

## The Parliaments of the World's Religions: Assemblies of Hope

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### 世界宗教議會：希望的聚會

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[ABSTRACT] The first World's Parliament of Religions met in Chicago in 1893, drawing religious leaders from around the world and launching the modern interreligious movement. From 1993 to 2009, there have been four Parliaments of the World's Religions, in Chicago, Capetown, Barcelona, and Melbourne. These are international, interreligious, inter-spiritual assemblies that invite leaders of a wide variety of religious and spiritual traditions to overcome interreligious animosity, foster more harmonious relations and work for a sustainable future. While the focus of the Parliaments has changed over time, the concern to foster conversation, mutual understanding, acceptance, and cooperation has remained constant.

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From September 11 to 27, 1893, The World's Parliament of Religions met in Chicago, Illinois, as part of The World's Columbian Exposition, which celebrated the 400th anniversary of Columbus's

voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. While there had been countless interreligious conversations in earlier periods, in recorded history there had never been an interreligious gathering exactly like it on the same global scale; thus this assembly is commonly taken as the starting point of the modern interreligious movement.<sup>1</sup> A century passed before the second such Parliament was held in 1993, once again in Chicago. For the 1993 assembly, the name was changed to “A Parliament of the World’s Religions.” Since then there have been Parliaments of the World’s Religions in Capetown, South Africa in 1999, in Barcelona, Spain in 2004, and in Melbourne, Australia in 2009. At the time of writing, tentative plans are underway for future Parliaments of the World’s Religions at various locations yet to be decided.

### **The World’s Parliament of Religions: Chicago 1893**

The late nineteenth century was an age of globalization, with new means of technology making travel and communication around the globe faster and easier than ever before; but it was globalization done largely under European colonial domination. The new discipline of comparative religious study (then commonly called the history of religions or *Religionswissenschaft*, or *sciences religieuses*) was being developed in Europe, and the English language was becoming more of a lingua franca internationally. In a climate of hope for the future, Chicago prepared to host The World’s Columbian Exposition both to commemorate the coming of Europeans to the Americas and also to showcase to the world the

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<sup>1</sup> Diana L. Eck, “Foreword,” in *The Dawn of Religious Pluralism: Voices from the World’s Parliament of Religions, 1893*, ed. Richard Hughes Seager with the assistance of Ronald R. Kidd (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1993), p. xv; Katherine Marshall, *Global Institutions of Religion: Ancient Movers, Modern Shakers* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 133.

rebirth of Chicago after the Great Fire of 1871. As plans were being made for the Exposition, a Presbyterian leader, John Henry Barrows, and a Swedenborgian lawyer, Charles Bonney, thought it should include The World's Parliament of Religions, presenting a vision of a tolerant embrace of religious diversity.

The Parliament was convened on September 11, 1893 in the building that later became the Art Institute of Chicago. On the opening day, Barrows set forth a ringing challenge in his "Words of Welcome," proposing "that whoever would advance the cause of his own faith must first discover and gratefully acknowledge the truths contained in other faiths... Why should not Christians be glad to learn what God has wrought through Buddha and Zoroaster — through the sage of China, and the prophets of India and the prophet of Islam?"<sup>2</sup> Charles Bonney hoped that the Parliament would foster "the coming unity of mankind, in the service of God and of man."<sup>3</sup> Barrows later looked back upon the opening ceremony and recalled:

"With the great peace-bell at the fair, tolling, as many hoped, the death-knell to intolerance; with the rabbis of Israel praying at that hour in all lands that the name of Jehovah might be revered over all the earth; with representatives of ten religions gathered beneath one roof; and with a Catholic Cardinal repeating the universal prayer of the world's savior, the parliament opened on the 11th of September, 1893. It was indeed a meeting of brotherhood, where 'the Brahmin forgot his caste and the Catholic was chiefly conscious of his catholicity'; and where, in the

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<sup>2</sup> John Henry Barrows, "Words of Welcome," in *Dawn of Religious Pluralism*, p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Hughes Seager, "General Introduction," in *Dawn of Religious Pluralism*, p. 5.

audience, ‘the variety of interests, faiths, ranks, and races was as great as that found on the platform.’”<sup>4</sup>

Though he was aware of the new developments in religious scholarship, Barrows explained that “the purpose was not to call together the specialists in comparative religion, to produce learned and critical essays.”<sup>5</sup> Instead, the goal was

