

FROM THE CONVENOR

In this issue we explore the third of the four principles of Inter Faith dialogue affirmed by our Bishops at the 1988 Lambeth Conference:

"Dialogue...may be a contribution in helping people of different faiths to make common cause in resolving issues of peace-making, social justice and religious liberty..."

The Archbishop of Canterbury has powerfully and courageously tackled these issues particularly as they relate to Christians and Muslims seeking to live together in society, eg in Egypt and the Sudan. Our other correspondents also seek to engage in this same dialogue as it affects their own societies in Australia, Malaysia, Fiji, Sri Lanka and the Philippines.

A recent article in an English newspaper argued that "it is dangerous to push the subject of the relationship between the different faiths to the back of the Church's mind, especially in a decade of evangelism..." NIFCON NEWS continues to try to keep the subject at the front of the Church's mind. Please pray for us.

CO-OPERATION NOT CONFRONTATION

I have referred to the fact of differences between the religions. Such differences are genuine and should not be denied. Respecting each other's faith is not at all the same thing as pretending they are really the same. But nor should it be implied that there is no common ground between them. There is more shared understanding and greater agreement than we sometimes think. This can provide a strong basis for greater co-operation and joint commitment to humanity's struggle to overcome evil, disease and poverty. Let me point to a number of areas where Islam and Christianity share common values and ideas.

For instance, devout followers of both faiths are encouraged to seek to be good citizens and good neighbours, and that this in turn not only involves a certain lifestyle in community but a private lifestyle which takes seriously a commitment to respect and love others. In my many meetings with Muslims since my first meeting with them in Egypt forty years ago, I have been impressed by discovering so much that finds echoes also in the Christian faith - the commitment to moral values, the importance of the family, respect for a non-violent way of settling disputes, care for the poor and under-privileged, and a sense of obligation and accountability to the One who judges all human life. In the Christian tradition, for example, we are commanded to love our neighbours as ourselves. And when Jesus was asked: 'Who is my neighbour?', he replied with the parable of the Good Samaritan, who poured out love and care for someone of quite different race and background. This emphasises that the love we owe to fellow human beings made in God's image must override the things that divide us. We need a theology of peaceful co-existence, which affirms that respect towards those with whom we disagree is not to be viewed as a constraint upon our faith. Such respect actually stems from our faith and is part of what we believe God wants of us.

Moreover, there is agreement that we share a common allegiance to eternal truths in a world which is often dominated by the short term. The common truth we bear witness to is that this world did not originate from chance, and cannot be explained just by what we can see and touch. We share then in a common witness against secularism as a system which defines life, knowledge and culture without any reference to what lies beyond this life. We reject those theories which seek to define humanity and human culture in terms of autonomous systems of thought which ignore the divine. We do so because of our understanding that life without the divine is ultimately meaningless. Humanity needs faith to survive. And the people or the fashions which may prevail in human societies at any one time should, in our common view, be judged against the eternal truths that are from and of God. These and other 'building blocks' of common ethical and religious agreement offer considerable scope for further progress between Muslims and Christians in combating the great evils that threaten the human family. Let me sum up by way of conclusion ways in which co-operation can be advanced.

(i) Co-operation in fighting poverty and human misery. All our societies are engulfed with human problems which dwarf our individual ability to solve them, it is easy to throw up our hands in despair and surrender to them, but both our faiths have long traditions of social care, and substantial resources which can be used to bring relief to others from want or illness. While it is good when religions do this on their own, we shall often be more effective if we co-operate together. For instance, in the field of emergency relief, voluntary agencies from the various faith

communities frequently work closely together and I am delighted that Christian Aid and the Islamic Relief Agency have now got a joint project running in Bosnia. Or, to take another example, in my own country a Council of representatives from the different religions represented in the inner cities works together with the Government to analyze shared problems and initiate practical action. Such initiatives provide good examples of what can be done through interfaith co-operation and provide models for further developments in these areas. Let us not forget that joint action can sometimes unify better than talking.

