

Interreligious Dialogue

One mind – One Heart

January 25, 2011



Dear Sisters, Interreligious Dialogue was first foreign to us for the most part. Then it was considered important; then necessary; then vital; and now it is designated "crucial". Yes, we agree - it is crucial for the sake of the planet, the cosmos, our human race, for all of us. God is with us and yet He is allowing darkness over the earth. His Spirit and saints and the power of prayer abound but He calls us to spread more and more of His light and Word within us, to be more generously generated. The power, the energy of common prayer for healing ascending from our City of Tucson has notably touched many in America and other lands. There is still much healing to be accomplished. This Church Unity Octave is the auspicious time to begin anew. One Mind, One+Heart, sr. pascaline

Monastics in the Dialogue

DIMMID: Fr. William Skudlarek, O.S.B., Secretary General, Monastic Interreligious Dialogue has announced its new website www.dimmid.org and its new journal: *Dilatato Corde* <http://www.dimmid.org>, both now on line. Fr. William encourages all monastics to tell others about the new website and journal and asks that that our Webmasters put a link to www.dimmid.org on our monastery's websites. Then try it out. Fr. William thanks all in advance for helping to make the website and *Dilatato Corde* a significant contribution to the cause of dialogue at the level of religious experience and spiritual practice.

DIM NEW PRESIDENT

Brother Gregory Perron, monk of St. Procopius Abbey in Lisle, Il. was elected President and Chairman of the Board of the North American Commission of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue. The election took place at the annual meeting of the board, held September 24-26, 2010 at

St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota. Bro. Gregory has been a director of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue for some ten years and currently serves his monastic community as subprior and infirmarian. He replaced Fr. Mark Serna. Next meeting 2011 in October at Beech Grove.

SWAMI ABHISHIKTANANDA – BIRTH CENTENARY CELEBRATION

Bro. John Martin of Shantivanam monastic Ashram in S. India, Fr. Laurence Freeman from London, were among the monastics who were present at Gaunts House, in Wimborne, Dorset July 15-18 for the 100th anniversary of Swami Abhishiktananda, Fr. Henri Le Saux's Birth. Non-monastics from the USA included Fr. Brian Pierce OP, Bob Doenges and others. Abhishik was born in 1910 in Breton and went to India in 1948. He is noted as one "of the most intriguing spiritual figures of the twentieth century," and is considered one of the "three" Founders of

Shantivanam Ashram in S. India.

The celebration was organized by the Bede Griffiths Sangha in London with talks by those who knew Swamiji: Fr. Laurence Freeman OSB, Prof. Bettina Baumer, Sanskrit professor and former President of the Abhishiktananda Society; and Shirley du Boulay, authoress of *The Cave of the Heart: the Life of Swami Abhishiktananda*, and compiler of *Abhishiktananda: Essential Writings*.

DALAI LAMA ON HOW WORLD'S RELIGIONS CAN COME TOGETHER

Doubleday in 2010 copyrighted the Dalai Lama's new book: [Toward a True Kinship of Faiths](#) filled with delightful and profound personal encounters, dialogues with spiritual teachers and practitioners of many of the world's religions. May the effort of this book, he prays in the Preface: "foster in us deep reverence toward each other."

*Lead me from death to life,
from falsehood to truth*

*Lead me from despair to hope,
from fear to trust.*

*Lead me from hate to love,
from war to peace*

*Let peace fill our heart, our
world, our universe.*

International Prayer for Peace

Interreligious Dialogue in Church and world

POPE BENEDICT XVI AND DIALOGUE INTERFAITH - INTERCULTURAL

On New Year's Day Pope Benedict announced that he will go to Assisi in October of this year to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the World Day of Prayer for Peace, convoked by Pope John Paul II on October 27, 1986. He has invited leaders of other Christian communities and religious traditions to join him as a pilgrim and to commit themselves to live out their religious beliefs.

The Vatican has confirmed that the Pope plans to visit Germany from September 22-25, visiting Berlin, Freiburg and Thuringia. His choice to include an eastern German diocese is pleasing the German President Christian Wulff as Thuringia was formerly in Communist East Germany DDR. "It will be an impressive way of paying tribute to the contribution made by the Christian Churches to the fall of the Iron Curtain in Europe," he said. In Berlin the Pope will address the Bundestag which will be the first time that a Pope has ever addressed the German

parliament. Especially at this time when "Christianity is faltering", many feel this will be a privilege for them to experience the "moral authority" figure in the Pope.

