



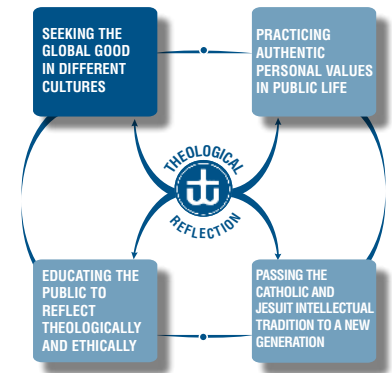
WOODSTOCK REPORT

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Muslims and Christians: Where Do We Stand?

by Jerry Filteau and Thomas J. Reese, S.J.

An international panel of Jesuit experts on Islam urged Christian-Muslim dialogue and what one termed “mutual repentance” at a Woodstock Forum November 19 at Georgetown University.

The title of the forum was “Muslims and Christians: Where Do We Stand? Three Jesuits Speaking from Experience.”

“The reason for a lack of dialogue is that we don’t have enough patience,” said Thomas F. Michel, S.J., an international visiting fellow at the Woodstock Theological Center and a former director of the Vatican’s Office for Islam, who spent many years developing relations with Muslims in Indonesia.

“There are many issues that do divide us Christians and Muslims, there are causes for concern,” but they need to be understood in perspective, said Aloysius Mowe, S.J., a Malaysian expert in Islamic law and director of Interfaith and Civil Society Projects for the Middle Eastern Graduates Center in Malaysia, also currently a Woodstock international visiting fellow.

Australian Daniel A. Madigan, S.J., the first panelist to speak, said the recent explosion of books and other publications on Islam and the plethora of blogs (Web logs) devoted to the topic might suggest that Americans are learning a great deal about Islam and Muslims.

What is lacking in the blogs and many publications on Islam, he said, is “the complicating factor of real people, real faces -- the names, the faces, the friendships” that must go into understanding the other person.

Moderating the session was Turkish-born Ibrahim Kalin, assistant professor of Islamic studies at Georgetown’s School of Foreign Service, who was founding director of the SETA Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research in Ankara, Turkey. He had just returned from a three-day meeting at the Vatican two weeks earlier, as one of 28 Muslim

representatives at the first session of the new Catholic-Muslim Forum. That forum was created as a result of a letter to Pope Benedict XVI by Kalin and 137 other Muslim scholars around the world seeking such a dialogue with representatives of the Catholic Church.

Kalin and the three panelists at Georgetown agreed from their own long experiences that most Muslims would welcome Muslim-Christian dialogue, and those who oppose it are a minority.

In addition to his former Vatican post, Michel has served as secretary for interreligious dialogue for the Society of Jesus and as interreligious and ecumenical secretary for the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences.

He said the Catholic framework for approaching Catholic-Muslim dialogue begins with the Second Vatican Council’s declaration that “the Church has esteem for the Muslims.”

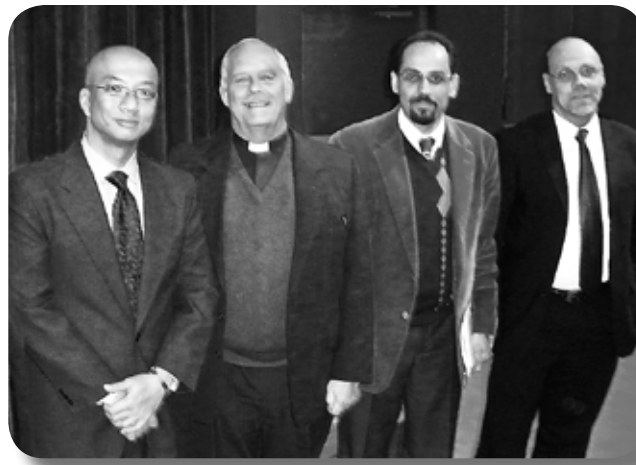
“Here you have a magisterial statement of the Church,” he

said. “It means that whenever I speak or however I act toward Muslims, if that’s not imbued with real esteem, then there’s something missing. It’s not truly a Catholic, Christian response.”

He said that in the 13 years he was director of the Office for Muslims of the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Interreligious Relations, “we really met with a lot of Muslims, Muslims from all over.”

“But the important thing” from high-level meetings and statements, he said, “is that they have to filter down, they have to filter into the grass roots, the ordinary people, the church-goers and mosque-goers.”

Originally a priest of the St. Louis Archdiocese, Michel first went to Indonesia in 1969 on loan to an Indonesian bishop who needed someone to teach English at his seminary and a local teacher’s college. “I really loved Indonesia. I loved the people. I



Aloysius A. Mowe, S.J., Thomas F. Michel, S.J., moderator Ibrahim Kalin and Daniel A. Madigan, S.J., all of whom have lived and worked with Muslims over many years in various parts of the world, gather prior to the forum in which they reflected on our future together.

From the Director's Desk

"To be religious today is to be interreligious in the sense that a positive relationship with believers of other faiths is a requirement in a world of religious pluralism."



Pluralism is here to stay. For those who accept it, the quotation above reflects a sea change in the way each of us puts our faith into practice in the new waters of religious pluralism. It comes from the official international document written for and by Jesuits entitled, "Our Mission and Interreligious Dialogue," promulgated in Rome in 1995 by the Thirty Fourth Jesuit General Congregation (GC 34).

You may recall that in the January 2009 issue of the *Woodstock Report* I wrote in this column that many people "have a hard time understanding how their religious values (or lack thereof) affect their behavioral choices." I then went on to refer to an example of how religious values can play a positive role in how the United States health care policy shapes the choices about how to take care of our health.