(ii) Peace and harmony among the peoples. I am in no doubt that there is very powerful concern in the mainstream religions for peace between peoples. It is a shocking thing that at any one time over 100 wars and military disputes rage throughout the world. Religious leaders can and should be taking a more active role in seeking to resolve issues involved. By modeling good relations between ourselves we can open up a way for others to follow. In this context I have pointed to the role of the Anglican Observer at the United Nations and encouraged those of other faiths to take the opportunity to have their own representatives there, making their own contribution to the work of that body in promoting peace.

(iii) Opposition to xenophobia. Wherever we look in the world, xenophobia is an enemy to racial and religious harmony. Even in countries like mine, which has a tradition of hospitality, xenophobia sometimes flares up in isolated spots darkening our good name. In some other countries religious extremists can undermine democracy itself leading to deep instability and social crisis. Those of us who have authority in faith communities have a duty - indeed, a mandate - to speak out clearly when men of violence set at naught a significant aspect of our faith. Friendship, including true tolerance, is something that needs to be cultivated, fostered and labored for in the midst of that violence.

I have spoken today as a Christian leader who is passionately committed to the cause of Christ but also as someone who has, over the years, learned to value and admire much in the beliefs and traditions of other faith communities. I remain utterly convinced that the role of religions is a vital ingredient in the search for peace, order and harmony among the nations. That role will only become effective when leaders of all mainstream religions, particularly Islam and Christianity, show a willingness to forge new links with one another, with a new generosity of spirit.

+George Cantuar

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE'S ASPIRATIONS IN AUSTRALIA

Aboriginal people in Australia seek justice in many areas - and rightly so. More and more Australians, some readily, some grudgingly, acknowledge that 1788 marked a white invasion of Australia. The Australian Prime Minister, Paul Keating, has publicly acknowledged this invasion and declared the need for Australia to make amends in pursuing justice for its indigenous people.

Both the governing Labor Party and the opposition coalition of Liberal and National Parties have adopted a bi-partisan resolution to seek processes of reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. For the government a key policy implementation was expressed in what is known as the Mabo legislation. Eddie Mabo was a resolute citizen and indigenous inhabitant of Thursday Island (situated at the northern tip of the north Cape York) who brought a case to the high court of Australia claiming recognition of native title to his ancestors' land.

In a majority and epoch-making decision the judges of the high court ruled in his favour. They acknowledged that the dominant claim made legally and politically by white Australians that before the arrival of the whites on the 26th January, 1788 the land was terra nulla (uninhabited land) was untrue. Thus the highest court in Australia at last acknowledged legally the pre-1788 existence of the indigenous people on the continent and islands of what is now called Australia.

The consequences of the Mabo legislation has yet to be fully tested in the courts. Not only are the government and indigenous people involved, but the claims and court cases will affect mining companies and pastoral properties. Here it is a heady mix of law, spirit and money - the tussle between Western capitalist valuation of land and Aboriginal and Islander claims to spiritual and ancestral bonds with land.

The church has a role to play in this. The three major churches in Australia - Roman Catholic, Anglican and Uniting - have given support in general to the claims to land asserted by Australia's indigenous people. On his first visit to Australia Pope John Paul II expressed that support in a significant speech he delivered at Alice Springs in the heart of the Australian continent.

The Anglican Church of Australia has also expressed such support. It has also formed the National Aboriginal Anglican Council. It is chaired by Australia's only Aboriginal Bishop, Arthur Malcolm, and its members are drawn from the Aboriginal and Islander Anglicans. They seek to present both a vision for, and practical ways of, ministering amongst Aboriginal and Islander people. As well the NAAC seeks to communicate to fellow Anglicans throughout Australia the aspirations of indigenous people.

These aspirations are varied; but a cluster of issues can be identified. Aboriginal and Islander people seek respect from, and reconciliation with, their fellow Australians. (That there is still some way to go was sadly illustrated only recently when vandals attacked Eddie Mabo's burial site, spraying racist graffiti and swastikas on the tombstone).

