



Dear Friend,

Once again we are happy to share with you the Elijah Interfaith Institute's most recent activities. We have much to report and hope you enjoy this month's *Wisdom* e-newsletter.

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#### **News Update - Elijah Premiers "Conversion of the Heart" at Gregorian University, Rome, Conference**

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The Gregorian University, Rome, along with a number of other organizations working in interfaith relations, held a major conference with several hundred participants from all over the world, September 25-28. The conference celebrated 40 years since the publication of *Nostra Aetate*, the Second Vatican Council's document on Catholic relations with other religions. Elijah presented to the public at the conference, for the first time, a recently-completed movie.

Entitled "Conversion of the Heart", the movie addresses the issue of conversion and its problematics. It is based on the 2000 Elijah summer school program, held in Jerusalem. It features teachers from five religions, and allows the participant to share in the learning, experience, visits, exchanges and debates that took place in the program. It provides a challenge to see conversion as a spiritual movement of fulfillment, and struggles with the relationship between this movement and formal conversion to other religions. Scholars featured in the movie include Frans Jozef van Beeck (Loyola University), Harvey Cox (Harvard University), Richard Hayes (McGill University/University of New Mexico), Sayyed Akbar Khan (University of Texas), Barry Levy (McGill University), Vasudha Narayanan (University of Florida) and Alon Goshen-Gottstein (The Elijah Institute).

The movie was received in ways that far exceeded our expectation. It was found to be a moving testimony to a spiritual experience and viewers felt it opened them up to this spiritual experience, as well as to stimulating thoughts. Moreover, there was a consensus that it provides suitable materials for classroom viewing and could

serve as the basis for a study session on the themes of conversion and identity. See below volunteering opportunities regarding this project.

### **News Update - Board of World Religious Leaders Meeting in Taiwan Moving Ahead Smoothly**

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The much anticipated Second Meeting of the Board of World Religious Leaders of the Elijah Interfaith Institute is now only a month and a half away. The primary topic of the Meeting is the Crisis of the Holy, a theme with which the readers of our newsletters will by now surely be familiar with. In addition, the meeting, following the first meeting of the Board two years ago in Seville, Spain, will explore a new area of concern both for the Board and for Elijah. A number of religious leaders in Asia and, in particular, our host Dharma Master Hsin Tao, Taipei, Taiwan, voiced their concern about a major epidemic of teenage and young adult suicides sweeping Asia in the past few months. A decision was reached to address this issue, in addition to the established agenda items, as a pilot for a Rapid Response Process that Elijah is developing with the Board.

A questionnaire has been developed and circulated to Board Members and the response and results will be discussed at the Taiwan Meeting. We are confident that this process will provide a significant contribution to those attempting to deal with this epidemic.

### **Sharing Reflections - Thoughts and Reflections from Rome**

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It is impossible to offer an adequate summary of the rich proceedings of the *Nostra Aetate* Conference. In lieu of that, we share some snippets of wisdom.

The question underlying *Nostra Aetate* and that leads to the elaborate work of stating a theology of other religions is a very basic question that concerns us all. We must not lose sight of this question, even as we become involved in the variety of technical discussions that accompany our careful study of other religions and the formulation of how we treat them theologically. The basic question is this: What is our relationship to the rest of the human family. A deep urge to articulate the sensed unity and relationship with the rest of humanity must drive our quest to articulate our view of other religions. (Mons. Brian Farrell, Pontifical Council for Christian Unity)

The important achievement of John Paul II in understanding other religions is the recognition that the holy spirit is present wherever spiritual aspiration is found. Thus, the holy spirit can provide a ground for recognizing God's presence in other religions. In this way, John Paul II has taken Christian thinking beyond the formulations of *Nostra Aetate* (Jim Fredricks and Chester Gillis).

Should we seek to portray the other as the other understands himself in traditional terms, or should our religious understanding of the other seek to express the ways in which we, in our tradition are led to understand and interpret the other? In a v

ery basic sense if we engage in the theological view of the other, we are forced to interpret them in our own terms (Fr. John Pawlikowsky).

## **Getting Involved - New Opportunities for Learning and Volunteering**

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We ask for help from the broader Elijah community. We seek two types of volunteers:

1. Teachers in religion classes who are interested in testing the movie in their classrooms and providing us with feedback on its reception and suggestions for making the most out of the movie in a classroom situation. If you wish to take part in this experiment, kindly contact [admin@elijah.org.il](mailto:admin@elijah.org.il) and we will arrange for the movie to be sent to you.
2. Volunteers who would be willing to transcribe the text of the movie. The movie is about 30 minutes long. Participants come from over a dozen countries, and with that bring a rich diversity of accents. Viewers suggest that subtitling the movie with the text will make it easier to use the movie across a variety of different accent-contexts. If you would be willing to transcribe some or all of the movie, please let us know. This will also provide you with the opportunity to comment upon the content and to help develop the final planned study unit.

Remember, the Elijah Interfaith Institute and all our 2005 activities are largely dependent on your active support and generosity. If you would like to help us offset the cost of producing the movie and if you believe in our mission, namely fostering peace among faith communities by integrating the lived spirituality and wisdom of world religions with the highest level of scholarly and academic work, in order to address pressing issues of our contemporary global society, please make a donation now.

Donations can be made at <http://www.elijah.org.il/participate/donate.shtml>

or by sending a check to our administrative offices:

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