



Ecumenical and Inter-religious LIGHTS

Formation on Islam

In March, the Bishops Commission for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Relations invited Associate Professor Ahmad Shboul AM and Dr Nijmeh Jajjar, both from the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies in the School of Languages and Cultures of the University of Sydney, to present information on Islam to a gathering of Catholic Bishops and members of the Australian Catholic Council for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Relations. Dr Shboul, a Sunni Muslim, and Dr Jajjar, a Melkite Christian, helped the bishops to understand aspects of Islam.

Topics covered included:

- o Introduction to Islam and the place of the Prophet Muhammad and the Qu'ran
- o Unity and diversity in Islam: Sunni and Shi'a schools of thought.
- o Women in Islam: historical and modern perspectives
- o Islam and openness to critical thought: Interpretations of the Qu'ran.
- o Islamic attitudes to Christianity

Fr. Patrick McNerney, a Columban priest and member of the Council, offered a further reflection from a Latin Catholic perspective.

Fr. McNerney assembled a list of internet sources on Islam to assist bishops and others in deepening their understanding of Islam. It is available at <http://www.acbc.catholic.org.au/bc/ecumifr/200706271082.htm>

Congress on Peace in the Middle East

NSW Parliament House was the venue for a Congress on **The Role of Religion in Achieving Peace in the Middle East** on Wednesday 2nd May. Archbishop Philip Wilson, on behalf of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference invited Mr Mohammad Sammak, Archbishop Elias Chacour to Australia. Mr Jeremy Jones spoke from a Jewish perspective. The audience included most of the Australian Catholic bishops, members of other Christian Churches, leaders in the Muslim communities and leaders of Jewish communities.

Each of the three speakers spoke for about fort-five minutes and then responded to questions of clarification. The panel of speakers responded to questions.

The Speaker of the Parliament, the Honorable John Aquilina hosted the day.

More than one person was heard to say, "This is the first time that I have spoken with a Muslim."

Archbishop Elias Chacour:

During the last war with Lebanon ten people from my diocese were killed. Among them was an older man. I went to celebrate his funeral and a Minister from the Cabinet of Israel came to give his condolences. He entered the church with four bodyguards as all ministers do when they are outside their offices, and sat in the first pews with the soldiers around him. I could not start the prayer. I said, "Mr Minister, we Christians in our churches have a very powerful body-guard, and you have yours. They cannot go together. Either you trust ours, or you trust yours. If you trust yours go out with your bodyguard or else send your bodyguard out and stay with us. Our bodyguard will look after you. Our bodyguard is the Almighty God of Abraham, Esau and Jacob. Your bodyguard are soldiers". The soldiers went out and during the sermon I said, "Everybody is looking at the church. What side would the church take? For Hezbollah against Israel? For Israel against Hezbollah? For the Palestinians against Israel? I tell you the church will never go into any trench. We will stand between you and the trenches and we will beg you to stop killing each other and to stop competing about who will kill more people and destroy more homes. We will stand there and if you need to kill anybody, kill us. We don't need to forgive you. We've already forgiven you because we love you. If our dead are a reason for reconciliation, then we welcome the kingdom of heaven.

Mr Mohammad Sammak:

A bell needs to be heard in this part of the world. Don't think there will always be Christians in the Middle East. Christians are migrating from the Middle East. If there are no Christians in the Middle East who will show the role of peace in the Middle East. Can you imagine peace in the Middle East between Moslems and Jews and no Christians? That's why the voice of people like Fr Chacour should be heard and respected because the role of Christians is of the utmost importance for achieving peace on the basis of respect and acceptance.

Mr Jeremy Jones:

Here we have the opportunity to meet and to discuss and talk about problems in other parts of the world where we may be able to make a contribution, by encouraging those who speak a language of ethics, or morality and responsibility, above the language of self-interest, narrow nationalism or winning and losing. It's not always easy because we are as open to the influences of our society as anybody else. All of us are open to be influenced and caught up with the difference between patriotism or pride in who you are and nationalism between being confident in your identity and arrogance in your identity. We are all capable of being caught up in this so we have to be very conscious of that fact and work out how we can make a constructive contribution.

During question time, Rabbi Kammins stated:

I've heard people say we, the Jewish people, fail to enter into dialogue. It's very hard to have a conversation with someone who denies your existential proof, who denies your right to exist as you are. We are not just a religion. We are a people with a land, with a language, with a memory. ... I love what the Archbishop said earlier, we are all children of God, and we take on the stories of our birth and the stories of our families who share with us, and of course, we all have different narratives. There is an Arab narrative, a Palestinian narrative and a narrative of the Jewish people.