As we continue to seek the global good in different cultures, we turn our attention to another area in which our religious values affect our behavioral choices. In this issue we navigate the waters of Christian-Muslim dialogue, one of the important components of interreligious dialogue. At GC 34, we Jesuits realized that we could no longer carry out our mission - the service of Faith through the promotion of Justice - without promoting interreligious dialogue. The tone had been set by Pope Paul VI many years before, when he himself charted new waters by saying "Dialogue is a new way of being Church." The Thirty Fifth General Congregation of the Jesuits (GC 35) in 2008 moved it another step forward in the document, "Collaboration At the Heart of Mission."

Our lead article, "Muslims and Christians: Where Do We Stand?" reflects the particular way in which Woodstock has followed through with collaboration at the heart of our mission of theological reflection on today's burning issues. In this and other articles, Professor Ibrahim Kalin, and Fathers Madigan, Michel, and Mowe share their wisdom as co-workers who collaborate at the heart of our mission (even in the blogosphere!). They speak from their extraordinary scholarly expertise combined with enlightening personal experiences of friendship and dialogue. This is a good example of how we put Ignatian discernment into practice, based on a vision of reality that "opens our eyes to the incomprehensible mystery of God's salvific presence (*Deus semper major*) in the world."

I was moved by the way Adolfo Nicolás, S.J., the newly elected Superior General of the Society of Jesus, captures this approach to discernment in his keynote address at Loyola Marymount University, "Companions in Mission: Pluralism in Action." He quotes GC 35, Decree 6, to explain how discernment enables us to engage our pluralistic world. It is "through a careful analysis of context, in dialogue with experience, involving evaluation through reflection, for the sake of action and with openness, always, to further evaluation." He then goes on to say that the Jesuit philosopher-theologian Bernard Lonergan has conveyed the meaning of discernment for our times and said, "if you have faith, then be in love with God." Theological reflection is highly enriched by the wisdom that Father Nicolás shares:

And I would add that if you are attuned to the inner movements of the Spirit, to where your heart is vibrating at its deepest level, then you will know where God is working in your lives. All of this has relevance to education in Jesuit schools, where we want people to be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible, and in love – and thus filled with freedom and in touch with the best of themselves.

This is the way a new Springtime can emerge out of the wintry economic and cultural crisis in which we find ourselves. Please continue your financial support so that Woodstock can stimulate these kinds of conversations on a broader scale.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Gaspar F. Lo Biondo, S.J." The signature is fluid and cursive.

Gaspar F. Lo Biondo, S.J., Director

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Activities of the Fellows



loved the culture,” he said. So with his bishop’s permission he joined the Jesuits there.

After taking his religious vows, at the suggestion of some of his Muslim students, he did advanced Islamic studies abroad and returned to Indonesia to teach and work on Catholic-Muslim relations. His provincial asked him to spend at least half his time building contacts with Muslims. He said for the first eight to ten months after his return, he would stop by mosques and Muslim student associations to meet the people there, attend Muslim lectures to introduce himself.

He said the people he met were nice and polite and welcoming, but “they never invited me” to engage more deeply -- until one day, during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, he was invited to give a talk at a Muslim university on the Qur’ân seen from a Christian perspective. People liked the talk and soon other invitations followed and real dialogue began.

“I think that the main reason why efforts at dialogue fail is lack of patience,” he said. “We don’t give it enough time. ... We are all carrying such a burden of history (of Christian-Muslim mistrust or antagonism) ... that it’s difficult to build trust. And until there’s trust, we might be talking, but it’s superficial. It’s just remaining kind of on the level of tea party conversation.”

He said there are different levels of dialogue, including everyday living together as neighbors and collaborating for the common good, scholars of either faith studying the other, often together, and “special times of sharing” when Christians and Muslims explain to one another what their faith means to them, how they understand God, how they pray.

“Where we’re at in Asia now is trying to move beyond the level of talking,” he said. “We have a peace course that we run together, Muslims and Christians, from 16 countries of Asia. We do it every year. ... We’re trying to build a fund of people in each of our Asian countries who are trained in conflict analysis, conflict transformation, who know what Islam teaches about peace, who know what Christianity teaches about peace, who can be called upon should there be conflicts.”

“It’s not just a Pollyanna idea,” he said. As an example, he cited the southern Philippine island of Mindanao, where Muslims form a large minority of the population. After years of hostilities between Muslim separatists and the Philippine government, he said, “a peace agreement was signed about 12 years ago” that neither side found satisfactory.

But he said Mindanao’s Bishops-Ulama Conference (originally called the Bishops-Ulama Forum) was formed, with both sides agreeing that they had to preach peace together in their churches and mosques. Ulamas are the most respected Muslim theologians in the country, most of them educated in Middle Eastern universities.

“I can think of no place in the world as active as the

MUSLIMS & CHRISTIANS: WHERE DO WE STAND?

Muslims and Christians (in Mindanao), trying to actively, proactively, prevent another conflict,” he said, as he ticked off a veritable laundry list of interfaith activities and organizations devoted to maintaining peace and improving Catholic-Muslim relations on the island.

Madigan said that despite the explosion of publications and blogs about Islam in the United States, “there’s a remarkable lack of experience at the basis of it. What we’re seeing is a self-perpetuating repetition of a ‘position’ approach which really is based principally on books, principally on readings of history which may or may not be accurate.”

Madigan was founding director of the Institute for the Study of Religions and Cultures at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. He is currently an associate professor of theology at Georgetown and senior fellow both at the Woodstock Center and at Georgetown’s Prince Alwaleed Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding.

He called the blogosphere “perhaps the most depressing place in the world,” where anyone hiding behind a pseudonym can verbally assassinate anybody.

He said many blogs define groups in terms of “‘we’ over against ‘them’” in a way that “maximizes difference and ultimately convinces us that there is no way of bringing these two together. Because we have defined ourselves in opposition to the other, we would lose our identity if we moved closer to the other.”

