



# MISSION AND JUSTICE

## 4/06

Cluster Bombs for Christmas - Lebanon

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### CHECK THIS OUT

I found this quite fascinating. "Optic chiasm & Albert the Great: What is it?"

Part of our visual system. Here, some nerves that come from the right eye cross and go to the left side of the brain, and vice versa. Chiasm comes from the Greek for cross.

Why the crossing? Like many pathways in the nervous system, nerves that look after vision on one side go into the other side of the brain. That means only nerves coming from the nose side of each eye cross. That's because what we see on our right goes into the nose side of our right eye and the outside of our left eye.

So the nerves from these bits go to the left side of our brain, and vice versa..

Who was Albert the Great? In the 13th century, German theologian and scientist, [Dominican], Albert the Great first suggested visual nerve fibres are crossed after noticing that damage to one side of the head caused loss of vision on the opposite side - vision, crossing"; **THE SYDNEY MORNING HERALD; DR ADAM TAOR; 26/8/06**

I find it annoying when people, and issues, are labelled as left-wing or right-wing. It could just as well be left- or right-eyed. The use of "right and "left" in this context has the pious nonsense about the bad angel being on our left-shoulder and good angel on our right and it also has a touch of the horrible suspiciousness about people who are left-handed. In reality the use of "left" and "right" is mostly a euphemism for "bad" and "good", or, "right" and "wrong". **GOLDEN INDIGNATION; 'ISLAMOFASCISTS' ARE ROAMING AMERICA'S CARTOON WORLD**

If we go along with Albert the Great it all appears to depend on the brain. It seems to me the very people who think someone is left-wing may in fact be quite left-wing themselves but not realise it because of these wandering nerves. It also adds new meaning to the term "cross-eyed" and helps to explain terms like "Islamofascists" Because usually the right/left distinction is mostly about politics, church teaching (because I am priest I get a lot of that) nastiness and downright silliness – Hollywood, and Fox News, being probably the greatest producers of Islamofascist, etc. silliness

I much prefer to use terms which say it like it is: anger, indignation, prejudice, mistaken belief, downright-ignorance, racist, silliness, piousness, extremist, intolerance, etc. Openness is much better and ultimately more honest.

Anyhow: this Christmas I offer you and (a) a letter - which I wish I had written - because "Muslim" has become a convenient whipping boy term in Australia and elsewhere, and (b) a bit of real silliness - which I am glad I didn't write but speaks volumes about some attitudes the current power games in the Catholic church..

a) **Muslims are not unique; CON VAITSAS; ASHBURY;**

[HTTP://WWW.SMh.COM.AU/LETTERS/INDEX.HTML?PAGE=FULLPAGE#CONTENTSWAP2](http://www.smh.com.au/letters/index.html?page=fullpage#contentswap2)

"While I agree with Colin Rubenstein that the term and policy of multiculturalism should not be changed ... I don't know why commentators always use Muslims as examples of those who preach hatred or extremism. All ethnic and religious groups, including Christians, Jews and Anglo-Aussies, have people who advocate violence and intolerance. No one distinct community has a monopoly on these traits."

But we have to learn to laugh when real silliness hits us:

b) **Vatican says Jesus died for all but correct Mass translation is "for many";**

**23/11/06; [HTTP://WWW.CATHNEWS.COM/NEWS/611/133.PHP](http://www.cathnews.com/news/611/133.php)**

"The Holy See congregation responsible for sacraments has instructed bishops to adjust the translation of the Latin words of consecration "pro multis" from "for all" to the more literally correct "for many", even though "for all" would correspond better to Jesus' intentions.

Catholic News Agency reports that Cardinal Francis Arinze, Prefect of the Congregation for the Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, has sent a letter to Church prelates worldwide, instructing them to adjust the translation of the phrase in the middle of the Mass's words of consecration.

Over the next few years, the Cardinal Arinze's letter says, the bishops should make adjustments so that when the priest celebrates the Mass in English he will say over the chalice, "... It will be shed for you and for many so that sins may be forgiven..." rather than, "...for you and for all..."

There you are - a dose of prejudice and silliness for Christmas. I hope these items don't affect your enjoyment of the Christmas season. I also hope you enjoy the rest of the articles.

A happy Christmas and have a great New Year.[LR]

## **GOLDEN INDIGNATION**

**2003-2006 TOM BARRETT; PAX CHRISTI, AUSTRALIA; 8/06**

At the end of the 1937 film *The Man Who Could Work Miracles* written by H. G. Wells, three gods discuss the value, or lack thereof, of humanity. One, known as The Giver of Power, concludes that humankind is worth keeping around. Though puny and weak, people are more than just apes. He says: "No, there is something in every one of those creatures more than that. Like a little grain of gold glittering in sand — lost in the sand — a flash of indignation when they think things are false and wrong. That's godlike. Dirt is never indignant. That is why they interest me."

That flash of indignation when we think things are wrong and false shows up early. Toddlers hate to see other sentient beings hurt. They know cruelty is wrong and it hurts their hearts. When one baby cries, it is likely the next one will cry too knowing that something is wrong; something is not as it should be.

Empathy can be strained out of humans. It can be lost in the sand with its close cousin indignation, but it is there at the start.

Our indignation may cause conflicts among us, even to the point of war, but it is also a source of good. It moves us to serve the good, to relieve suffering, to imagine a better world and to act to that end. The indignant join the army or march for peace or gather medical supplies and take them to refugees. They build schools and hospitals and design better cities.

Frustrated indignation can lead to cynicism, which rarely leads to constructive action. The cynic focuses on the problem and accommodates to it. Cynics can be very funny, but are they happy?

Sometimes indignation burns in our minds and we see no relief for the pain. We know about the falsity and wrongness of conditions, but we seem powerless to change them.

Stuck in frustrated outrage, depression sets in and the light of life grows dim. When we focus on our own frailty and weakness and the immensity of what is wrong with the world we can feel hopeless. When we look instead at what we can do and then begin to serve, hope grows, as does our sense of being effective and worthwhile.

So let us consider our own sense of indignation, and honour it, and focus it, and act upon it. Let our indignation be infused with the compassion that lies near its original source. Let it be a reminder that we are born with wisdom, an innate knowing of what is good and fair and right.

## **DOMINICAN FAMILY ASIA PACIFIC JUSTICE, PEACE AND CARE OF CREATION CONFERENCE**

CONFERENCE STATEMENT; 20TH OCTOBER 2006

### **Context:**

Fifty delegates of the Dominican Family representing 11 countries throughout the Asia Pacific region gathered at St Dominic's High School, Kaohsiung, Taiwan, for the Seventh Asia Pacific Justice, Peace and Care of Creation Conference, 16 – 20 October 2006. The Socius for Asia Pacific, the International Co-Promoter for Justice, Peace and Care of Creation, the Asia Pacific coordinator for Dominican Sisters International and the Dominican Leadership Conference UN representative were also present. We wish to thank the Dominican Family of Taiwan for their gracious and generous hospitality.

The three-fold conference theme included Migration, Trafficking and Justice and Peace Spirituality.

Resource persons provided in-depth knowledge of their respective topics, many reporting graphic and heart-rending accounts of their ministry, particularly concerning Migrants on the Move, and Trafficking. Exposure visits to organizations associated with migrant and trafficking issues were insightful.

Justice and Peace spirituality within the major religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity) provided new and deeper understandings for the participants.

### **Declaration:**

We, the Dominican Family Justice, Peace and Care of Creation delegates within the Asia Pacific region, having reflected deeply on the themes of Migration, Trafficking, and Justice and Peace Spirituality, declare the following:

We affirm the loving care and efforts of those sisters and brothers whose ministries are currently addressing issues associated with Migrants, Refugees, and Trafficking in the Asia Pacific region.

We condemn all forms of human rights violations, particularly human trafficking, and all forms of abuse and unequal treatment of women in the church and society. We especially condemn the abuse and commodification of women and girls for sexual and labour purposes.

We stand in solidarity with the victims of human rights abuses, especially migrants and refugees and their families, and pledge our supports as they act to regain human dignity.

We strongly encourage support of organizations working with victims of human rights abuses, especially migrants and trafficked people.

We alert our congregations, provinces and communities to human rights abuses in their own country, and urge appropriate actions to eliminate the underlying causes of such abuse.

We recognize that in a spirituality of justice “prayer and action for justice, contemplation and social transformation are all integral dimensions of Christian spirituality. Justice perfectly finds its place as an integral element of a holistic Christian spirituality.” Conference Address by Quirico Pedregosa, Jr, OP

We pledge our support for continuing interfaith dialogue and collaboration in joint actions of justice.

It will be important to network and collaborate among the Dominican Family in the Asia Pacific region wherever this would be mutually helpful to fulfill the declared actions.

