good Friday ceremonies we celebrate in the Ecce Homo. His nephew Humad (short for Mohammad) was with him. They dusted the cross and put it in place. They placed the small candles around it and then lit them so they were burning when the people began to arrive for silent prayer before the ceremonies. The image of this Moslem man helping us prepare for the celebration of Jesus’ suffering and death is forever engraved in my mind. I knew that Moslems limit the death of Jesus on the cross an unacceptable teaching. They believe that Jesus was replaced by someone else, as a great prophet could not be subjected to such a death. Yet here was this wonderfully wise and gentle man helping us prepare for the celebration of Jesus’ death. We are surrounded by pain and division and mistrust and yet in the midst of this is Issa ... and other Jesuises.

On the 20-21 March we had three feasts being celebrated here. Mohammad’s birthday, Purim (the story of Queen Esther saving the Jewish people in Persian times from Haman) and Holy Thursday. On the night of Holy Thursday we walked from Ecce homo to the Peace Garden on the Mt of Olives and then down across the Kidron valley to the church of Peter in Gallicantu (cock crowing) where Peter’s denials are remembered. It was a beautiful evening and there were thousands of people around: Moslems finishing the celebration of the Prophet’s birthday, Jews celebrating Purim and the Latin Christians celebrating Holy Thursday. This city certainly is the place of Interfaith encounters: both formal and informal encounters are possible and even part of everyday life. It is also a city where Latin and eastern Christians meet each other and get to know each other. The Holy Sepulchre is a microcosm of ecumenical relations. The sensitivity needed to balance the differing celebrations and spaces within that church is at times repugnant because of the strife and bitterness involved and at times truly an expression of Jesus’ desire for us all to be one. One learns here to live with the contradictions, with reality and with hope.

I assure each one that I will pray for you here in this city where Jesus lived his last days. Where he celebrated with his friends, where he became completely vulnerable to God’s love and accepted suffering and death ... and new life.

May your Easter be blessed! May you spare a prayer for the peace of Jerusalem!

With love, Mary Reaburn nds

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**‘DIALOGUE INTER-MONASTIQUE – MONASTIC INTERRELIgIOUS DIALOGUE’**

_Fr John Dupuche (pictured right), a member of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission of the Archdiocese of Melbourne and Chair of the Catholic Interfaith Committee, has been appointed a member of the Board of Directors of the ‘Dialogue Inter-monastique – Monastic Interreligious Dialogue’ (DIM-MID). The ‘Dialogue Inter-monastique – Monastic Interreligious Dialogue’ (DIM-MID) was set up by Paul VI under the aegis of the Abbot Primate of the Benedictines. The purpose of DIM-MID is to promote the dialogue of experience, especially between monks and nuns of various religious traditions. DIM-MID has flourished over the years and significantly developed the dialogue of religious experience._

For various practical reasons, DIM-MID has been incorporated in the USA. This step required the establishment of a board of directors consisting of the coordinators of the continental commissions (at present: Europe, North America, India/Sri Lanka, and Australia) and several at-large members. Fr Dupuche’s appointment follows naturally from his service as Coordinator for DIM-MID in Australia.

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**VISITORS TO THE COMMISSION**

As in years past, this year Commission members met with a number of groups who visited us at the Archdiocesan offices and the Cathedral. In 2008 these included students from the Tabor Bible College, participants in the Australia-Indonesia Muslim Leaders Exchange, and Sikh visitors from India.

The Indonesians consisted of two separate groups, one of young men and the other of young women (above). They were Ms Arati Hari from the Centre for Dialogue and Cooperation among Civilisations, Ms Jubaaedh Husuf from Islamic College for Advanced Studies (ICAS), Ms Melati Aklidamayanti a journalist from the NooR Women’s Islamic monthly, and Ms Yulaningsih Riwfan from the Centre for Religion and Cross-Cultural Studies, Gadjar Mada University. These met with David and Fr John for a long and interesting discussion. Due to scheduling difficulty the men’s group were unfortunately unable to meet for dialogue, but David was able to show them around the Cathedral before their next appointment.