The texts of the presentations are available at <http://www.acbc.catholic.org.au/bc/ecumifr/index.asp>

Muslims, Jews and Christians listening together



Cardinal Pell, Archbishop Paul Saliba, Archbishop Elias Chacour

Archbishop Saliba is



Archbishop Jibrial Kassab (Chaldean Eparch) Archbishop Baliozian, Bishop Issam Darwish (Melkite Eparch), Archbishop Elias Chacour, ?, Mr. Michael Rizk (President of the Christian –Muslim Friendship Society)



Mr Mohammad Sammak.

Mr Sammak has an impressive curriculum vitae. He

Mr Jeremy Jones presented on the Jewish faith.

Mr Jones has been one of the Jewish leaders who have met with the Australian Catholic Bishops over a number of years.



Bi-lateral Dialogues

AustARCC Australian Anglican-Roman Catholic

Catholic members:

Bishop Christopher Prowse (Catholic Co-chair), Rev Dr Greg Brett, Rev Dr Denis Edwards, Sr Dr Mary Reaburn nds, Rev Denis Stanley (Secretary)

During the past few years, AustARCC has concentrated on helping Anglicans and Roman Catholics reflect on what it means to be a member of the Church. They have reflected on a spirituality of belonging. A document, provisionally titled, **Why the Church?** is almost ready for publication.

Prior to this document, the dialogue reflected on authority in the Church, asking "How can authority be life-giving to Anglican and Roman Catholic communities?" The document, **The Challenge of Gospel Authority**, was a result of this dialogue.

A Study Guide on ARCIC's Agreed Statement, *Church as Communion* was their earlier publication.

Roman Catholic – Uniting Church

Catholic members:

Archbishop John Bathersby (Catholic Co-chair), Bishop Michael Putney, Rev Dr Tom Ehlich, Ms Elizabeth Harrington, Rev Bill O'Shea, Rev Dr David Pascoe, Rev Dr Ormond Rush

Lutheran – Roman Catholic Dialogue

Catholic members:

Archbishop Philip Wilson, Bishop Greg O'Kelly SJ, Dr Mary Cresp rsj,
Rev Dr Denis Edwards (Catholic Co-chair), Rev Dr Gerard Kelly, Dr Josephine Laffin,
Rev Dr James McEvoy, Rev Dr Laurence McNamara CM, Dr Marie Turner

In 1998 the Dialogue completed a study on *Justification*. Since then it has been working on a new topic, *The Ministry of Oversight: The Office of Bishop and President in the Church*. This study will be completed in 2007, and will be available for study in the churches.

The document on Justification is available at

<http://www.users.bigpond.net.au/stpauls/justification.html>

Dialogue with His Holiness, the Dalai Lama

On Tuesday 12 June, Bishop Christopher Prowse participated in an Inter-faith dialogue with the Dalai Lama, titled "One World, Many paths to Peace", held at the Australian National University, Canberra . 4,200 people booked out the venue, the AIS arena. The Jewish participant was Rabbi Jonathan Keren Black, and the representative from Islam was Professor Abdullah Saeed.

Bishop Prowse' s full text is available at

<http://www.acbc.catholic.org.au/bc/ecumifr/200706271734.htm>. The following is a brief extract.

When power meets power, there is a power struggle.

When power meets vulnerability there is alienation.

When vulnerability meets vulnerability there is intimacy.

History is replete with examples of power struggles arising from individuals or communities, even religious communities, refusing to give way or make room for each other. Likewise, the alienation of vulnerable peoples when they meet the force of an advancing power can be devastating. For example, our own Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are witnesses to this. But when vulnerability in the human heart meets the vulnerability of another, the intimacy of a strong and constant friendship has a chance of growing. It is like a little seed that might just grow as tall and strong as a mighty Australian gum tree.

It is this latter type of encounter between us that may enable a friendship to grow that is worthy of our common humanity. It is a shared vulnerability that becomes a fertile soil enabling peace to grow and the flowers of mutual respect to bloom.

Are we strong enough to be vulnerable to each other?

International Dialogues

Methodist-Catholic Dialogue

In June 2006, the International Commission for Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council issued their eighth report, **The Grace Given You in Christ**. Bishop Michael Putney is the Catholic co-chair of this dialogue.

See http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/meth-council-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20070125_bolen-methodists_en.html for a statement by Rev. Don Bolen (Co-secretary of the Commission and member of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity).

