

DIM —O— MID

Dialogue: Cross and Emptiness

Monastic Encounter



**Some Members of our European Conference
at the Sikh Gurdwara**

*Biannual Bulletin of the
Monastic Interfaith Dialogue (MID)
Commission of Britain and Ireland.
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*Monastic Interreligious Dialogue
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(The cover photograph shows L-R the following DIM/MID delegates:
Benelux IBI, Gen Secretary/US, Nordic, Hungarian, Italian, French, Swiss and the European Coordinator.)

The 39th Annual European Conference took place in London, hosted by MID-GBI. The CONFERENCE REPORT WITH PHOTOGRAPHS may be accessed on our web site. The GBI Coordinator, Sr. Lucy, with monks from Ealing Abbey, organised the Conference. What follows is her personal account.

Sr. Lucy is responsible for any errors!

There were thirteen in our MID/DIM European Conference group: three based in Rome and working globally, and ten delegates/coordinators from different European countries. We were expecting our first arrivals on the morning of Monday October 4th, so I went into London on Sunday 3rd to be there at the outset. The women of our group were staying with the Dominican Sisters, a few minutes' walk away from Ealing Abbey where the men were divided between the Abbey and the Guest-house. I was fortunate enough to be taken by car to London, and we found the Dominicans without difficulty, and we were warmly welcomed by five Sisters from Germany, England (2), Pakistan and Italy! A fitting start to an international conference! I oriented myself and found where the others of our group were sleeping, put folders in their rooms, and presented myself at the monastery to find out where the men were staying and leave their folders in their rooms. As the guest-house rooms were awaiting final preparations, I was able to relax until the following morning. I joined the monks in choir for Vespers and afterwards the Sisters invited me to supper with them. I also joined the entry procession for Lauds and Mass next day. On the first evening it felt **very** odd to be the only woman, AND IN WHITE among the file of tall, black-robed monks processing into choir through the big church, for Solemn Vespers. Later, Fr Stanislaus showed me where our EURO-DIM group would be sitting and Fr Alban showed me the special leaflets he had prepared for the Divine Office and Mass for our group, which would make life easier for us, mostly newcomers to Ealing Abbey. Our gratitude goes to Abbot Martin and the monks of Ealing, who were tremendously hospitable and kind throughout the week.

Next morning after Mass, Lauds and breakfast I went to wait for our first arrivals, who were Fr Lino (Portugal) and Fr Cosmas (Germany/Austria). The latter had landed straight into a strike on the Underground and it had taken him far longer to get to Ealing than he had planned. Both coped cheerfully, though. Fr Andrew also showed me the rooms we would be using for the week, and we sorted out some last-minute administrative details. Organising something from a distance was difficult on both sides. The whole year was a very good learning experience for me as plans and details changed according to our circumstances. At the very last minute, the catering arrangements for the Day of Theological Exchange had to be altered. Somehow Fr Andrew managed it. He and Fr Dominic were always at hand when we needed help or advice. One thing which was impressed upon me at the outset, and which I had to bear in mind all week, was that the rooms in Ealing Parish Centre were **booked for us** from the Parish administration for the period we required, and we needed to be very punctual, as other groups were waiting for the rooms as well! The same was true of meal-times. Sheep-dog mode was needed!! Our EURO group were very co-operative and patient with the sheep-dog.

The rest of the group arrived in ones and twos throughout the day. They handed over their accommodation fee either in €s or £s, were led to their rooms, shown the guest-house (or convent) facilities and so the 39th Annual European Conference got underway. It was really good to meet friends from other commissions. It was also a great joy to welcome some people to their first Conference: Br Matteo from Bose for Italy, Fr Gergely Bakos (Hungary) and Rev Pierre-Yves Brandt, acting Coordinator of Switzerland. I remembered Fr Gergely showing us around in Pannonhalma at the Vienna Conference in 2006, my first as GBI Coordinator. One item arranged at this stage was the day ticket on the Underground for us to use the following day to get to Westminster Abbey—payment in sterling only this time ... Our last two members (Italy and Hungary) did not arrive until the evening meal, having had to cope with the **aftermath** of the strike—long queues, long delays, and overcrowded or full trains.

We had our first session chaired by the European coordinator, Fr Daniel Pont, after Vespers, to go over the timetable for the week and explain various details. It was agreed that we should begin next day with small groups and if necessary finish that session later. It worked well. We were all glad to adjourn at 9.00 p.m. after quite an arduous day.