Also visiting the Cathedral this year, with Commission friend Jag Shergill, was Dr Sarbjinder Singh (above), professor in the Dept. of Sri Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh Scriptural) Studies at Punjabi University Patiala in India. When looking over the Cathedral, they met a friend from their Gurdwara – who was working at the Cathedral as a security guard!
Regional Youth Interfaith Forum: Embracing Diversity: Delivering messages of understanding.

Nick Chui, Family Life Society, Singapore

Family Life Society (FLS) is a non-profit organisation that offers counselling and care services as well as educational programmes and resources to families and individuals. As directed by the Catholic Archbishop of Singapore, the Family Life Society was established as the Family Life Bureau in 1983 and registered in February 1985 under the Societies Act of Singapore to promote understanding and respect for marriage, family and human life.

Through our 14 programmes and services, we have been reaching out to families and individuals, regardless of their background, race or religion, in promoting pro-family and pro-life values.

Our mission is to promote a deep understanding of the relevance for marriage, family and human life and to make our peace building program resulted in no conversions to Catholicism from Muslims and members of the Mindanao indigenous community. While I fully understand that conversion is a sticky business in that part of the world unlike in Singapore, I could not help but be saddened by this. While it is true that being involved in peacemaking is definitely part of the Church’s social mission, and we should offer this to every person of good will, I could not help but wonder if in our eagerness to ensure the person of Christ and play down his unique salvific role. Inter-faith dialogue becomes an important means to build a peacemaking culture. The need for Conversion and evangelization is downplayed or perhaps even not on the agenda at all.

Indeed, in such inter-faith gatherings, Catholics who are not well formed in their own faith may actually, in their enthusiasm for peace and good relations with members of other faiths and also to highlight how much similarities there are among different faiths, end up in a form of religious indifferentism which says either that all religions are the same or that all religious indifferentism which says either that all religions are the same or that all religions are equal paths to truth.

That seems to be only natural. In the three day conference, participants were enthusiastic about meeting other participants from different religions and different countries and during the three days together, relationships were cordial and friendly. Everybody were eager to portray themselves as open-minded, respectful and sincere which I believe were real qualities emanating from the participants. We came out with common statements and objectives. My discussion group declared “we as young people of diverse religious faiths, beliefs and cultures are committed to the values of peace, compassion and love (understood uniquely contextually and culturally) and respect for human rights.

Who can possibly object to creating such an environment? Yet sometimes in our eagerness to dialogue similarities or to celebrate our differences as merely culturally interesting rather than making actual truth claims, we as Christians would have failed to proclaim Christ and his often demanding truths. After all, who would want to be labeled (as Cardinal Ratzinger was labeled so often) as someone who rocks the boat of harmonious inter-faith dialogue, asking tough questions and challenging the followers of other religions to respond in an equally intellectually vigorous way?

Inspite of these so called dangers or concerns highlighted, I do think that Catholics should continue to engage in inter-religious dialogue and also see it as an avenue for evangelization. For one thing, the atmosphere of friendship cultivated in an inter-faith setting is crucial. Meeting people as friends is important. There are no secrets between friends and friends can share with each other, their most intimate concerns without fear. The time will come when deep questions and disagreements will naturally emerge in any discussion of religion. It is in these situations where the Catholic must testify to the person of Jesus Christ and give an account for the hope that is in him. The wish that you do hope that the other person comes to know Jesus one day should also be extended. Conversion can be done only in total freedom but one should not be afraid to extend the invitation.

