Editorial : Racism

In underlining the importance of a U.N.-sponsored international conference on racism Pope Benedict XVI urged participants to take “firm and concrete action, at the national and international levels, to prevent and eliminate every form of racism and intolerance.” Above all, he said, a vast educational effort is needed so that human dignity and fundamental human rights are better understood and respected.

The pope said the conference was important because, despite the lessons of history, racist attitudes and actions are still present in contemporary society.

He encouraged participants to take “firm and concrete action, at the national and international levels, to prevent and eliminate every form of racism and intolerance.” Above all, he said, a vast educational effort is needed so that human dignity and fundamental human rights are better understood and respected.

The conference, which opened in Geneva April 20, was being boycotted by the United States and several other Western countries because of fears that it would provide a platform to critics of Israel.

Shortly after the pope’s remarks, Germany became the latest country to announce it would not attend the Geneva conference, joining the United States, Israel, the Netherlands, Australia, Canada and Italy.

The Pope is stressing that we ignore constructive discussion of racial issues at our peril. Navi Pillay, the U.N. high commissioner for human rights, said she was shocked and disappointed at the U.S. decision not to attend the conference. She said the boycott by several countries undercuts the global effort to fight racism and intolerance.

Guyana is essentially a multi racial society, one that has borne its full share of racial violence over the past several decades.

Last March Ms Gay McDougall the UN’s independent expert on minority issues noted in her report that in 2003 the special rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism found that Guyanese society was permeated by a profound moral, emotional and political fatigue which arose out of the impact of ethnic polarization. Ms McDougal said that in 2008 she witnessed a continuing malaise in society that had deepened and transformed into despair, anger and
resistance. This is particularly evident she says among Afro-Guyanese who reported feeling excluded, discriminated against and criminalized.

The report claims that ethnically divided political and administrative structures and failed political processes have created deep frustrations and distrust in the political administration. She has also warned that what she sees as entrenched ethnic divisions in the country could escalate into violence. The Guyana government is expected to respond to the report today.

Commendable steps have been made by the Government to address issues of ethnic tensions, crime and economic underdevelopment said the report which added that open and constructive dialogue on inclusive governance was essential for new foundations on which the country could build.

In light of efforts being made worldwide and locally to end to every form of racism, discrimination and intolerance, we share the hope of many Guyanese that her findings may be carefully examined and may help to make a reality this country’s motto of one people one nation one destiny.

**Plans Advanced, Enthusiasm High Ahead Of Catholic Men’s Conference….**

*From David A. Mortley*

On May 23, the Marian Academy auditorium is expected to explode with excitement and renewal, as no less than five hundred Catholic men are expected to attend the first ever Catholic Men’s Conference to be held in Guyana.

If you think this is wishful thinking, think again. The Catholic Men’s Conference planning committee, is made up of a group of Catholic brothers, whose faith in GOD and unbridled enthusiasm is second to none.

The conference, to be held under the theme “Men of Faith, Men of Hope”, had been blessed by Bishop Francis, and the excitement has enveloped Fathers John Persaud and Terrence Montrose as well as Brother Paschal Jordan, all of whom have shared their ideas with the committee.

Over two years ago, the idea for a conference for Catholic Men, germinated in the mind of Brother Joel Freeman. He studied the idea, researched it, developed it into a dream, and then shared his dream with a few other brothers. The committee came into being and plans to make the dream a reality were put into motion.

Contact was made with two men who are very experienced with the hosting of Men’s Conferences, to be the main presenters. They are Brother Andrew Cromwell, a Canadian based son of Guyana, who is also a former priest in our local Diocese and who is now involved in social work, among men in Canada; the other is Father Dwight Merrick, a son of Trinidad who is also deeply involved with Men’s Conferences in his native land.

The Conference is aimed at attracting and re-attracting Catholic men across the Diocese and especially those brothers who have taken an “extended sabbatical” from Church and family life. The purpose of the Conference is to:
- ignite men’s faith and re-awaken their spiritual lives,
- renew their commitment to faith and family,
- bring men at all levels of their faith journey together to learn, praise, pray and draw closer to JESUS,
- return men to parishes with renewed vigour and passion to serve others. Over the years, men have allowed themselves to drift further and further into the background of Church and secular life and are only making headlines for the wrong reasons. When it comes to involvement in leadership, moral values, fatherhood, discipleship and being responsible spouses, men are becoming a diminishing factor. Today, brothers are being macho in all the wrong ways. And sisters, we need you too. Encourage your husbands and fathers, brothers and boyfriends, classmates and club-mates, your uncles and cousins and all the brothers in your lives to make May 23, 2009 a date to remember.