## **118 DAYS**

**HOW I SURVIVED CAPTIVITY IN IRAQ; JAMES LONEY; SOJOURNERS 12/06; JAMES LONEY HAS BEEN A MEMBER OF CHRISTIAN PEACEMAKER TEAMS SINCE 2000. HE HAS SERVED ON CPT PROJECTS IN IRAQ, PALESTINE, KENORA AND ASUBPEESCHOSEEWAGONG, ONTARIO, AND ESGEENOPETITJ, NEW BRUNSWICK. HE LIVES IN ONTARIO AND WORKS AS CPT'S CANADA PROGRAM COORDINATOR.**

*[The Editors*

*On Nov. 26, 2005, four members of the Christian Peacemaker Teams in Iraq — Tom Fox, James Loney, Norman Kember, and Harmeet Singh Sooden — were taken captive at gunpoint near the Umm al-Qura mosque in Baghdad by men who later identified themselves as the Swords of Righteousness Brigade.*

*Through videos and statements sent to the Arabic-language television network al-Jazeera, the captors threatened to kill the four men unless the Iraqi government freed its prisoners and U.S. and British forces left Iraq.*

*On March 9, 2006, Tom Fox was killed and his body dumped in a residential neighbourhood in western Baghdad. He died from gunshot wounds to his head and chest.*

*After 118 days in captivity, Loney, Kember, and Sooden were released March 23, 2006, when intelligence gathered by British forces led to a raid on the house where the men were held. The captors had left before the soldiers arrived. No one was harmed in the extraction.*

*During the four months that the CPT members were held, a worldwide coalition of supporters emerged — including Palestinian children, Iraqi peace activists, and Islamic political leaders.*

*After their release, Christian Peacemaker Teams, in consultation with Iraqi partners, decided to transfer their operation to northern Iraq. CPT — which is a program of the historic peace churches in the U.S. and Canada, including Brethren, Quaker, and Mennonite churches — currently has 190 members working on projects in Iraq, Colombia, Palestine, Canada, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and along the U.S.-Mexico border, training people of faith in the principles and practice of non-violence to enter conflict zones and promote peace.]*

We were taken, one by one ... an abductor at each arm, into a living room and pushed onto a couch. First Tom Fox, 55, American, full-time Christian Peacemaker Teams member and veteran of 14 months of project work in Iraq. Then Harmeet Singh Sooden, 33, a Canadian citizen living in New Zealand and a short-term CPT delegate. Then me, 41, Canadian, CPT Canada program coordinator and delegation leader. Finally, Norman Kember, 72, British, retired professor of physics and another short-termer.

The Quran was being sung from a 24-hour religious channel, illustrated with a slideshow of flowing water, green landscapes, blue sky, clouds.

On the wall was a picture of a man with puppy-dog eyes, long hair, and beard, fingers pointing to a heart exposed through flowing robes. I grimaced. Being kidnapped, searched, relieved of our passports, handcuffed, and blindfolded — all under the provident eye of the Sacred Heart and the prayer-song of the Quran - was surreal.

But the guns, the dog barking viciously in a room somewhere, the Iraqi man carried past our door and out of the house, his screams of terror muted by a gag — they were all horribly and irrevocably real. A 1,000 - pound question mark dangled over our heads. Would we be killed, tortured, released tomorrow, held for years, or disappeared forever?

That first day, I turned instinctively, blindly, to prayer. I used my fingers to pray the rosary. I prayed the Jesus Prayer, over and over, until it breathed autonomously in me.

I thought of each person I knew, held them in light, gave thanks to God for their lives. I prayed especially for those who would carry the burden of our captivity: our families and loved ones, the other CPT members in Baghdad, and the staff in the Chicago and Toronto offices.

I made up long litanies to the Sacred Heart of Jesus: "O most holy Sacred Heart" along with "Deliver me ... Free me ... Protect me." I didn't know God's will. I didn't know what I might be asked to give. I feared that I was too weak, too selfish to offer it.

As our captivity progressed, the acute, heart-pounding terror of those first days gradually phased into a chronic white noise. Boredom became the great enemy. I was lost in a universe of grey-wash, grey that invaded, infected, and debilitated every pore of my being.

Tom Fox became the prophet of the present moment. "All we have is the now," he would say. "The past is a fiction and the future doesn't exist." He would tell us about his meditations, how, as he passed through his fingers the chain that bound his wrists, he would receive and send God's light with the count of each breath. He strained with his whole being to let go of everything — even the hope of release — and just be present to the present.

An initial feeling of challenge and inspiration gave way to theological irritation. That's fine for ordinary times, I thought, but not when the present moment is a living, ineradicable hell. I became self-absorbed, irritated with everything: Harmeet's wiggling toes, Norman's burps, the way Tom chewed his food, the hours of feckless small talk.

I didn't dare tell them. Each day, each hour, each minute I was confronted with a choice: Withdraw, clench my heart into a fist, and conserve my widow's mite of emotional energy or open my heart, inhabit the moment, be generous with acceptance and conversation and listening.

Sometimes, the misery of captivity would dissolve into sharing about our lives: games of Wheel of Fortune, riddles, discussions about bad movies or strategies for unlearning racism, heated Quaker, Baptist, and Catholic Bible exegesis. I imagined that our daily task was to build a Palace of the Present Moment, a refuge from our 11-foot square, paint-peeling room of never-ending gloom.

This, I began to see, is what it means to be born again. The present moment was the birth canal of incarnation.

From Early on the prospect of release was held before us. First our captors said we would be freed in a few days, as a propaganda statement "to show the world we are not like al Qaeda." Then it was to be before the Iraqi elections in mid-December. When those came and went, they said it would be another week. Just in time for Christmas, we thought, a public relations coup for the insurgency. We began to entertain fantasies about a Christmas reunion with our families.

As the day approached, Norman was the first to shift his focus to getting us through a Christmas in handcuffs and chains. I was the last to give up that hope, and staved off despair by recounting Dr. Seuss' *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*.

Norman led us through a Christmas Eve service, and with the help of his prodigious memory we sang 36 Christmas carols. Tom told Luke's Christmas story from memory. I gulped down tears at the words, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy for all the people ... Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace."

The next day, we told ourselves, was just another day. We tried not to think about our families labouring through Christmas without us. Dinner consisted of pita bread stuffed with white rice.

That night we were visited by the ringleader whom we called "Medicine Man" because he brought Norman's blood pressure medicine on day two of our captivity. He dropped a pile of clothes on a chair: track pants, socks, underwear, an undershirt, and sweater for each of us. I was delighted. The nights were growing cold.

After 30 days in captivity we were no longer quite so fresh. Medicine Man told us that negotiations for our ransom were under way; that we would be released in five days. He pointed to us and held his nose. "Tomorrow you will take some shower," he said. When he left, I said, "Do you guys mind if I take one of those sweaters now? I'm cold." Of course, they said. The one on top happened to be the one I liked best.

As promised, we had our first bath in 31 days. Standing in a grime-bottomed bathtub, I poured basin after basin of kerosene-heated water over my naked body, every cell of it thrilling with pleasure.

While getting dressed I noticed that the pull-tab on the new sweater's zipper was shaped like a heart. I wondered if it was a woman's sweater and examined it carefully. The tag said it was for men. But a heart-shaped pull-tab? I looked again at the piece of polished metal, open in the centre. An open heart. The Sacred Heart. Tears filled my eyes.

On December 28, our captors brought us a Christmas cake decorated with thick white icing, green palm trees, and indecipherable pink writing. They sang "Happy Birthday to You" in honour of Jesus' birth,

and we sang "Silent Night." The captor we nicknamed "Uncle" cut and distributed the cake with a piece of cardboard. Then, laughing merrily, he scooped up a big fistful and shovelled it into his mouth.

The next day, the captor we called "Junior" declared he was going on a suicide mission.

He mimed driving a car full of explosives up to an American Humvee, and boom! Pointing first to himself and then skyward, eyes rolling piously, he said, "Jenna [heaven]. With my mother, my father, my fiancé." They, along with his best friend and one of his sisters, were killed when the U.S. bombed his house in Fallujah. Then, pointing to the earth and spitting, he said, "America."

I once asked him what he would be doing if the U.S. hadn't invaded his country. "Helping my father in the market," he shrugged. Junior was 25 years old with a grade six education.

His intention to use his young body as a weapon disturbed me profoundly. I racked my brain for some way to break through his bomb-proof, God-blessed, necrophiliac logic. I wanted him to know, right in his body, how good, how beautiful he was, how much God loved him.

On New Year's Eve, while Junior supervised our morning exercise and bathroom routine, I brought him a chair, pointed to it, then pointed to his shoulders and mimed massaging them. He often complained of neck and shoulder pain. He took the chair, eyes wide with surprise.

My thumbs and fingers searched through the network of knotted muscle and spasms that had colonized his back. I could feel him melting into the chair. Something told me he had never been touched this way.

It was day 17. We were un-handcuffed and rotating through the bathroom in preparation for bed, Harmeet, Norman, and me. Tom had been separated from us on Feb. 12, 2006—39 days before. Though we feared the worst, we lived with and accepted our suspicions just as we did our handcuffs, our chains, the ongoing theft of our lives.