Indeed, it was in a spirit of friendship that I was able to have fascinating discussions with both my Buddhist and Muslim friends from Singapore. For instance, my Buddhist friend Siew Wee and I spoke about the existence of the self, the purpose of the body the significance of the Resurrection of Jesus, the teaching of Buddha if, as Hans von Balthasar writes, the story of salvation should be seen as both a “theo-aesthetic” and a “theo-drama” than the presentation of the truths of the Christian religion, its inner coherence and logic and its answers to the perennial questions of humanity will constitute in an organic manner, an apologetic of beauty. Logical syllogisms and examination of the evidence would remain a necessary part of evangelization. Yet there is another way, a way perhaps less intimidating, the evidential power of beauty. If Christ is the truth and if all human hearts long for total truth and joy, then such a presentation would be enough to stir a thirst in the other person to know more about the Christian religion.

Government and Religion: Respect, Cooperation, Cooptation, Conflict, Tolerance, Indifference.

“Surely what can governments do?” was the theme of the 2nd plenary session on the first day of the conference. As a Catholic, I do not oppose the government for the sake of doing so. Governments can and have done a lot of good and a Catholic should support such initiatives in any way they can. Yet governments
too may have agendas which run counter to the convictions of religious believers. A "religious cover" would nevertheless serve a government well and provide a form of the lives while simultaneously promoting the destruction of innocent human life through abortion to see how religion can easily be co-opted into the service of some bigger agenda.

Indeed, on the first day, we actually received an exhortation from a certain professor Amr that one should not be reading the scriptures literally but always in a contextual manner for to do so is a sure way of lapsing into fundamentalism, absurdity and even violence. Yet such an assertion while sincerely made still left many questions unanswered. Who decides what is to be read literally or in a contextual manner? How about "love your neighbour as you love yourself"? Governments would surely hope that believers read that piece of scripture literally. How about the account of the Resurrection? Liberal demythologizes are eager to read this in a "spiritual" and "contextual" fashion which betrays immediately a philosophical bias against miracles. How about the absolute claims of Christ and Christianity?

Also, I felt a hint of co-option during the hypothetical forum held on the 2nd day where the theme was climate change. Participants in that hypothetical forum were supposed to agree that climate change and global warming are serious problems and that they would have to plan strategies to "sell" this message back to their communities. A sensible question to ask in this instance is who is setting the agenda? Are religious communities mere appendages of government and state apparatus designed to soften or sell messages and agendas already determined or do religious communities possess autonomously their own agendas which will come into creative tension with that of the state?

In her keynote address author Randa Abdel-Fattah said that religion ought not simply to be tolerated but respected. Indeed, there is a world of difference between tolerance and respect. We tolerate something undesirable where eliminating it would do more harm than good. We respect on the other hand, positive goods. Indeed, French President Nicolas Sarkozy once commented that he found it strange that in his own country, when a school, a stadium or a community centre is built, there is enthusiasm from the state. But when a mosque or a Church is built, the state quickly distances itself from the project wanting no part of it, fearing it would upset its living resembled. While not endorsing any form of religion, the state may well consider if the endorsing of religiosity, a certain civic religion if you will, of course certain sensible limits might not be a public good in itself. Running for the Republican nomination for the US Presidency, Mitt Romney said it quite well in his recent campaign speech that he is inspired when he sees mosques, temples and churches whose spires reach out to the heavens as that was a recognition from all religions of the common source of our origins.

Avoiding Sloganeering and Motherhood Statements: The importance of Language and the Parameters of Discussion.

Flannery O’Connor once said that "compassion leads to the gas chambers". This shocking statement should cause us to pause and reflect on the importance of clarifying positive concepts, discovering what they really do mean. Nobody would say that they do not want peace, justice and harmony. But what this constitutes remains vague. As such, the declarations made by the religious groups, while important first steps, need to be clarified and examined thoroughly. The caveat in our declaration (about understanding the statement contextually, uniquely and culturally etc) was at least to my mind a problematic statement. In some cultures, widow burning is considered an act of compassion. Do we have a response to that or are we to be silenced by the paralyzing force of cultural relativism? Reason, as the Pope's Regensburg Address makes it clear, must be the common language across cultures so that pathologies both of religion as well as science can be healed. As such, it was a pleasant surprise to discover from the Polish delegate Magdalena that the organization she belongs to, "World Youth Alliance" www.wya.net does exactly that, organizing such activities around the great and important themes which humankind can ill afford to get wrong.

