

UN World Interfaith Harmony Week - Event in Stuttgart on 06.02.2016

UPF Stuttgart was co-organizer of an event to celebrate World Interfaith Harmony Week, held on 6th February in the First Church of Christ, Scientist (a branch of the First Church of Christ, Scientist founded by Mary Baker Eddy in 1879 in Boston, Massachusetts).

The guests - made up of people from over 12 nationalities and faiths, all deeply motivated by the desire to set a sign for more peace and harmony between religions - were warmly welcomed into the large, bright room. The atmosphere was prepared by beautiful organ music which filled the room and helped us to ready ourselves internally for the peace prayer and ceremonies.



After a greeting by the committee chairman of the First Church of Christ, Scientist, Ms Heidrun Leverentz, a deeply receptive atmosphere was created by a very moving song from Cornelia Ragg.

Then followed an address by Lutz Leverentz, deputy chairman of the House of Religion in Stuttgart. He reminded us that King Abdullah II of Jordan proposed a Week of Interreligious Harmony on 23 September 2012, in order to counteract the division between people of different religions created by misunderstandings



and mistrust, since mankind is connected not only by common interests, but also by God's commandments which tell us to love God and our neighbor. When we ask ourselves why the power of division is so strong; why there are war and assassinations and people seeking recourse in hate; then we must come to the conclusion that we have not loved enough.

These thoughts were developed in a song rendered by Cornelia Ragg, accompanied on the piano by her father Pirmin Ragg - a poem by Christian Fürchtegott Gellert opening with words from Psalm 36: 'thy steadfast love, o Lord extends to the heavens, thy faithfulness to the clouds', set to music from Beethoven.

These words teach us that God comes to us at once when we pray and are open to him. God is synonymous with all that is good, and God's will is also good. Every religion summons us to act according to God's will and not our own. The worldwide week of harmony stands under the motto: love God and love your neighbor, or, love what is good and love your neighbor. Thus we can all connect when we love God or goodness.

The idea that only my own religion has the truth and therefore the others are lies, leads to division. We have to recognize that there are different paths to the same goal. Every religion calls upon people to serve only God alone, and identifies everything that leads us away from loving God and our neighbor as a false God. Religious division is thus every bit as much a false God as the fear of strangers, contempt or hatred. If we want to talk someone into fear of any religion, we need to keep in mind that we all pray to the same God, that he supports us, and therefore we do not need to fear anyone who does the same.

If someone sees insurmountable obstacles in religious teachings, because, for example, the Bible or Koran speaks about murder, we should bear in mind that religion is a way to improve our character. Jesus said that he who throws the first stone should himself be without sin. We cannot change character by force or violence, but must leave this up to God.

Again the spoken word was transformed into a song from Gellert/Beethoven, this time with the words from 1 John: 'whoever says he loves God but hates his brother is a liar'. Mary Baker Eddy put it in a nutshell with the statement that all people have one spirit, one God and Father, one life, one truth and one love. The more that this is visible, the less will there be war, since mankind will recognize that the truth is that they are brothers.



The next speaker, Mr. Hakan from the Mihr Foundation/Sufi-Islam, quoted from a speech from Imam Iskender Ali Mihr on the topic of 'love' and 'being there for others'. We must not forget that God/Allah loves us more than we can ever love him. We cannot be happy without God, and so the secret of happiness is to reach God. The Koran says twelve times that the spirit given to us by Allah must come back to him or else there is no salvation. Always when we live not for ourselves but for others, Allah will not leave us. When we use everything we have been given to live for others, we can experience all dimensions of bliss. If we take care of others' problems and teach them what we know about God, then evil, hate and revenge will have no further influence. The love for God and mankind mutually multiply like two love circles which lift us higher and higher. We can recognize from the reflection of those around us that the love we receive from others is a measure of the love we give them.

But those who are faithful to God may also face difficult situations in life. Sufism means to reach the point where these circumstances no longer make us unhappy. Life is the art of not allowing oneself to be influenced by problems or worries. When we have a deep desire to reach God, we are given the first stage of Paradise. Bliss means peace and harmony. We can create peace in the world by overcoming conflict with our fellow men. We create peace in our inner world by bringing an end to the conflict between mind and soul. Peace in our relationship to God is accomplished when we follow and keep his commandments. We must heed the necessary lesson from the Holy Scriptures.

In conclusion, the speaker left us to consider that Satan thought he had accomplished "that the seven steps of surrender, the conversion for the spirit, the body, soul, the steps of correct leadership and the resignation of free will, would sink into oblivion. But if we are not able to reach the first level of conversion through our heart's desire, we will be unable to reach all the subsequent levels. We are only able to go through the first door if we have this real heart's desire to return to God."

This was followed by prayers from representatives of different religions and faiths, accompanied by Mr. Pirim Ragg on the organ. After each prayer, a floating candle was lit and placed in a bowl of water, to symbolize all religions uniting their lights and gathering their power harmoniously for peace. Light is a symbol for truth. Light and fire transform and have high vibrations. Water symbolizes the ocean of truth into which all rivers flow. Water cleanses, is flowing love, and stands for growth and commitment.

The ceremony was opened by Hubert Arnoldi, chairman of the House of Religion, Stuttgart. Then followed, united harmoniously and complementing each other in heart with their prayers, various religious representatives:

Mihr Foundation/Sufi Islam: Mr. Hakan; Catholicism: Dr. Vera Antons; Brahma Kumaris: Ms. Anja; Islam: Samir El Midani; Scientology: Dr. Manfred Schick; Shinto Buddhism: Yoshiko Arnoldi Ito; Bahai': Mr. Novodny; First Church of Christ, Scientist: Ms. Ruocco; Catholicism: Margret Bellomo; Unification Church: Hubert Arnoldi; Society of Friends Hans Georg Weidner: Ms. Rusitzka.



This special event drew to a close with a group photo to a background of organ music. We continued close heart to heart discussions for a long time while enjoying coffee and cake.

Special thanks go to all participants, those who helped behind the scenes, as well as to all who would have liked to have come but who were unable to because of other responsibilities.

The next time, God willing, we will meet in a wonderful mosque, because in our Father's house there are many mansions!

Report by Hubert Arnoldi

Words of the poem by Christian Fürchtegott Gellert

1-

And if someone says: I love God
but hates his brother,
he makes a mockery of God's truth
and destroys it.

God is love and wants me
to love my neighbor as myself.

2-

He who has possessions on this earth
and sees his brother suffering
and does not feed the hungry,
does not wish to clothe the needy,
is unfaithful to his first duty
and does not possess the love of God

3-

He who shames his neighbor's honor
and listens to scandal
who rejoices when his enemy dies
and does not give his best
and does not contradict the one who slanders,
he also does not love his brother.

4-

We have one God and Master
and are members of one body
so serve your neighbor gladly
for we are all brothers.
God made the world not for me alone
my neighbor is his child, just as I am.