He said dialogue must start from a different standpoint, one which recognizes that Muslims and Christians, although we have our differences, often belong to the same “we.” That is how Samuel Huntington defines a civilization: “the biggest ‘we’ within which we feel culturally at home as distinguished from all the other ‘thems’ out there.”

“So let me ask you, ‘Where do *we* stand? Where do we, Christians and Muslims, stand?’” he asked. “So much of the talk around us, so many of the books you find on the shelves of Barnes and Noble, so many of these self-assured statements in the blogosphere want to tell you ‘where *they* stand.’”

Christianity and Islam stand in relation to one another and many of the tensions derive from historical wrongs on both sides, he said.

He said the temptation when one sees a pathological action like a suicide bombing or terrorist action is to condemn it as a Muslim pathology without recognizing that we have our pathologies as well, that we are all in this together.

“The real dialogue that is needed in the first person plural, it seems to me, is a dialogue of mutual repentance,” he said. “There’s a dialogue in which we have the courage to admit to ourselves and to one another precisely what we have done and what we are doing: That instead of

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... the main reason why efforts at dialogue fail is lack of patience.

dialoguing about the ideals that we share, which are all fine, and instead of dialoguing about the triumphs we have notched up over the centuries, that we should actually take the next step -- a rather vulnerable step -- and allow ourselves to speak of and to reflect on our failures to live up to the ideals.”

“So where do we stand?” he asked. “We stand, I think, on the low moral ground. We don’t stand -- either of us, Muslim or Christian -- on the moral high ground able to look down on the other and simply say: You have a problem.”

“We have to come down from those heights and find each other together ... to stand next to, to stand in solidarity with, to stand on the moral low ground with Muslims and Christians,” he said. That is when Christians and Muslims can work out their role in constructing a new “we” and “work out a vision for what kind of a ‘we’ we want that to be,” he added.

Mowe also rejected the “they” caricatures of Islam. “If we keep insisting on the inflexibility of Islam being on the road to terror, for example, or if we keep insisting that somehow, inherently, the values of Islam are contrary to our values; if this were true, then we would also have to say that the Spanish Inquisition, for us, was simply prologue. But with some relief we can say that the Spanish Inquisition for the Catholic Church is not prologue; it is merely history,” he said.

He acknowledged serious issues in places, including Malaysia, where Islamic governments impose Shariah, Islamic religious law, as civil law.

“In Malaysia the fact is that official Islam is oppressive, one-dimensional, monolithic,” he said. “Sermons in every mosque in the country are written by the government. You may only read out a sermon that has been sent out to the mosque by a government department. Morality for Muslims is policed. Squads go around making sure that unmarried couples aren’t sitting on a park bench together...”

All three panelists have been International Visiting Fellows at the Woodstock Theological Center. The International Visiting Fellows program provides to scholars from outside the United States an opportunity to spend time carrying out a personal research project at the Woodstock Center. (See IVF homepage for more information on the program.)

Jerry Filteau was a journalist with the Catholic News Service for 37 years until his retirement in 2007. He was bureau chief in Rome for the inauguration and early years of Pope John Paul II. He also wrote extensively on theological, ecumenical, liturgical, interreligious, canon law and social justice issues. He is a frequent contributor to the Woodstock Report.

“Shia Islam is illegal in Malaysia in most states — you can only be a Sunni Muslim. Apostasy from Islam is criminalized in most of the states. If a Muslim scholar, a mufti, gives a fatwa (a religious opinion) through official government channels, that fatwa becomes law. Questioning a fatwa in Malaysia is in itself a criminal offense.”

He added, however: “By and large, the victims of this oppressive Islam in Malaysia are Muslims, not non-Muslims. It is the morality of Muslims that’s policed. It is the way Muslims worship that is regulated. It is how Muslims perceive themselves as a community that is subject to thought control. And therefore, the people in the forefront of calls for democratic change, for religious reform, for greater civil space in Malaysia, are Muslims... The fight for democratic reform, for civil space in Malaysia, is very much a fight led by young Muslims.”

Mowe said that recently, about three weeks before the Georgetown forum, “the government approved yet another fatwa, which has now become law, forbidding women from dressing, acting or looking like men.” Dubbed the “Tomboy Fatwa” by the press, he said it sparked street demonstrations, including young women who shaved their heads in protest.

He said that when he hears condemnations of Islam as “extremist, inherently violent, ineluctably on a collision course with the West or Christianity,” he thinks of Muslim colleagues of his who are working for reform through their writing and teaching “and the young Muslims in Malaysia and in Indonesia who are trying to have this engagement with the modern world.”

“Sure, a vocal minority of Muslims in Malaysia agitates for some kind of chimeric Islamic state,” he said. “But extremist minorities, however loud they may be, do not represent the whole. ... Is that not true of most religious traditions, including my own?”

In fighting violence and oppression “Muslims are our allies,” he said.

Pathologies have long histories and very imaginative memories.

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Where Do We Stand?

The following are excerpts from the talk given by Daniel Madigan, S.J. at the “Muslims and Christians: Where Do We Stand?” forum on 11/19/08

From Barnes and Noble to the blogosphere, there has been an explosion of apparent information about Islam. What is quite striking about these “publications” is the remarkable lack of experience at their foundation. Perhaps the most depressing example is the blogosphere, where people hiding behind pseudonyms feel free to dismiss and assassinate anybody and everybody. There is a discourse which thinks it knows precisely what a Muslim is, expressing itself in simple declarative sentences like: “Muslims cannot...”, “Islam is incapable of...”. This essentializing discourse thinks that once you have the label, you have entirely understood the person or faith tradition...