Tuesday began with rain (well, it is England after all) as we Sisters walked over to the Abbey for 7.00 a.m. Mass and Lauds. This time the procession from cloister to choir was much longer and more varied in height and colour! After breakfast in our respective guest-houses, we assembled in the Abbey guest-house for our first session. We had two Anglophone groups and one Francophone. Our brief was to discuss the experience of our own region and summarise it briefly on cards of three colours representing the main points: positive aspects; negative aspects and future projects or ideas. It was encouraging to find that we all faced similar difficulties, and had similar hopes and desires. We left the evaluation of this session till later and went to the parish centre for the second part of the session, talks by Abbot Primate, Fr William Skudlarek, Fr Pierre de Béthune and Fr Timothy Wright (Details of these talks may be read in the Conference Report on our web site.)

Our afternoon visit to Westminster Abbey was a great privilege. To be among such visual and auditory beauty in an ancient Benedictine foundation, as invited guests, was very special. I felt the ecumenical side of MID-GBI was strongly recognised, and this was noted and commented upon by our hosts. One sentence of the Canons who spoke with us, struck me very much: “We try to make tourists into visitors, and visitors into pilgrims.”

The Day of Theological Reflection on Wednesday was open to others apart from MID. We had Muslim and Christian speakers and guests, other MID-GBI members from all over the country, and various other invited guests, including Archbishop Emeritus Kevin McDonald. Early in the year he had hoped to be involved as a speaker, but he became very ill and had to withdraw. We were delighted he had recovered enough to come as a guest, and he gave us an encouraging message from himself and on behalf of the RC Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales (q.v.). Katharina Müller, Secretary of the Committee for Interreligious Dialogue was also present as a guest. We had one or two people who had come with the invited guests too, about fifty of us in all.

A feeling for the day can best be had from the comments of guests and speakers at the end of this bulletin. The talks by the Muslim speakers led into our theme—the Nature of God—in the morning. First, Dr Reza Shah-Kazemi spoke on “*My Mercy Encompasses All*” in a very sensitive, prayerful way. Dr Mohammad Ali Shomali’s talk was based on a book written jointly by him and his wife, “*Images of God in the Qur’an*”. It was a source of regret that she could not be with us because of visa restrictions. The talks were so interesting to me, that I made quite a painful (for everyone!) blunder and forgot about the coffee break! People were very patient. During a period before lunch where there was a space for silence to meditate together in the side chapel, Dr Shah-Kazemi began with a chant in Arabic praising the mercy of God. We ended with a chant in which God speaks of being nearer to us than our heart. Finally we stood and prayed the Our Father. Several people commented to me on how important this silent prayer-time together was for them.

After a sumptuous lunch the two afternoon speakers undertook the most difficult task of the day—keeping us alert and attentive after a large lunch and dessert. First Dr Michael Iprgrave spoke on “*The God who provokes us all to holiness*”. The concept of God “provoking” us to holiness through our interfaith differences captured everyone’s imagination, as we saw in the questions. Dr Shah-Kazemi quoted Qur’an 5:48, where God said something very similar. Dr Michael Barnes then spoke of the nature of God in “*God and the Language of Praise*” referring to the Sikh tradition, a good preparation for our dialogue visit the following day.

After receiving so much spiritual and physical nourishment, we decided by consensus to omit the final panel session. Archbishop McDonald gave his message at this point. We thanked our speakers and guests and adjourned to another room for tea and more refreshments and gradually took leave of each other. And so to Vespers.

The work of the Commission continued after Vespers, as we put together the results of our Tuesday morning session. When we finally went to rest it felt like the end of a long and arduous but very worthwhile day!

Thursday was an interesting experience of Dialogue with two other Faiths. In the morning we visited the Sikh Gurdwara in Southall (an area which is known locally as “little India”, and we could see why!) where our visit included paying our respects to the Guru Granth Sahib (Sacred Scriptures), and later joining with other people in a free meal, which is part of the daily service in the Gurdwara. They told us they serve at times up to 1,400 people

daily; and all the food comes from donations. We had a guided tour of the Gurdwara and of the exhibition of Sikh history laid out in an upstairs gallery. Although it was difficult for people to hear the guide, our group being rather large, the authentic atmosphere of the place impressed me greatly. Almost everyone we saw was Indian. Even though we had had some preparation, and knew, for instance, about dress code (see the cover photograph), previously I had no idea of the importance of the sacred scriptures in Sikhism, and of how the Word (Guru Granth Sahib) is regarded in a very personal way, even to having a bed and bedroom specially assigned. As we stood in the entrance hall listening to our guide, people of all ages were coming and going, pausing before the Word to read the passage for that day, and then going into the worship hall to bow low in homage before the shrine of the Word and to make an offering for the poor. I came away greatly enlightened as to the history, beliefs and practices of Sikhism and determined to learn more.