Against, hypocrisy, self-interest and deceit: Cultivating habits of the heart for fruitful Inter-Faith Dialogue.

As one of the delegates from Germany, Friedrich mentioned, he detected a certain angelism in the discussions as if good intentions and the elimination of ignorance through education were all that is needed to create a better world. As Catholics, we know that sin lies in the depths of the human heart, perennially tempting human beings to hypocrisy, self-interest and deceit. In such instances, mere good intentions are not enough. Habits of the heart, virtues, need to be cultivated. Persons who are insincere cannot be trusted to engage in any form of fruitful dialogue. In such instances, niceties will not do. Denunciations are sometimes in order.

Inter-Religious News:

Inter-Mirifica and New Media; Challenge and Opportunities

On the second day of the conference, both Mr. Peter Dunn and Dr Martin Mhando were given time to exhort delegates to understand and make full use of new media, i.e. internet discussion groups, online forums, youtube etc to spread the message of inter-faith harmony. Indeed, the impact of New Media ought not to be underestimated. I do hope that this reflection paper should not be seen as a lack of gratitude to the Australian Government and the EU for organizing this symposium. Rather, they are given in the hope that subsequent forums can be more successful. To conclude, when I told the Filipino delegate that we had the Jeweller's Shop in Singapore, she was very excited. I was also able to talk excitedly with Friedrich about the latest encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI and with Aubrey of Brunei about the Theology of the Body. I discovered national solidarity with my Singaporean delegates as we were justifiably proud of the achievements of our country in terms of inter-religious harmony.

Conclusion

I do hope that the time spent during the three days in Perth will lead to better things to come. The three days spent in Singapore, she was very excited. I was also able to talk excitedly with Friedrich about the latest encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI and with Aubrey about the Theology of the Body. I discovered national solidarity with my Singaporean delegates as we were justifiably proud of the achievements of our country in terms of inter-religious harmony.
JEWISH LEADER WANTS HONOR FOR JOHN XXIII

ROME, NOV. 4, 2008 (Zenit.org)

The founder of the Raoul Wallenberg Foundation wants Pope John XXIII to receive the honorary title given to those who took extraordinary measures to save Jews from the Holocaust.

Baruch Tenembaum is proposing that the Italian Pope be given the title “Righteous Among the Nations” by the Yad Vashem.

“If we fail to declare Pope John XXIII as ‘Righteous Among the Nations,’ our kids will be the ones who will do that,” Tenembaum said.

The Jewish leader’s appeal comes as the Church has just marked the 50th anniversary of John XXIII’s election to the See of Peter, on Oct. 28, 1958.

Tenembaum noted that before being elected Pope, Bishop Angelo Roncalli “interceded in favor of the Bulgarian Jews before King Boris of Bulgaria and he did the same before the government of Turkey in favor of the Jewish refugees that had escaped to their country. He also did everything possible to prevent the deportation of Jews from Greece and he became a source of information for the Vatican as far as the annihilation of millions of Jews of Poland and Eastern Europe was concerned.”

“During the time he was stationed as the apostolic delegate of the Vatican in Istanbul in 1944, he organized the rescue of Jews and other people who were persecuted by the Nazis,” he continued.

“Thanks to his actions, thousands of people who were condemned to death had their lives saved. His deeds and historic figure is therefore close to many other diplomat rescuers from the Holocaust.”

The foundation founder also lauded the advances made in Jewish-Catholic dialogue under the guidance of John XXIII: “A new era in Catholic-Jewish dialogue started when John XXIII was elected Pope.”

BENEDICT XVI REMEMBERS KRISTALLNACHT

VATICAN CITY, NOV. 9, 2008 (Zenit.org)

Benedict XVI joined Jews around the world in remembering the 70th anniversary of Kristallnacht, or “Night of Broken Glass.”