Where do we stand? We don’t stand independently of one another. We stand always in relationship, and we have done so right from the beginning. Islam begins in conversation with Christianity, with a certain critique and yet also with a sense of shared history and vocation. From the beginning, there has been a sense that where we stand is somehow *together*. Both Muslims and Christians belong to a certain extent to the same “we...”

In September of 2001, the beginning of this mass production of information, I was in Rome. After many years of developing good friendships with Muslims and at a time when I had Muslim students with whom I delighted to converse at length, I sat in front of the TV watching the attacks on New York and I felt sick. I asked myself: Have I been deluded here? I have been convincing people that Muslims are part of the same “we,” but have I been blind to this obvious pathology? It was a moment of temptation to feel superior and in a position to simply condemn. That reflection led me to realize that our pathologies need also to be seen in the first person and in the plural...

We live in a world of various pathologies, but we delude ourselves if we think it is only “those other people” who have them, and that the way to resolve our ills is by denigrating the others or even getting rid of them. Our pathologies interrelate. Pathologies have long histories and very imaginative memories. The situation of Palestinian suicide bombers is pathological: young people in the prime of their lives blowing themselves up. They have grown up in a pathological situation of oppression and occupation – a policy that has itself grown out of another pathology – the fear endemic in Israeli society. But then you ask: Well, where does that come from? The creation of the state of Israel following the truly pathological Holocaust. But where does that come from? The pathology of Nazism. And that? The leftovers of World War I, the resentment born of the humiliation of the German people, and the long history of anti-Semitism in Christian Europe. There is a history of interacting pathologies. Our tendency is simply to look at our world now and say: “those people over there: they have a problem,” rather than to see our world situation in the first person plural and recognize that we are all in this together, that we are part of a history of fratricidal violence that goes back as far as Cain and Abel...

The real dialogue that is needed is a dialogue of mutual repentance, where we have the courage to admit to ourselves and to one another what we have done and what we are doing. Instead of dialoguing about the ideals that we share and about the triumphs we have notched up over the centuries, we should take the next step – a rather vulnerable step – and allow ourselves to speak about and reflect on our failures to live up to the ideals. Neither of us – Muslim nor Christian – stands on the moral high ground able to look down on the other and simply say “you have a problem.” We must come down from those heights, meet each other on the moral low ground and begin to speak to one another of how we have failed. Only then can we speak to one another of our hopes and our visions. We are not confined to an “us” vs. “them” future of simply clashing civilizations. Each one of us now, in our globalized world, has the opportunity to stand in solidarity with the other. There is hope.

Daniel A. Madigan, S.J., the Jeanette W. and Otto J. Ruesch Family Associate Professor of Theology, has been recently appointed Director of Graduate Studies in the Theology Department at Georgetown University. He is a Senior Fellow at both the Woodstock Theological Center and the Al-Waleed Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, and Founding Director of the Institute for the Study of Religions and Cultures at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.



America's Next Ethnic Barrier

Aloysious Mowe, S.J. (from blog posted 11/19/08 in the Washington Post)

There are 6 million Muslim Americans, and yet how many non-Muslim Americans can claim to have a Muslim friend, or a Muslim family-member? The Muslim version of the “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner?” moment is still a rare one in the US, but opinions about the nature of the Islamic religion, and the character or psychology of Muslims, flood our airwaves, newsprint and web sites. Everyone has an opinion about Islam, and yet so few know any Muslims firsthand.

We are so easily able to turn Muslims into the Other, the alien whose values are diametrically opposed to our own, because we have no experience of Muslims apart from the headlines-grabbing atrocities, or the 1001 Nights visions of women in veils, and the nightmares of adulterers punished by stoning. There is a deep cavern where experience and relationship do not exist, and we pour into it our fantasies, fears, and anxieties.

We tend to think of Muslims as Arabs, and vice versa, with all the tribal mores and historical baggage that encumber many Arab societies. But there are more Muslims living in Indonesia and Malaysia than in the entire Arab world. Their concerns are our concerns: the economy, the future of their children, neighborhood crime. Their dreams are not of world domination, but of secure homes and sustainable environments.

They live alongside non-Muslims, and their interaction with them goes beyond mere passive tolerance. The largest Muslim organization in Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama (its membership is estimated to number 30 million), sponsored a rally in June 2008 calling for religious moderation and tolerance in the country, in response to attacks on a religious sect, the Ahmadiyya, by hardline Muslims. In Malaysia Muslim lawyers and activists rushed to the aid of Lina Joy, a Muslim woman whose attempt to convert to Christianity was thwarted by conservative Muslim forces.

One of the strands of the history of Islam and Christianity is that of mutual conflict. Neither faith has clean hands: our histories are marked by the blood spilled by our sectaries and the ruins left in the wake of our missionaries. Our histories, however, do not have the force of determinism: the past is not a template for destiny.

When I look at my Muslim friends and colleagues, I do not see the terrorists who perpetrated the 9/11 atrocities, or the London bombers, or the Taliban. I see people who struggle with their faith, the way that I daily wrestle with mine. I see people whose convictions are that all of us, Muslim, Christian, atheist, share a destiny by virtue of our common humanity.

I look forward to the day when Muslims in the US will be able to take to heart the words that George Washington wrote to those other descendants of Abraham in his letter to the congregation of Truro Synagogue: “May the Children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other Inhabitants; while every one shall sit under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid.”



Aloysious A. Mowe, S.J., an International Visiting Fellow at the Woodstock Theological Center, is Director of the Interfaith and Civil Society Project for the Middle Eastern Graduates Center in Malaysia.