Our afternoon visit was to the Hindu Shri Sanatan Mandir in Wembley. The atmosphere and visual impact of the Mandir were enormously impressive. The specially-chosen carved stonework had the delicate beauty of lace. It was almost incredible to think of each piece being HAND-CARVED in India by craftsmen, and then shipped to UK, and assembled on site, without a single nail being used in the process. If any piece of stone was damaged in transit, it was replaced completely, not repaired. For me the breath-taking beauty of the place was what continually held my attention and raised my mind to God. The carved marble statues of the different Deities had their own beauty and mystery. Seeing old and young people pausing in prayer here and there before some particular image was especially moving. And on a more materialistic and practical plane, the presence of security arrangements and guards led to a sobering reflection on the dangers that can disrupt religious observance and holy places in our world.

We were informed that this particular Mandir is called “Sanatan” meaning all-inclusive, because it holds images of all the Hindu deities. “Every Hindu will be at home here”, the guide told us proudly. There was a little surprise for us Christians too: an image of Blessed M Teresa of Calcutta carved on one of the pillars of the Mandir.

A delicious tea had been prepared for us, large plates of vegetarian sandwiches of different kinds, chocolate biscuits, crisps and a spicy Indian mustard-seed cake. There was tea and water to drink. It showed a careful sharing of cultural values in food! The Mandir officials were obviously delighted by our visit and interest, and took photographs to commemorate the event. We were shown around by the Executive Chairman and the Treasurer of the Board of Trustees.

We were collected later by the Ealing School bus, and at this point had a small adventure. After waiting (rather a long time) for the bus we saw it arrive—then it drove slowly **PAST US**. The driver, looking over our heads at the impressive Mandir buildings, had not seen us. Realising he must have gone further on to turn around, a few of us crossed the road to attract his attention. He turned the bus around and was driving slowly past the Mandir, and again he (almost) missed us: a crowd of nuns and monks in habit! As he passed, Br Matteo ran on to the road and banged on the bus window as it slowed down for a bollard. Then the driver saw us. Phew! We did get home again in time for Vespers.

After a final group session between Vespers and supper, to draw our MID/DIM work to a close, we talked of how this Conference had been. The general consensus was that we had tried to do rather too much in the available time, though it was all enjoyable. We discussed the 2011 Conference (to be held in Spain) in the light of what we had all learned this time, and fixed on a venue for 2012—Bose in Italy.

As a consequence of the Day of Theological Reflection, Dr Reza Shah-Kazemi and Dr Michael Ipgrave are planning to lead a day for a MID-GBI day—open to a wider public—on the theme of “provoking each other to holiness” in the summer or early autumn of 2011.

If you would like to know more, please contact Sr Lucy by email for details.

COMMENTS ON THE CONFERENCE BY PARTICIPANTS

(With special reference to the Day of Theological Reflection)

PAUL FLEETWOOD, OSB, WORTH ABBEY, MID-GBI

All the arrangements seemed to work so smoothly, and it was a real pleasure to meet the other participants, especially those from abroad. The speakers were excellent—such edifying and inspiring talks, as well as instructive. And the visits to Westminster Abbey on 5th and Gurdwara on 7th were equally encouraging. (I had to leave before the visit to the Mandir.)

DR REZA SHAH-KAZEMI, INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC STUDIES, LONDON, SPEAKER

I thoroughly enjoyed the day of reflection and discussion, and was particularly pleased that you made time for periods of silent meditation and, for us Muslims, space and time for our formal prayers also. That was most thoughtful of you.

The highlight of the day for me was Michael Igrave's paper, which gave all of us much to think about. I believe that his idea of reciprocal "provocation" between religious communities--what the Qur'an calls in 5:48 a healthy 'competition' between them, all of the different, divinely-ordained communities vying for goodness--is one of the most important and original approaches to inter-religious dialogue I have come across. The questions he posed at the end of his paper, especially 1) and 2), relating to ways in which Christian and Islamic 'holiness' might be positively enhanced by exposure to spiritual 'provocation', deserves deep thought. A conference might well be organised around that specific theme, and I think it could yield rich fruit, God willing.

Once again, many thanks for your sterling effort, and for inviting me to this spiritual banquet. I feel like reformulating the Marxist dictum and saying: Contemplatives of the world unite--you have nothing to lose but your egos!

MURTAZA ISWAN, SHI' MUSLIM PARTICIPANT

I just wanted to thank you once again for the well-organised conference you organised, and your warm welcome. I thoroughly enjoyed and greatly benefitted from both the lectures and the attendees.