Junior held out his right forearm and pleaded, "Come on, Jim. Massage. Massage." I was sitting on top of our communal bed and Junior sat cross-legged in front of me. Despite my reluctance, I complied. It's hard to say no to a captor. As I kneaded his forearm, he released a torrent of woes: no mother, no father, no house, no marriage, no children, no job, no money to fix the clutch on his car. He explained in body language that the pain in his arms was from his day job, using a high-powered rifle to shoot American soldiers.

He seemed on the brink of despair.

"What do they say in Canada about suicide? Is it okay or not?" Junior asked me. "It is haram [forbidden]," I answered, "by Esau [Jesus]."

"Good," he said, "just like Islam." He looked at me, pointing his finger solemnly at his own chest, and said, "I no suicide. Suicide no good — haram. I [get] married. I [become] father."

Junior locked us up, turned off the light, and left the room. That was my last encounter with him. The next morning Britain's Taskforce Black busted us out. Junior and a second captor fled before their arrival. Just as we were kidnapped, so were we freed, in the time it takes a general to snap his fingers.

It has been a year since our abduction. I often wonder what's become of Junior and the others, what trajectories their lives have taken. Our lives have followed the trajectory of return to ordinary time, but I suspect none of us are quite the same. I know I'm not, though how I can't really describe.

It's an ontological imprint left by Tom (dear Tom!), Harmeet, and Norman; our captors; our 118-day sojourn through the black hole of captivity; the paradox of being freed (and incredible gratitude for being freed) by the arms of the very soldiers we would disarm.

This, I think, is what I've learned, though I make no claims about success-fully living it: We are born to be born, again and again, every day in every moment in every decision, big or small, regardless of where we are or what is happening to us.

We were given birth to give birth, and every body is holy.

The hardest birth of all is dying. The labour pains will seize us; we have no control over the time or place.

Our job is to allow God to breathe us through, together, in the mystery of incarnation.

And peace — the birthright, the manger and swaddling clothes of every human being, announced by angel voices that say "Do not be afraid!" — I have come to cherish as the dearest and most essential of all things, even more (I say with fear and trembling) than life itself.

The gun, the bomb, the military-industrial office chair, the words that carpet-bomb the garden God gave us to share: These are anti-Christ indeed, as incarnation as Junior's immolate despair.

### A Gateway to Humanity - Harmeet Singh Sooden

Harmeet Singh Sooden, who was held captive in Iraq for 118 days, is a post-graduate student in English literature at the University of Auckland (New Zealand). This article is excerpted from a speech he gave for the university's 2006 Peace Day chapel service.

I have always been uncomfortable with the designation "peacemaker." "Makers" usually have an intimate relationship with their craft. How do I even begin to talk about the abstract notion of peace? We were just four men sitting in a room.

During our protracted captivity, Tom instigated a multi-faith discussion forum as a way for us to cope psychologically. We would recall a proverb or quote and spend some time discussing its meanings and implications.

"I remember Tom for his outstanding humanity," wrote fellow captive Norman Kember. "We often heard explosions in the city and he would pray for the victims and their families. He reminded us that our deprivations in captivity were paralleled by those in the lives of many in Iraq and the wider world. In captivity he volunteered to take on the greater discomforts." The last of his discomforts was relinquishing his life.

We abhorred the thought of any payment of ransom money, taken from the impoverished in one part of the world to kill the impoverished in another. We failed the tortured Iraqi man incarcerated with us whose cries, whimpers, and terror we were only able to commit to memory.

Jim spent much time with one of our more volatile captors trying to convince him not to become a suicide bomber. He encouraged him most evenings while massaging his tense back, telling him he would make a good father.

Tom built relationships that created a sense of duty within him. He did not merely "hope for a day," but he exercised free will — in fact, good will. In that 10-by-12-foot prison, under the constant threat of death, fettered for 23 hours a day and deprived of food, Norman, Jim, and Tom took on the responsibility for the well-being of our captors, themselves human beings under occupation. The captor we called "Uncle" responded naturally with tenderness beyond the mandate of his role when he presented us with a rose in a teacup.

If one considers the many-windowed house as a metaphor for peace, then its windows, "of dissimilar shape and size," as Henry James puts it, "hang ... all together, over the human scene," providing pacifist insights of a political, historic, economic, cultural, environmental, philosophical, or religious nature.

Peacemakers, who are bound by brick-and-mortar conceptions of peace, inhabit not an enclosed facade but instead a gateway that offers not only

### THE POPE'S EVIL LEGEND — MOHAMMAD'S SWORD

URI AVNERY; 3/10/06; [WWW.JORDANTIMES.COM/INDEX.HTM](http://WWW.JORDANTIMES.COM/INDEX.HTM) THE AUTHOR IS AN ISRAELI WRITER AND PEACE ACTIVIST WITH GUSH SHALOM. HE IS ONE OF THE WRITERS FEATURED IN "THE OTHER ISRAEL: VOICES OF DISSENT AND REFUSAL". HE IS ALSO A CONTRIBUTOR TO COUNTERPUNCH'S HOT NEW BOOK "THE POLITICS OF ANTI-SEMITISM".

Since the days when Roman emperors threw Christians to the lions, the relations between the emperors and the heads of the church have undergone many changes.

Constantine the Great, who became emperor in the year 306 — exactly 1,700 years ago — encouraged the practice of Christianity in the empire, which included Palestine. Centuries later, the church split into an Eastern (Orthodox) and a Western (Catholic) part. In the West, the Bishop of Rome, who acquired the title of Pope, demanded that the emperor accept his superiority.

The struggle between the emperors and the popes played a central role in European history and divided the peoples. It knew ups and downs. Some emperors dismissed or expelled a Pope, some popes dismissed or excommunicated an emperor. One of the emperors, Henry IV, "walked to Canossa", standing for

three days barefoot in the snow in front of the Pope's castle, until the Pope deigned to annul his excommunication.

But there were times when emperors and popes lived in peace with each other. We are witnessing such a period today. Between the present Pope, Benedict XVI, and the present emperor, George Bush II, there exists a wonderful harmony. The recent speech by the Pope, which aroused a worldwide storm, went well with Bush's crusade against "Islamofascism", in the context of the "Clash of Civilisations".

In his lecture at a German university, the 265th Pope described what he sees as a huge difference between Christianity and Islam: while Christianity is based on reason, Islam denies it. While Christians see the logic of God's actions, Muslims deny that there is any such logic in the actions of Allah.

As a Jewish atheist, I do not intend to enter the fray of this debate. It is much beyond my humble abilities to understand the logic of the Pope. But I cannot overlook one passage, which concerns me too, as an Israeli living near the fault line of this "war of civilisations".

In order to prove the lack of reason in Islam, the Pope asserts that the Prophet Mohammad ordered his followers to spread their religion by the sword. According to the Pope, that is unreasonable, because faith is born of the soul, not of the body. How can the sword influence the soul?

**The Sephardi ("Spanish") Jews settled all over the Muslim world, from Morocco in the west to Iraq in the east, from Bulgaria (then part of the Ottoman Empire) in the north to Sudan in the south. Nowhere were they persecuted. They knew nothing like the tortures of the Inquisition, the flames of the auto-da-fe, the pogroms, the terrible mass expulsions that took place in almost all Christian countries, up to the Holocaust. Why? Because Islam expressly prohibited any persecution of the "peoples of the book". In Islamic society, a special place was**

To support his case, the Pope quoted — of all people — a Byzantine Emperor, who belonged, of course, to the competing Eastern Church. At the end of the 14th century, the Emperor Manuel II Palaeologus told of a debate he had — or so he said (its occurrence is in doubt) — with an unnamed Persian Muslim scholar. In the heat of the argument, the emperor (according to himself) flung the following words at his adversary: "Show me just what Mohammad brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached."

These words give rise to three questions:

- a) Why did the emperor say them?
- b) Are they true?
- c) Why did the present Pope quote them?

When Manuel II wrote his treatise, he was the head of a dying empire. He assumed power in 1391, when only a few provinces of the once illustrious empire remained. These, too, were already under Turkish threat. At that point in time, the Ottoman Turks had reached the banks of the Danube. They had conquered Bulgaria and the north of Greece, and had twice defeated relieving armies sent by Europe to save the Eastern Empire. In 1453, only a few years after Manuel's death, his capital, Constantinople (the present Istanbul) fell to the Turks, putting an end to the empire that had lasted for more than a thousand years.

During his reign, Manuel made the rounds of the capitals of Europe in an attempt to drum up support. He promised to reunite the church. There is no doubt that he wrote his religious treatise in order to incite the Christian countries against the Turks and convince them to start a new crusade. The aim was practical, theology was serving politics. In this sense, the quote serves exactly the requirements of the present emperor, George Bush II. He, too, wants to unite the Christian world against the mainly Muslim "Axis of Evil". Moreover, the Turks are again knocking on the doors of Europe, this time peacefully. It is well known that the Pope supports the forces that object to the entry of Turkey into the European Union.