Seeking Common Ground between Muslims

The long and checkered relationship between Islam and Christianity shows how difficult establishing religious and cultural accord is. Islam’s rise in the 7th century created a sense of rivalry and urgency among Western Christians. Its claim of restoring Abrahamic monotheism was received as a theological challenge and its rapid expansion into formerly Byzantine lands appeared as a political and military threat. The dominance of Islamic culture and civilization in the second millennium soothed nothing. Andalusia, Baghdad, and Istanbul provide some brilliant examples of peaceful co-existence, yet perceptions and attitudes of exclusion and hostility have survived and continue to shape current

views of Islam and Muslims.

A large group of prominent Muslim scholars and community leaders has been working over the last two years to address some of these issues. In October 2007, an open letter signed by 138 Muslims called “A Common Word Between Us and You” was sent to Christian leaders and communities around the world to open up new lines of communication between Muslims and Christians. This followed up “An Open Letter to the Pope,” sent in response to Benedict’s controversial Regensburg Speech in 2006. That letter responded to Regensburg’s two claims: first, that Islam was unable to develop a rational discourse about its religious tenets and thus invited its followers to “submit”

to God rather than to think about or love Him; and second, that Islam spread through violence, which is an extension of its irrational nature. On both counts, the Pope seemed to imply that Christians cannot have theological dialogue with Muslims.

Taking its cue from the commandments to love God and neighbor, the Common Word asserts that there is ground for theological engagement between Christians and Muslims. Admitting religious differences is part of a genuine dialogue and ethics of co-existence. One does not have to have uniformity to seek common ground. The challenge is to create an ethics of co-existence and cultivate a sense of respectful difference. Many engaged in

40 Years of Dialogue with Muslims

by Thomas Michel, S.J.

Christian friends often ask me, “Is dialogue with Muslims really possible?” “Doesn’t Islam teach that Muslims must fight against those who do not share their faith?” It is always difficult to know where to start to respond to such sweeping judgments. One place to begin is to say, “If dialogue with Muslims is impossible, I don’t know what I have been doing the past 40 years.” In my case, that’s a true statement. Shortly after taking vows as a Jesuit in Indonesia in 1969, I was sent to the Middle East to begin the study of Arabic as preparation for engaging in Islamic studies. Since that time, most of my apostolic activity has been involved in various forms of dialogue with Muslims.

The fact that the greater part of my life as a priest has been spent with Muslims does not mean that I have been trying to “convert” Muslims. Catholic teachings are clear that dialogue is an essential aspect of the Church’s mission in the world, an activity with its own value and goals, a valid and necessary work of the Church which should not be confused with proselytism.

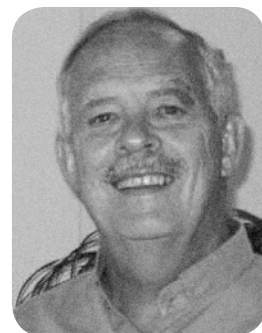
Dialogue is not limited to “talking” with persons of other faiths. Interreligious *dialogue* at its deepest means “sharing life” at all levels with believers of other religions. Our Jesuit documents speak of four types of dialogue: “the dialogue of life,” when ordinary people live the values of their own religions in full respect for their neighbors’ faiths; the “dialogue of deeds,” working together concretely for the good of all; the “dialogue of study,” when experts come together from various faith traditions to examine philosophical or theological problems or pressing issues of the day; finally, “the dialogue of spiritual experience,” when each party shares what is deepest in their lives, their life with God, however the Divine is understood and describe.

It is in this multi-faceted way that I have related to Muslims over the years. Most of the time I have been teaching Islamic studies in Christian schools or teaching Christian theology in Islamic institutes in countries like Turkey, Iran, and Indonesia. Very often I’ve lived in cities where I was the only member of the Christian community; for my students, I was often the only Christian they had ever met and usually the first with whom they had discussed matters of faith.

I’ve also worked with Muslims on peace projects, human development activities, aid and relief efforts, and we’ve campaigned together for government reforms. However, some of the most vivid memories I have of my 40 years of dialogue with Muslims are the days and evenings we spent sharing who God is to us, how we personally relate to the Creator, what happens to us when we read and reflect on God’s Word. My Muslim friends are as eager to describe to me their spiritual experience as I am happy to relate my inner life as a Christian. I often feel enriched by what I learn from witnessing the lives of good Muslims, and my friends tell me the enrichment is mutual.

This October, I had the joy of receiving an International Peace Prize awarded by the Islamic Archive of Germany for my efforts at building Muslim-Christian understanding. This institution, one of the earliest Muslim institutions in Western Europe, dates back to 1927. Every four years they grant the prize to someone who has worked to build greater harmony and respect between Muslims and Christians, and it was a great honor for me to be recognized as the 2008 recipient of the prize.

Thomas F. Michel, S.J., a recent Woodstock International Visiting Fellow, former Secretary for Interreligious Dialogue for the Society of Jesus, and Inter-religious and Ecumenical Secretary for the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, served in the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue where he directed the Vatican’s Office for Islam. He is currently on assignment in Ankara, Turkey and continues to associate with Woodstock.



and Christians

Ibrahim Kalin

(from blog posted 11/19/08 in the Washington Post)

interfaith dialogue prefer to deal with practical issues with the hope that it will produce concrete results. Interreligious dialogue, however, cannot function in a “beyond-the-truth” kind of attitude when all religions lay a claim to the truth. These claims must be taken seriously.

So far, the Common Word has led to three high-level meetings. Muslim and Protestant theologians took up its two themes first at Yale Divinity School last July. The second meeting, at Cambridge University in October, ended with a meeting with Dr. Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury. The third meeting took place at the Vatican in November as the first Seminar of the Catholic-Muslim Forum, and the fourth will be organized

by the Prince Alwaleed Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University this year.