Benedict's visit to England was a "resounding success" despite numerous protests beforehand. *The Tablet* credits him as coming across as "a gentle, humble, warm and endearing individual with a powerful message, which he expressed eloquently in his speeches and homilies. During his visit he himself performed the ceremony of Beatification of Cardinal John Henry Newman, whom he especially loved and admired. The Cardinal's personal motto was *Cor ad cor loquitur*, "Heart speaks unto heart" – a real call to "continue to work to build bridges of friendship to other religions, to heal past wrongs and communities". Pope Benedict's last words before leaving for Rome, at the Birmingham airport, were: "The very diversity of modern Britain is a challenge to its Government and people, but it also represents a great opportunity to further intercultural and interreligious dialogue for the enrichment of the entire community."

Before visiting England the Pope was in Portugal attending a celebration at the shrine of Fatima. The Catholic Church in Portugal, as elsewhere in Europe, is struggling to come to terms with a pervasive spirit

of secularism, a topic that comes more and more from the concerned heart of Pope Benedict. "The presence of secularism and a culture of faith is something normal, but the separation and the opposition between secularism and a culture of faith is something anomalous and must be transcended. The great challenge of the present moment is for the two to come together and in this way to discover their true identity. He cautioned against "an excessive trust in ecclesial structures and programs" and over-reliance on "simply proclaiming the message". Even more surprising, given his opposition to relativism, was the Pope's telling the Cultural Center at Belem, Lisbon, that the Church "is in the process of learning how to live with respect for other 'truths' and for the truth of others. .Dialogue, without ambiguity and marked by respect for those taking part, is a priority in today's world." This is not quite the Joseph Ratzinger we are familiar with. This is more the open-minded man on a journey into unknown territory, a journey from confrontation to dialogue. No one can be sure of the destination, but it is certainly not back to the past.

SECULAR MODERNITY?

Gregory Baum, Canadian theologian, in a major lecture in D.C. in mid November said

that “Interfaith dialogue, especially Catholic-Muslim dialogue, must deal with how world religions confront secular modernity. Interreligious dialogue transforms the traditions involved in it: it purifies them and enriches them. But if such dialogues are to be authentic, they must also work together to face up to the challenges that classic world religions face in today’s globalized world of technology, finance, trade, and other cultural and secular forces.” By modernity he explained “I mean the new world produced by technology, science, a maximizing economy, democratic pluralisms, human rights and religious liberty. Modernity is an ambivalent civilizational force affecting the entire globe that challenges every society and raises difficult challenges for every religion.”

Baum noted that after more than a century of rejecting Enlightenment ideas of human rights and democratic pluralism, the Catholic church “was able, at the Second Vatican Council, to say a critical yes to modernity, while continuing to oppose scientific reductionism and utilitarian individualism” He sees a similar wrestling with the challenge of modernity taking place in the other world religions and he says it seems to him that “Interreligious dialogue may not avoid this topic.”

In this Nostra Aetate Lecture at Georgetown University Gregory Baum noted Pope Benedict’s change of heart, citing many instances where Benedict’s thinking on interreligious dialogue has evolved over the years. He noted that in L’Osservatore Romano, Benedict “recognizes that dialogue with Jews is not oriented toward their conversion.” .

WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK -

The Time has come! The United Nations accepted the proposal introduced by King Abdullah II of Jordan, with the support of the Vatican and about 20 other nations for a World Interfaith Harmony Week to be celebrated annually the first week of February. The king’s personal envoy, Prince Ghazi bin Mohammad then gave a “remarkable speech” in which he mentions the Second Vatican Council as the starting point of a movement of interreligious dialogues that produced the shared conviction that the time has come for the worldwide promotion of religious harmony.

ALTERNATE READING COULD BRING NEW MUTUAL RESPECT BETWEEN THREE ABRAHAMIC FAITHS

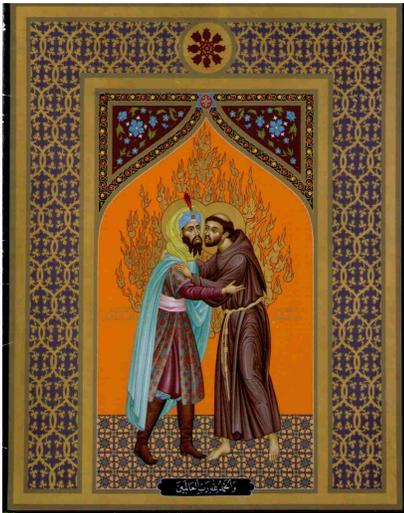
Christian scholar, Michael Cuypers was given the “World Prize for the Book of the Year”

by the Iranian Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance in 2009 for his latest book: The Banquet: a reading of the fifth sura of the Qur’an published in French in 2007 and in English by Convivium Press in English in 2009. The ministry labeled it “one of the best new works in the field of Islamic studies.” Based now at the prestigious Dominican Institute for Oriental Studies in Cairo, this Catholic scholar originally from Belgium, offered a way of interpreting the Qur’an that is not only convincing and entirely respectable in terms of Islamic scholarship, but also pulls the rug out from under those who have used and continue to use a rhetoric of violent martyrdom, extracted from the Qur’an, to commit mass murder.