It would be a pleasure and honour to be able to attend other similar events. My wife and I are both interested in such inter-faith discussions, and would be delighted to participate in other such conferences you may be organising.

SR. ALIYA JAFRI AZAM, MUSLIM PARTICIPANT

The conference was an enlightening experience listening to the eloquent speakers describing the nature of God. It was fascinating to be amongst all the nuns and monks from Europe; and without them having to speak, their presence spoke volumes about their close relationship to God Almighty which is needed to be seen in the world, where decadence is becoming an all too often reality. The conference was a unique opportunity to express and establish a relationship with the monastic community. I believe the conference removed misconceptions that some may have about the nature of God in Islam illustrating an All-embracing and All-loving Merciful God that encompasses everything. This was only possible through the initiative of the inter-faith dialogue and promotes more unity between the two faiths of Christianity and Islam.

I pray that God Almighty blesses you with the best of everything.

BR PHILIP DULSON, OSB, MUCKNELL ABBEY, MID-GBI

Trying to capture the day in a few lines is very difficult indeed.

The entire day, from the moment we arrived to our departure was a sheer delight, in meeting all the others. Chatting over coffee, lunch and tea; and a profound listening to four excellent speakers was truly illuminating. I came away feeling more joyful than I've ever been in the ongoing work of seeking God's mercy. It seemed a truly new and fresh way of looking at Benedict's desire for us monastics.

VENERABLE DR MICHAEL IPGRAVE, ARCHDEACON OF THE ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF SOUTHWARK, SPEAKER

What struck me most about the MID day of theological reflection was the determination of those present to engage with the really deep things of their faith, and to recognise and treasure the really deep things in others' faith. While those present on the day were mostly Christians with some Muslim guests, it was interesting to note that on more than one occasion the discussion also turned towards Buddhism, and Fr Michael Barnes' paper focused on Sikhism. There was a generous and informed appreciation of the varieties of those spiritualities also even in the absence of their representatives. This made me reflect on how valuable it would be for some of the more activist expressions of inter faith engagement in this country to be connected into this dialogue of religious experience. For understandable reasons, encounters between different faith groups can often find it difficult to get beyond the level of quasi-political negotiation; the MID experience is a reminder of the need to engage with one another at the level of our spiritual encounter with God, however we interpret that reality.

ABBOT EMERITUS TIMOTHY WRIGHT, ROME

I was delighted the visit to Westminster Abbey went so well and I thought the discussion after Evensong in the Jerusalem Chamber was impressive and I am sure the Canons enjoyed it.

The first two papers of Mohammad and Reza were quite excellent - I have of course heard them before, but thought they brought out clearly something so vital in Islam and easily overlooked in much of modern dialogue—the love and mercy which is at the heart of Islam.

ABBOT PRIMATE, ROME

I think the meeting has been excellent. I was most impressed by the two Muslim speakers. They made us discover a different view of Islam than we are reading in the everyday news. They showed us the heart of Muslim believers.

FR COSMAS HOFFMAN, MID—GERMANY/AUSTRIA

The visit to Westminster Abbey was an introduction to the treasure of the Anglican Church and the exchange with the deans was very inspiring about possibilities and ideas of interreligious services.

The Wednesday talks of the Muslims about mercy showed the beauty and depth of Islamic theology and mystics and were a chance to discover what we have in common as we are all children of Abraham.

Michael Ipgrave's talk was also inspiring; playing with the word 'provocation'. Fr Michael Barnes had the most difficult period for his talk. The very good meal and dessert then the talks in a rather airless hall made it difficult to remain alert but it was an interesting preparation for our visit the next day. The visits to the Temples that day were very good and gave a colourful illustration of the multi-religious nature of British society.

SR. ZAINAB REZAVI, MUSLIM GUEST

The welcome and hospitality offered to us guests were warm and friendly, making the day relaxed and comfortable. The programme was well organised so that everything ran smoothly and yet flexible enough that we were able to change the arrangements towards the end by mutual consent which actually gave us some useful time to talk with each other over tea and biscuits/cake. By the way, the catering was also excellent!

The talks were excellent, well presented and thought provoking. As you found, forgetting about the Coffee Break must say something about the quality of the talks! By the end of the final session it certainly seemed as if we needed time to contemplate and inwardly digest what had been said because so much of interest had been shared and there was plenty of food for thought.

I found the opportunity to talk to sincere and committed Christians very refreshing and inspiring. There is so much in common between us and my heart was touched by the closeness I felt to my sisters in God. There is a sense of rest and peace which one finds with those who believe whole-heartedly in God and in serving Him just as one finds rest and peace in the 'Presence' of God Himself.

