



Monastic Interreligious Dialogue

Sponsored by North American Benedictine and Cistercian Monasteries of Men and Women

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Concluding Remarks

Stephanie Kaza, Fr. Paschal Phillips, OCSO, Fr. William Skudlarek, OSB, Rev. Heng Sure, Ph.D., Abbot Damien Thompson, OCSO
from **Gethsemani Encounter II, April 2002**

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Stephanie Kaza: I would like to echo what Joseph Goldstein mentioned—that this has been a personal retreat for me. I want to thank all of you for carrying me through some of the phases of that retreat. I would suggest that we take the challenge of building friendship to strengthen our conversations around gender, because some people have spoken more than others and I feel some regret and sorrow not hearing from more of the Catholic sisters. I would like to know what their experience has been, and I suspect I would hear more if I were speaking in a women's only group. We should be brave enough to see what men and women monastics would have to say to each other from the different traditions. I put that out as a possible challenge for a next Gethsemani Encounter. I also want to encourage everybody, as Heng Sure did, to write something from this encounter that will become public. I was very inspired by Sister Barbara McCracken's piece. It's hard to do, but with all of us behind the momentum, your piece could go out in your newspaper or local religious bulletin on a topic we touched on.

I particularly want to thank the people who chose the time of year for this encounter. The paschal mystery has been most profoundly exhibited to me in the fruit trees in bloom and the grass growing green and thawing out my own Vermont winter heart. This has probably enabled us much more to be able to carry the tremendous breadth of understanding of suffering. This has been for me an opportunity to celebrate. This is what I tell my students who are inheriting all these problems; that these are not just opportunities for suffering but

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Stephanie Kaza is an associate professor, concentrating on environmental ethics, religion and ecology, and ecofeminism at the University of Vermont.

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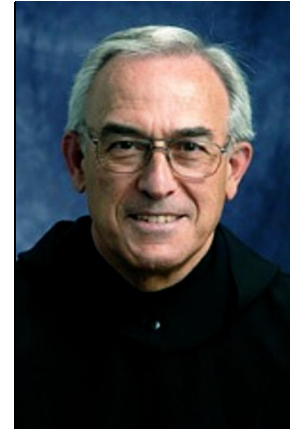
Fr. Paschal was a monk who organized energetic field days at the Gethsemani Abbey so that environmentalists, foresters and loggers might begin to understand each other better for the improved future of Kentucky forests.

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opportunities for practice. Therefore we can celebrate, because there are so many opportunities. My first experience on coming to Gethsemani was walking alone to the garden of Gethsemani and encountering in two beautiful, huge snakes. I enjoyed spending quite a bit of time with them. One was three feet long and another was five feet long, coiled around the statues. They are there, too, with the fruit trees in bloom.

William Skudlarek: This is the moment to continue and expand on that third word, the "Thank you." Personally my thanks go to all of you, and especially to those who were invited to give the opening presentations. I have a confession to make. When I sent to all the people who were to make an opening presentation a description of what we would like, I honestly didn't believe it was going to happen. I know how attached one can get to a paper you have written. It was amazing to me to see how unattached you were. Again, it was precisely because of that not grasping on to those papers that an incredible richness emerged.

Felix Machado, whom I also want to offer a special word of thanks to for his presence here, representing the Pontifical Commission for Interreligious Dialogue, told me that he has never seen anything like this in his nine years of attending interreligious dialogues. The normal model is people get up and read their papers, and everyone offers a comment or clarifying question. But what we had here was dialogue and conversation, and that happened because the presenters modeled to us this ability to speak freely from the heart and with truth and love. I also want to very much offer a deep word of appreciation to all the people who are listed as staff and technical support in the programs in the list of participants: To Kate Andrews, our stenographer; to Greg Knox, who did such an able job with the sound; to Dan and Toddy Daly for all their behind-the-scenes work; Jim and Marina Funk for their photography; Gene Gollogly and Martin Rowe, but who were here representing Booklight; the representatives from the Fetzer Foundation, Kate Olsen and Paul Gailey, without whose financial support this event could never have happened; and to Mr. David Piser, who coordinated the transportation for us. It's that behind-the-scenes work that makes all this possible. And thanks once again to Dennis



Fr. William Skudlarek, OSB, has been the Secretary General of DIMMID since November 1, 2008. Prior to that he served as chair of the MID board from 2000 to 2005, and as Executive Director of MID until his appointment as Secretary General. He is a monk of St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota, but resides at Sant'Anselmo in Rome.