A few snippets from the text:

IARCCUM

Archbishop John Bathersby is the Catholic Co-chair of IARCCUM, the International Anglican Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission.

Earlier this year, the Commission's document, **Growing Together in Unity and Mission**, received a great deal of publicity.

Following a high level of publicity, Archbishop Bathersby and Anglican Bishop David Beutge, the co-chairs of the Commission, released a statement which reads in part:

The first part of the document, which treats doctrinal matters, is an attempt to synthesize the work of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) over the past 35 years. It identifies the level of agreement which has been reached by ARCIC, but is also very clear in identifying ongoing areas of disagreement, and in raising questions which still need to be addressed in dialogue. Those ongoing questions and areas of disagreement are highlighted in boxed sections interspersed throughout the text. It is a very honest document assessing the state of Anglican-Roman Catholic relations at the present moment."

In response to speculation they add, 'It is our overwhelming desire that the Anglican Communion stays together, rooted in the historic faith which our dialogue and relations over four decades have led us to believe that we share to a large degree'."

Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches

Two Australians have been appointed as delegates to the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches: **Ms Margareta Brosnan** of Brisbane, currently working for the International Young Christian Students Movement in Paris and **Ms Margaret Naylor**, Ecumenical Officer for the Archdiocese of Brisbane.

The term of office is 2006-2013 with the first meeting scheduled to take place in Rome from 20-27 January 2008, during the 100th anniversary of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

Young Catholic Women's Interfaith Fellowship

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference through its Office for the Participation of Women is promoting the participation of women in the Catholic church in Australia. The CACW Young Women's Interfaith Fellowships will cover:

- Graduate Certificate in Interfaith Relations
- Interfaith engagement
- Media training

- Skilling in liaison with governments and community groups
- Leadership formation

The Fellowship includes, tuition, accommodation, travel and administration. Applications are now being received for the 2008 Fellowship. Application forms are available at www.cacw.catholic.org.au

National Council of Churches in Australia Forum

Between July 13 and July 17, members of the Christian Churches will gather in Maroochydore for the biennial forum of the National Council of Churches in Australia. This event will mark the end of the current term for people who have participated in various networks and commissions. It will also mark the beginning of new terms. The participation of the various representatives in these ecumenical forums is valued greatly.

One significant topic for the forum will be the implementation of the Covenant document.

The Covenant is available at

http://www.ncca.org.au/_data/page/104/A_NATIONAL_COVENANT_July_041.doc

Australian Catholic Council for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Relations

Following the restructure of the Australian Catholic bishops Conference in 2006, the Australian Catholic Council for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Relations was established. Its members are Mr Michael Brown, Sr Giovanni Farquar, Fr Gerard Kelly, Msgr Peter Kenny, Ms Margaret Naylor, Fr Patrick McInerney and Sr Mary Reaburn.



♣ Sr Giovanni Farquar rsj
♣ Dr Gerard Kelly



♣ Fr Patrick McInerney ssc
♣ Sr Mary Reaburn

♣ Mr Michael Brown
♣ Msgr Peter Kenny



Ms Margaret Naylor

Bishops Commission for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Relations

Bishops Michael Putney, Issam Darwish, Geoffrey Jarrett, and Kevin Manning commenced their three –year term as members of the Bishops Commission for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Relations in May 2006. Bishop Michael Putney was elected chairman by the Conference. Archbishop Jibrail Kassab joined the Commission following his appointment to the newly erected Eparchy St Thomas the Apostle of Sydney of the Chaldeans.

The Commission has been active in planning the formation day on Islam, the Congress on The Role of Religion in Achieving Peace in the Middle East, the NCCA Forum – apart from ecumenical and inter-religious activities at both national and diocesan levels.

At the state level

Mending the Torn Net is the theme of the Queensland Conference of Roman Catholic Commissions for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations to be held 23rd -24th August in Rockhampton. Bishop Michael Putney will present both a public lecture, *How is Ecumenism a necessary part of the Christian Life?* and a conference talk, *Christian Fundamentalists: our dialogue with them and their impact on our interfaith dialogue*. Other presenters include Rt Rev Godfrey Fryar, Anglican Bishop of Rockhampton, Rev Brian Sparksman and Sr Di Phillips, both from the Diocese of Toowoomba, and Sr Beryl Amedee from the Diocese of Rockhampton.

Cardinal Edward Cassidy will be the guest speaker at the formal dinner. No doubt drawing on his vast experience in the Vatican, he will speak on Informal Workings of PCPCU.