Current global problems call for a conversation between Christians, Muslims, and others. As religions have to learn to live in an increasingly pluralistic world, they are bound to listen to one another more attentively. Muslims and Christians need to mobilize their resources to address the spiritual crisis and social problems of our day. It is encouraging to see that the Catholic-Muslim Forum has agreed to “explore the possibility of establishing a permanent Catholic-Muslim committee to coordinate responses to conflicts and other emergency situations.” Such measures could prove to be vital to diffuse communal

tension and misunderstanding.

Ibrahim Kalin, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies at Georgetown’s School of Foreign Service, is Founding Director of the SETA Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research based in Ankara, Turkey, and among the signatories of the Common Word, a major initiative to improve Muslim-Christian relations.



Interreligious Dialogue Hosts Student

by John Borelli, Ph.D.

Even before election 2008 results were tabulated, it was clear that religion played a conspicuous role. Analysis would take more than a few days, if not months, after the close of polls on November 4, but interest in immediate evaluation was high two evenings later on November 6 when the Woodstock Theological Center hosted "Election 2008: What Was the Role of Religion?" in Riggs Library on Georgetown University campus. Fourth in a series of open interreligious conversations for students organized by the Woodstock Interreligious Dialogue on Education, the program featured students as well as members of the dialogue.

Lauren Funk (SFS '10), Vince Kennedy (SFS '11) and Scott Odell (NHS '11), representing the Catholic, Protestant, and Latter Day Saints student communities joined Sherman Cohn, Zahid Bukhari, Siva Subramanian and me in offering five-minute first impressions on the campaign and election. With speakers commenting briefly out of their religious traditions, the program offered the perspectives of a Jew, a Muslim, a Hindu, two Catholics, a Protestant, and a Mormon. Barbara Brown Zikmund, a United Church of Christ minister and member of the dialogue, directed the conversation.

Participants in the Woodstock conversation reiterated topics already in the news for weeks and months beforehand in a very long presidential campaign: obsession with President Obama's middle name, Hussein; the economy as the deciding issue and not

abortion as urged by some religious leaders; the lack of engagement of regional religious issues, particularly the Middle East by candidates more focused on not losing than winning support; and concern about the marginalization of religious voices. Zahid Bukhari spoke directly to the failure to turn the election using the "Islam card" against President Obama but noted its ineffectiveness in rendering non-existent any public appeal or voice to American Muslims. Comprising perhaps 2% of voters, American Muslims were favorable to George W. Bush in 2000 but had fallen away significantly to Democratic candidates by 2008 affecting certain congressional and local elections. Sherman Cohn, acknowledging the economy as the primary issue on most voters' minds, hoped that religion was an implicit factor for those

concerned about the Middle East, American foreign policy, and a healthier, more open condition of Government. The high percentage of new voters casting ballots for Obama (66%) was a sign that racism in American society, an issue he had addressed through much of his career, was weakening to insignificance.

Laura Funk, Vince Kennedy and Scott Odell spoke personally out of their experience voting in their first election. Laura noted the difficulties a conscientious Catholic has in being a "faithful citizen," referring to materials developed by Catholic bishop (Faithful Citizenship and Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship) and underscoring the guiding principal of not deciding because of one issue. Vince emphasized the enthusiasm of young



Three students enjoy their pizza in the Riggs Library prior to the lively conversation that ensued two days after President Barak Obama's historic election. Approximately 50 were in attendance.

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Conversation on Election 2008

voters for this election. Scott offered a unique perspective from the Latter Day Saints because one losing candidate in the primaries, Mit Romney, was unacceptable by a significant percentage of Republicans because of his affiliation with the LDS. He drew parallels between President Obama's association with Islam and candidate Romney's membership in the LDS.

Siva Subramanian, a founding member of the Woodstock Interreligious Dialogue on Education, also spoke to the issues of the status of minority religious groups, religious freedom, racism, prejudice, and a lack of sensitivity to minority perspectives by large segments of the U. S. Christians, who would rather convert than engage minorities as equals. I noted how "the Catholic vote," which exists more as an idea than a reality, again mirrored the U. S. population but that two populations voting higher than 65%, new voters and Hispanics, were essential to the future of the Catholic Church in the U.S.

For the other 50 or so present that evening, the range of topics and observations raised in the ensuing conversation made for lively exchanges. This was expected because the election was unusual in many ways. Beyond it being the first bid by an African-American nominee of a major party, it included live, televised interviews in succession of both expected nominees in mid-August by America's prominent Evangelical pastor, Rick Warren, much to the chagrin of voters with overriding secular interests.

Other interesting features were noted in a February 2009 posting on the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life website. While data indicate that the structure of faith-based politics remained the same between 2004 and 2008, the little change, President Obama's slight improvement in some majority groups

and large increases among minority groups over the previous election, was important enough to determine the outcome. Interestingly, majorities in all major religious categories expect and hope that President Obama succeeds. Also in February, E. J. Dionne, writing in *Commonweal*, observed that election 2008 has shown that religious winds are changing in American politics, not least among these is a re-thinking of the role of religion beyond manipulation for short-term political goals and fostering division.

Analysis and discussion will continue, and Woodstock will have a place in that ongoing discussion, as it did two days after the election on November 6, 2008, in an open conversation with students.



Students Lauren Funk, Vince Kennedy and Scott Odell join Dr. John Borelli, who facilitated the event; Dr. Barbara Brown Zikmund, Moderator; Dr. Richard Gathro of Nyack College; Professor Sherman Cohn of the GU Law Center and others in offering their unique perspectives on what role religion played in the election.

Dr. Borelli is Special Assistant to the President for Interreligious Initiatives and an Associate Fellow at the Woodstock Theological Center. Under his direction, the project has supported gatherings of faculty and scholars who are seeking to broaden understanding of religious pluralism within American society by organizing customized interreligious programs for the Georgetown University campus and elsewhere.