Claims to land are close to the heart of Aboriginal and Islander people. Of concern to them also are the appalling statistics as regards infant mortality, prevalence of diseases, (especially diabetes, alcoholism, and AIDS) amongst their people. These are consequences of a people whose traditional control of good sources and custom-held social cohesion has long been devastated by dispossession of land and fracturing of clans and families.

High rates of imprisonment (through the ruling whites court system) grossly out of proportion to their population size and the incidence of domestic violence - these, too, are crisis issues.

Aboriginal and Islander Christians bring a depth of care and commitment. Nor is such confined to them. But as Australians seek to implement the practical challenges reconciliation calls forth, an invaluable contribution is already being made by Aboriginal and Islander Christians.

Revd Dr Ray Barraclough

A NEW MALAYSIAN NEIGHBOUROLOGY

Sermon preached at the Diocesan Synod, All Saints Church, Kuala Lumpur on 25th August 1995

Text: Matt 22: 34-40
Hormatilah Jiran

To know Malaysia is to love Malaysia

My concerns are:

- a) A theological Perspective - a 'balanced theology'
- b) An evangelistic perspective
- c) A social perspective

Let me begin with a story. Thirty years ago, at St. Gabriel's School, K.L. for the first time I heard about the love of God in Jesus. I was taught that God loved and sent his beloved Son. I was taught we must love God..... with all our heart, mind and soul. After that, only later did I learn that one who loves God must also love one's neighbour. It is heartening to note our Malaysian Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad saying that non-Muslims (ie. non-Malays) according to the Constitution, are not restricted in becoming the Prime Minister or Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia.

Malaysia, since its political independence, has enabled many countries to be its neighbours. This is mainly for its economic well being. In a multi-racial Malaysian situation, loving God and the principle of Rukun Negara are put to the test. We are caught up in the divine drama of salvation, the theme of which is love, and those who live in love and in God, and God living in them (1 John 4:16). The Church is a community manifesting God's love. As in the words of Michael Ramsey, former Archbishop of Canterbury, 'As a priest I am called to represent God to the people and the people to God. In this loving devotion to God and my loving service to my neighbours, I am tested.'

Text: Our theological perspectives are irrelevant until we raise correct questions such as:

- 1) Who do you think that Jesus Christ is?
- 2) What were his key concerns about God and Man?

As Christians, we believe Jesus Christ is both God and man. Jesus Christ taught us how and why we should approach God the Father and all our brothers and sisters in Christ. He showed us how to love God and our neighbour. To put it in a nut-shell, the Law, 10 Commandments and the Prophets are summed up in 2 sentences: Love God and Love your neighbour. These are two sides of the same coin. How easy it is to love God and yet be ethnocentric, racist and nationalist -The struggle for ethnic welfare is a major threat in many communities. What is

the price of loving our neighbour especially of other ethnic groups, or marginalized people? A balanced theology includes neighbourology as shown by Jesus Christ. We need a 'balanced' Evangelistic theology. It is the love of God overflowing to love of our neighbours.

What is the main concern of evangelism? It is loving God and loving our neighbour. This is an old commandment, and yet a new attitude towards our neighbours of other religions is a necessity when we face religious/cultural revival and resurgence. The Church and especially my missionary friend, taught me what it means to love our neighbour, especially of other ethnic communities.

My name is Batumalai. There is only one Revd Batumalai in Malaysia, as far as I know. Every Hindu who meets me knows that I was a Hindu. A few of their questions are: "Why did you become a Christian? Do we need to change our religion?" I tell my Hindu friends -

God's love was best shown in Jesus Christ Christ's love is most – irresistible – overwhelming - and commissions us to meet/contact our neighbour

My approach is one of love - God loved and died for my sins. Above all He wants us to share this love. My approach is one of loving neighbours rather than condemning them. It recognizes and appreciates the best in others. Ruth, a Moabite, in the Old Testament showed her devotion to God (Ruth 1). In the New Testament, seeing the faith of the Centurion Jesus Christ said, "I don't find such a faith in the whole of Israel'.