Is there any truth in Manuel's argument?

The Pope himself threw in a word of caution.

As a serious and renowned theologian, he could not afford to falsify written texts. Therefore, he admitted that the Koran specifically forbade the spreading of the faith by force. He quoted the second Sura, verse 256 (strangely fallible, for a Pope, he meant verse 257) which says: "There must be no coercion in matters of faith".

How can one ignore such an unequivocal statement? The Pope simply argues that this commandment was laid down by the prophet when he was at the beginning of his career, still weak and powerless, but that later on he ordered the use of the sword in the service of the faith. Such an order does not exist in the Koran. True, Mohammad called for the use of the sword in his war against opposing tribes — Christian, Jewish and



others — in Arabia, when he was building his state. But that was a political act, not a religious one; basically a fight for territory, not for the spreading of the faith.

Jesus said: “You will recognise them by their fruits.” The treatment of other religions by Islam must be judged by a simple test: How did the Muslim rulers behave for more than a thousand years, when they had the power to “spread the faith by the sword?”

Well, they just did not.

For many centuries, the Muslims ruled Greece. Did the Greeks become Muslims? Did anyone even try to Islamise them? On the contrary, Christian Greeks held the highest positions in the Ottoman administration. The Bulgarians, Serbs, Romanians, Hungarians and other European nations lived at one time or another under Ottoman rule and clung to their Christian faith. Nobody compelled them to become Muslims and all of them remained devoutly Christian.

True, the Albanians did convert to Islam, and so did the Bosniaks. But nobody argues that they did this under duress. They adopted Islam in order to become favourites of the government and enjoy the fruits.

In 1099, the Crusaders conquered Jerusalem and massacred its Muslim and Jewish inhabitants indiscriminately, in the name of the gentle Jesus. At that time, 400 years into the occupation of Palestine by the Muslims, Christians were still the majority in the country.

Throughout this long period, no effort was made to impose Islam on them. Only after the expulsion of the Crusaders from the country did the majority of the inhabitants start to adopt the Arabic language and the Muslim faith — and they were the forefathers of most of today’s Palestinians.

There is no evidence whatsoever of any attempt to impose Islam on the Jews. As is well known, under Muslim rule, the Jews of Spain enjoyed a bloom the like of which the Jews did not enjoy anywhere else until almost our time. Poets like Yehuda Halevy wrote in Arabic, as did the great Maimonides. In Muslim Spain, Jews were ministers, poets, scientists.

In Muslim Toledo, Christian, Jewish and Muslim scholars worked together and translated the ancient Greek philosophical and scientific texts. That was, indeed, the Golden Age. How would this have been possible, had the prophet decreed the “spreading of the faith by the sword”?

What happened afterwards is even more telling.

When the Catholics reconquered Spain from the Muslims, they instituted a reign of religious terror. The Jews and the Muslims were presented with a cruel choice: to become Christians, to be massacred or to leave. And where did the hundreds of thousand of Jews, who refused to abandon their faith, escape? Almost all of them were received with open arms in the Muslim countries.

The Sephardi (“Spanish”) Jews settled all over the Muslim world, from Morocco in the west to Iraq in the east, from Bulgaria (then part of the Ottoman Empire) in the north to Sudan in the south. Nowhere were they persecuted. They knew nothing like the tortures of the Inquisition, the flames of the auto-da-fe, the pogroms, the terrible mass expulsions that took place in almost all Christian countries, up to the Holocaust.

Why? Because Islam expressly prohibited any persecution of the “peoples of the book”. In Islamic society, a special place was reserved for Jews and Christians.

They did not enjoy completely equal rights, but almost. They had to pay a special poll tax, but were exempted from military service — a trade-off that was quite welcome to many Jews. It has been said that Muslim rulers frowned upon any attempt to convert Jews to Islam even by gentle persuasion — because it entailed the loss of taxes.

Every honest Jew who knows the history of his people cannot but feel a deep sense of gratitude to Islam, which has protected the Jews for fifty generations, while the Christian world persecuted the Jews and tried many times “by the sword” to get them to abandon their faith.

The story about “spreading the faith by the sword” is an evil legend, one of the myths that grew up in Europe during the great wars against the Muslims — the reconquista of Spain by the Christians, the Crusades and the repulsion of the Turks, who almost conquered Vienna. I suspect that the German Pope, too, honestly believes in these fables. That means that the leader of the Catholic world, who is a Christian theologian in his own right, did not make the effort to study the history of other religions.

Why did he utter these words in public? And why now?

There is no escape from viewing them against the background of the new Crusade of Bush and his evangelist supporters, with his slogans of “Islamofascism” and the “Global War on Terrorism” — when “terrorism” has become a synonym for Muslims. For Bush’s handlers, this is a cynical attempt to justify the domination of the world’s oil resources.

Not for the first time in history, a religious robe is spread to cover the nakedness of economic interests; not for the first time, a robber's expedition becomes a Crusade.

The speech of the Pope blends into this effort. Who can foretell the dire consequences?

### **ISLAM A GREAT RELIGION, SAYS BENEDICT - CORRECTED REGENSBURG TEXT**

10/10/06; [WWW.ASIANNEWS.IT/](http://WWW.ASIANNEWS.IT/)

Recognising the "understandable indignation" aroused by his Regensburg lecture last month, Pope Benedict has released a corrected version in which he now explicitly acknowledges his respect for the Koran as the Holy Book of a "great religion". The BBC reports that the Pope expresses his respect for Islam in new footnotes to his lecture and also corrects the actual text of his lecture.

In his lecture exploring the relationship between faith, reason and violence, the Pope had quoted a 14th Century Byzantine Christian emperor, Emperor Manuel II Paleologos who said the Prophet Mohammed had brought only "evil and inhuman" things. The emperor's words Pope Benedict quoted were: "Show me just what Muhammad [sic] brought that was new and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached."

During his original delivery, Benedict had said "I quote" twice to stress the words were not his and added that violence was "incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul". However, this was not sufficient to prevent strong offence being taken in the Muslim world.

In the new version of his text, Pope Benedict makes it clearer that he finds the "brusqueness" of the emperor's words "unacceptable". In the footnote, the Pontiff acknowledges that in the Muslim world the quotation was unfortunately taken as his personal view, arousing "understandable indignation".

"In the Muslim world, this quotation has unfortunately been taken as an expression of my personal position, thus arousing understandable indignation," the Pope writes in the new footnote.

"I hope that the reader of my text can see immediately that this sentence does not express my personal view of the Qur'an, for which I have the respect due to the holy book of a great religion. In quoting the text of the Emperor Manuel II, I intended solely to draw out the essential relationship between faith and reason. On this point I am in agreement with Manuel II, but without endorsing his polemic," the Pope added.

He also now qualifies Manuel's comments as being of "startling brusqueness" that we now "find unacceptable"

### **DALAI LAMA; MUSLIMS HAVE BEEN DEMONIZED IN WEST**

10/10/06; [WWW.ABNEWS.COM/](http://WWW.ABNEWS.COM/)

The Dalai Lama, Tibet's exiled spiritual leader, has warned against portraying Islam as a religion of violence, saying Muslims have been wrongly demonized in the West since the Sept. 11 attacks. Promoting religious tolerance, the world's most influential Buddhist leader said Sunday that talk of "a clash of civilizations between the West and the Muslim world is wrong and dangerous."

Terrorist attacks have distorted people's views of Islam, making them believe it is an extremist faith rather than one based on compassion, the Dalai Lama told a press conference in the Indian capital.

Muslims are being unfairly stigmatized as a result of violence by "some mischievous people," said the Dalai Lama, who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 for his work to bring democracy and freedom to his people. All religions have extremists and "it is wrong to generalize (about Muslims)," the 71-year-old spiritual leader said. "They (terrorists) cannot represent the whole system," he said.

The Dalai Lama, who has lived in the northern Indian hill town of Dharamsala since fleeing Tibet after a failed uprising against Chinese rule in 1959, said he had cast himself in the role of defender of Islam because he wanted to reshape people's views of the religion.

Asked about the uproar last month when Pope Benedict XVI quoted a 14th-century Christian emperor to portray Islam as a religion tainted by violence, the Dalai Lama said "if you return to past history there are a lot of complications." "It is better to forget ... and to deal with today's reality," he said. "Past history is (full of) uncivilised events," he said.

Benedict had quoted statements by Emperor Manuel II — ruling from what is now Istanbul — that everything the Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) had brought was evil and that he spread Islam by violence. The pontiff later apologized for the comments which triggered angry reactions around the world.