Brothers, take the day off from work. Close the beer gardens for the day, park the taxis and leave the horses in the betting shops and head for the Marian Academy. No fancy dress is required. If you feel comfortable in jeans and tee-shirts or short pants and slippers, come. Come and bless GOD for the gift of manhood.

If you need any further information, have any suggestions or would like to make a financial or other contribution, please feel free to contact any of the following brothers:

Daniel Freeman – 610-4969; Daniel Thomas – 624-7742, Kent Vincent – 639-6057
Robin Roberts – 674-6446, Paul Braam – 675-91-5, David Mortley – 651-7334

GOD bless you all

Indigenous Indians want more information, consultation….

The indigenous Indians in Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana want more information and consultation on issues which affect them. This was one of the major calls coming out of the first ever meeting of the leaders of tribes and villages of indigenous Indians in the Guiana Shield which ended in Guyana last weekend. Representatives of the Guyana government, non Governmental organisations and multilateral institutions also held discussions with the delegates to the four day event.

The 45 leaders of the indigenous Indians in the Guyana Shield, namely Guyana, Suriname and French Guyana who took part in the event said their four day encounter did enable them to come to a better understanding about issues which affect them such as mining, carbon credits and the proposal to use the forests to counter climate change. As a result of this they have begun to form alliances with each other, non governmental organizations and the multilateral institutions to make a more co-ordinated effort to overcome these challenge they face.

Executive co-director of the Amazon Alliance Mr Trevor Simpson told the Catholic Standard that he felt was one of the key recommendations was that Indigenous Indians should be more involved in national decisions which affect them. “I think the primary recommendation that came out of the indigenous delegations of all three countries is the need to be more involved in national decisions that affect their peoples including mining, infrastructure projects and climate
change proposals so that their inputs and their expertise can also inform these proposals and policies and make them more adequate for indigenous peoples," Mr Simpson said.

Members of the Guyana delegation were eager to know more about President Jagdeo’s offer to keep forests standing in exchange for development funds. Addressing the conference President Jagdeo offered to explain his proposal to the indigenous communities but added that they had no need to be concerned since the lands of Indigenous Indians would not be included. However the leaders pointed out that there is no clear distinction between lands to which indigenous Indians have titles and traditional Indian lands.

The Amazon is the only home, university and pharmacy of hundreds of thousands of indigenous peoples. It is also very center of their way of life. Yet the rate of destruction of the Amazon rain forest is accelerating and this is one of the main reasons why many tribes are simply disappearing. This is mainly as a result of indigenous Indians being chased off their lands by miners or developmental projects.

Representatives from Equador, Peru, Bolivia and The Amazon Alliance based in the US were also present at the meeting which will also had discussions with Non Governmental organisations, and multilateral institutions. There were also discussions on how the group can continue working together between meetings.

**We Do Not Torture…**

**BY MIKE JAMES**

It has now been confirmed by official documents released by the US government that “waterboarding” or “near-drowning technique” authorized by the US government has been practiced by US officials. Specifically a 2005 memo released states that the C.I.A. used waterboarding 183 times in March 2003 against Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, who has confessed to being one of the key planners of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. It also states that another Guantanamo detainee, Abu Zubaydah accused of being an Al Qaeda “operative” was waterboarded at least 83 times in August 2002.

Two issues have become subjects of intense concern and discussion internationally following the confirmation of the practice.

**First: Is waterboarding torture?**

Article 1 of the 1987 UN Convention on Torture, ratified by 145 nations including the US, states

For the purposes of this Convention, the term "torture" means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity.

Torture is specifically prohibited by this Convention, the Geneva conventions of the treatment of prisoners and a host of other international treaties. The US confirmed its prohibition of this
practice to the extent the term "cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment" is synonymous with the "cruel and unusual punishment" prohibited by the Fifth, Eighth, and Fourteenth Amendments to the US Constitution

**The Catholic Catechism specifically condemns torture**

**Article 2297** ... *Torture* which uses physical or moral violence to extract confessions, punish the guilty, frighten opponents, or satisfy hatred is contrary to respect for the person and for human dignity...

**Article 2298**. In times past, cruel practices were commonly used by legitimate governments to maintain law and order, often without protest from the Pastors of the Church, who themselves adopted in their own tribunals the prescriptions of Roman law concerning torture. Regrettable as these facts are, the Church always taught the duty of clemency and mercy. She forbade clerics to shed blood. In recent times it has become evident that these cruel practices were neither necessary for public order, nor in conformity with the legitimate rights of the human person. On the contrary, these practices led to ones even more degrading. It is necessary to work for their abolition. We must pray for the victims and their tormentors."

Which part of waterboarding might not constitute “cruel” or “unusual” punishment prohibited by the US Constitution is difficult to imagine. However President Bush, who was ultimately responsible for authorizing the “techniques” repeatedly and emphatically declared, “We do not torture”. A dwindling but vocal minority continues to argue that waterboarding does not constitute torture.

