

Monthly Highlights

April 2013

International Interreligious Affairs

While three significant international interreligious conferences took place in April in Jerusalem, the major international event in my calendar was the TEDx conference held at [the Vatican on Friday April 19th](#).

The general rubric was the subject of Religious Freedom Today; but the program consisted of a range of presentations on the role of religion in different aspect of contemporary life and I had been invited to speak on the subject of the importance of Inter-Faith relations.

Below is the program and list of speakers

www.tedxviadellaconciliazione.com

April, 19th 2013

This TEDx event, «ViaDellaConciliazione-Religious Freedom Today» brings together a wide range of speakers of different professions and faiths to promote respect for religious freedom as a human right.

Program Conference Schedule & Speakers

8:45-10:15 – Session1: Networks of common ground

Gianfranco Ravasi; Cardinal, President of the Pontifical Council for Culture

Guy Consolmagno; Vatican Astronomer

Brian Grim; Global Researcher. The Pew Foundation

David Rosen; Chief Rabbi, International Director of Interreligious Affairs, AJC

11:00-1:15 pm – Session 2: Beauty is truth, truth is beauty

Soumaya Slim and Fernando Romero; Witnesses of the beauty

Sheikha Hussah Sabah al-Salem al-Sabah; Memory Keeper
Elisabeth Lev; Art Historian
Gloria Estefan; Singer

Daniel Liebskind, Architect

2:30pm-4:00pm – Session 3: Forgiveness and reconciliation

Wenzong Wang; Tribal children Educator
Alicia Vacas; Peace Crusader
Vlade Divac; Basketball Charity Champion

5:00pm-6:45pm – Session 4: Living Together

Franco Vaccari and Rondine Students; Noah Remix
Pilar Mateo; Chemical Researcher
Mohammed Ali; Spiritual Street Artist
Hisham El-Sherif; Charismatic Technologist
Barrie Scwhortz; Shroud Investigator

My presentation may be viewed at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sogpp-2v9qI>



and my text was published in The Vatican insider :- <http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it/en/inquiries-and-interviews/detail/articolo/tedx-religion-freedom-24236/>

The TEDx event was covered in the local media, such as the following:-

http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/religious-freedom-is-theme-of-vatican-sponsored-conference?utm_campaign=weeklyhtml&utm_medium=email&utm_source=dispatch

<http://www.thebostonpilot.com/article.asp?ID=15913>

While in Rome I was interviewed by various media including Vatican Radio and the Catholic News Service, the latter focussing on the relations between Popes past and present and the Jewish People. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4LRpLJacPjk>

Taking opportunity of the fact that as the TEDx event was on a Friday and I thus had to stay over in Rome for Shabbat, I hosted a Shabbat dinner for a number of friends, including Cardinals, Archbishops and Professors at the key institutions and dicasteries with which we interact closely; as well as the State of Israel's Ambassador to the Holy See and leaders from the Italian Jewish community. This was the third time we had held such a Friday evening Shabbat meal in the Vatican.

Jerusalem

April, 8-11, Protestant-Jewish colloquium

At the initiative of the Lutheran Church in Germany and in the Holy Land, a group of leading Christian and Jewish clergy and scholars from Israel, the PA, Germany, Holland and the US, convened for three days to discuss the subject "Going back to the Exodus, the Hermeneutics of Liberation" that looked at Jewish and Christian ethical understandings/interpretations of the Exodus narrative and their relevance to current issues in particular the Israeli-Palestinian context.

I was one of the presenters in this seminar which sought to find appropriate balance between Jewish-Christian religious self-understanding and mutual commitment together with acceptable and necessary critique in the Middle East setting.

The colloquium was reported on the website of the International Council of Christians and Jews (of which I am a past president.) see:-

http://www.iccj.org/Excellent_Seminar_in_Jerusalem.4154.0.html?

April 21-24, International Conference on Green Cities

The Municipality of Jerusalem under the leadership of the Deputy Mayor Naomi Tzur, convened the first international Green Pilgrimage conference focussing on green and sustainable religious tourism around the world, with Jerusalem as paradigm. The conference which attracted religious figures, environmentalist and urban planners and officials from around the world, was held at the YMCA and AJC was one of the few dozen conference sponsors. I spoke at the opening gala event (that was also addressed by Mayor Barkat, Deputy Mayor Naomi Tzur, the director of the YMCA Forsan Hussein, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, the Franciscan Custos Father Pizzaballa and the representative of the Bahai world community, Kern Wisman.



In addition I spoke at the opening plenary the next morning on the subject of “Interfaith Dialogue in a Global Arena” . The full program may be seen at :-

<http://greenpilgrimjerusalem.org/symposium2013/symposium-program/> ;

a video of excerpts from the conference may be seen at

<https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B9NUanTFA0LtdmhHaHNsSVN5MVE/edit?pli=1#> and photos at

<https://plus.google.com/photos/107669495378507205366/albums/5869402889410016977?authkey=CKWN9uvX2Yzw1gE>

April 29/30. AJC co-sponsored Conference in honour of the late Pope John XXIII and the 12th meeting of the Bilateral Commission of the Vatican and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel

Together with the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS), AJC co-sponsored a historic conference - the first ever in Israel paying tribute to Pope John XXIII for his role in saving Jews during the Shoah, advocating for the establishment of the State of Israel; and above all for convening the Second Vatican Council that promulgated the document “Nostra Aetate” which revolutionised the teaching and relationship of the Catholic Church towards the Jewish People, Judaism and ultimately towards the State of Israel. Yad vaShem and the Tel Aviv University’s Kantor Centre were also sponsors of the conference, which was very much the initiative of former Israeli government minister Yair Tzaban. The conference was timed to coincide with the 12th meeting of the Bilateral Commission of the Vatican and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel thus ensuring the participation of a very high level of religious authorities including Cardinals Koch and Turkson from the Vatican , Archbishops Forte and Lazarotto (the Papal Nuncio), the local Custos (head of the Franciscans) the Latin Patriarch and bishops; as well as some of the most prominent rabbis including Chief Rabbi She’ar Yashuv Cohen, Chief Rabbi David Brodman, Rabbi Professor Daniel Sperber and Rabbi Professor Avraham Steinberg (both recipients of Israel’s most prestigious award, the Israel prize); together with an array of scholars from Israel, Italy and France.

The attendance was overflowing with people seated in the aisles and above all the quality of the presentations was of the highest calibre. In the words of the Director of KAS in Israel, Michael Mertes , “this was the most successful conference we have ever held here in Jerusalem”.

The conference went a significant way in paying a long overdue debt to John XXIII for having pioneered the historic transformation in relations between Catholics and Jews.

There was quite good local media coverage and the conference was also reported on in the Italian and Vatican media and in the Vatican Insider, see:-<http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it/en/world-news/detail/articolo/vatican-israel-peace-24473/>

In addition, Ha’Aretz ran an op-ed of mine on John XXIII and thus the significance of the conference. See http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/i-am-joseph-your-brother.premium-1.519634#.UYi2E_BLCwA.email



Photos courtesy Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Jerusalem



Left to right: Cardinal Peter Turkson, Rabbi She’ar Yashuv Cohen, Cardinal Kurt Koch, Patriarch Fouad Twal, Rabbi Rene Shmuel Sirat

The next day the private meeting of the bilateral commission (of which I am a member) took place under the chairmanship of Cardinal Turkson and Rabbi She’ar Yashuv Cohen and in the presence of Cardinal Koch.

The meeting served to assess the previous encounters, prepare for publication of their proceedings and agree on the format and agenda for future meetings. At the end of this meeting the following Communique was released.

COMMUNIQUE OF THE BILATERAL COMMISSION MEETING OF THE DELEGATION OF THE HOLY SEE’S COMMISSION FOR RELIGIOUS RELATIONS WITH THE JEWS AND THE CHIEF RABBINATE OF ISRAEL’S DELEGATION FOR RELATIONS WITH THE CATHOLIC CHURCH (JERUSALEM, APRIL 29-30, 2013; IYAR 19-20, 5773)

The Bilateral Commission of the Holy See and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel held its 12th meeting in Mishkenot Sha’ananim, Jerusalem. The meeting dedicated its first day to celebrating the memory of Pope John XXIII on the 50th anniversary of his death, with a conference on his historic role in transforming the attitude and teaching of the Catholic Church towards the Jewish people, based on mutual respect and affirmation of the eternal

Covenant between God and Israel in keeping with the declaration Nostra Aetate of the Second Vatican Council.

Meeting shortly after the ascension of Pope Francis to the Papacy, the Commission noted his past well-known deep engagement and friendship with the Jewish community in Buenos Aires in particular. The Commission accordingly looks forward to the continuation and deepening of Catholic-Jewish relations during his Papacy, following on from the historic strides under his predecessors.

At this very time these are being epitomized in a particular way in the meeting taking place at the Vatican between Pope Francis and President Shimon Peres, who had sent a message of greeting to the Conference accordingly. This meeting in Rome was noted with satisfaction by the Commission.

The Commission reaffirmed the importance of educating our respective communities about the nature, substance and significance of these changes.

The Commission accordingly calls on the Israeli Ministry of Education, and on the Holy See's Congregation for Catholic Education to explore ways and means by which the above-mentioned developments and their substance – together with respect for the identity and integrity of each other – can become an integral part of the required syllabus of educational institutions under their respective authorities.

The mutual respect and friendship that has been established between us over recent years, brings with it the responsibility not only to present each other the way each sees themselves; but also to defend and advance the wellbeing of each others' community.

This requires us to stand up against prejudice and threats – in particular against Jews and Christians. Especially where one community is the dominant ethos of a country and the other is a vulnerable minority, the responsibility on the former is even greater.

Accordingly, the Catholic delegation reaffirms the commitment of the Holy See to do its utmost to combat anti-Semitism everywhere, in keeping with the declaration Nostra Aetate, and especially where the dominant ethos is Catholic; and the delegation from the Chief Rabbinate reaffirms its resolve to do its utmost to promote the wellbeing of the Christian minority in the State of Israel.

In this regard, the Commission expresses its fervent hope that the protracted negotiations between the Holy See and the State of Israel to resolve all outstanding issues will be speedily resolved and ratified.

In conclusion the Bilateral Commission reaffirmed its trust in the Lord of Creation and History, giving thanks for its dialogue and common witness, and asking for His continued blessing on its endeavors.

Additional media

The Jerusalem Report requested an article from me on the election of Pope Francis and its significance for Catholic-Jewish relations. This appears in the latest edition as its opening Commentary. See: <http://www.jpost.com/Jerusalem-Report/Jewish-World/Pope-Francis-and-the-Jews-310889>