**"if you return to past history  
there are a lot of  
complications. It is better to  
forget ... and to deal with  
today's reality. Past history is**

## **EGYPT PRIEST SAYS POPE'S STATEMENTS 'FORTUNATE FALL'**

**3/10/06 :: [WWW.JORDANTIMES.COM/INDEX.HTM/](http://WWW.JORDANTIMES.COM/INDEX.HTM/)**

Pope Benedict's statements which linked Islam to violence and caused outrage in the Muslim world were in fact a "fortunate fall" which could lead to a more open dialogue between the two faiths according to an Egyptian priest.

Henry Boulad, the director of the Jesuit College in Cairo, believes the time has come for "clarity, an exit from the vagueness," in the relationship between Christianity and Islam.

Born in Alexandria in 1931 and now the head of Cairo's French Jesuit college, Boulad says that the speech given by Pope Benedict XVI which quoted a medieval Christian emperor who linked Islam with violence, while "unfortunate and regrettable" had the ability to spark a "more real and frank dialogue" between the two religions.

"If there was an error on the part of the Pope, it could turn fortunate: It is a *felix culpa*," he told AFP, borrowing St. Augustine's expression "fortunate fall" in Latin, to describe an unfortunate event which brings about good.

Sitting in his modest office at the college of the Holy Family in the Fagallah district of Cairo, a melting pot of Cairo's elite for over a century, the priest predicts "the beginning of the experiment." Boulad believes that moderate or reformist Islamists are today marginalised in Egypt, suppressed under a trend of "Islamisation of society." For him, Islamism, a trend advocating the reorganisation of government and society in accordance with laws prescribed by Islam, "reflects the essence of an Islam that has been frozen, like a chick still in its egg.

"It's a type of totalitarian thought," says the priest who formerly held the post of vice president of the Christian aid agency Caritas in the Arab world. "Girls are veiled younger and younger and the thrust towards fundamentalism continues with a radicalisation of minds," he says.

The priest who studied in Lebanon, France and United States also talks of an "Islamic schizophrenia" especially on the issue of women who are seen as "objects of lust but forbidden" simultaneously. "Gender is a central problem," he says.

Benedict's comments "fully reflect his will to clarify what separates Islam from Christianity over these fundamental questions," says Boulad.

According to the priest, Benedict is a man who understands Islamic theology well, allowing the Pope "to say that 'Islam is inseparable from politics and a global social project.'" As for the reactions of Muslim communities around the world which were at times violent, Boulad describes them as "understandable but often irrational." "The Pope's statements will force each person to expose what is in their heart, without pretence," he says.

"When they say Islam is a religion of tolerance, I'm waiting for the proof," he says pointing to the lack of religious freedoms in the 57 countries with majority Muslim populations.

In Egypt, it is inconceivable for a Muslim to freely and openly convert to Christianity. Ten per cent of the 72 million population are Christian, most of which belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church. If they do convert, "it is in complete secrecy or in exile," he says. "But a Christian man who wishes to marry a Muslim woman is forced to convert to Islam," he says.

"The Pope knows this. He is very lucid and he has no illusions on religious reciprocity, or rather the lack of it," says Boulad.

## **SOMETHING HAS GONE TERRIBLY WRONG**

**JIM WALLIS; SOJOURNERS; 6/06**

Australia is an absolutely beautiful country, and it wasn't until I got back there (after more than a decade) that I realized how much I missed it. And being there again, about as far away from the United States as you can get, gave me new perspective on the perilous state of my own country.

I went "down under" again because a young woman that I had baptized as a teenager was getting married, and she had called to ask if I would officiate at her wedding ceremony.

**My tour was sponsored by World Vision Australia, and I was joined the whole way by its director, Tim Costello — a clear and public voice of prophetic conscience in his own nation. The way an imperial and increasingly messianic American foreign policy has gotten associated with Christian faith around the world is almost incomprehensible — and terribly embarrassing to the mainstream Australian**

The request was wonderfully oblivious of my schedule and

was borne of the deep relationship I have had with her and her family, who were part of Sojourners before returning to their native Australia.

So I said yes, took the whole family, made it into a terrific spring break for my boys, with kangaroos and koalas, and agreed to launch the Australian version of my book *God's Politics* at the same time. What a wonderful 12 days...

Over the years, I've been to Australia many times, and the connections run deep. I remembered my very first visits, invited by a strong network of Christian communities (with wonderful names, such as the "House of the gentle Bunyip") who were vitally linking religious conviction with concrete action in the world on behalf of the poor and oppressed. I met powerful teachers such as Athol Gill, who insisted there was no credible belief in Jesus without following him in "radical discipleship." Later I did a national speaking tour around the country, which began with an event hosted by some of Australia's indigenous Aboriginal leaders who gave me "permission" to speak in their country and presented me with an Aboriginal flag, a ceremony I found very moving.

After a lovely wedding... we headed for a Melbourne Town Hall event on Palm Sunday and then, two days later, to the Great Hall at the University of Sydney, with breakfasts and lunches with church and political leaders in between, book signings and more speaking, all sandwiched among a myriad of media interviews.

As was the case on my British book tour last year, both the political and religious media were quite interested in an American Christian that didn't think God was an American or a right-wing Republican who cares more about anti-gay marriage amendments than about the 30,000 children under 5 in our world who die each day due to hunger and disease.

As in both the U.K. and the U.S., we were able to bring together church leaders from all across the political spectrum — from conservative evangelical and Pentecostal to mainline denominations — to explore how they might find unity on the urgent matters of poverty, the environment, and global violence. Like in the U.S., political leaders from both major parties also wanted to meet and explore a moral vision of politics.

Also like in the U.S., they are increasingly concerned about the rise of a Religious Right in Australian politics. And like everywhere, young people filled the venues, looking for an agenda worthy of their gifts, energy, time, and lives.

After what's happened around *God's Politics* elsewhere, I wasn't surprised by the reception in Australia, and again I was very encouraged. What most struck me were the attitudes of Australians toward the United States — and how much that has changed since I last was there. Don't get me wrong, Australians generally like Americans and that hasn't changed.

But the level of alienation, anger, and disbelief so many people now feel toward American policies was extraordinary. George Bush's war in Iraq generates great emotional opposition from ordinary Australians, despite Prime Minister John Howard's characteristic acquiescence to U.S. war policy.

They can't understand how the deception and manipulation that led to war were allowed to stand. They can't comprehend how President Bush and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld continue despite the disaster of Iraq.

They can't stomach Americans involved in torture, and not holding those in authority responsible for it. And they are increasingly opposed to the presence of Australian troops in Iraq — a recent poll in the country found 59 per-cent of Australians opposed, the highest to date.

The week I returned to the U.S., Australia suffered its first casualty in the war, which will certainly drive the opposition even higher. They think America is losing its sanity and its soul with its "war on terrorism." And how can this administration ignore the consensus of the world on global warming, they wonder? And how can the U.S. now threaten to attack Iran, perhaps even with nuclear weapons? What can the U.S. officials be thinking? I was continually asked.

On one of the leading evening news shows, I was asked what I thought of these two "fundamentalists" (Bush and Iran's President Ahmadinejad) squaring off, with nuclear weapons in the balance. I replied that it should be a very frightening prospect for all of the world's people.

The profound disaffection with their old American friend wasn't limited to the left wing of Australia. My tour was sponsored by World Vision Australia, and I was joined the whole way by its director, Tim Costello — a clear and public voice of prophetic conscience in his own nation. The way an imperial and increasingly messianic American foreign policy has gotten associated with Christian faith around the world is almost incomprehensible — and terribly embarrassing to the mainstream Australian Christians with whom I spoke.

Many Australians are deeply disillusioned with the policies and priorities of the Bush administration. They think something has gone terribly wrong in America. Being with them for Easter, on the other side of the world, made me realize again how much they are right. And I'm sure my Australian friends would have shuddered, once more, when George Bush reminded us last week that he is the "decider" in America and, by implication, in the world.

Perhaps it's time for Americans to confront the question of how those who have taken our nation down this disastrous path can be removed from power. It's hard to keep being reminded of how crazy and dangerous so many people around the world think our country has become.

### **CONFRONTING VIOLENCE**

ONLINE CATHOLICS; #119; 8/06; [HTTP://WWW.WCRP.ORG/](http://www.wcrp.org/)

More than 800 senior religious leaders from every region of the world and all major faith traditions have been meeting to reject violence and the "hijacking of religion" at the [Religions for Peace](#) World Assembly, in Kyoto. The participants were called to Japan by their religious convictions, [Dr William F. Vendley](#), Secretary General of Religions for Peace, said in the opening ceremony speech. Founded as an international, non-sectarian organisation, Religions for Peace is now the largest coalition of the world's religious communities.

The Religions for Peace Eighth World Assembly is the world's largest and most diverse multi-religious assembly. Delegates have come from the Religions for Peace network of more than 70 national and regional affiliated inter-religious councils and groups, and include Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Shinto, Zoroastrian and Indigenous leaders.

"Our religions call us to bear the burdens of the human family. We are here because together we can do more than any one community can do alone." The burdens of the human family were known too well to the people gathered, he said.