All articles by or about Fr. William Skudlarek, OSB



Reverend Heng Sure has been an ordained Buddhist

Nelson for the marvelous musical conversation that took place with us.

Thanks again to all the members of the monastic community here at Gethsemani who were welcoming and hospitable to us. A special words of thanks to Father James Connor, who was the guest master; to Brother Robert Cummins, who was our contact person, to Brother Harold Thibodeau, who was another of the contact people, and who offered us the floral arrangement. One person who is not listed on your sheets under the heading, "Monks of Gethsemani More Directly Involved in the Encounter" was Father Paschal. Father Paschal was the person most directly involved with MID when Gethsemani I was planned. We are here as a budding of Gethsemani I. This emerging flower would not be here yet were it not for Father Paschal's work with Sister Meg, Father James Wiseman, and all the others involved in planning the first Gethsemani Encounter. We would like to recognize his presence here, offer him a gift for his past contributions to Gethsemani Encounter, and to thank him for all that he did which made this possible.

Father Paschal of Gethsemani: I'd like to thank all of you for coming. I have two little ideas to pass on. One you know perfectly well. The other might surprise you. The first: My life is totally different as a monk. Right from the start I've held five or six jobs all the way through. I don't pray much. I don't read much. I work on all kinds of funny things: Tax problems, insurance problems, etc. And after fifty-two years, I'm still here. So I don't feel there is only one form of monastic response, because God can call people to live the life in different ways. The second idea I have, which you might not have realized, is that I've been quite involved with some fundamentalists recently, the type that holler all the time, beat on the Bible, get down on the floor, and the whole thing, and I would say their view of suffering is considerably different than between Buddhists and Roman Catholics.

Since fundamentalists are growing like crazy, we ought to look and see what the problem is. This group I work with has given me a series of CDs of songs from the Appalachians, and they are beautiful. And I haven't heard one word a Catholic couldn't live with. It's all a question

monk in the Chan lineage of China since 1976. He is the director of the Berkeley Buddhist Monastery.

**All articles by or about
Rev. Heng Sure, Ph.D.**

**Abbot Damien
Thompson, OCSO**, is the Abbot of Gethsemani Abbey, in Gethsemani, Kentucky.

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of balance. The fundamentalists don't think that suffering has any relationship to the suffering of Christ. We Catholics have it all in there. The point seems to be halfway. But thanks for coming. It's a joy. Hope we can see each other again. Amen.

William Skudlarek: It was Abbot Damien Thompson who welcomed us here Saturday night, and we would like to hear from him again.

Damien Thompson: I've been sitting and observing at most of the talks and what I said in the beginning really happened. We were talking about transcending the parameters of our own identity and coming into the deep sense of what conversation means. It seems to have happened with you, and thank God for that. It's something we have to spread to society, to know that we are one, and I hope it continues this way. I hope there are many more encounters. But somehow it has to be more than just an occasional meeting every couple of years, because something that's happened to me in my own friendship with a Buddhist is that, all of a sudden, in seeing the depth of unity because of friendship, my faith becomes much more clear. I think his Buddhism also became much more clear. I was asked by someone about having Buddhists come here for a retreat. This place is open to you as Buddhists. We have all sorts of different faiths that come here on retreat, and it would be an honor for us to have you share our life on a more informal basis, just so we can get to know each other.

William Skudlarek: Now Reverend Heng Sure will lead us in the Dedication of Merit.

Heng Sure: It may be a pointer toward the future as our conversations deepen and enrich. This is the first new English language Buddhist liturgy, born of our encounter at Beech Grove at Our Lady of Grace Monastery for the follow-up of Benedict's Dharma. The Catholic monastic community and convent there was the cradle for a tune that in its Chinese form seems to have stuck. This was present for all when Benedict's Dharma occurred on September 18, six days after the towers fell, and in a short time people have embraced this in the Chinese and Vietnamese communities. What a wonderful shared joint mutual *koinonia, amaravati*.

Continued in **Opening Ritual (Gethsemani Encounter II, April 2002)**

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