Acts 10:31 says: "God accepts the person from every nation who fears him and does what is right." This quality should lead a person to Christianity. Speaking for myself, the Church not only showed me Christ but helped me in my education. Many Christians in squatter settlements and rural areas need assistance in economic and educational fields.

This year (1995) I baptised 40 non-Christians. In April, 15 were baptised in Batu Gajah. During Easter I baptised 5 adults. In the month of July I baptised 20 people - about half of those baptised are adults. They are poor in terms of material goods but not in spiritual terms. They are not able to support the Church financially but they love the Lord. The Church needs to address such issues. This leads to my last and final part

Loving our neighbour in the socio-economic perspective.

In our enthusiasm and excitement for 'soul wining', which is a necessary aspect, we must not forget the holistic approach of 'God's love'. The Old Testament and the New Testament show God as an impartial God.

Ruth belongs to a race often despised by Israel. She was blessed because of her faithfulness to her mother-in-law. A Jewish lawyer was taught what it means to love one from a Samaritan race. Jesus Christ showed his concern for the marginalised in society (eg. Samaritan, publican) and others.

Malaysia is booming economically - but not the Anglican Church. Perhaps there is a lack of love for the Lord. A new version of loving God is - Love God with all your 'purses'. Purses must be baptised! The Church needs to consider the problems faced by people within the Church and outside the Church. Let me just mention a few: women in general, ethnic minorities, Tamil and Chinese in the rural areas, the plight of Orang Asli (aboriginal peoples) who are affected adversely due to tourism and other factors. Recently we saw the emergence of the first Orang Asli lawyer. How about the rural Indians, Chinese, Malays? According to the Sunday Times (18/8/95) women are discriminated against in every country. Women's agencies complain about sexist advertisements - The Church cannot sit and watch or be silent. It can be prophetic and intercessory on behalf of women - our 'mothers and sisters' in Christ. How about the women in the church? How much concern is shown for the needs of the poor and marginalized? To what extent are foreigners exploited for our economic well-being (Ps. 146:9). Who can become their neighbours?

We need to relate positively with all the ethnic groups. Let the love of God transcend beyond our evangelistic concern.

Conclusion:

God's love is more than 'soul saving.' He came to give us abundant life and He loved us all at the cost of his life and not just in words. Many have not known the love of God. Each Parish and Missionary District needs to work out a strategy to manifest the love of God.

As there is an emphasis about 'new Malays' and 'Bangsa Malaysia', Malaysia needs a new neighbourology. Firstly, in order to present a new neighbour, we need to emphasize both loving God and loving neighbours. Secondly, this loving attitude will enable us to demonstrate the Good News of God which cannot be resisted easily. Thirdly, love of one's neighbours must include without fail attending to the needs of all those who are in adverse social circumstances. May a true understanding of the love of God and neighbours prevail in our beloved country of Malaysia. Let this love/charity begin in our Diocese.

Dr S Batumalai

A NEW AREA OF WORK FOR INTERFAITH SEARCH FIJI

Working together on a subject of national importance has been a very binding and unifying undertaking for Interfaith Search Fiji during 1995. This was something rather different from the usual pattern of presenting our own positions on a common theme. This time, because the Constitution of Fiji, which was imposed following the Coup d'Etat of 1987, is being reviewed it was agreed that Interfaith Search Fiji should answer the call of the Review Commissioners for Submission, even though many doubt that there will be any changes for the better as a result of the review.

The project began with a careful look at the religious liberty provisions of the Constitution, but it soon became apparent that Interfaith Search could not stop at that and needed to address other issues of injustice within the Constitution, and indeed the whole question of how the country should be governed. It must be realised that political differences remained with us throughout the process of compiling the Submission, but despite this we felt by the end of the project that we had been drawn considerably closer to one another through dealing with issues of justice and integrity which affect the very fabric of our lives.