"Too many of us know too well the blood of war; how it kills, maims and destroys the lives of the innocent. Too many of us know too well the crushing weight of poverty; how it stunts, humiliates and plunders. Too many of us know too well the children orphaned by HIV/AIDS; know how their families are decimated, their schools emptied, their lives shadowed with stigma and shame. "And yet we gather in hope and as a pledge to action."

He said the hour was short and that there was a double urgency to be faced: the need to address the burdens was urgent but so too was the obligation for the world religions not to allow themselves to be hijacked.

"Whenever extremists attempt to hijack religion for violent ends, whenever politicians seek to exploit

**"Men and women of faith have an important role to play in the global quest for peace, development and dignity. As teachers and guides, you can be agents of change. As community leaders, you can inspire people to new levels of awareness and public service. And, as you are doing at this event, you can set an example of interfaith dialogue, cooperation and respect ...  
By standing together in multi-religious alliances, you are well-placed to be effective agents for peace. By cooperating within the Religions for Peace networks, your effort is multiplied, and your impact in your communities**

sectarian differences, and whenever the press mischaracterises our faith traditions, people of faith, religious communities and religious leaders must stand up, speak out and take action," he said. "Religious communities are gathering at a critical time because religion has been hijacked by extremists, politicians and the media."

In his message to the world assembly, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan wrote: "Men and women of faith have an important role to play in the global quest for peace, development and dignity.

As teachers and guides, you can be agents of change. As community leaders, you can inspire people to new levels of awareness and public service. And, as you are doing at this event, you can set an example of interfaith dialogue, cooperation and respect."

He noted there were many forms of violence in the world: armed conflict, poverty, and the devastating human impact of HIV/AIDS. "By standing together in multi-religious alliances, you are well-placed to be effective agents for peace. By cooperating within the Religions for Peace networks, your effort is multiplied, and your impact in your communities magnified."

He concluded: "My predecessor Dag Hammarskjöld once said, 'The United Nations stands outside – necessarily outside – all confessions. But it is, nevertheless, an instrument of faith. As such it is inspired by

what unites and not by what divides the great religions of the world'. While spiritual and religious practices differ widely, at heart we are dealing in universal values: to be merciful, to be tolerant, to love thy neighbour.

"No tradition can claim a monopoly on such teachings; they are ingrained in the human spirit. They also animate the UN Charter and lie at the root of our global mission of peace. With your help – through prayer and good works – that mission can succeed."

Among the speakers was Prof. Hans Kung, representing the Global Ethic Foundation, Germany.

Through its assembly theme, Confronting Violence and Advancing Shared Security, Religions for Peace says that cooperation is the key to confronting violence. Religious communities working together can be powerful actors to prevent violence before it erupts; mediate among armed groups in the midst of conflict; and lead their communities to rebuild war-torn societies. Multi-religious efforts are more powerful than the efforts of individual religious communities working alone. For example, Religions for Peace has actively addressed situations of conflict in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Iraq through multi-religious efforts.

However, it says, religious communities cannot confront violence alone – religious communities are strengthened through partnerships with governments, international organisations, and all sectors of society.

Religious communities must be part of the solution to violence – there can be no security without them. Religious traditions call on people of faith to care for each other and to treat the problems faced by others as their own. Walls can never be high enough to insulate anyone from the needs and vulnerabilities of others.

The Eighth World Assembly of Religions for Peace plans to articulate a new vision of "shared security" based on the common experiences of the world's religious communities confronting violence. Assembly participants also wish to build partnerships among religious communities and between religious communities and other groups to combat chronic poverty, hunger and disease.

Having brought together religious leaders from zones of conflict – among them Palestine, Israel, Iraq, Lebanon, the Congo and Sudan – it wants to begin the process of healing by finding common moral ground to end the violence that is taking place in religion's name. The assembly, for example, planned to provide an opportunity for meaningful discussion of common concerns among Iraqi Shia, Sunni and Christian religious leaders.

In an attempt to harnesses the power of cooperation among the world's religious communities to transform conflict, build peace, and advance sustainable development, the Religions for Peace Eighth World Assembly has returned to Kyoto, site of the historic first World Assembly in 1970.

Since then, Religions for Peace World Assemblies have been held in Louvain, Belgium (1974), Princeton, New Jersey, USA (1979), Nairobi, Kenya (1984), Melbourne, Australia (1989), Rome, Italy (1994) and Amman, Jordan (1999).

Founded as an international, non-sectarian organisation, Religions for Peace is now the largest coalition of the world's religious communities.

## **WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION**

**OCTAVIUS PINKARD** THE WRITER, A PROFESSOR OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF THE HONOURS PROGRAMME AT CHRISTOPHER NEWPORT UNIVERSITY (US), IS A SPECIALIST IN ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA. HE CONTRIBUTED THIS ARTICLE TO THE JORDAN TIMES; [WWW.JORDANTIMES.COM/INDEX.HTM/](http://WWW.JORDANTIMES.COM/INDEX.HTM/); 5/10/06

Foreign policy failures are difficult to hide. So, too, is the incompetence that produces them. From the calamity in Iraq to the worsening situation in Afghanistan, it has become ever more challenging to either defend or explain Washington's approach to the world beyond its borders.

The succession of failures is dumbfounding, and particularly so because it has been sustained for some six-and-a-half years by a president who has had ample time to get his act together. So far, so bad.

One of the most troubling aspects of America's foreign policy has been the propensity to view complex geopolitics through overly simplistic prisms of "good vs. evil", "freedom vs. tyranny" and "with us or against us". Simple thoughts for simple minds, perhaps, but the realities of the broader Middle East do not unfold into so neat a package.

Take Afghanistan, for example. The dynamics of the country were reduced to a conflict between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance. The situation was, and remains, a far more complicated affair. The country is a most representative (and thus, dangerous) model of a failed state. The central government controls little beyond Kabul and is proving itself less capable, with each passing day, of responding to the proliferation of violence that continues to befall the capital.

Warring factions are intensifying their attacks on one another, on the government and on foreign troops. The supreme irony is that many of the warlords largely responsible for destabilising the country were once funded by the United States in an effort to develop and support local resistance to the Taleban. In this instance, turnabout is foul play, or so it would seem.

Washington insists on disregarding the lessons of history and relies, instead, on the flawed logic that military superiority and superpower status provide advantages in guerrilla warfare. It all sounds eerily familiar — 1979, anyone? The sad reality is that this White House has never truly understood the intricacies of Afghanistan, a state composed of some 50 different ethnic groups which speak no fewer than three dozen different languages. It is not surprising, then, that the conflict has been presented and pursued as if an easy dichotomy — Taleban vs. Northern Alliance.

So far, so wrong.

Iraq is arguably the most significant man-made disaster of the past 20 years. Clearly, George W. Bush and his advisers manipulated intelligence to justify a war that should have never taken place. There was no link between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda. There were never any stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction. And the Iraqi regime played no role in the attacks of Sept. 11.

The White House offered fiction as fact, and an under-informed and uncritical public failed to ask the tough questions and demand the straight answers. The result has been a painful reminder that when the know-nothings are left to do something, chaos and disorder generally ensue. Their masterstroke has given rise to a level of violence, death and insecurity that will likely plague Iraq (and the region) into the foreseeable future.

New revelations by author Bob Woodward only confirm what everyone has suspected for some time, namely that George W. Bush misled the American people and the international community in the lead-up to the invasion; and he withheld information, after the fact, that proved his Iraq policy to be as injurious to peace as it was conducive to the spread of both fundamentalism and terrorism.

So far, so destructive.

Americans deserve better from their presidents, but they also need to be more discerning in selecting them. The past six-and-a-half years have shown just how important it is to have informed, credible leadership in the White House.

The sophomoric aplomb with which Bush continues to declare Iraq a “success in progress” is a telling commentary on the extent to which this president is either blind to reality or unwilling to face it.

So far, so disappointing.

## **‘ISLAMOFASCISTS’ ARE ROAMING AMERICA’S CARTOON WORLD**

MICHAEL SABA; 12/10/06; [WWW.ARABNEWS.COM/](http://WWW.ARABNEWS.COM/)

OK. It’s time to write about racism and bigotry again. I picked up the newspaper today and there it was...”Islamofascism” on the cartoon page. The popular syndicated cartoon, Mallard Fillmore by Bruce Tinsley ran in the paper today. The cartoon shows Tinsley’s famous cartoon duck saying, “I find myself agreeing with people who say the President (Bush) should stop using the term

**For some time, I have also been concerned about the use of the term “Islamist” in public discourse. Islamist is usually defined as political Islam. If one goes back to the derivation and the initial uses of this term, you can trace it to groups that almost always put Muslims in a negative light. Again, do you ever see terms like**

‘Islamofascists’ to refer to Islamic terrorists.” In the next panel the duck continues, “...though I’m having trouble deciding whether he should replace it with ‘Islamobombers’, ‘Islamomurders’ or ‘Islamobeheaders’ “.