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Remembering Avery Dulles, S.J.

By Thomas J. Reese, S.J.



Cardinal Avery Dulles, S.J. and Fr. Gasper LoBiondo, S.J. at the Woodstock Theological Center 30th Anniversary Mass, September 25, 2005.

lay people across the country. When I interviewed hundreds of bishops and chancery officials for my book, *Archbishop: Inside the Power Structure of the American Catholic Church*, his *Models of the Church* was the book most cited by people working for the church. It was an instant classic, which helped people understand the church from a variety of perspectives.

At the Woodstock Center I was privileged to recruit Avery to work on projects that resulted in two books: *Episcopal Conferences: Historical, Canonical & Theological Studies* and *The Universal Catechism Reader*. He was always intelligent, insightful, generous, gracious and on time. What more can a project leader want?

Although he was a brilliant scholar, he was not very practical. In our Woodstock Jesuit Community, he once complained that his clothes were soaking wet when they came out of the washer. Someone had to explain to him that he was putting his clothes in the dishwasher.

Cardinal Dulles was always a faithful supporter of the Woodstock Theological Center. On the 30th anniversary of the Center, he preached at Mass and spoke of its mission “to see what theology might have to say to people involved in secular callings such as business, law, medicine, and government.”

As editor of *America* magazine, I continued to call on Avery as a writer whose insights were always clear and crisp. Although I tried to keep most authors under 2,000 words, I would frequently suspend the rule for Avery, who always had distinctions to make and much to say.

In his later years, Avery was often labeled a conservative, but if all conservatives (and liberals) were as gentle and thoughtful as Avery, the Church would be a happier place. Avery is missed by all of us. His intelligence, his dry humor, his generosity and kindness. We at Woodstock especially miss him as a friend and supporter.

Father Reese has been published and quoted by many of the most widely circulated newspapers, news services and Catholic periodicals around the world, and has appeared as an expert commentator on numerous national and international television networks. He is one of the most quoted sources on Catholic issues in America.

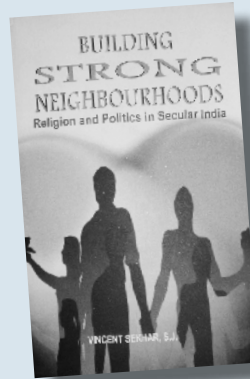
Having received my theological education on the left coast, I was not privileged to have been a student of Avery Dulles, the famous Jesuit theologian who spent many years as a teacher at Woodstock College, the theological seminary of the Maryland and New York Provinces of the Society of Jesus. The Woodstock Theological Center inherited its name from the college, which was named after the small town of Woodstock, Maryland where it was founded, not as we constantly have to point out, the New York rock concert.

Although Avery did not teach on the West Coast, we did read his books and articles, as did thousands of other seminarians and

BOOK REVIEW

Building Strong Neighbourhoods: Religion and Politics in Secular India

by Vincent Sekhar, S.J.



Vincent Sekhar, S.J. began writing this book when he was a Woodstock International Visiting Fellow, studying Religion and Politics in American as well as Indian situations. He is currently Lecturer in Philosophy and Controller of Examinations at Arul Anandar College, Karumathur, Madurai Dist., India.

Conflicts between religions is now a global phenomenon. There is widespread recognition that the real causes of inter-religious conflict may often be economic, political or social. The conflict seems particularly dangerous when religion is used as a political tool because it touches the depth of the human spirit in a game of power. Such a political use of religion is called ‘communalism’ in India. At the same time we cannot deny that religions seem to lend themselves to such use because of exclusivistic tendencies. Minority-majority tensions, a history of domination of one group by the other, ignorance, prejudice and propaganda - often false – add fuel to the fire. The context of the book is India. In the first part, Sekhar presents the phenomena of communal struggles in India and analyzes their causes. The focus is largely on the Hindus attacking Moslems and Christians, though two brief sections deal also with Islamic fundamentalism and Christian aggressiveness.

Sekhar’s purpose is not to elaborate on religious violence, but rather to see how we can bring about peace in such a situation. This search for peace is actually the main focus of the book. In the first section he explores how the present Indian constitutional or legal model can be used to solve communal problems. Besides exposing the constitutional model of India, a secular state that treats all religions equally, even offering special rights to the religious minorities, Sekhar takes up particular cases of violence against minorities and examines how they can be best solved within the existing Indian legal framework.

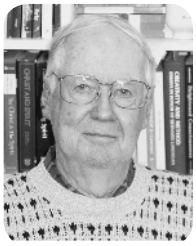
In the second section, Sekhar takes a more creative approach. He explores the notion of community in the Bible and in the Indian religious ethos and shows how they agree on encouraging oneness-within-diversity. In the Indian context, this would mean the building up of strong neighbourhood communities of people belonging to different religions. We are familiar with the phenomenon of Basic Christian Communities. Neighbourhood communities bring together people of all religions living in the same neighbourhood. Their motive for coming together is the promotion of their common human needs, including the spiritual, connected with their life together. Acting, ever struggling, together for their own wellbeing integrates them socially. This social fellowship can be further strengthened by common prayer and celebration. A Hindu religious vision like “*Vasudaiva Kutumbakam*” (family of God) and a Christian ideal like the ‘Kingdom of God’ can give a spiritual orientation to the togetherness. These communities can withstand divisive forces at moments of communal conflicts.

‘Neighbourhood communities’ is a new idea that is slowly gaining ground. Asian theologians have spoken of Common Human Communities. Sekhar is giving them a geographical base and, in this manner, makes them practical. The main challenge is to change peoples’ mindsets and attitudes. Living, working and celebrating together is certainly a good way of achieving such a change.

