

INFORM-ACTION

Newsletter of the Social Action Office - Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes Queensland

Creating a Culture of Peace

At the beginning of 2003 the SAO redefined its operating principles, one of which is: *Mutuality* - *The SAO seeks a world where relationships between persons and among nations are based on equality, mutual respect and the interconnectedness of human life with all of creation.*

The choice to take *Creating a Culture of Peace* as one of four priority areas is obviously connected to this priority. This decision came after reflecting on the current global and national climate of fear and misuse of power and significant rise of fundamentalism. The planning group decided that the focus for 2003 would be to provide material and opportunities for people to reflect on and discuss the issues around a *Culture of Peace* - to provide individuals with material to reflect on the importance of attitudes and of non-violent ways of living and acting. Other strategies included promoting events organised by other organisations and to host a *Culture of Peace Forum*.

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An evolving process for the SAO is the establishment of *Circles* - the *Sophia Circle*, the *Water Circle* and then the *Peace Circle*. Those who had indicated their interest in pursuing the *Creating a Culture of Peace* agenda met and thus the *Peace Circle* was established. This group decided to begin a reading group and are meeting monthly to read and reflect on the whole topic. A Peace Forum is planned for 25 October - see notice for this on page 4.

An unplanned and exciting development in this agenda area has been the establishment of a *Women of Faith* group. Wendy Flannery rsm asked if, as part of the agenda area of *Creating a Culture of Peace*, the SAO could include some dialogue around *Women and Islam in Australia*. The initial goals were to:

- Challenge the stereotypes of Islamic women generated by Australia media
- To eliminate the targeted abuse of Islamic women in distinctive clothing, in the context of recent terrorist attacks
- To build intercultural and interreligious understanding and tolerance.

After several meetings of a small group of three religious and one Muslim women (and engaging the expertise of Pauline Rae rsm in Sydney), a proposal has been established to form *An Alliance of Believing Women for a Culture of Peace*. This is an exciting development in progressing a more peaceful world. The vision for this project is:

At a time when people of Islamic faith have become identified in popular understanding with violence and terrorism, with the accompanying rise of stereotyping and abuse of Islamic women, believing women find themselves called to:

- *Build alliances that will counter the prevailing divisiveness*
- *Contribute to a lasting culture of peace, and*
- *Collectively acknowledge and celebrate the bonding of religious faith.*

The next meeting of this group is Tuesday 21 October at 5.00pm at Justice Place. If you are interested in joining this group please contact Annette Arnold on (07) 3891 5866 or email annette@sao.clriq.org.au

Excellent resource: *Bridges* - the newsletter of the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations, Columban Mission Institute, 420 Bobbin Head Road, North Turrumurra NSW 2074, phone (02) 9488 8844, email inter-faith@accsoft.com.au, website http://www.columban.org.au/cmi/cmi_chris_mus.htm





Book Review



Farid Esack: *On Being A Muslim: finding a religious path in the world today*, Oxford, Oneworld Publications, 1999

Esack is a black South African Muslim Scholar of international repute. As I read this book, I enjoyed accompanying him on a spiritual journey, which touched into basic issues of the life of a believer. His writing was grounded in humanity – and this is the area where all real interreligious dialogue begins. Esack has a gift for expressing profound thoughts and reflection in language that is easy to read without losing any of its value. As in his previous book, his irrepressible sense of humour and willingness to ‘dub himself in’, gives increased humanness to the message he is sharing. Rather than speak of this as a book of theology, I would classify it as spirituality – the lived response in faith from a person’s deepest integrity to the events and experiences of daily human life.

The chapter titles give an insight into the approach he takes to integrity in the life of a Muslim.

“On Being with Allah”: This first chapter sets the tone for the person’s deep, interior relation with Allah, the basis of all faith commitment.

“On Being with Myself”: Throughout the book, in addition to his exegesis and hermeneutics of relevant Sura of the Holy Qur’an, there is a very good sprinkling of practical psychology as well as of suggestions for its everyday application in relation to being at ease with “who I am”.

“On Being with You”: Here the author enters into the question of interpersonal relations and, again quoting the relevant Sura, challenges to a mode of relating to other co-religionists.

“On Being a Social Being”: Esack has a very strong social conscience, and his life practice, an embodiment of his responsibilities as a member of the wider society, come through clearly in this chapter.