“to bring the different faiths into contact and conference; to deepen the spirit of brotherhood; to emphasize the distinctive truths of each religion; to show why men believe in God and the future life; to bridge the chasm of separation between Christians of different names and religious men of all names; to induce good men to work together for common ends; and to promote the cause of international peace.”<sup>6</sup>

The Parliament was significant in introducing intelligent and articulate Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Zoroastrian, Parsee, Daoist, Shinto, and Confucian leaders to Americans who had for the most part never encountered such persons before. Newspaper reporters sent home stories of how surprisingly reasonable and persuasive the unfamiliar religious leaders were. The *Chicago Tribune* found the significance of the assembly “in the fact that those whom we have been accustomed to call heathens are not so much heathens as we imagined. Under some of the religions lies the clear idea of divinity. Under all lies the clear idea of morality.”<sup>7</sup> The newspaper expressed

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<sup>4</sup> John Henry Barrows, “Results of the Parliament of Religions,” in *A Museum of Faiths: Histories and Legacies of the 1893 World’s Parliament of Religions*, edited by Eric J. Ziolkowski (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1993), p. 133.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>7</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 24 September 1893; quoted in *Dawn of Religious Pluralism*, p. 353.

its hope that the Parliament would lead to greater understanding and toleration, as well as the end of religious fanaticism. In Paris, *Le Temps* described the Parliament as the most innovative and astounding display America has presented to the world.

However, the tolerance of the organizers was limited, as they largely assumed that Western Protestant Christianity would emerge as the world's dominant faith tradition. The overwhelming majority of the speakers were Christian. Some religious bodies were either absent or notably under-represented. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (informally known as the Mormon Church) was not invited. At a time of increasing racism in late nineteenth-century America, African Americans and Native Americans were not generally welcomed at the Columbian Exposition or at the World's Parliament of Religions. From the African American community, only Frederick Douglass and Benjamin William Arnett spoke at the Parliament. An academic anthropologist presented a paper on the religions of the First Nations (Native Americans) in North America. The organizers of the Parliament invited the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II to send an Islamic delegation, but the sultan refused to join in the planning or to send representatives. As a result, Islam was underrepresented.<sup>8</sup> Representing the Islamic tradition was an American former diplomat, Mohammad (Alexander Russell) Webb, who had served as the U.S. Consul to the Philippines and had converted to Islam five years earlier in 1888.<sup>9</sup>

The most brilliant star of the Parliament was the young (thirty-year-old), charismatic Swami Vivekananda from India. On the

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<sup>8</sup> *Dawn of Religious Pluralism*, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Mohammed (Alexander Russell) Webb, "The Spirit of Islam," in *The Dawn of Religious Pluralism: Voices from the World's Parliament of Religions, 1893*, edited by Richard Hughes Seager with the assistance of Ronald R. Kidd (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1993), pp. 270-78.

first day of the Parliament, he went to the podium, threw open his arms, and exclaimed, “Sisters and Brothers of America!” He expressed the hope “that the bell that tolled this morning in honor of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.”<sup>10</sup> As a Hindu, he welcomed the Parliament as a vindication of the teaching of Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita: “Whosoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to Me.”<sup>11</sup> The crowd went wild, and he quickly became a favorite of the audience in attendance.

With Vivekananda, two other young Asian leaders made a significant impact in Chicago. Thirty-four-year-old Zen master Shaku Soyen of Japan and twenty-nine-year-old Theravada Buddhist leader Anagarika Dharmapala of Sri Lanka found in Chicago an international platform on which to present a reformed understanding of their respective traditions to the world, hoping to spread knowledge of and interest in Buddhism to Americans and Europeans. Dharmapala stressed that “Buddhism is a scientific religion, inasmuch as it earnestly enjoins that nothing whatever be accepted on faith.”<sup>12</sup> Shaku Soyen appealed for unity among different religions: “Let us, the true followers of Buddha, the true followers of Jesus Christ, the true followers of Confucius and the followers of truth, unite ourselves for the sake of helping the helpless and living glorious lives of brotherhood under the control of truth.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *Chicago Addresses* (Calcutta, India: Advaita Ashrama Publication Department, 1992), p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> H. Dharmapala, “The World’s Debt to Buddha,” in *The World’s Parliament of Religions*, ed. John Henry Barrows, 2 vols. (Chicago: Parliament Publishing Co., 1893), 2:878.