On the other hand, even close associates of the former Republican Administration are now denouncing the practices. Philip Zelikow, a former State Department lawyer and adviser to then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who claims that his written legal advice submitted that such techniques violated the US constitution were deliberately destroyed by the then administration because it did not accord with their decision to authorize waterboarding nevertheless. Zelikow now adds there has been too much focus on waterboarding with little or no mention of other techniques, such as "hanging people from ceilings with chains, naked, so they couldn't fall asleep for days at a time, manipulating their diet, cramming them into boxes in stress positions, slapping them around - all these other things are employed in combination as part of a program."

**The second area of intense debate has centred on the question of whether these “enhanced interrogation techniques” are admissible if it can save human lives.**

President Bush himself was a leading advocate of the argument in favour, in his assertion that “When people study the history of this particular episode, they'll find out...we gained good information from Khalid Sheikh Mohammed in order to protect our country. We believe that the information we gained helped save lives on American soil.” Former Vice President Cheney is now calling for the CIA confessions extracted from Sheikh Mohammed to be made public to prove that the 183 waterboarding sessions to which he was subjected are fully justified.

It is a classic case of the argument that once the ends are morally good (the saving of innocent American lives from terrorist attacks) all the means taken (torture of foreign suspects to obtain details of future terrorist attacks planned) are morally and legally justified.
11 Pakistani students arrested in the UK earlier this month on suspicion of planning terrorist attack had the charges withdrawn because police and intelligence allegations could not be substantiated in court. The UK nevertheless plans to deport them as “national security risks” without a hearing. Under the Bush-Cheney “ends justify the means” doctrine, torture applied to the Pakistanis would have quickly and efficiently produced the required “proof” to present in courts, or at least “confessions” that would have justified the targeting of the group. The Bush-Cheney doctrine, however, requires the wholesale denial of human, legal and civil rights to the terrorists, the enemy, the opposition, the dissidents, and finally to all those who disagree with us so as to protect the rights of our country, our race, our religion, our culture, ourselves. In essence the Bush-Cheney doctrine that justifies torture and the deaths of tens of thousands of innocents in the war against terror in Iraq and elsewhere is identical to the doctrine of Osama Bin Laden, which justifies the destruction of thousands of innocent lives in New York and elsewhere as means to their creation of a “perfect”, anti-capitalist, Islamic world. “Good” ends can never justify “evil” means. Other people can never be “means”. All people are “ends”.

EARTHDAY 2009: VIEWPOINT
BY
VIBERT PARVATAN

Earth Day April 22, 2009 reminds us of the necessity and our obligation to secure planet earth and have an environment conducive to good health, comfort, safety and happiness.

Environmental degradation has been topical in recent times with the realization that many of the practices especially in relation to fuels and deforestation are destroying the environment, leading to global warming with its terrible consequences.

In Guyana, we are blessed with large areas of forest with special programmes as in the case of Iwokrama and at a national level, programmes designed for conservation of our forest. At an individual and community level we can make our contribution to the programme by planting trees.
Many vocalists made popular the song TREES. The lyrics which were written by Joyce Kilmer include:

“I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree;
A tree whose hungry mouth is pressed
against the earth’s sweet flowing breast;
A tree that looks at God all day
And lifts her leafy arms to pray……….”

“Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.”

The City of Georgetown has often been described as the Garden City with its variety of trees adorning many parapets and avenues.

The fact that many of those trees were planted over sixty years ago is testimony to the forward planning of the Administrators in Colonial times, as well as their appreciation of the beauty and relevance of trees. Paintings and pictures of scenes in Main Street in the heart of Georgetown, done decades ago show large trees creating a setting of beauty and tranquility. Looking around the city one finds, the majestic Samaan trees; the colourful Flambouyant; the hardy Eucalyptus; the Palms; the Canon Ball with its poisonous fruit, the Almond trees and others. While Brickdam has a mixture of trees on the parapets, certain streets like Irving, Princess, Hadfield and Cemetery Road have some uniformity. But the trees now show lack of care. Bird vines parasitize many trees weakening the branches and subjecting the plants to secondary infection. Some trees especially the Palms have been attacked by Caterpillar and Castnia. One sees no effort to deal with the pests. Many palms have been decapitated. This is exemplified in the LeRepentir Cemetery.
Trees provide cool shade which in our tropical climate is always welcome. Trees beautify the surroundings. The greenery under a blue sky is contrasting. Trees provide a sanctuary for birds. In terms of the much publicized environmental concerns we would always want to maximize photosynthetic activity with trees reducing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen. Looking around our City, the question may be posed as to whether the chopping down of trees is part of a systematic plan. My guess would be no. The City Council with its best intentions has not the resource personnel to deal with the matter. I am of the view that a special group of persons with the needed skills and interest should be established to focus on this matter.

