



Interreligious Conference Building a Peaceful and Inclusive Society: The Role of Religion

Espace Barrault, Paris, France, June 2, 2018

By Jacques Marion

On June 2nd, 2018, UPF-France organized an interreligious meeting at its “Espace Barrault” office in Paris. The gathering was intended to prepare for the inauguration of the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD) to be held next September in Paris.



Dr Otsuka welcoming the participants



Mrs Ye-Bonne Maldonado, MC

The theme of the meeting was “Building a Peaceful and Inclusive Society: The Role of Religions”. Over 90 participants from various denominations and NGOs attended the event - part of whom had to follow the debates through closed circuit TV in an overflow room.

A highlight of the event was the participation of Dr Andrew Wilson, Professor at the Unification Theological Seminary in New York, editor of World Scripture, an Anthology of Sacred Texts published in 1991 at the request of UPF Founder Rev. Sun Myung Moon, to which contributed famous scholars of religion such as Ninian Smart, Huston Smith or Sheikh Ahmed Kftaro, the late Grand Mufti of Syria.



Jacques Marion acknowledging Dr Wilson's presence before his introduction

The first session on the theme “Religious and political leaders, which cooperation?” was opened by Jacques Marion, President of UPF France, who reported about the recent IAPD inauguration for Europe and the Middle East in Vienna and explained the vision behind this UPF project. Then Mr. Camel Bechikh, founder of the Association “Fils de France” (Sons of France), an assistant to the Imam of Bordeaux in Southern France, spoke about issues facing Islam in France, where religious institutions have been challenged since the Enlightenment, and about the need for Muslim women to take a more prominent role in religious matters.



Mr. Camel Belshikh

Three members of “Coexister” then took the stage. The 3000-member strong association “Coexister” is a well-known youth organization promoting inter-religious and “inter-belief” dialogue in France. They organize every year an Interfaith Tour around the world, with four young people from different religions or beliefs visiting over 70 nations for 8 months, meeting with local religious leaders and communities.



Mrs. Radia Bakkouch and other members of Co-exister

Ms. Radia Bakkouch, president of Coexister, spoke about the history and goals of the movement. Then Eloi Deschamps, a young Catholic, gave a testimony about his experience in the 2017-2018 Interfaith Tour, during which he met some UPF representatives and contacts. Vincent, also a Catholic, spoke about the upcoming Tour he is preparing for 2019.

An active question-answer session followed on the role of women in religion and inquiring further about the experiences of Coexister members.



Time for questions and answers

The second session theme, “Dealing with the challenges of our time by looking toward the Ultimate Reality», emphasized the need to focus interreligious dialogue on the core understanding of God.

Mr. Jean-François Moulinet, coordinator of the Family Federation for World Peace in France, gave an introduction to “World Scripture” and spoke about the ongoing project of translation into French and promotion of the Anthology. Then Dr Andrew Wilson gave a presentation on the theme of “God’s Maternal Love”. Giving both historical and biblical references in Judaism and Christianity, referring at times to the Coran, he explained how a better understanding of the “feminine” aspect of God would bring about a more peaceful, inclusive and harmonious practice of religion and contribute to create a more peaceful world.



Mr. Jean-François Moulinet and Dr. Andrew Wilson

Mrs. Brigitte Wada, the president of the Women’s Federation for World Peace in France, then reviewed the remarkable work of interreligious dialogue and service accomplished in the last 20 years by the WFWP and UPF representatives in Birmingham, Patricia and David Earle.



Dr. Wilson and Mrs. Brigitte Wada

The last panelist was a Catholic scholar, Mr. Jean-Marie Setbon, author of a recent book on “God at the heart of our family”. A convert from Judaism, Mr. Setbon emphasized the need to understand the Bible based on a close analysis of the original text. He shared about the importance of the family and about his own experience of religious study and dialogue within his own family.



Mr. Jean-Marie Setbon and dialog with the audience

Many questions were raised that touched deep feelings among participants, so the discussion with the audience went beyond schedule, confirming that interreligious dialogue is “an idea whose time has come” in France.