<sup>13</sup> Shaku Soyen, “Arbitration instead of War,” in *The World’s Parliament of Religions*, ed. John Henry Barrows, 2 vols. (Chicago: Parliament Publishing Co., 1893),

Dharmapala and Soyen shared the confidence that their respective Buddhist traditions constituted a rational religion that could withstand Christian criticisms and would be persuasive to modern Westerners.<sup>14</sup>

Pung Kwang Yu, the First Secretary of the Chinese Legation in Washington, DC, represented the Confucian tradition, which he described as embracing a variety of religious traditions: He described Buddha, Lao-tze, and Jesus Christ as having "practically the same end in view, though each points out a different road to reach it."<sup>15</sup> He also accepted the Christian practice of calling God "Father": "[T]o call the pure creative power of nature, Father, and the pure consciousness of man, child, is by no means contrary to the principles set forth in the Book of Changes."<sup>16</sup> The presence and the addresses of the Asian speakers marked a significant development in increasing American awareness of Asian religious traditions.

The Parliament was also a major moment symbolizing the acceptance of Catholics and Jews in American culture alongside of Protestants. Because the liberal Protestant organizers were concerned about being opposed and even ridiculed by more conservative Protestants, they were very interested in gaining Catholic participation. The leading American Catholic churchman of the day,

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2:1285.

<sup>14</sup> John S. Harding, *Mahayana Phoenix; Japan's Buddhists at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions* (New York: Peter Lang), pp. 65-74; Tessa Bartholomeusz, "Dharmapala at Chicago: Mahayana Buddhist or Sinhala Chauvinist?" in *A Museum of Faiths: Histories and Legacies of the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions*, ed. Eric J. Ziolkowski (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1993), pp. 235-50. See also Judith Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and the Columbian Exposition* (Chapel Hill, NC, and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Richard Hughes Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions: The East/West Encounter, Chicago, 1893* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), p. 80.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Seager, *World's Parliament of Religions*, p. 80.

James Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore, decided to attend, as did Chicago's Archbishop Patrick Feehan. In recognition of Catholic support, Cardinal Gibbons was given a prominent place on the first day of the program. In his address he confidently asserted that he was not involved in a search for religious truth because he had already found it. But he went on to say: "Though we differ in faith, thank God there is one platform on which we stand united, and that is the platform of charity and benevolence. . . . [N]ever do we approach nearer to our Heavenly Father than when we alleviate the sorrows of others." And he concluded his remarks in a similar vein by quoting "the pagan Cicero": "There is no way by which men can approach nearer to the gods than by contributing to the welfare of their fellow-creatures."<sup>17</sup>

A Catholic speaker who had converted from Congregationalism, Merwin-Marie Snell, boldly forecast:

"It appears, then, that the religion of the future will have no fences; perhaps I had better say, it will have no blinds. It will be open on every side towards every vehicle of truth, every embodiment of beauty, every instrument of goodness; that is to say, toward all expressions of thought, all manifestation of feeling, all standards of conduct. Since love is the father of all the gods, the root and essence of the spiritual sense, it is especially by love and in love that this breaking down of the old barriers will be realized. The fundamental characteristic of the religious future will

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<sup>17</sup> James Cardinal Gibbons, "The Needs of Humanity Supplied by the Catholic Religion," in *Dawn of Religious Pluralism*, p. 164.



be a universal union in love. . . . Truth is one, but the aspects of truth are infinite."<sup>18</sup>

However, not all Catholics shared this enthusiasm and openness. The Apostolic Legate of the Pope, Archbishop Francesco Satolli, observed these events from a distance and was concerned that Catholic participation gave the impression that the one true Church appeared to be simply one among many religions. He wrote a negative report to Pope Leo XIII. Pope Leo, in turn, ordered that if there should be another such event that was not organized by the Catholic Church, Catholics were not allowed to participate. Pope Leo did allow that Catholics could hold their own assemblies and invite "dissenters" to attend.<sup>19</sup> Many others were critical as well; Barrows records hostile reactions to the parliament: "It has been stigmatized as 'Bedlam,' 'Babel,' and 'a booth in Vanity Fair'; and its promoters have been likened to Balaam and Judas Iscariot! All this shows that the parliament has important work yet to do in the world."<sup>20</sup>

The organizers tacitly assumed that Anglo-American Protestantism could provide a unifying framework for the world's religious diversity. Looking back on this Parliament a century later, historian Richard Hughes Seager argues: "The Parliament was a liberal, western, and American quest for world religious unity that failed. . . . The Parliament, however noble its goals and aspirations, was tainted by the same parochialism, ethnocentrism, imperial pretensions, and hegemonic intentions as the entire [Columbian] Exposition."<sup>21</sup> As this project failed, another effect, unintended by

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<sup>18</sup> Merwin-Marie Snell, "Future of Religion," in *Dawn of Religious Pluralism*, p. 173.

