

## Interreligious online conference on the topic „Body -Spirit -Society“

Austria, March 16, 2021

The second interreligious conference organised by the Austrian Family Federation this year was held on the topic of how religions view the body and the relationship between body and spirit and how this influences society. The Bible quote which served as a guideline, was „Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that God’s spirit dwells in you?“ (1.Cor 3:16)

At the beginning of the conference, the MC **David Wurzer**, FFWPU Community Leader of Styria, set the goal for the evening, namely to contribute to the interreligious dialogue in Austria and to acknowledge the contributions of the religious communities to the betterment of society.

Seven speakers from different religious communities gave their input. Among them were representatives of four different Christian denominations, as well as a Buddhist and a speaker of the Ravidass group. The last speaker was from the Family Federation.

**Rupert Santner**, deacon of the Catholic Church, explained that for him Saint Paul’s words mean that God can connect to humankind through his incarnation, Jesus. The unity between God and man can take different forms of relationships, such as friendship or the parent-child relationship. The body serves as the instrument of unity between God and man, and as such has eternal value, just like the soul.

**Sandra Ogunbumni**, Church Elder of the Celestial Church of Christ, explained that their denomination tries to serve and attend God in the purest form, because God is holy. We should keep ourselves clean, not just our body, but our spirit as well, by being careful what we are taking in. Our body belongs to God, and we should use it to serve Him.

**Kristina Malina-Altzinger**, Austrian President of the „Plattform Christdemokratie“, (a union of Christians who engage themselves for Christian values in society and in politics) shared her impressions on the Bible verse of 1. Cor 3:16: We are called to be God’s temple, which means God wants to be everywhere, together with us, and it is our privilege to let people feel God’s love through us. It is also our responsibility to build a society based on God’s love.

**Anthony Tsibu**, pastor of the International Bible Church in Linz and President of the African Pentacostal movement in Austria. As such, he is also member of the Main Board of the Austrian Pentacostal Church. In a few minutes he depicted a clear picture of the relationship between God and man: God created man in his own image. That’s why society was meant to be a wonderful place without any trace of sin. But man failed God. God wanted to live within us, but man doesn’t recognise this anymore. Only holy men and women can reconnect to God.

After these four presentations a musical piece was played: „Light of the World“, followed by three more presenters:

**Brigitte Bindreiter**, Chairwoman of the Buddhist Association of Upper Austria, gave insight into the Buddhists' attitude towards the body, namely that the body is the vessel for the spirit, and therefore has to be treated with respect, just like our spirit. Both, body and spirit, need good elements for nourishment in order to function well, whereby the best elements are produced by a life guided by high moral and ethical values.

**Prince Sodhi**, Board member of the Religious community „Ravidass“, a group which separated from the Sikhs, shared universal principles as they are presented in their holy book and by their gurus: „There is no difference between you and me, we are like water and its bubbles“. My body is my own room, my space. I have to feel myself. Through meditation I can feel God within myself. God exists in everyone.

**Bogdan Pammer**, FFWPU Leader of Upper Austria, was the last speaker, reflecting upon several Bible quotes which refer to the role of the body and the relationship between body and spirit. One main point of his speech was the importance of us accepting and loving our body and thus uniting the bodily desires with the direction our spirit wants it to take.

The conference ended with a question – answer session and a last round for the speakers where they had the chance to articulate their opinion and insights to the questions.

There were more than 80 connections on zoom and more on the fb event. The cooperative attitude of all speakers showed how much the interreligious exchange is appreciated and needed in today's society.

Elisabeth Cook