Michael Amaladoss, S.J

Michael Amaladoss, S.J. is currently Jesuit Chair in the Theology Department at Georgetown University. He has served as Director of the Institute for Dialogue with Cultures and Religions in Chennai, India; Professor at Vidyajyoti College of Theology, Delhi; President of the International Association for Mission Studies; Consultant to the Vatican and the World Council of Churches; and General Assistant to the Superior General of the Society of Jesus in Rome.

Activities of the Fellows



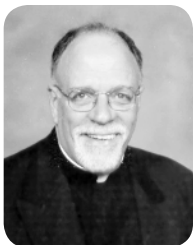
JOHN C. HAUGHEY, S.J. This semester, Fr. Haughey has been teaching a course at Loyola University in Chicago to Jesuit scholastics and graduate students in theology. His course is an attempt to develop a theological anthropology that, informed by the harm our species is inflicting on planet earth, can better align itself with God's purposes in bringing about a new heaven and a new earth. He has also

addressed an international conference on Islam held at Louisiana State University on March 7th. His paper suggests an alternative route to interfaith dialogue by examining the work of Fethullah Gulen, the figure who is the conference's focus, in relation to Bernard Lonergan's understanding of interiority.



JOHN H. HUNTINGTON, Ph.D. Dr. Huntington explored "An Interreligious Exploration of Religious Business Ethics" in which Christian and Muslim business leaders would reflect together on their business lives. He continued with production of a DVD on the October 2008 theological symposium entitled "Energy, God and Kinship with Nature." He attended conferences on Christian Business

Ethics in New York and Atlanta, provided Steward Leadership readings for monthly meetings of the Woodstock Business Conference, and planned the April 30 Business Leaders' Seminar.



REV. RAYMOND B. KEMP In January, Fr. Ray Kemp gave the invocation for the swearing in of the new DC City Council; began the 16th Iteration of "Struggle and Transcendence," a theology course for Georgetown undergraduates; participated in the Board of Directors Retreat for the DC Central Kitchen, facilitated by Mr. Dominic Perri, a former associate at Woodstock; began

work on Woodstock's Faith in the City project on the Education of DC Youth at a DC City Council Hearing; and interviewed candidates for the Program Director of the Georgetown Center for Social Concern's After School Kids Program. During the month of February, Fr. Kemp spoke to Cristo Rey students who are being tutored at Georgetown; participated at the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities with Harry Wu at the Catholic Social Ministers Gathering; and spoke with Patrick Healy Fellows and Alumni. Fr. Kemp directed a Lenten Parish Mission at St. Mark's Parish in Erie, PA from March 7-10; and directed a Preaching the Just Word Workshop with Richard Clifford, S.J., for New England Clergy at Boston College on March 23.



DOLORES R. LECKEY Dolores continued her work on the Monika Hellwig book project. She spoke with the Carmelite community at Whitefriars Hall on the topic, "What Can 21st Century Carmelites Offer to 21st Century Laity?" She wrote an article for the St.

Anthony's Messenger Press website featuring articles from the "Called to Holiness" series; an article for an anthology of pre-Vatican II spiritual practices; an article for the USCCB Marriage and Family website; and a blog for *America* magazine. Dolores also worked on reflections regarding faith and evolution and began preparations for a workshop that will be presented for the Paulists at their first national symposium on reconciliation to be held in Boston during the month of April.



DANIEL MADIGAN, S.J. At the beginning of the Spring semester, Fr. Dan Madigan took over as Director of Graduate Studies in the Theology Department, which currently has twelve doctoral students focusing on religious pluralism. In addition he is teaching two new courses: the Senior Theology Majors' Seminar on Religious Pluralism, and "The Qur'an and Its Readers," which has attracted

several Muslim students from Theology and from the Arabic and Islamic Studies doctoral program. Public lectures given included "A Word in Common: Reading John's Prologue with a Muslim" and "A Word of Forgiveness: Sin and Salvation in Muslim-Christian Perspective" at St. Bartholomew's Church in Bethesda; "The Jesuit Commitment to Interreligious Understanding" at Georgetown University during Jesuit Heritage Week in February; and a presentation to the Theological Faculty entitled "Religious Pluralism: FAQ." He met with other members of the U.S. Institute of Peace steering committee preparing educational materials on "A Common Word," the letter of 138 Muslim scholars to Christian leaders, at the Airlie Conference Center in Virginia. During the month of March, together with Woodstock Visiting Fellow Aloysius Mowe, S.J., he presented a series of lectures on "Muslims & Christians: Where Do We Stand?" at St. Ignatius Church in Baltimore. Also during the month of March, Fr. Madigan gave a public lecture on "Royal Initiatives in Interreligious Relations: Qatar, Jordan and Saudi Arabia" at the Middle East Institute, Columbia University, New York; a lecture on "Mutual Theological Hospitality in the Academy" at the University of South Carolina School of Law Symposium on "A Common Word," and traveled to Geneva for a follow-up meeting of theologians involved in the October consultation on Christian Self-Understanding in Relation to Islam at the World Council of Churches.



THOMAS J. REESE, S.J. In January, Father Tom Reese gave a presentation on "International Relations and the Catholic Church" at the George P. Shultz National Foreign Affairs Training Center for State Department employees who were preparing for service abroad. He also attended the national prayer service at the National Cathedral on the day after the inauguration

of President Obama. In February, he presented the Candlemas Lecture at Boston College. Father Reese was also busy helping the media by responding to questions about the lifting of the excommunication of Bishop Williamson, the appointment of Archbishop Timothy Dolan to New York, and many other issues.

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It distributes the products of its work through publishing books and articles, conducting conferences and seminars, and using other channels of communication designed to appeal to persons of all ages, including the young.

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