<sup>19</sup> James F. Cleary, "Catholic Participation in the World's Parliament of Religions, Chicago, 1893," in *Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 55 (1970), p. 605.

<sup>20</sup> Barrows, "Results of the Parliament," in *A Museum of Faiths*, p. 137.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Hughes Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions: The East/West Encounter, Chicago, 1893* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University

the planners, emerged. Seager continues: “Having failed as a liberal quest for religious unity, the Parliament unintentionally turned out to be a revelation of the plurality of forces on the American and world scenes. As a result, it was a harbinger of the rise of the idea of religious pluralism that is alternatively celebrated, studied, decried, and in various ways struggled over in many different quarters today.”<sup>22</sup>

The failure of the quest for unity lurks in the background of Parliament activities today, in 2013. The current Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions does not seek to achieve unity of religions and instead seeks to promote harmony among religions. The Mission statement proclaims: “The Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions was created to cultivate harmony among the world’s religious and spiritual communities and foster their engagement with the world and its guiding institutions in order to achieve a just, peaceful and sustainable world.”<sup>23</sup>

The Parliament had a significant impact on many areas of the United States because a number of the visitors from Asia prolonged their stays and fostered a wider awareness of Buddhism and Hinduism in North America. Anagarika Dharmapala and Shaku Soyen traveled around the United States, explaining the teachings of the Buddha. Even more important in the long run, publisher Paul Carus invited the young companion of Shaku Soyen, D.T. Suzuki, to stay in the United States after the Parliament had ended and work for him at his publishing house in Lassalle, Illinois, southwest of Chicago. Suzuki began an influential career introducing Mahayana Buddhism, especially the Rinzai tradition of Zen Buddhism, to

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Press, 2009), pp. xxxviii-xxxix.

<sup>22</sup> Seager, *World’s Parliament*, p. xxxix.

<sup>23</sup> <<http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/index.cfm?n=1>>

Americans. Followers of Vivekananda established the Vedanta Society, which would be a major forum for the presence of Hinduism in American culture in the decades to come. Many North Americans in the twentieth century came to know Zen through the work of D.T. Suzuki and Hinduism through Vivekananda and the Vedanta Society.

The late historian of religions Joseph Kitagawa observed that the planners of the first Parliament assumed that either Western Christianity or Judaism was superior and did not treat all religions equally. Nonetheless, he argued that there was a very significant development in 1893 because the Parliament marked a turning point in interreligious relations, as religious leaders began to present their own perspectives with an awareness of how they would be heard and responded to by members of other religious traditions. "In retrospect, it becomes evident that it was a new experience for many of the Parliament's planners to be self-conscious about the distinction between the 'inner meaning' and 'outer meaning' of religions."<sup>24</sup> Kitagawa also noted appreciatively the strong impetus that the Parliament gave to the study of comparative religion in America.<sup>25</sup> He noted an important unintended consequence. Shaku Soyen, Vivekananda, and Dharmapala learned at the Parliament that many Christians believed that other religions were "fulfilled" in Christianity; these Asian leaders appropriated this perspective and developed their own "fulfillment" theories in which other traditions would lead up to their own.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Joseph Mitsuo Kitagawa, *The Quest for Human Unity: A Religious History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), p. 208.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Mitsuo Kitagawa, "The 1893 World's Parliament of Religions and Its Legacy," in *A Museum of Faiths: Histories and Legacies of the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions*, edited by Eric J. Ziolkowski (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1993), pp. 185-87.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

The first Parliament has been hailed as “The Dawn of Religious Pluralism” and the beginning of the modern interreligious movement. It inspired the creation of some new organizations, including the International Association for Religious Freedom, which was founded in Boston in 1900, and the World Congress of Faiths, which was organized in London in 1936. Kyoto, Japan, hosted a Great Religious Exposition in 1930, which was inspired by the Parliament. However, after the 1893 Parliament there was no sustained organization to hold further Parliaments on a regular basis. In the early twentieth century, American attitudes to other nations hardened, and by the 1920s tight immigration restrictions were established, limiting the number of immigrants from Asian countries with Muslim, Buddhist, Confucian, or Hindu backgrounds. Theologically, many Christians became more conservative and less interested in interreligious explorations.

