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Freedom and Forgiveness: Discussion

Catherine Bielski, Yong Chin Denn, Patrick Henry, Ph.D., Rev. Kusala, Judith Simmer-Brown, Ven. Yifa

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Reverend Kusala: My name is Reverend Kusala. I'm from Los Angeles and I'm a member of the Buddhist-Catholic Dialogue in LA. As I was listening to the presentation, the word "forgiveness" stuck with me.

Father Gill, who was part of the Buddhist-Catholic Dialogue, and I had a little conversation about forgiveness and I said in a very bold way, "You know, Father Gill, I don't think Buddhists have forgiveness. I think rather than forgiveness, we have acceptance." And Father Gill looked at me and said, "Well, OK. And why do you think acceptance is better than forgiveness?" I said, "Well, Father Gill, it seems to me if somebody's forgiving someone, the forgiver is higher than the forgiven. Acceptance seems to have a more level playing field." Father Gill, in all his compassion and wisdom, listened to me and said, "Well Kusala, I think you're right. But, the consequence of forgiveness and acceptance are exactly the same, and that is bringing relationship back into balance." And I said, "Thank you Father Gill."

In Buddhism, we don't necessarily take a vow of poverty, instead we've just had a bad choice of profession as far as making money is concerned [laughter]. A Zen master once said, "It's not that you have to give everything away, you come to the realization that everything will be taken away from you." And one last point, I'm a chaplain at UCLA and we were having a clergy meeting about what to do after the World Trade Center tragedy. I suggested let's have a peace rally like back in the 1960s. We'll have tie-died T-shirts and we'll have flowers and we'll encourage the students to talk about the tragedy and the

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Patrick Henry, Ph.D., (here on the left with Fr. Patrick Barry) recently retired as executive director of the Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research at Saint John's Abbey and University, Collegeville, Minnesota. He was the editor of *Benedict's Dharma*.

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anger and hatred and trying to prevent another war. One of the other clergy said to me, "But Kusala, this could be the first war of the 21st Century." And I said, "But this also could be the first chance for peace in the 21st Century." Thank you.

Yong Chin Denn: I just wanted to share my experience with the tragedy last Tuesday. I was watching it on TV and I started to feel remorse about myself because I knew all along what the Palestinian people had been suffering. Year after year their family members are killed and I know that hundreds of millions of people have suffered in Iraw since the Gulf War and we have not lifted a finger to help them. And that was all in the back of my mind and the magnitude of terrible tragedy finally opened my ears to listen to the suffering people. To me, it's not that the terrorists inflicted that kind of violence on us, but that is what is required for people to open their ears to listen to the suffering of the people. And to me, with this kind of tragedy, all I can say is that it's like looking at my own hands: the right hand does not know that the left hand is part of the body so it cuts it off. To me, rather than going to war, all I would like to do is for everybody to do is rip their clothes, sit on a heap of ashes, and just weep for the suffering humanity, because we have not acknowledged we are one and have inflicted suffering century after century. How much proof do we need that violence does not work? Here our country is all out for war again. How many more innocent people will be killed? I'm just so worried about this.

Patrick Henry: One more and then we'll break into our diads.

Catherine Bielski: I'm Catherine Bielski, a local lay person. Yesterday, you [Yifa] spoke of the Benedictine Rule as having been couched in the culture from which it grew and having been a response, not only to that, but to the grace of God. Today, we speak of peace always from the grace of God. But I sense that Eastern and Western minds need to dialogue, understanding how the other thinks. And I think that perhaps we are rationalizing differently. I hear much from people in college and high school about the need for war. And when speaking about peace, they cry, "I want to do something to help. I want to stop this. I don't want to sit idly by." What I'm perceiving from the Eastern mind is to

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say, "We need to back up. We need to see the larger truth and we need to be a people of peace by refusing to jump into the battle." I wonder if there is some way to build a bridge between them both. Perhaps the Benedictine contemplation would be helpful, but more than that we do have to listen to people in pain who have lost fathers to take care of little children and mothers who take care of those little children. It's hard not to be present to both the pain and to the practicum that is connected to it.

Patrick Henry: I think that what Rev. Kusala was saying was a very good concrete illustration of the dialogue between those minds. That acceptance and forgiveness come out of very different basic awarenesses or perceptions, but they seem to have the same end result, which is a kind of refocusing or reestablishing of community. It's clear I think that there is much to talk about, and I suggest now that we break into the dyad groups and carry on the conversation between you and your partner in whatever way seems appropriate. I think you go off very far from what we've been talking about, that's fine. If you concentrate on what we've said here, that's fine. It's up to you to see where it goes.

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