



An Interreligious New Year Celebration

Madrid, Spain, December 18, 2018

Written by Armando Lozano

The On Tuesday evening, December 18, our interfaith family in Madrid gathered together to ask God for His blessings on the new year and show the beauty of spiritual diversity through Music, Words and Food. We decorated the stage simulating an altar. Our desire was to help the very diverse attendance group to have a deep experience through the setting itself.

Music is at the core of any religious ritual. Therefore, the first half an hour was made of short interventions. We started with a female Catholic choir singing Gregorian chants. That set the tone. The 70 people attending calmed down and open themselves to silence and sacredness. We had after that two Jewish hymns by Nora Usterman, one Ethiopian Orthodox Church hymn and Arab religious song by Sara Habasha and Wafir Sheikheldin, a beautiful interreligious blessed couple of musicians who are a bridge between Islam and Christianity, Sudan and Ethiopia. Following that calmed offering, Antonio Martin of Ananda Marga Association invited us to stand up and dance to the singing of a Hindu mantra. This part ended with Sirus Shanavaz, the Persian director of the Sufi Tariqa Molaviye, who read a

poem by Rumi and led a dervish whirling dancer on the stage. That was the amazing finale of the first part.

Gopala, a famous poet follower of Sivananda Vedanta, opened the second part dedicated to poems and prayers by reading some of his spiritual verses. We continued with the reading of a blessing (berakhah) by Yael Cobano, the director of a Jewish Reformed Synagogue. It was beautiful to see

many members of the synagogue in the audience. We proceed with the reciting of the Koran by Wafir Sheikheldin, a Tibetan Buddhist prayer by Lama Jampa Chojor, and ended with Father Demetrios (Rogelio Saez Carbo) reciting the prayer that will be said in the Greek Orthodox Churches to start the new year. It was a very moving moment because he asked the audience to stand up and respond to the prayer



same as if we were in an Orthodox Church. After that we had a moment of silent meditations so that all people could offer their prayers since not all could participate. We had Catholic representatives, theologians and lay people, Orthodox Christians, Unificationists, Reformed Jewish, Sunni, Sufi and Ahmadi Muslims, a great diversity of Hindu groups, Zen, Thich Nhat Hanh and Tibetan Buddhist, Scientology, and others.

Following the meditation, we distribute cups of sacramental wine and juice and myself as moderator read three wishes: "May love and compassion fill the earth", "May all mankind find the way to gather as one family", "May each living being reach liberation and enlightenment", that was followed by a prayer for God's blessing to them, their families and loved ones and partaking the wine and juice. It was a great moment and people were very touched.

We ended with an Interfaith Banquet. Nothing more unifying than food. I had asked each community coming to bring small food offerings of their traditions. And they were so generous that ended up with a real banquet of sweet delicacies and exotic snacks from around the world each with a tag showing what it was. We talked and talked and people didn't seem to get tired. It was beautiful to see all as one, a little sample of what could be the human family united by the love of God.