Early in the deliberations a meeting was held to bring together as many as possible from all the fourteen member religious organisations at which each group formulated a Religious Statement on which to base the Submission. A common Vision for Fiji was reached

Our Vision of Fiji is:

that Fiji should be a country where everyone is proud to be a Fiji Citizen; where all can live with dignity and respect without fear of injustice, victimisation and persecution; where social justice, righteous living, love and care become everyone's concern; where there is acceptance of being different and where conflicts are dealt with in non-violent ways; where all can enjoy their freedom and where no one group's freedom interferes with another group's freedom; and where all can feel a sense of belonging and share in nation building.

There followed several weeks of intensive meetings attended by a core of representatives from most of the Interfaith Search Fiji member organisations, and the final draft of the Submission was approved and presented to the Review Commission in August. It was well received by the Commission. There is no doubt that Interfaith Search Fiji has an important role to play in bringing reconciliation between the different ethnic and religious groups in the Fiji community, the very purpose for which the organisation was set up in 1987.

Meanwhile, Interfaith Search Fiji's normal programme continued with preparation and presentation of papers on the theme 'Introducing an Important Person in our Tradition'. In addition there were gatherings of member organisations for the annual Senior Citizen Service, and 'To Affirm God's Creation and Say No to Nuclear Testing', on which occasion some of those sailing on a protest vessel to Mururoa were present and received a special message of Peace and Blessing from each religious organisation.

A few weeks later, when Fiji celebrated 25 years of Independence, Interfaith Search Fiji took part in a national service of Thanksgiving and Prayer attended by the President of the country and the Prime Minister. Sadly, the largest religious organisation in the country, the Methodist Church, boycotted the occasion in protest at the inclusion of other than Christian faiths. The Revd Paula Niukula, a past President of the Methodist Church of Fiji and currently Vice Chairperson of Interfaith Search Fiji, was not only present, but offered prayer for the nation in the Fijian language in a moving and brave gesture of support for the reconciling aims of Interfaith Search Fiji.

Tessa Mackenzie, Secretary, Interfaith Search Fiji

CREED

(CREED is the Cultural and Religious Education Department of Easter College, then Easter School in Baguio City, Philippines. The following article will tell its share in the 'spreading of the Kingdom of God'.)

CREED is onward to its third year. It is an offshoot of the Christian Education program of the institution and the Selly Oak experience of the writer. To keep CREED on its toes, there is a staff which includes the CREED Officer, the Chaplain, a secretary, and an administrative assistant who helps most especially in the preparation of liturgies, at the same time teaching Christian Education to the Freshmen.

Religious Education: Since the inception of CREED, our Christian Education program has been strengthened to a large extent. The course of study has been revised and will be revised constantly to suit the needs of the times. The teachers are being upgraded from time to time. For the course of study, the Chaplain is tasked to prepare the theme based on the Sunday gospel. The teachers who have the expertise do the teaching guides. This system of having one frame of reference makes monitoring and evaluation easier.

Two 'children' of CREED have been born. They are RUTH and AMOS which stand for Restore, Uplift, Teach and Heal and Advancing the Ministry of Our Saviour, respectively. These are outreaches so that we don't confine our services to the school, but the other parishes/deaneries as well. AMOS is in partnership with OIKOS, the TEE program of the Diocese. It addresses the theological needs of the laity. The style of delivery and the design of the program are patterned from CEFACS.

RUTH has been so named to get away from the traditional term 'Sunday School.' It is an experiment to see if it will make a difference. It has met twice and a third one comes in April in one of the parishes some 90 kilometres away from Baguio. A good number of participants have shown up in RUTH 1 & 2 and they are looking forward to the next. For the two times they met, the RUTHERS (the trainees) have demonstrated their long-desire for assemblies such as this. Hopefully, their commitment will be healing both the young and old.