Tinsley’s cartoon runs in many newspapers throughout the US. It is often on the editorial page of the newspaper and frequently the conservative perspective of Tinsley’s cartoon is used by newspapers to balance the more liberal views of cartoonists like Gary Trudeau and his classic character, “Doonesbury.” However, whether it is a conservative perspective or a liberal perspective, the common denominator is that it is all right to bash Arabs and Muslims.

Last night, I attended a lecture at the local Jewish community centre that featured an author who was defending President Franklin Delano Roosevelt against the onslaught of revisionist writers who have condemned Roosevelt for not doing enough to save European Jews from Hitler’s wrath against them. He pointed out that many of these writers go as far as calling president Roosevelt an anti-Semite.

He presented some very convincing arguments to disprove his detractors' assertions that Roosevelt didn't do enough for the European Jews. His logic and arguments were sound and made a great deal of sense. And then he was asked a question about the Irgun, which he referred to as a terrorist organization which killed Arabs and the British in Palestine during and immediately after World War II. As he was explaining the dastardly deeds of the Irgun, he said, "With the actions of the Arabs and Muslims today, I probably would have done the same thing that the Irgun did then."

I was impressed with the author up to that point. But when he made that statement about Arabs and Muslims, I lost respect for his opinions. What is the difference between his attitude about Arabs and Muslims and the attitude of Hitler and the Nazis regarding Jews? And no one in the audience questioned his racist bigoted attitude toward Arabs and Muslims. It has become easy and commonplace to bash Arabs and Muslims in America and the West.

Yes, it is true that individuals calling themselves Muslims or Jews or Christians can be guilty of horrible crimes and deserve to be condemned. But to chastise the whole of Islam or Christianity or Judaism for the acts of certain individuals is just plain wrong.

Let's go back to Mallard Filmore and Islamofascism. Is there such a thing as Judeofascism? Does Christofascism exist? One does not see those terms in common use. If these terms were used by mainstream media, they would be rightly condemned. Yet cartoonists and editorialists and media pundits freely use the term Islamofascist in their media outlets. For some time, I have also been concerned about the use of the term "Islamist" in public discourse. Islamist is usually defined as political Islam.

If one goes back to the derivation and the initial uses of this term, you can trace it to groups that almost always put Muslims in a negative light. Again, do you ever see terms like "Christianist" or "Judaismist" to refer to political Christianity or political Judaism whatever those terms might mean? No, because one who used those terms regularly would be called a bigot. However not only do enemies of Islam use the term Islamist regularly but also neutral observers and even Muslims themselves now use this term frequently.

So when cartoonists have adopted "Islamofascist" and its derivatives in their vernacular, the racists and bigots have accomplished their goal. They have inserted their bigoted attitudes into popular culture.

And in the process, they have hardened the attitude of the average person toward Muslims and Islam. The battle of words and images can be as important, if not more important, as the battle of guns and missiles. Let us stand up to this battle and not let the bigots win.

"Islamofascist" is a racist term and it should be treated as such. Let's demand that it be removed from decent discourse.

## **ASIAN CHRISTIANS SHOULD ROOT FAITH IN OWN CULTURE**

UCAN; 6/11/06

*Asia faces several obstacles in telling the story of Jesus and listening to it, says Jesuit theologian Father Samuel Rayan. That story, he asserts, should become a humanizing story that completes other humanizing stories of Asia. The 85-year-old Indian priest shared with UCA News his reflections on the theme of the upcoming Asian Mission Congress, "Telling the Story of Jesus in Asia." About 1,000 Church people from across the region were expected to attend the Oct. 18-22 congress in Chiang Mai, Thailand. ...*

*Father Rayan ...is a former professor at New Delhi's Vidyajyoti College of Theology. He was also a member of the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order Commission from 1968 to 1982. Later, from 1988 to 1990, he was principal of the Indian School of Ecumenical Theology, based in Bangalore, India. Father Rayan's works have been published widely in India and abroad in both English and his native Malayalam language. He also has spoken often on issues of importance to developing nations.*

### **UCA NEWS: What do you think of the congress theme?**

**Fr. Rayan:** I'm concerned about the meaning of the word "story" here. Is it just a kind of narrative of the story of Jesus that can be derived from one or all the Gospels? Or does it also include the story of his body, the Church in Asia, from the time Jesus' disciples began to exist in the Asian scene? Or does it also include the activity and presence of the Word of God from the beginning of history, which became flesh, which is Jesus Christ.

But the telling of the story of Jesus seems to me evangelization of Asia. The story is the Good News. It is the story of the incarnate Word living in this world as one of us. And his life, passion, death and resurrection - all that was carried out as representative of humanity. We are heirs to all that. We need to



appropriate all that through faith. This story is to be remembered, told and meditated on. That may be the meaning of the theme. I'm just guessing.

**Christ's story is an Asian story. Why do we have to tell it in Asia?**

It is an Asian story. But it is one way lived, and in some ways distorted in the West. At the same time, it is not widely enough known in Asia. We had only small communities of Christians in East and West Asia. The story needs to be told in all of Asia.

Telling the story in Asia would mean going to the sources, not taking it through Western perspectives. If what we have is a Western interpretation of the story, then there is a need to reread and retell it in our own context. What is in the Scriptures should be retold in interaction with our situation, problems, hopes and sufferings.

That retelling should involve all the people because Jesus Christ stands for humanity. He is not simply a representative of some Jews, much less of some Europeans. He is established by God as representative of humanity. Hence telling the story of Jesus would also mean discerning what the Word of God has been doing in history - in any history anywhere - to guide humans to the path of finer humanity, justice and love. This is part of the mission. It would mean considering all the sacred texts of all communities as far as they are humanizing, meaning (as far as they) help humans to walk the right path of justice, love and solidarity, and rejecting what is dehumanizing, meaning what degrades humans.

**Do you mean that what the Scriptures of other religions say is also part of the story of Jesus?**

The Word of God has been there eternally, and it is through the Word that God has created the world. Through the Word and through the Spirit, God has been guiding all individuals and all human groups that they may become more authentically human in love and justice.

This is part of the story of Jesus.

This openness has been there in the Church, but somehow we have missed it. In the Old Testament, there is a sort of universalism, which the Jews rejected later. That universalism starts with Adam and Eve. Every human in the world comes from them. They are parents to all.

Coming to Abraham, who is supposed to be the father of Jews, we see another one. In Genesis 14 we see him coming back after defeating an invader. There, Melchizedek, who is described as priest of the Most High God, blesses Abraham. Now, Melchizedek does not belong to Abraham's tribe or family. But Abraham accepts his blessing and pays tributes to Melchizedek. It shows that besides Abraham and his tribe, there is someone who is described as the priest of the Most High God. This universalism is interesting.

**Today, when missionaries come to a community in the name of God - whether Asian or European - they should begin by asking what God has been doing in that culture down the ages. What blessing, what inspiration has God been giving them and what godsend saints have appeared among them? Who are these saints and what inspiration has the community received from them? What kind of records of this inspiration do they have? What kind of songs? What symbol system? Trying to find these out is one of the**

There are also other passages that show this openness. But the Jews, in the course of time, have taken themselves as the chosen people. In the book of Jonah, God shows mercy and kindness to non-Jews, even to the enemies of Jews. It shows God's universal

compassion, love and care. In the New Testament, Jesus says he was sent to the lost sheep of Israel. But he works miracles for Syro-Phoenicians and Romans.

The Bible and authentic tradition of the Church teach us that God creates people, loves everybody into existence anywhere in the world at any period of history. God destines them for eternal life with himself. That means God wants their full development as human persons with intelligence and freedom during their life on earth. It is God's plan for everybody.

**If God's plan always includes everybody, why should we tell people of other religions the story of Jesus, rejecting their Scriptures?**

Whether those Scriptures are rejected is another matter. But it is perfect (for us) to communicate the incarnation of the Word of God, because that is the ultimate origin. The very existence is in and through the Word. The Word, Jesus, is the basis and origin of human history and destiny. That story has to be communicated to as many people as possible.

**Are you saying Jesus must be presented as the fulfillment of Asian sacred texts such as the Hindu Vedas?**

Yes.

But the Jews won't be able to say that because they know nothing about the Vedas. We Asians should do that. The Europeans won't be able to do it. Though they ought to make an attempt in doing so, they may not succeed because they do not belong to this tradition. In the discipleship of Jesus, all need to understand that Jesus is there from the beginning of the world.

And any positive Scripture - any Scripture that is humanizing - comes through him. So we have to pay attention to such Scriptures as part of the Word of God.

**Why doesn't the Church then try to reinterpret the story of Jesus in the context of those sacred texts?**

Re-interpreting in the sense of discovering the values of Jesus, his presence and activity within these texts is correct. And nothing prevents us from doing it. But foreign missionaries who began to tell the story of Jesus in Asia were unable to do it.

