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Geshe Lobsang Tenzin: Discussion Suffering Caused by Personal and Structural Violence

Rev. Thomas Baima, Bhikshuni Thubten Chodron, Professor Ewert Cousins, Dr. Janet Cousins, Joseph Goldstein, Fr. Donald Grabner, OSB, Archbishop Felix Machado, Eric Marcoux, Ven. Chuen Phangcham, Rev. Heng Sure, Ph.D., Geshe Lobsang Tenzin, Danielle Witt, SSND

from [Gethsemani Encounter II, April 2002](#)

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Janet Cousins: I wanted to respond to the thought of compassion in response to personal violence by also suggesting that there should be another response to structural violence with structures of peace.

Regarding what Heng Sure just said about it stopping at the root, an example of that might be there are some groups of mothers whose children have been murdered who have formed a group that express concern for the perpetrators. They have put out their compassion, but done so in a structural way so that the violence stops and there is not more violence committed by killing the killer. An example of this on another level is the University for Peace in Costa Rica, which was founded in 1981. Its motto is a turn-around of the well known motto, "If you want peace, prepare for war." Their motto is, "If you want peace, prepare for peace." It follows the words of Jesus: If you have an argument with your brother, try to settle it before it gets bigger and goes to court. These are ways this university and other structures like it try to present methods of dealing with the beginnings of things leading to violence before they get big, methods of conversing just like we are doing that will prevent violence. What we do here is also a work for peace and nonviolence.

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Rev. Thomas Baima is Vice President and Provost the University of St. Mary of the Lake/Mundelein Seminary in Chicago and Associate Professor in the Department of Systematic Theology. He served as Director of the Office for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the Archdiocese of Chicago. He is an advisor to the board of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue.

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Eric Marcoux: Dear brothers and sisters: Please notice what arises in you when I say the following. First of all, do you hear the emotion in my voice? Notice how quickly we retreated from the elephant that my friend brought into this room. I've been involved in this field of working with sexual misbehavior and struggle for about seventeen years as a therapist. I'm retired, mostly because I'm tired. I have seen the other side. I have seen into the lives of people who to compensate for their humiliating and irresponsible lapses have managed to be perhaps better than I have ever been. I would suggest that we have a structure of internalized violences, our unwillingness to look at our own discomfort, of our unresolved childhood or adult curiosity about sexuality.

As Geshe pointed out, consequences are the result of many causes and conditions. In this instance, these are many embarrassing human responses, curiosity, as well of personal deprivation. Let's look at the situation from a monastic standpoint, whether it's Buddhist or Christian. *Lectio divina*, contemplative lingering on a subject, is relevant here. It is not only interdependent arising as a philosophical principle, but an experience of what it is to let our minds rest on the being of the perpetrators of sexual misconduct—perhaps visualizing them, in the instance of a priest, at the altar the next morning or after an inappropriate behavior. These are people with families, and they know it. These are people with a profound love of God, and they know it. You can fill in the blanks here.

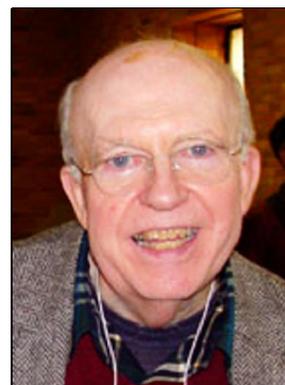
What I propose is that we allow our minds and hearts, our cognitive and our affective faculties, to rest for more than a moment on this topic. Professionally, I've had to do it. You hear the pain in my voice. It is not feeling sorry for them, but feeling sad and frightened with them. I think everyone in this room knows what that's like. So please, dear Brothers and Sisters, internally stay for more than a moment with the perpetrators as real human beings, who also hear birds, who also hold the Eucharist in their hands, whether to receive the Eucharist or to offer it, or for our Buddhist brethren, who put their buns on the cushion and bow to one another. When we do this, we'll find courage to have the pragmatic conversations and discussions that are absolutely essential.



Bhikshuni Thubten

Chodron received novice vows in 1977 and full ordination in 1986. A student of H. H. the Dalai Lama, Tsenzhab Serkong Rinpoche, and Zopa Rinpoche, she has been resident teacher at Amitabha Buddhist Centre in Singapore and Dharma Friendship Foundation in Seattle. She is active in Jewish-Buddhist and Catholic-Buddhist dialogue, including the MID-sponsored Gethseman... [[Read full biography](#)]

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Donald Grabner: I'm also involved in a seminary situation, and I don't want to pursue that at this point. Cardinal Law [who was at the time of the conference under pressure to resign following allegations of widespread sexual abuse in the Boston diocese], when he was bishop of Springfield, was a member of our board of regents. And Bishop Anthony O'Connell, who was the bishop of West Palm Beach, Florida and had to resign when he was in Jefferson City as the rector of their minor seminary was on our board of regents. So these scandals hit home very closely for us. In both instances, of course, the issue was the question of the abuse of power.