“On Being with the Gendered Other”: Esack was the first Imam in South Africa to have a woman – another international Muslim scholar – speak at Friday prayers in his mosque. This raised a lot of ire in various circles. As in my own faith, the role of women is a question that has come to the forefront of discussion in recent decades.

“On a Self in the World of Otherness”: This chapter, which touches into the reality of interfaith dialogue and relations, is a down-to-earth and challenging call to respect the value of the other, and challenges also to examine the real causes of our negative attitudes.

The final chapter is for the “New South African Muslim”, but nevertheless is broad enough in its approach to cause the readers to reflect on their own lived faith commitment in their own culture and situation.

The conclusion to the book is typically Esack. He writes two letters to himself. However unique this may seem for a conclusion, the content is a scholarly presentation of questions that have been addressed to him regarding the faith stance he is living, to which he responds objectively in these two letters. It is a crowning statement of his deep love of Islam and of his struggle for spiritual and personal integrity.

Challenging, coming from an extensive background of scholarship and international, intercultural experience, *On Being a Muslim Today* is a good read.

Kathleen Collins ssp

Anti-Poverty Week is an Australia-wide event beginning on Monday 13 October and finishing on Friday 17 October - the **International Day for the Eradication of Poverty**. The main aims of Anti-Poverty

Week are to: strengthen public understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty and hardship around the world and in Australia; and encourage research, discussion and action to address these problems, including action by individuals, communities, organisations and governments. There are events planned in every Australian state and good information can be found on this website: <http://www.antipovertyweek.org.au/>.

Postcard Campaign: The National Coalition Against Poverty (NCAP) is currently distributing postcards with a series of requests that governments can implement to help reduce poverty and financial hardship in Australia. These postcards should be signed and sent back to NCAP as soon as possible so as to be used in a media event on Friday 17 October - International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. To obtain postcards, contact Mark Zirnsak at NCAP on phone (03) 9251 5265 or email mark.zirnsak@vic.uca.org.au

anti-poverty week
13-17 october 2003

Water: identifying our values and future policy direction

As part of the development of its lobbying campaign on water issues, the Social Action Office Water Circle met during August to reflect on the values of Catholic Social Teaching and how these values will provide guidance and direction for its education and lobbying activities on the public policy issues surrounding water politics in Queensland.

The meeting was held at Justice Place, Woolloongabba and encouraged those present to speak about why they are concerned about water/sustainability issues, and about what they believe or value that urges them on to doing something about the issues.

Some of the values included:

- Every species has a right to water. Ecosystems are being affected from being deprived;
- Water is a natural resource and belongs to all. It needs to be accessible to all. It is part of the common good;
- By its nature, water cannot be bought or sold;
- The incredible Murray-Darling Basin begins here in Queensland and impacts on those who live all along it;
- Water, more than any other natural resource, connects us with the environment, our health, our food, our spirit;
- Earth and water have their origin and continued existence in the divine and mediate the divine. Our spirituality is impoverished when they are not healthy.

Some of the problems and concerns around water were then discussed and reflected upon. These included:

- Protection and greed exist side by side and are the basis for national and international conflict;
- Poor people and women are the most affected by scarcity of water and by radical policy changes, even when these are about better water management;
 - Concerns about quality, access, policy conflicts and the effects of corporatisation and possible privatisation in Queensland;
 - The need for a balance between participation in decision-making at the local/regional level, and the formulation of national policy “for the common good”.



Current public policy processes, where our values have relevance and also where our problems and concerns may have implications for a water policy reform agenda in Queensland,

were outlined. The relevant State and Federal policies associated with water were then discussed.

The Water Circle will be developing a Reflection/Discussion/Sharing process to be used during National Water Week, 19-25 October 2003. Watch out for this reflection which will appear in SAO Bytes and at <http://sao.clriq.org.au/eco.html> prior to Water Week.

The next meeting of the Water Circle will be held at 6.00pm on Wednesday 29 October 2003 at Justice Place and the SAO invites any contribution and/or networking, especially from anyone living within the Murray-Darling Basin.

Water Circle Project Worker: Victoria Kearney – project@sao.clriq.org.au

INFORM-A^CTION ONLINE!