### **A Parliament of the World’s Religions: Chicago 1993**

A century passed, and the world continued to change. The United States modified its immigration laws in 1965, allowing larger numbers of immigrants from around the world. This led to increasing numbers of Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, and followers of virtually every other religion coming to the United States. During the 1980s a number of religious leaders in the Chicago area, especially the Hindus of the Vedanta Society, were mindful that the centenary of the first Parliament was approaching, and took the initiative of exploring the possibility having a second Parliament. In 1988, the Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions was established to organize this event. In 1893, most Chicagoans had never seen a Buddhist or a Hindu or a Muslim; in the 1980s and 90s,

there were host communities in Chicago from virtually all of the world's religious traditions who organized the new Parliament.

The second Parliament, this time called a Parliament of the World's Religions, met in Chicago from August 28 to September 5, 1993. About 8,000 people came from all over the world to the Palmer House Hotel for a week of discussions. The centennial Parliament of 1993 included many, many groups, large and small, long established and newly formed, well known and new to the scene. Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, the Archbishop of Chicago, represented the Catholic Church. The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, quietly violating Pope Leo's order of a century earlier, sent Archbishop Francesco Gioia to speak on "The Catholic Church and Other Religions."<sup>27</sup> Numerous Catholics were involved in the planning and the activities of the Parliament.

One of the keynote addresses was given by Gerald Barney, a physicist who had earlier been commissioned by U.S. President Jimmy Carter to do projections of future global population growth, availability and use of resource, and environmental impact for the United States government. In 1993 he presented to the Parliament a series of graphs and charts on projected expectations "in the lifetime of a child born today." Many of the figures were extremely worrisome regarding the impact of human technology on the environment and the effects of population increase on land and water use, crops, and the availability of food. He noted the danger of resulting struggles leading to violence and all-out wars. Then he challenged the world's religious leaders to address the situation. He noted that almost all organizations are geared for the short term and

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<sup>27</sup> Francesco Gioia, "The Catholic Church and Other Religions," in *The Community of Religions: Voices and Images of The Parliament of the World's Religions*, edited by Wayne Teasdale and George F. Cairns (New York: Continuum, 1996), pp. 83-90.

proposed that religious leaders have responsibility to think about the coming generations and have a history of challenging people to do what is not in their short-term interest but to make sacrifices for the sake of a greater good. After Barney finished his remarks, Rabbi Herman Schaalman, who was chairing the session, said, “Now we know why we are here.” This concern was one of the most important shifts from 1893, and it became a central theme for the 1993 Parliament and has continued to be among the most important concerns of later Parliaments.

Eco-theologian Thomas Berry saw this attention to ecological awareness as the central realization of the 1993 Parliament: “If the finest consequence of the First Parliament of Religions, held in 1893, was the recovery of a profound sense of the divine in the human soul through the leadership of Swami Vivekananda, the finest consequence of the second Parliament of Religions, held in 1993, should be the recovery of an exalted sense of the divine in the grandeur of the natural world.”<sup>28</sup> Berry warned of the dire consequences of a scientific-industrial worldview that views nature simply as resources to be exploited and plundered. Berry saw the 1993 Parliament as contributing to the awareness “that the natural world has from its beginning been a mystical as well as a physical reality. As the primary manifestation of the divine, the natural world is the primary sacred scripture and the primary sacred community.”<sup>29</sup> Today countless interreligious discussions around the world include concern for ecology.

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<sup>28</sup> Thomas Berry, “The Role of Religions in the Twenty-first Century,” in *The Community of Religions: Voices and Images of The Parliament of the World’s Religions*, edited by Wayne Teasdale and George F. Cairns (New York: Continuum, 1996), p. 182.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

The 1993 Parliament included a dialogue organized by Monastic Interreligious Dialogue, bringing together Catholic and Buddhist monastics to discuss "Kenosis and Shunyata," exploring the meanings of emptiness and emptying in their respective traditions. This discussion led to the later Gethsemani Encounters, week-long meetings of Buddhist and Catholic monastics at Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky in 1996, 2002, and 2008. The 2008 dialogue focused on "Green Monasticism," i.e., the role that monastic interreligious dialogue can play in fostering respect for ecology.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to the public sessions, there were closed meetings of The Council of Spiritual and Religious Leaders, which discussed and endorsed a statement, "Toward a Global Ethic: An Initial Declaration," which had been prepared by Hans Küng and his colleagues.<sup>31</sup> This declaration sets forth basic moral principles which the religious and spiritual leaders in the Council accepted. The core of the declaration is based on the Golden Rule and its implications for cherishing life, respecting religious diversity, and honoring freedom of conscience. Representing the Catholic Church, Cardinal Bernardin, who was a member of The Council of Spiritual and Religious Leaders, signed the declaration, "Toward a Global Ethic."