After reciting the Angelus together with the crowds gathered in St. Peter’s Square, the Pope lamented the Nazi program that killed or arrested thousands of Jews and destroyed synagogues during the nights of Nov. 9-10, 1938.

“Nazi fury was unleashed against the Jews in Germany,” he explained. “Shops, offices, dwellings and synagogues were attacked and many people were also killed, initiating the systematic and violent persecution of German Jews, which ended with the Shoah.”

“Today I still feel pain over what happened in those tragic circumstances,” the Pontiff said. “The memory of those things must serve to prevent similar horrors from ever happening again and must lead us to dedicate ourselves, at every level, to fight against every form of anti-Semitism and discrimination, educating the younger generations in respect and reciprocal acceptance.

“I invite you to pray for the victims of that time and to join with me in manifesting a deep solidarity with the Jewish world.”

JEWS, CATHOLICS WANT CALM ON PIUS XII ISSUE

BUDAPEST, NOV. 14, 2008 (Zenit.org)

Exacerbating tensions regarding controversial issues is contrary to the desire of a panel of Jews and Catholics working for growing rapprochement between the two creeds, a joint statement affirmed.

The statement came at the end of the 20th meeting of the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee of the Holy See’s Commission for Religious Relations With the Jews and the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations, which took place Sunday through Wednesday in Budapest.

The affirmation was particularly in regard to reports and statements made about the role Pope Pius XII played in speaking out against the Holocaust.

Cardinal Walter Kasper, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, which oversees the Commission for Religious Relations With the Jews, and Rabbi David Rosen, the co-chairs of the committee, declared: “We reiterate our commitment to a relationship based on mutual respect and sensivity. Disagreements between us which inevitably occur from time to time must always be expressed in a manner that reflects this spirit and not in language that only exacerbates tension.”

Cardinal Kasper assured during the meeting that the concerns of Jewish parties have been clearly conveyed to the Holy See at the highest levels.

On Oct. 30, the request was made by the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations at a panel hearing. With Benedict XVI that all archival material be made available for independent scholarly review before any far-reaching decisions are made by the Holy See concerning persons and policies during the period of the Second World War.

Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, director of the Vatican press office, soon afterward clarified that the Holy See is working to catalogue the archives in question so that they can be opened to expert review. But he warned that the sheer number of documents (some 16 million from the 1939-1958 pontificate) would take six to seven years to prepare at the current rate of progress.

A BISHOP AND A RABBI EXPLAIN THE NEW GOOD FRIDAY PRAYER FOR THE JEWS

Source: www.chiesa by Sandro Magister

...As for the new formulation of the prayer, the note in “La Civiltà Cattolica” concludes in this way, in a somewhat convoluted manner:

“This contains nothing that is offensive toward Jews, because in it the Church asks God what St. Paul asked for Christians: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ may enlighten the eyes of the Ephesians’ hearts, so that they may eagerly seek the gift of salvation that they have in Jesus Christ (cf. Ephesians 1:18-23). The Church, in fact, believes that salvation is only in Jesus Christ, as is said in the Acts of the Apostles (4:12). It is clear, besides, that Christian prayer can be nothing other than ‘Christian’, meaning that it is founded upon the faith – which is not that of all – that Jesus is the Savior of all men. For this reason, the Jews have no reason to be offended if the Church asks God to enlighten them so that they may freely recognize Christ, the only Savior of all men, and that they too may be saved by the One whom Shalom Ben Chorin, a Jew, calls ‘Brother Jesus’.

Naturally, the new formulation of the prayer applies only to the liturgy of the ancient rite. So in almost all of the Catholic churches next Good Friday prayer for the Jews will continue to follow the formula of the missal of Paul VI from 1970.

According to this formula, which is universally the most widespread, prayer is offered for the Jews so that God “may help them to increase always in love of his name and in fidelity to his covenant.”

Unobjectionable words – and, in effect, they have never been challenged – but also less rich in biblical references, to the Old and the New Testament, than those introduced by Benedict XVI with his variation of the ancient text of the prayer.