As of this issue, INFORM-A^CTION will be available as a pdf document, i.e. it can be sent to you as an attachment to an email and be opened using the free *Acrobat Reader* program. (It will also be available as a pdf on our website.) So if some of our current recipients could receive it this way, this would help reduce paper usage (and also postage costs). **Please send a quick email to cathyok@sao.clriq.org.au to let us know if you would be happy to receive the newsletter by email.** Of course it will still be available in print form for those who don't have email access and for those who prefer to receive it by mail.

If you have any questions about this, please don't hesitate to contact Cathy on (07) 3394 1804 or by email as above.

What's On?

The Social Action Office and the Justice and Peace Commission (Brisbane) invite you to the second Common Wealth for the Common Good Address

***Common Wealth for the Common Good:
The Moral Challenges of Shaping
a Sustainable Earth Community***

to be delivered by Christine Milne
(Oceania representative to the Global Council of the World Conservation Union and Member of Catholic Earthcare Australia Advisory Committee)

Local speakers will include:

Mary Tinney rsm, Co-ordinator, Earth Link
Mark Copland, Executive Officer, Social Justice Commission of the Diocese of Toowoomba

Thursday, 16 October 2003 at 7:30pm
O'Shea Centre, 19 Lovedale Street, Wilston (Brisbane)
Refreshments provided
(Donations welcome at the door)

RSVP by Thursday 9 October
to Catholic Justice and Peace Commission
Ph (07) 3891 5911; Fax (07) 3891 6944
or Email cjpc@uq.net.au

**Peace Forum - all welcome...
Saturday 25 October at Justice Place
10.00am to 3.30pm**

This day workshop is open to anyone who would like the opportunity to explore with others the whole area of Creating a Culture of Peace.

Earlier in 2003 people heard Tony Kitchen (Executive Officer, Curriculum QCEC), Peace Educationalist, talk of a framework for peace-making that he has developed. Since then Tony has participated in and delivered a paper (Education for Healing and Solidarity) at the International Peace Educators Conference in Seoul. The theme of this conference was *Educating for Peace in Divided Societies*, confronting the challenge of educating toward justice, peace and sustainable development considering peoples, nations, and regions deeply divided by political, ideological, cultural and religious differences.

Tony will lead this workshop giving some input and creating the space for people to explore their own ideas and thoughts. In order to adequately prepare for the day and for catering purposes you need to register for the day. Please contact the Social Action Office on (07) 3891 5866 or email annette@sao.clriq.org.au by Friday 17 October. Morning tea and lunch will be provided. \$5.00 donation to cover catering costs would be appreciated.

For Your Calendar

2003 - International Year of FreshWater



OCTOBER

- 4 World Space Week commences
- 5 UN World Teachers' Day
- 5 Respect the Beach Day
- 6 World Habitat Day
- 13 Anti-poverty Week commences
- 16 World Food Day
- 16 Second Common Wealth for the Common Good Address (see *What's On?*)**
- 17 International Day for the Eradication of Poverty
- 19 National Water Week commences
- 24 United Nations Day
- 24 Disarmament Week commences
- 25 Peace Forum Workshop (see *What's On?*)**
- 26 National Bird Week commences
- 26 Federal Govt hands Uluru back to the traditional owners, the *Mutijuli* people 1985
- 31 Racial Discrimination Act proclaimed 1975

NOVEMBER

- 1 Frog Week commences
- 9 Wall separating East and West Berlin opened 1989
- 10 Nine Nigerian human rights activists killed
- 10 National Recycling Week commences
- 12 Dili Massacre, East Timor 1991
- 16 International Day for Tolerance
- 20 Universal Children's Day
- 25 International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women
- 25 Sophia Circle 5.00pm at Justice Place - *Celebrating the Year***
- 29 International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

DECEMBER

- 1 World AIDS Day
- 1 Coastcare Week commences
- 2 International Day for the Abolition of Slavery
- 4 Battle of Eureka Stockade
- 5 International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development
- 7 Ocean Care Day
- 10 Human Rights Day
- 18 International Migrants Day

PLEASE NOTE:

Due to staff changes at SAO this year the number of Sophia Circles has had to be decreased. There will only be one more ritual before the end of the year: Tuesday 25 November at 5.00pm – *Celebrating the Year*.