Not all discussions were harmonious, and significant conflicts arose. The delegation of First Nations (Native Americans) presented a "Declaration of Vision" to the Council of Spiritual and Religious

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<sup>30</sup> Donald W. Mitchell and William Skudlarek, eds., *Green Monasticism: A Buddhist-Catholic Response to an Environmental Calamity* (New York: Lantern Books, 2010).

<sup>31</sup> Hans Küng and Karl-Josef Kuschel, *A Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions* (New York: Continuum, 1993). For a discussion of the complex process leading up to the statement, see Thomas A. Baima, "Toward a Global Ethic: An Initial Declaration: Its Making and Its Future," in *The Community of Religions: Voices and Images of The Parliament of the World's Religions*, edited by Wayne Teasdale and George F. Cairns (New York: Continuum, 1996), pp. 143-149.



Leaders, condemning the Papal Bull, *Inter Caetera*, issued by Pope Alexander VI in 1493, which granted lands in the Americas to Spain. The chair of the Council, David Ramage, ruled the Declaration of Vision out of order because the Council was convened to discuss only the topic of the declaration regarding a Global Ethic, not to adjudicate particular historic grievances. Some Jewish attendees left the Parliament in public protest because Louis Farrakhan was allowed to speak. Farrakhan is the African-American leader of the Nation of Islam and had made earlier statements that were deemed anti-Semitic. One of the most heated moments of this Parliament came during the session on “Voices of the Oppressed,” when a Sikh speaker was recounting the ways in which Hindus had mistreated Sikhs in India, never mentioning any offences that Sikhs had done to Hindus. A number of Hindu men ominously approached the stage. Security personnel emerged to restrain them. The speaker was interrupted by the program managers, and there was a long, awkward pause in the program. Some people began chanting a soothing refrain; and finally, a Native American leader, Burton Pretty on Top, took the podium and gave a more conciliatory message. It was a sign of the real-life tensions that surround interreligious relations. As the chair of the organizing committee, Jim Kenney, commented, “The Parliament is not tarnished when the real world shows up.”<sup>32</sup>

## **The Parliament in Capetown 1999**

The third Parliament met in Capetown, South Africa, from December 1 to 8, 1999. This was a very significant moment in time,

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<sup>32</sup> George Cairns and Wayne Teasdale, “Introduction: Harmony in the Midst of Great Diversity,” in *The Community of Religions: Voices and Images of The Parliament of the World’s Religions*, edited by Wayne Teasdale and George F. Cairns (New York: Continuum, 1996), p. 11.



coming just a few years after the end of apartheid, in the midst of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and on the eve of the new Millennium. On the Opening Day, the international AIDS Quilt was unveiled, with hundreds of hand-stitched panels, each commemorating a victim of the AIDS epidemic. Cleve Jones, the founder of the Quilt project, led a discussion of how religious traditions can respond to the challenge of HIV/AIDS. Over 10,000 participants then marched to District Six, an area that had been designated "white-only" under the earlier apartheid government, when non-white residents had been forced to move to under-resourced locations. Participants then proceeded to the Good Hope Center for the Opening Plenary Assembly.

The most prominent speaker at this event was Nelson Mandela, who told the assembly of the ambivalent role of religion in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. He noted that religion can legitimate terrible oppression; but he also recalled that in the jails of the apartheid system, "it was religious institutions, Hindus, Moslems, leaders of the Jewish faith, Christians, it was them that gave us hope that one day we would come out. We would return."<sup>33</sup> This gave a concrete and powerful example of how interreligious collaboration can have a concrete impact in addressing situations of injustice. This has been another major focus of the Parliaments—collaboration on issues of social justice. A multitude of other sessions in Capetown focused on issues of religious identity, interreligious dialogue, and the role of religions in addressing the critical issues of the present day.

Building on the Declaration, "Towards a Global Ethic," the Assembly of the Parliament issued "A Call to Our Guiding Institution," addressing leaders of religion, government, business,

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<sup>33</sup> <<http://www.teosofia.com/mandela.html>> [2013-01-31]

education, arts and media, science and medicine, international intergovernmental organizations, and organizations of civil society. The Call invites leaders to a process of creative engagement to apply the moral and ethical values shared by major religious and spiritual traditions to the pressing challenges of today. A number of communities and groups offered “Gifts of Service,” which were described as “projects undertaken to relieve suffering, promote harmony, and build a better world.”<sup>34</sup> Among the many gifts were the Earth Charter, Project Shalom, World Movement for Nonviolence, and the Children’s Peace Museum.