“I begin to see how true it is that God shows no partiality. Rather the one of any nation who fears God and acts uprightly is acceptable to Him.” (Acts 10,34)

Dialogue in Spirit and in Truth and Hope

MUSLIMS OFFER THEMSELVES AS “HUMAN SHIELDS” FOR CHRISTIANS



St. Francis and the Sultan

In Egypt, Muslims offered themselves as “human shields” to protect Coptic Christians celebrating their Christmas just a week after a church bombing that killed 21 people.

Egypt’s Ahramonline reported that droves of Muslims turned up at Coptic churches to act as “human shields.” It quoted Mohamd El Sawy, a Muslim arts tycoon, credited with first floating the “human shield” idea, as saying “We either live together, or we die together.”

Christians and Muslims have had a long history of both animosity and goodwill. The image above shows St. Francis and Sultan Malek al-Kamil. St. Francis had gone to stop the Crusaders but failed in his attempt to do so. He and the Sultan tried to convert each other but soon realized that they shared a love of God that united them. The Sultan gave Francis an ivory trumpet that remains in his crypt in Assisi. They parted in peace after

sharing dialogue on prayer and the mystical life.

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL EXEMPLIFIES DIALOGUE THAT REACHES OUT

The Church’s Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue annually extends congratulations and heartfelt wishes for peace and joy to our Buddhist friends around the world on occasion of their Buddhist feast of Vesakh. “Christians and Buddhists Respect Human Life as the Basis of Respect for all beings,” the message was entitled to Buddhists at the end of May.

Likewise there was official outreach to our Hindu Friends on the occasion of their Feast of Divali (Deepavali) the festival of light celebrated annually by Hindus, Jains, Siekhs and many others at the beginning of November. “As people who hold in common the well-being of individuals and communities, may we give greater visibility with every means in our power to a culture that promotes respect, trust and cooperation. May God, the Supreme Light illumine your minds, enlighten your hearts and strengthen the human bonds in your homes and communities. We wish you all a joy-filled Deepavali.”

Darkness needing Light: Prayer and Dialogue

“CHRISTIANOPHOBIA” OR BIAS AGAINST CHRISTIANS ON THE RISE

Christians have become the most persecuted of all the world’s religions. Pope Benedict has stated this unequivocally in several of the messages he issued at Christmas time... a leitmotif that is running consistently through everything the Pope writes. Intolerance and discrimination against Christians is manifested in various forms across Europe... including violent attacks against persons, property and places of worship, as well as restrictions to the right to freedom of religion or belief, and inaccurate portrayals of Christian identity and values in the media and political discourse.” Cardinal Christoph Schonborn has appealed to Christians to ‘break the spiral of silence’ on Christian persecution. When the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Carey, spoke out at the launch of the “Not Ashamed campaign” he urged Christians to “wear their faith with pride”. The Christian Legal Center ‘s concern is not only that Christians are under attack in secular Britain, but that they are discriminated against in a society which is far keener to respect other religions. They accuse the state and even some private-sector employers of going out of their way to accommodate Muslims and people of other faiths, while

discouraging and even penalizing ostentatious Christian expression.

India: Christmas carol singers were assaulted by Hindu fundamentalists in Mumbai, with the assailants even taking the carol singers to a police station and accusing them of insulting Hindus. Fr. Thomas Chirattavayalil, at remote mission center at Odagady village in Madhya state, was attacked and seriously injured in a midnight raid on the mission. In the diocese of Andhra Pradesh state on Dec. 12th statues of the Virgin Mary, St. John & Mary Magdalene at Calvary were found decapitated and disfigured. Fr. Babu Joseph, spokesman for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India said, "We have reasons to suspect there is a hidden agenda behind such violence".

Venezuela: President Chavez asked the National Assembly to give him a year to rule by decree in the aftermath of devastating flooding, which has made more than 100,000 Venezuelans homeless. Archbishop Baltazar Porras Cardozo of Merida has attacked the recent move which indicates Chavez is 'moving towards dictatorship'. Mr. Chavez has questioned the cardinal's right to criticize the government, but Cardinal Urosa claimed the same constitutional right to express himself as any other citizen. Last month President Chavez stated his desire to "recover" a Catholic television station from

the Church. "We need to recover that channel and put it at the service of the people and not the cardinal," he said. Mr. Chavez asked the Minister of the Interior to "revise" the license of the non-profit channel.