With the new formula, in fact, pope Ratzinger did not attenuate, but instead greatly reinforced the prayer with more pregnant Christian content.

Returning to the new formulation of the prayer for the Jews in the ancient rite, here is how Archbishop Gianfranco Ravasi – president of the pontifical council for culture, but also a biblicist of worldwide...
fame – explained the stupefying richness of this in an article in “Osservatore Romano” on February 15, 2008.

Immediately after this is an essay by American rabbi Jacob Neusner, published in Germany on February 23, 2008, in “Die Tagespost” and in Italy in “il Foglio” on February 26, also in defense of the new formulation of the prayer.

One day, responding to his friend Gustav Janouch who was asking him about Jesus of Nazareth, Kafka said: “That is an abyss filled with light. One must close one’s eyes if one is not to fall into it.”

The relationship between the Jews and their “older brother,” as the philosopher Martin Buber had curiously called him, has always been intense and stormy, reflecting in part the much more complex and tumulted relationship between Judaism and Christianity. Perhaps, despite its simplification of the formula, there is suggestive value in the phrase of Shalom Ben Chorin in his essay with the emblematic title “Brother Jesus,” from 1967: “The faith of Jesus unites us to the Christians, but faith in Jesus divides us.”

We wanted to recreate this foundation, which in reality is much more vast and varied, in order to situate more consistently within it the new “Oremus et pro Iudaeis” for the liturgy of Good Friday.

To read the text of Bishop Ravasti’s essay, and for the complete article, including the essay by Rabbi Neusner, visit http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/193041_engey

ORDINATION OF WOMEN BISHOPS IN ANGLICAN CHURCH WIDENS RIFT – BISHOP PUTNEY

Source: Catholic Weekly, By Damir Govorcin 27 April, 2008

The ordination of women bishops in the Anglican Church further “deepens the obstacle” to reconciliation between our two Communions, says Bishop Michael Putney, Chairman of the Bishops Commission for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Relations.

The Rev Canon Kay Goldsworthy will be consecrated a bishop on May 22, in St George’s Anglican Cathedral, Perth.

She will be the first woman to become a bishop in an Australian Church, although women have been appointed as bishops elsewhere in the Anglican Communion since 1989.

Bishop Michael said: “When the Anglican Communion world-wide began to ordain women priests, the Catholic Church made it clear to them that this was a further obstacle to reconciliation between our two Communions.

*Ordination for women is a doctrinal issue, not just a practical issue for us. And the ordination of women bishops enhances that obstacle because bishops are the leaders of the Church, and even within the Anglican Communion that leadership will be received ambiguously.

“Some will not accept it, even within the Anglican Communion, so it enhances the obstacle to reconciliation.”

He added: “But in fact it doesn’t change – it is the same doctrinal issue. It just makes it more complex.

“We will continue to dialogue and continue to collaborate, and ultimately with all things to do with ecumenism it’s in God’s hands to help us to find the way forward.”

Bishop Michael, Bishop of Townsville, says from a Catholic perspective because we don’t believe that we’re able to ordain women for doctrinal reasons, “we must ensure that the role of women within the Church in every other way is strong, that women have equal participation to men in every other way within the life of the Church”.

“We can’t see how we can ordain women as priests from a doctrinal point of view,” he said. “It’s not a question of us choosing not to, it’s a question of us being seen that we’re unable to.”

In announcing the appointment of Australia’s first women bishop, the Anglican Archbishop of Perth, the Archbishop Roger Herft, said “we in the Church of Perth continue our unwavering commitment to Christ’s gospel by recognising women and men as equal partners in the world.”

Archbishop Herft said Archdeacon Goldsworthy was an outstanding candidate for the position.

“Her previous experience within the diocese, including terms as school chaplain, canon of the cathedral, parish priest, and archdeacon means she is one of the best qualified priests to take on this role at this stage,” he said.

Archbishop Herft said the way was cleared for women as bishops in October 2007 with the ruling that such appointments were in accord with the constitution of the Australian Church.

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