Culture: CREED is exerting efforts in inculturizing/indigenizing our liturgies, especially those for school use. There are church services everyday spread out to accommodate the grade/year levels per day. In terms of indigenization, we have started with translated hymns, using the translation of the Book of Common Prayer liturgies, local vessels, and ethnic musical instruments. At the start, the children found it quite awkward; however, constant inculturation is almost making it to the goal. Some of us are attempting to compose hymns in our dialect and tuning them to ethnic melodies. A number of these compositions are already in public use.

A chorale called Palte-enq was organized to be the song and dance ministry arm of the institution. Palte-enq is a tribal term which means 'genuine/authentic.' Before our compositions/translations are out for public use they are first tested and critiqued by Palte-enq. While these dish out ethnic-oriented songs and dances, the composition of the group is cross-cultural. This is one of the beautiful aspects of the chorale.

Linkages: We have been blessed with the visits of British friends during this year and the previous one. In July, Stephen Carr and David Northfield both of Lincoln Seminary came for a side trip from Manila. They visited some classes and talked with some of the children. It was from them that we learned of the closure of Lincoln Seminary. They left a beautiful portrait of the seminary. We had it framed and now it is positioned nicely at a strategic area in the office. In September, Fanny Storr of USPG called on us to say hello and see how USPG alumni are doing. She and some of our Christian Education teachers had a brief encounter over a cup of coffee. In November, the Rev Canon John Peterson, the General Secretary of the Anglican Communion, arrived for a two-hour visit. This was another side-trip from Manila. We had lunch with him. He has indicated his support for CREED in terms of spurcing out for books. On our end, we thought we have really been blessed for having had an audience with a high church dignitary, the General Secretary of the Anglican Communion. He felt impressed with what he saw.

The previous year brought us Sue Wilkins of Lincoln Seminary and Michael Lovell, a young man in his early twenties and a graduate of theology from Cambridge University. These visits have demonstrated our oneness in Christ, though we are miles and miles away from each other.

Frances Laoyan

IN THEIR FOOTSTEPS - A Story from Sri Lanka

Our Madukande experience was a reversal of the saying that the anticipation is more exciting than the real.

Four of us - two men and two women - travelled to Madukande, a suburb off the war front town of Vavuniya, to participate in a programme of reconciliation amongst Sinhala and Tamil villagers, Ananda Hamuduru, our Buddhist monk friend and co-ordinator, had made all the necessary arrangements for a community dialogue. Representatives of the local Sinhala and Tamil communities, a local Buddhist youth group, Ananda Hamaduru, the Lay Worker at Vavuniya, a theological student and the four of us participated. The gathering was informal and simple. We sat on mats and shared ideas, fears and aspirations. ("Give counsel, grant justice....betray not the fugitive." Is. 16:3)

Ananda Hamaduru explained the purpose of our dialogue. Could not relationships amongst the communities be strengthened? Could we consider the building of a common pre-school for both communities? The best peace efforts were experienced through such gestures, he added. He traced the history of relations amongst the local communities, highlighting past co-operation and present fears. Today's climate needed courageous pioneers. When the children came together, a common identity would be initiated. Adults would necessarily be then drawn in. ("...and a little child shall lead them." Is. 11:6)

With a sudden unexpected digression he revealed a family secret. His family, he said, was greatly privileged to have a Tamil sister. His brother had married a Tamil who had now become a very close sister to him. He related an incident of how when he had to accompany her with her baby and baggage from Colombo to Vavuniya by bus, he received curious glances from people who seemed unable to reconcile the relationship.

The point was made with dignity. The invitation to cross boundaries was made by one who had himself done so. ("For He is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility" Eph 2:14)

It was now our turn to speak. I began with a word of caution. People often viewed the Christian Church with suspicion - was there a hidden agenda of proselytization through our presence? We had no such intention. Our presence was certainly motivated by Christ, who pushed us into real human situations of distrust and division. Christ opened our eyes to the needs of humanity - and made it necessary for us to be here. ("All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself; and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." 2 Cor. 5:18)

We were here to listen, share and facilitate; and if at all to provide the help of the apprentice (Golaya) through hand assistance (Ath Uddawwa) towards local efforts in reconciliation.