Iraq: The Dominican sisters and brothers in Iraq are experiencing a tremendous persecution and violence-- principally by foreign El Queda terrorists who were let into the country by the U.S. invasion in 2003. Happening now are: massacres and assassinations, driving people from the country.

Congo: Clergy in Congo's North Kivu region have warned of "genocide in the making" as "insecurity, violence, massacres, sexual violence and murders are recorded every day".

Kosovo: Christians in Kosovo have complained of tension with local Muslims after several churches were attacked and daubed by Islamic militants. There have been a series of anti-Christian incidents in the Balkan State, whose Feb. 2008 independence declaration has been recognized by the US and UK but not by Serbia or Russia. The building of a Catholic cathedral dedicated to the ethnic Albanian Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta, to be completed with government funding in the capital Pristina in the autumn, has faced opposition from Mufti Naim Ternava, spiritual leader of Kosovo's Muslims.

Colombia: Terrorist groups are the primary threat to religious freedom in Colombia, according to this year's International Religious Freedom Report. The US Department of State document said rebels have "killed, kidnapped, and extorted religious leaders and practitioners, inhibiting free religious expression."

Egypt: Coptic Christians have clashed with police while protesting over the halting of construction of a new church near the pyramids in Giza. Authorities said a Christian community center was being transformed into a church without permission, while protesters claimed the necessary construction permits were secured. On November 24, four Copts were killed, including one child, dozens were injured and 93 people were arrested.

China: Cardinal Joseph Zen Zekiun of Hong Kong has warned the Vatican not to compromise too much in its relations with the Beijing Government, insisting that "there is no religious freedom in China". The Cardinal insisted that China has shown no willingness to change on the question of the appointment of bishops and "absolute" control was still its religious policy. On Nov. 20 the state-backed Patriotic Church ordained Joseph Guo Jincai as bishop in Chengde, without the approval of the Pope. The Vatican condemned China for the ordination, calling the episode

a “painful wound” hampering dialogue between the Holy See and Beijing. The Holy See condemned the meeting’s declared purpose to implement principles of independence and autonomy, self-management and democratic administration of the Church, saying the assembly and recent ordination of a bishop without papal approval was “unacceptable”. China said the Vatican’s statement was “imprudent and ungrounded”.

Afghanistan:

Parliamentarians and students are calling for the arrest and execution of Christian converts as a new wave of anti-Christian prejudice sweeps the country. Demonstrations have been held in cities across Afghanistan, including Kabul, where university students demanded the expulsion of foreigners accused of proselytizing.

Fatima: During his visit to the Marian Shrine of Fatima Pope Benedict told Portugal’s Bishops that this present time demands “a new missionary vigor on the part of Christians, who are called to form a mature laity identified with the Church and sensitive to the complex transformations taking place in our world.” He further lamented that “among politicians, intellectuals and communications professionals” there is a “disdain for the religious and contemplative dimensions of life.”

Obituaries: 2010 noted *Interreligious Dialogue exponents who passed to the*

Other Shore during the past year include:

Fr. William Johnston, S.J.

who died in Tokyo on October 10th. For many decades Fr. Johnston was a scholar and spiritual teacher, a writer and leading exponent of the contemplative dimension of the Gospel and modern approaches to interreligious dialogue. Born in Belfast in 1925. His family moved to Liverpool and he entered the Society of Jesus in 1943. He insisted “only prayerful dialogue between Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism can save our planet from destruction. What a responsibility we have.” One of his much loved, final books was entitled: Arise My Love.

Raimon Panikkar – apostle of interfaith dialogue died at his home in Tavaertet, near Barcelona, Spain, August 26 at the age of 91. Fr. Panikkaar was one of the greatest scholars of the 20th century in the areas of comparative religion, theology, and inter-religious dialogue. He was born Nov. 3, 1918, son of an Indian Hindu father and a Spanish Catholic mother. He held three doctorates and wrote on returning to Europe: “I left as a Christian, I discovered I was a Hindu and returned as a Buddhist without ever having ceased to be Christian.” He studied his Hindu roots in India walking to the mouth of the Ganges with Fr. Bede Griffiths and

frequently visiting Shantivanam ashram. He was keynote speaker for the Monastic Interreligious Dialogue Conference in Holyoke, MA in 1984. His published notes were called: *Blessed Simplicity*.

Cor ad cor loquitor ‘heart speaks unto heart’

(Sources for this newsletter were mainly drawn from The Tablet, Westminster Interfaith Newsletter, NCR and MID secretary)