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A LAST SUPPER

by Iftekhar Hai

San Francisco: Rita Semel of San Francisco Interfaith Council called me on May 20, 2005 and said, “We want to give a Farewell Party to the Archdiocese William Levada. You know he will be leaving San Francisco in August for Rome to work with the new Pope. He has been a great blessing for the interfaith community.” I was excited about the global implications with William Levada at the Vatican.



On June 10 at 5:30 pm, religious leaders from all over the Bay Area started to gather at The Temple Emanuel. Every seat is occupied, around 400 worshippers, majority being Jewish people who had come to celebrate the Shabbath.

Episcopal Bishop of California, William Swing along with his wife, Greek Orthodox Bishop of Greek Orthodox diocese, His Grace Anthimos of Olympos, Archdiocese William Levada along with his team and representatives from every Christian denominations can be seen. Souleiman Ghali, Executive Director and Imam of Islamic Society of SF along with Buddhist and Hindu monks carefully listen to the words of the Torah from Rabbi Stephen Pearce. The preaching was centered on peace among religions, all living on one Earth – a gift of God for all to share. The Jewish services had an interfaith message of peace. The last time there was such a gathering was at St. Mary’s Cathedral to remember the passing away of Pope John Paul, where I gave the Islamic call to prayer.

Grace Cathedral is holding one such interfaith gathering on June 25th to celebrate 60 years of the birth of United Nations in San Francisco. They are expecting an interfaith crowd of 2000 from all over the Bay Area.

I first met William Levada, twelve years ago, along with sixteen Imams of various mosques. He invited the local Muslim community to establish dialogue with the Catholic community. The Catholic-Muslim relations from then onward have been on the up swing. William Levada lamented about the flight of Christians from the Holy Lands and pondered about how we can work together with the Jewish community in improving relations among the Abrahamic people in the Holy Lands.

The next phase of the party was at the Greek Restaurant called Kokkari in the heart of downtown. Mr. George Marcus, the owner, invited 20 religious leaders to dine. Here again all religious leaders blessed the food and shared jokes. Laughter and fun took over the religious leaders. This was the best time of my life. The menu was fish, lamb or chicken served with Greek salad and Greek appetizers. Wow! Just great. I had fish and William Levada tasted little bit of everything. The wine flowed and flowed – but not for me. Muslims do not drink and I did not mind others drinking. This is all about tolerance and accommodations among people of faiths.

I was seated facing William Levada and William Swing. We talked about how we can work with the Vatican for increasing the global cooperation among world’s religions. I said this religious group want to be

invited to the Vatican to forge a United Religion Global Commandments to which all religions can be signatories. William Levada immediately welcomed the idea and said, "That will be great let me settle down. All of you are welcomed."

If this dream of going to Vatican ever happens it would be my first time. Rabbis, Imams, Ministers, Hindu and Buddhist Monks all traveling to the Vatican on a peace pilgrimage to defuse religious tension as the famous Catholic German theologian, Hans Kung said, "There can be no peace among nations, if there is no peace among religions and there can be no peace among religions, if there is no dialogue among religions." I called upon the beloved William Levada to see that the Vatican can take up this issue of inter-religious peace and harmony and set in motion the time when, "Nations shall not lift up swords against nations and man shall not learn about war any more." I pondered on how religions can make war obsolete and making negotiations the only way to conflict resolutions.

The feasting ended at 10:00 pm, my heart full of hopes for miracles like this happening all over the world and San Francisco leading the way as a model for religious tolerance.