These are not evil people. What has happened is not something I think that arose out of hatred but some kind of abuse of power that arises, I suppose, out of ignorance of some sort or whatever it is that drives us sexually. We all have those problems, and this issue is not something that is new in the Church. It's a problem that we've had to contend with from the very beginning, that that sort of abuse has always been there. We are meeting it in a new way. But the crisis in the abuse of power, I think, has to do with the institutions. And the abuse of power is not always done for evil purposes or for wicked purposes or out of hatred. That's what I find to be the real issue. How do we explain such an abuse of power from people that we know to be quite good? As Brother Eric mentioned, these are people who are trying to do the best they can, to work out the will of God as it appears to them in a way that yet has to deal with their faltering. What is their effect on others?

Felix Machado: The root of violence, as the Dalai Lama was quoted as saying, is hatred. Venerable Heng Sure said the solution has to be long-term, to start at the very beginning, at the root. Janet Cousins also said something like that. I would like to give an example of interreligious dialogue as a solution, but not one resolving immediately the problem of violence but doing so in the long-term. It requires a lot of patience for us to be committed and involved in interreligious dialogue.

I have often said that people think interreligious dialogue is like an ambulance you call when there is conflict or violence. I particularly

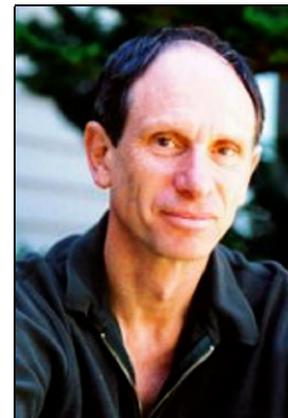
Ewert Cousins, Professor Emeritus of Fordham University, died on May 30, 2009, in Bethlehem CT.

Dr. Cousins served for many years as an advisor to Monastic Interreligious Dialogue. He was the chief editorial consultant for the 100 volume Paulist Press series, The Classics of Western Spirituality and was also General Editor of the 25-volume series, World Spiritualit... [[Read full biography](#)]

[All articles by or about Professor Ewert Cousins](#)

Dr. Janet Cousins is a writer and editor who works with her husband, Professor Ewert Cousins.

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Joseph Goldstein is the co-founder of Insight Meditation Society and The Barre Center for Buddhist Studies in Barre,

mean violence in India between Hindus and Muslims, and between Hindus and Christians, when, in 1992 soon after the demolishing of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, the very name which means “zone of no war,” the extremists tried to rebuild the temple in honor of Rama. As a consequence of that, in Bombay sixteen bombs went off in the span of one hour. A cousin of mine was killed. I was in Bombay, very involved in interreligious dialogue, and had very good friends across the bodies of religions. I got lots of phone calls from Catholics and people from other religions: “Where is your interreligious dialogue?” They asked. “Why doesn’t it work, and why are you wasting your time in that?” Because people would like to think that interreligious dialogue is a solution that we can apply at the eleventh hour.

But it doesn’t work that way. Therefore, I very much see what His Holiness the Dalai Lama means when he says hatred is the root cause. We’ve got to attack that root cause. We’ve got to start building a culture of dialogue, as Pope John Paul II suggests. I think the Catholic Church at present is committed to doing just that, to create a culture of dialogue. Let’s not think of the violence only of today. I think much of the violence of today has been prepared over the years. Let’s think for the future, of how in twenty-five or fifty years hence there will be violence, and let’s keep working to stop that.

Joseph Goldstein: I have a question that I think has some implications that I haven’t sorted out. The question is: How do we hold the probable reality that violence will not come to an end, and would we have a different response to violence if we see it not as something that will come to an end, but which is in the nature of the unenlightened, unawakened human condition? I feel there is a certain illuminating power that comes from accepting the reality of violence as an expression of the unawakened mind rather than acting from a hope or illusion that we can bring it to an end. I wonder if our response, both internally and also institutionally, would be different and perhaps more effective.

Geshe Lobsang Tenzin: One thing that came through clearly in the discussion is that there is no quick fix to violence. I think that we have realized that violence comes from many different conditions, and we

Massachusetts. He was involved in both Gethsemani Encounters.

All articles by or about Joseph Goldstein



Fr. Donald Grabner, OSB, is professor of theology at Conception Seminary College and a member of Conception Abbey, Conception, Missouri. He contributed to both Gethsemani Encounters.

All articles by or about Fr. Donald Grabner, OSB



Archbishop Felix Machado served as under-secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue prior to his appointment as

have to have some long-term approach to it. As to the question about whether the violence is ever going to end: I think that what Joseph pointed to is that in unenlightened society and minds there is always going to be impetus for violence and greed. Greed, when not fulfilled, will spill out as anger and violence and so forth. Being aware that our minds and bodies are contaminated or conditioned with certain impulses or conditioning of greed etc. helps us to accept violence when it takes place in other places. I think it's important to realize the reality of the violence itself and where it comes from. That knowledge might then provide for us a way to deal with the violence in a more constructive way—not just with violence but with compassion. His Holiness the Dalai Lama feels compassion toward the Chinese communists; he considers them spiritual guides. In getting a proper understanding about the elements of the violence I think we can have a better kind of constructive response to it.

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bishop of Nashik (India) on January 16, 2008.

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Geshe Lobsang Tenzin

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All articles by or about Geshe Lobsang Tenzin

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