A few have tried, although in a partial way. God and his Word have been active in all history, not only in European or Jewish history. The Word of God is to be discerned everywhere. Some, especially the Europeans and ecclesiastical authorities, were unable to do that and sometimes they lacked the mental equipment to do that.

**Was that a problem of clearly telling the Jesus story in Asia?**

Yes. But not only that. At one point they said there is no salvation outside the Church. That goes against the core of the (Christian) Scriptures and revelation. The Second Vatican Council threw that out. Today, when missionaries come to a community in the name of God - whether Asian or European - they should begin by asking what God has been doing in that culture down the ages.

What blessing, what inspiration has God been giving them and what godsend saints have appeared among them? Who are these saints and what inspiration has the community received from them? What kind of records of this inspiration do they have? What kind of songs? What symbol system? Trying to find these out is one of the tasks of evangelization.

**What is the next step then?**

The next step is to tell them: God has guided your forefathers and your community but I have a little more Good News. God did all these to express his love for you in a fuller way. And that fuller love is expressed in a person named Jesus. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son ... ." He loved the world - not just Jews. That is important. That story needs to be told.

Even before the coming of Christ, God was saving people. God saves people in certain ways. But that salvation is a lesser gift. In Jesus he gives a greater gift. This greater gift is to be presented to more and more people. The final gift is Jesus Christ, his own son. He lived as one among us, and in him God reveals the meaning of human suffering and death, and above all the ultimate resurrection of human beings.

All this is very enriching to know and live by. This is what we are here to communicate. God gives certain gifts, which are fundamental. God gives final promises and final gifts in Christ. That needs to be celebrated and communicated.

**If people can be saved without formally becoming Christians, then why insist on Baptism?**

There is no insistence. It is about giving them an opportunity to share a fuller life. I do not say mission culminates in Baptism. Ultimately, mission culminates in a person's turning to God, and to his brothers and sisters. But the invitation is to join the community, which already lives this faith and enjoys the presence of Jesus Christ. The community has certain treasures, which one is invited to share.

**Do we have such ideal Christian communities now?**

The ideal Christian community may not be there. But if there is a minimum of justice and love, and a minimum of commitment to God in Christian community, others can be invited to that. I do not think that we can say such communities do not exist.

Of course, communities with justice and love may exist in other religions too. But in the Christian Church, you have personal contact with the person of Jesus. The Word of God is present in other religions also, but in the Christian Church you have the incarnated Word, which lived among us. There we have Christ's bodily presence, which is represented in the Sacraments. The invitation is to be baptized and incorporated in this community. The bodily presence of Jesus in Christianity is important.

**Are we not bordering on fundamentalism when we say that Jesus is the fulfillment of all other prophets and he is the only God incarnated?**

No.

There is no fundamentalism here.

We are merely stating a fact - that the Word of God became flesh, and his value system and teachings came into conflict with certain religious leaders, and that led to his arrest, humiliation, torture and murder. But God raised him from the dead, accepting his sacrifice as redeeming. We have certain symbols to accept and experience these as personal realities. We are merely offering these facts, inviting others to make them personal realities. If they take, they take. There is no fundamentalism here.

Even the Scriptures themselves offer this. When Jesus was asked, "Who is my neighbour," he tells the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10). The Samaritan, an outcaste for the Jews, takes care of the man he found wounded and attacked. At the end of the story, Jesus says, "Go and do as he did." We do not know what idea the Samaritan had about God, what prayers he said, or if he prayed at all. But just because of his action, Jesus presented him as an ideal.

It shows that even a person from another religion can be an ideal if that person practices justice and love. And justice would mean sharing resources - time, money and energy. We have this in more than one story. Jesus asks his followers to share their resources with the poor, the needy, the stranger and the widow.

### **So telling the story of Jesus would mean preaching such sharing?**

Certainly. Telling the story of Jesus in Asia would mean taking care of the marginalized, the oppressed, the starving, the despised, those who are considered untouchable. We need to serve them even without taking the name of Jesus, in the name of humanity. Human persons are the most precious and noblest reality on earth, regardless of their status and richness. We need to defend their rights and dignity without considering their status. That is what Jesus wants from us. He even washes fish-workers' feet and says this is my new commandment, love one another. Love and justice go together. Get people to do this sharing - this is evangelization.

### **Do you think the Church as it stands today is a block to such evangelization?**

Sometimes it has been a block. In the past centuries certain attitudes were a block. When (the Church) took to the Crusades, to burning of witches and so on, it was on the wrong track, going away from the Gospel of Jesus. Even today, if the Church is unconcerned about justice and the dignity of people, and concerned only about certain ceremonies or certain titles or certain structural organizations, it is not being a disciple of Christ. If the Church is concerned about the poverty in the world and the need of re-arranging economics and works upon that in the name of humanity and of God, it is doing the right thing.

### **What are other blocks? Why did the story of Jesus not spread much in Asia?**

I do not know.

But most of the apostles and disciples seemed to have travelled around the Mediterranean. Very few came to Asian regions.

Only after 16 centuries organized evangelization happened in Asia. Before that, some traders may have come occasionally, settled down and traded.

Historically, the West's imperialism and colonialism - conquering, subjugating, exploiting people in various parts of the continent - have been a block to the Gospel. That has turned away many from accepting the Gospel message, because Christianity was associated with colonialism. Those who preached the Gospel contradicted it with their lives, rendering the Gospel meaningless. Many could not understand the Gospel values such as love and justice because of colonialism.

In Asia many more would have accepted Christ but for the Western Christians' imperialism and colonialism. It was a block to the Gospel, the Western betrayal of the Gospel. That is the reason why in Asia and Africa, Christianity was not accepted in large numbers.

But planting the cross in these continents is the focus of mission in this century.

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What does "planting the cross" mean? If it is a way of expression, then fine. In concrete ways it should mean greater justice, justice to the most deprived and recognition of their human dignity and rights. That is what planting the cross means. All inhuman social systems should be reversed to re-establish human dignity and rights. That is evangelization.

Today, evangelization anywhere in the world would mean emphasizing justice and equality irrespective of race, caste and gender. It calls for reorganization of economics. And it would also mean an

insistence on the centrality of the human person and the human community. This is vital for any evangelization and any development process.

The human person, his development, is the ultimate meaning of politics, religion, science and technology. Any problems will have to be tackled from this angle of human centrality.

**Are you saying the Church has moved away from this human centrality?**

In the Middle Ages Christian theologians and thinkers used to repeat that Sacraments are for humans. Liturgy is not for liturgy's sake, nor ceremonies for ceremonies' sake - they are for human welfare. Therefore, they can be changed according to circumstances and needs. Until the Second Vatican Council, the Mass was celebrated either in Latin or in Syriac. It was an imposition of a foreign language, which was radically wrong and a betrayal of people.

That is why we have been speaking about inculturation or adaptation as some call it. Or it can be called incarnation of faith. The logic behind this is incarnation. When the Word became incarnate and dwelt among us, he did not put on some heavenly dress.

He was clothed like everybody around him, he spoke their language and he ate their food.

When he instituted the Eucharist, he did not bring heavenly wine and bread. He used what was available on the table. And we get wine from Australia!

**Why then the insistence on such things as wheat wafers and wine?**

This is a kind of narrow-mindedness and a kind of fundamentalism, and a certain lack of understanding about what these things are all about. For people who made rules that only wine should be used in the Eucharist, wine was their daily drink. Wheat bread and wine were common in the Mediterranean. If I take rice-bread and tea, will Jesus say no? Will he say, "I won't be present?" It is important to follow the logic of incarnation.

When the Europeans or Western missionaries came, they brought their own language and their own symbol system, cultural traditions. And these were imposed on Asia. This was unfortunate. These are against the logic of incarnation.

**What is the way out?**

Faith is common. But its expression should be in local culture. Most rites in the Catholic Church are rooted in local culture. But in India, the three rites are imported. (Editor's note: The Indian Catholic Church comprises the Latin rite and two Oriental rites, the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara).

It is our right to accept faith and adopt it according to our culture. I celebrate Mass sitting on the ground and wearing an Indian shawl. That is one way of telling the story of Jesus in Asia. Expressing faith in the local cultures - that is the meaning of evangelization in Asia today.

**To all of you who, calling themselves atheists, have asked me at one time or another with great sincerity: "Where is your God?" ... God was in the profound emotion that thousands of persons felt as they listened to a radio program and heard a young working-girl say before the microphones 'I have just gotten out of bed and sneaked out of the house to come here to bring my week's salary so that you can buy a blanket for someone poorer than I. I know very well what cold means because for several years I slept with only newspapers to cover me, dreaming that it would soon be daylight so that I could sit in the sun and stop shivering'.**

**The God I don't believe in, Juan Arias, 1973**



Now there were shepherds in the region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The messenger of God appeared to them and they were struck with great fear. But the messenger said: "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy. This will be a sign to you. You will find a child laying in a manger".