### **The Parliament in Barcelona 2004**

The fourth Parliament met in Barcelona, Spain, from July 7 to 13, 2004, with the overarching theme: “Pathways to Peace: The Wisdom of Listening, the Power of Commitment.” The Parliament called attention to four international issues of pressing concern: overcoming religiously-motivated violence, eliminating international debt in poor countries, supporting refugees worldwide, and increasing access to clean water. There were three main tracks focusing on intrareligious identity, interreligious dialogue, and engagement with contemporary issues.

The Parliament included a three-day consultation on Interfaith Education, which explored how interfaith education can contribute to conflict transformation, living with differences, and shaping the next generation. There were symposia on interfaith peace-building skills, science and religion, human rights, and responding to HIV/AIDS.

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<sup>34</sup> “1999 Parliament of the World’s Religions Summary Report,” p. 11, <[http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/\\_includes/FCKcontent/File/1999report.pdf](http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/_includes/FCKcontent/File/1999report.pdf)>[2013-08-06]

The Sikh community exemplified the spirit of hospitality by hosting lunch for all each day in a large tent near the Mediterranean.

One panel discussion focused on "Finding the Brother in the Other: Overcoming Negative Images of Other Faiths as We Build Our Religious Identities and Seek Common Ground." At one point in the question period, Mufti Habimana Saleh, a Muslim imam from Rwanda, took the microphone and expressed his appreciation for this type of "free zone" where people from different faiths and backgrounds could come together amicably to discuss difference. "I am from Rwanda," he said, "where one million people were slaughtered in a hundred days because people did not find a brother or sister in the other." Then he addressed directly Rabbi Brad Hirschfield, an American Orthodox Jewish leader: "I am getting to know Jews here. I really appreciate what you have been saying about Judaism not being just a way to be Jewish, but a way to be human—and so it must be with all other religions, too. I want to shake your hand!" As the Rwandan mufti approached the American rabbi, Hirschfield came to meet him and the two men spontaneously hugged each other. Everyone in the room was moved by the power of the moment and burst into spontaneous and prolonged applause. It was one image that expressed the hopes of the Parliament in a violent world.

## **The Parliament in Melbourne 2009**

The fifth Parliament met in Melbourne, Australia, from December 3 to 9, 2009. The agenda again included an extremely wide range of topics, ranging from healing the earth, ecology, peace building, human rights, and overcoming poverty, to interreligious education, women in leadership, and local and global interreligious

movements. In the context of Australia, there was a special focus on the heritage of indigenous peoples. Most sessions began with a respectful recognition of the role of the First Nations in caring for the land; and there were many discussions of indigenous religious life and culture, especially in Australia and North America. Many sessions focused on the challenge of ecological sustainability; the title of one session pointedly warned: “Mother Nature Doesn’t Do Bailouts.” Another major theme was the relation of Islam and the West, as numerous discussions explored various aspects of the Islamic tradition and its relation to “the West,” a term that was strongly criticized but nonetheless employed.

Each day, the Parliament began with a variety of religious rituals and meditation practices, some of which involved more than one tradition. For example, Rev. William Skudlarek, OSB, and Mahayana Buddhist leader Rev. Heng Sure collaborated in reflecting on the significance of breath in meditation in the Catholic and Buddhist traditions. Other sessions involved a single tradition, such as Ven. Jinwol leading Zen meditation, or the Shinto rite of the Konko-kyo tradition involving the harmonious collaboration of kami (divine being) and humans. There were also numerous musical performances, and a moving performance of the one-person play, “Simone,” presenting the life of Simone Weil.

Many sessions focused on the experiences, the suffering, and the resources for healing of the indigenous peoples of Australia and the Americas. One session led by representatives of the Ngarinyin Australians began with a smoking, a tradition of Australian aboriginal peoples when they go to another region of the country or when they share their sacred images with others. They had come to Melbourne, some distance from their home, and they were preparing to show us the sacred rock paintings that are an important part of their heritage. A fire was lit in the corner of the conference room, and

leaves were placed on it to create smoke. Participants were then invited to come forward and stand before the fire to receive the beneficial effect of being smoked. With this protection, the Ngarinyin people then discussed the "Mamaa" taboo, which guards their sacred images from use or abuse by outsiders. In the 1950s this people had been forcibly removed from their traditional land where the paintings are found, but more recently the Australian High Court upheld their property rights to their traditional area. The problem remains, however, that surrounding lands are owned or leased by others, and so access is often difficult. In the discussion, a number of Australians debated the best way to lobby government officials regarding this situation.