The most difficult task will be to determine what landscape trees should form part of the replanting programme.

- The Samaan trees have served well over decades, but the large rooting system will restrict it to selected areas.
- The Palms offer little shade and falling branches seem not to recommend it.
- Poisonous trees should not be considered.
- The silk cotton tree with lots of superstition which intimidates the woodcutter for fear of the wrath of Dutch Spirits and blood oozing from branches will have no relevance.
- The evergreen fruit trees such as cashew, mango and genip may be worth looking at.

For the City Council, the question of a clear policy on parapets must be established. The initiatives of citizens should fall into a clearly defined policy. Earth Day 2009 is supposed to mark the beginning of the Green Generation campaign.

**Always Hurrying ...**

**Family Page by Cris & Noelma Lam**

It was a clear, cloudless, beautiful evening, much cooler than usual, with the new moon just rising over the horizon. We were running late for a meeting - (what else is new) - as we hurried into the car, with books and files and tossed them onto the seat. We glanced at the books, the umbrella and other loose items in the back seat and vowed to clean the car over the weekend.

We will always remember that car ride in detail - not because of what happened, but because of what almost happened. As we were aware that we were running late, we sped down the familiar road hoping to make the appointment on time. We just might make it if we increased our speed.
Then, suddenly, a car backed out of a driveway and blocked our path. Chris slammed on the brakes, and weighed the odds of whether we could reach a complete stop before hearing the sound of crunched metal. Papers from the files and the books were hurled forward in disarray.

By the grace of God, the car in front of us moved just enough to avoid the collision. As we caught our breath and pulled to the side of the road to move the book that was now resting under the gas pedal, and to gather the loose papers that had flown to the front seat. We felt foolish and blessed at the same time at our miraculous escape.

Whatever made us drive like such a maniac? We were definitely going too fast. We continued on our journey at our usual slower pace, fully believing our close encounter was a wake-up call from God.

A few days after the incident, a friend called and told us that he and his wife had been hit by a car. It seemed unbelievable. They were riding down the road on their motorcycle, when a speeding car struck them down from behind. They were now recovering from their injuries, she was in hospital, and would not be up and around for a few weeks.

When we heard the story, we felt sorrow for our friends and for the driver who we understood was visibly shaken as he waited with them for the ambulance to arrive. We wondered if he’d been in a hurry as we had been so many times. We shivered as we realized how close we came to walking in his shoes.

Our experience, and our friends’ tragic story, led us to reflect on the hectic pace of our lives. We’re always rushing somewhere. Even our time with God seems rushed. Our haste might save a couple of minutes, but it could be at the risk of injury to ourselves or someone else, or to the detriment of our spiritual lives.

Speeding is against the law. But, more importantly, our decisions on the road could change the course of many lives in a split second. Whenever we get in the car these days, we think about our close call, and our friend’s hospitalized wife. We pause a moment and ask ourselves, “Are we really in that much of a hurry?”

Children’s Page
Prepared by Marian Academy

Dear Boys and Girls,

In the Gospel reading this week, the disciples told their story of what had happened on the road to Emmaus and how they had recognized Jesus at the breaking of bread. They were still talking about their experience and he himself stood among them and said to them,

“Peace be with you!”

In a state of fright, they thought they were seeing a ghost. Jesus saw how agitated they were, he showed them his hands and feet. He said, “Yes, it is I indeed, touch me and see for yourselves, a ghost has no flesh and bones, as you can see I have. The disciples were so overjoyed at seeing Jesus
again. Then Jesus explained the scriptures to them that everything written about Him had to be fulfilled.

Here are some things we can learn from this Gospel reading.

1. Jesus wanted them to know that He was alive;
2. He ate before their eyes, a reminder of the meals showed in the past and of the Eucharist which would unite His disciples in the future;
3. God’s saving plan, foretold in scripture and carried out by Jesus, invited repentance.

NOTICE
A Catholic Men’s Conference would be held under the theme “Men of Faith, Men of Hope” on Saturday May 23, 2009 at Marian Academy Auditorium
Come and listen to motivational speakers from Canada and Trinidad, be involved in fellowship & group discussions. Registration forms can be uplifted from any parish priest or office. Registration cost is $1,500 (lunch inclusive).
Come! Dare to be involved!

Catholic Television
On Sunday 26 Catholic Magazine will be showing “Some Like It Hot” Pt 2 on NCN at 2.30pm and on Channel 2 at 8.00pm.
Chan 8 in New Amsterdam will show “Easter a Drama in Three Acts” at 6.00pm.