I want on to re-iterate that even though we were a pluralistic society, many Sri Lankans lived in isolation. Vavuniya, however, was different. Were people were privileged to live alongside other communities. Such pluralism enriches as communities mature; offering and learning mutual lessons of humility (all cultures are rich in values), tolerance (all have equal rights) and truth (all have valuable insights, and none a total monopoly).

Such a privilege carries a parallel responsibility. Vavuniya should integrate with dignity and offer this model to the nation. Will Madukande take this challenge?

Ananda Hamuduru's suggestion of a common pre-school received our support, I said, adding that other possibilities were, a community centre, the acquiring of respective language skills, and mutual security in times of communal tension. Such gestures would reduce prejudices; and enhance reconciliation. The latter, I stressed, is never reached. It's always around the corner. Hence we do not stop working.

It was time for my testimony. I identified myself as a product of a mixed marriage. My family tree had a Buddhist branch and a Christian one. During the brief silence that followed it slowly dawned on me that the four in our team belonged to pluralistic families. We shared Ananda Hamuduru's experience. Indeed this privilege certainly carried a parallel responsibility to celebrate communal identity and common humanity.

A wise village chieftain spoke next. With typical rural courtesy he asked for permission to criticize. Peace and reconciliation he said was in the doing, ("....seek peace and pursue it" Ps 34:14) The time when clergy preached doctrine from the high chair is gone. Today, religious leaders must sit with the people, listen, discuss and enter their sufferings. Then reconciliation will follow. ("And the Word became flesh and lived among us" Jn 1:14) with a twinkle in his eye and a glance in my direction, he remarked that peace does not come by flying high and sitting in high places. He spoke to the community calling for an end to racial prejudice for we were all members of one human race. ("I am for peace, but when I speak they are for war." Ps. 120)

An apt illustration followed. During times of tension members of one community would hide at night in a ditch, and wake up the next morning to discover the other community in the same ditch! Fear and security, he concluded,

knew no common barriers. ("If one suffers, all suffer together" 2 Cor. 12:36) He closed by calling for community shramadane (voluntary work effort) to clear the land for the pre-school, and to build a road linking the two villages. A few others spoke briefly. They appreciated the dialogue, echoed previously stated views, and offered co-operation.

The dialogue was not formally adjourned; the agenda for reconciliation carries into life. As tea and food were served people continued to talk in small groups. When we eventually began to leave in twos and threes, intuition suggested that the dialogue would flow into the fields and across the fences.

For us the dialogue was a deep spiritual experience. We had received much more than we dared to offer. We had received a rare encounter with the Kingdom Values of integrity, humanity and courage, sans religious labels, and so essential for reconciliation. ("And people will come from East and West, from North and South and sit at the table in the Kingdom of God" Lk 13:29) Consequently our own faith had been tested. We had been encouraged to delve into our lives in Christ, to examine and to interpret our discipleship with honesty. In other words, listening to other voices, we were drawn to consider a deeper encounter with Christ the reconciler.

It was fitting that steps to reconciliation would begin small, and under local leadership and initiative. It was significant that our first common act would be to literally build a road linking the two communities. This would serve as a sign and a symbol of what must follow and what must be expected; the strain and the effort; the pot holes and the pit falls of an arduous journey; and yet also the two way traffic, and a common pilgrimage towards a shared destination. ("The Lord will keep your going out and coming in from this time....and for evermore." Ps. 121.8)

All this occurred in the open, under the shade of the venerated Bp tree. The serene Buddha facing us and the unseen Christ surrounding us had been our encouragement. For in them - the Logos, the Ultimate Reality, the Eternal Wisdom, the Universal Athman - there is no need for reconciliation as perfect harmony exists. ("For in them steadfast love and faithfulness will meet, righteousness and peace have kissed." Ps. 85.10)
It is now for us to walk in their footsteps.....

Revd Duleep de Chickera