A number of sessions presented the impressive history of interfaith collaboration in Australia itself. This was already underway before the year 2000 and has increased dramatically in the wake of the attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001 and the bombing in Bali in 2002, which killed 89 Australians. Many local Australian communities and metropolitan areas such as Melbourne have energetic interreligious forums underway at the present time. Attendance in Melbourne was less than at the 2004 Parliament in Barcelona, possibly due to the distance required for many people to travel to reach Melbourne and also due to the worldwide economic downturn. Nonetheless, the spirit of enthusiasm was strong.

In comparison with the historic Parliament of 1893, it is more difficult to assess the cumulative impact of the recent Parliaments, both because we are closer to these events in time and also because the international field has a much larger number of interreligious organizations than in 1893. Today there are numerous organizations with analogous concerns, including Religions for Peace, United Religions Initiative, and Sant Egidio's annual Prayer for Peace, as

well as the commissions for interreligious relations of many religious bodies, including the Catholic Church. There are countless grass-roots initiatives for interreligious and inter-spiritual understanding and collaboration, and so the recent Parliaments take their place in an environment filled with similar discussions and activities.

The recent Parliaments have certainly contributed to the widespread discussion of ecology, poverty, conflict transformation, and human rights in interreligious and inter-spiritual discourses. They have helped to network the interreligious community worldwide, offering a forum for traditions and organizations to present their activities and aspirations. Recent Parliaments have sought to widen their appeal beyond organized religious traditions. In 1893, Catholics and Jews found a new public platform in the United States; the recent Parliaments have provided a space where new and smaller religious and spiritual movements can share their perspectives and values. The recent Parliaments have offered a forum to a wide variety of religious traditions that have often been neglected or marginalized. Katherine Marshall comments, “The world’s smaller faith traditions have tended to see the parliament as a rare opportunity to find a forum and voice and the principle of inclusion extends to atheists and Pagan groups, as well as a growing commitment to including indigenous traditions.”<sup>35</sup> CPWR invites all persons and communities, including humanists and spiritual seekers who are not involved in a particular religious tradition to be involved in its activities.

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<sup>35</sup> Marshall, p. 137.

## The Future

Today, the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions (CPWR), based in Chicago, offers webinars on a variety of topics<sup>36</sup> and sponsors PeaceNext, an online forum for "creating spaces where people can work together for a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world."<sup>37</sup> As Katherine Marshall observes, "In practice, the parliament has operated as a small interfaith organization for most of the time, necessarily gearing up to a far larger organization as five-year parliament events (which are large and complex) approach."<sup>38</sup> In addition to organizing Parliaments, CPWR is seeking to establish a network of Partner Cities throughout the world, bringing together persons seeking harmony and understanding.

At the time of writing, plans are underway for future Parliaments of the World's Religions to be held in places around the globe. One of the goals of the CPWR is to increase the level of activities in between the Parliaments. As part of these preparations, the Council will invite people in cities around the world to host pre-Parliament events. These would connect in some way with the themes and concerns of the Parliament, fostering harmony and cooperation among different religious traditions in addressing the challenges that all humans face. Cities with a developed program of interreligious cooperation are welcome to become Partner Cities.

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<sup>36</sup> <<https://www.parliamentofreligions.org/>>

<sup>37</sup> <<https://www.peacenext.org>>.

<sup>38</sup> Marshall, p. 137.

## For Further Reading

Seager, Richard Hughes. *The World's Parliament of Religions: The East/West Encounter Chicago, 1893*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009.

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Website of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions: <https://www.parliamentofreligions.org>

[摘要]1893 年的第一屆世界宗教議會集合了全球各地的宗教領袖，亦開展了現代跨宗教運動。在 1993 年至 2009 年間分別在芝加哥、好望角、巴塞隆拿及墨爾本舉行了四次會議。這幾次會議都是國際性、跨宗教、跨靈性的會議，邀請了多方面的宗教及精神傳統領袖，一同去克服宗教間的負面情緒，去培育和諧的關係及持續性的將來。雖然會議的焦點隨時間有所變更，但在關注保育、互相了解、接納及合作這些議題上維持不變。