Ealing Abbey itself is beautiful and has a good atmosphere which served to enhance the spirituality of the day especially during the midday meditation and when I recited my midday and afternoon prayers in the Chapel.

At a time when the media would have us believe that people of different faith communities are often in conflict with each other, the M.I.D. goes to prove that the reality is that we share so much in common and we can surely live and work together in peace and co-operation in spite of our differences, sharing our efforts to bring justice and tranquillity to our troubled world.

ABBOT FRANCIS BAIRD, PRINKNASH ABBEY, MID-GBI

The Day of Theological Reflection at Ealing Abbey on the 6th October was for Abbot Aldhelm and me a most enjoyable one. We were attending part of the 39th Annual European DIM - MID Conference held at Ealing Abbey from the 4th to 8th October 2010. The theme was 'The Nature of God' and the four guest speakers gave excellent talks that were both interesting and thought provoking. In fact Dr Michael Ipgrave's talk was entitled '*The God who provokes us all to Holiness*' and was particularly stimulating. Apart from Canon Michael, we heard how 'God's Mercy Encompasses All' from Dr. Reza Shah-Kazemi, '*Images of God in the Qur'an*' from Dr. Mohammad Ali Shomali and a talk from Dr. Michael Barnes, SJ, on '*God and the Language of Praise*'. The day was very well attended and our most grateful thanks go to Sr. Lucy Brydon, OSB, for organising the Conference and for all the work involved to make it such a success, not forgetting Abbot Martin Shipperlee and the Ealing Community for their kind and generous hospitality. The following day there was to be an outing to the Sikh Gurdwara in Southall. Abbot Aldhelm and I were sorry that we were unable to go on this, as it promised to be a most interesting visit.

SR. MARY MARK, WEST MALLING, MID-GBI

I thought the conference was good and I enjoyed meeting the other members from abroad. It was an unexpected privilege and joy to be present at Sung Evensong in Westminster Abbey, something I thought I would never do again. I enjoyed the meeting and exchange in the Jerusalem Chamber, too. The Wednesday lectures were interesting, enlightening and thought-provoking, and I was glad of the introduction to Sikhism of which I was totally ignorant. The silent time of meditation

together was very good. Of the Thursday visits, I was surprised to find the Gurdwara so plain and austere. I was expecting something ornate along the lines of the Hindu Mandir! I have been very impressed with the directness and simplicity of their beliefs and the high standard of their conduct since reading the literature they gave us and I feel I have more in common with them than with the Hindus. The structure of the Mandir was overwhelmingly beautiful but I am glad to have been to Neasden, so as not to come to it entirely in the dark, and I could understand a little of the significance of the Deities.

SR. M LAURENCE, BURNHAM ABBEY—MID-GBI CONTACT PERSON

This year's M.I.D. meeting at Ealing Abbey, West London was a very happy one. I loved the international flavour of it, with coordinators and delegates from all over Europe. There were the familiar faces too from our English monasteries, Roman Catholic and Anglican, including many of our host community who provided generous hospitality. Time did not permit us in one short day to greet all who were there but I was delighted to speak with the three Muslim ladies who were able to come. I felt the day was filled with the love and compassion of God, these overwhelming attributes of God in the Qur'an which the two Muslim speakers, Dr Reza Shah Kazemi and Dr Mohammad Ali Shomali, described to us. I was very moved by Dr Michael Barnes' tribute to the Sikh tradition (there was to be a visit to the Southall Gurdwara next day); and Canon Michael Ipgrave's talk was a reminder of St Paul's struggles, as he shows in his Letter to the Romans, in meeting the challenges of new Gentile members in the early Church. "Provoking" one another, in our very different faith traditions, to greater understanding and holiness is something that must surely happen, especially for those of us in monastic life.

BISHOP KEVIN MCDONALD, ARCHBISHOP EMERITUS OF THE RC DIOCESE OF SOUTHWARK

I was very pleased to be present at this gathering of monastic religious who are involved in and concerned about interreligious dialogue. It was an international and an ecumenical gathering. The latter was especially heartening given the importance of ecumenical collaboration in interreligious work. In the morning we had two Muslim speakers on the nature of God and the names of God. What was striking was the very calm, devout and reverend spirit in which the talks were given. It made me reflect once again on how the media perception both of Christianity and Islam is shaped so much by the dark side of religion and not by the spiritual witness of the kind of representatives of those faiths who took part in this conference. There were clear resonances between what the speakers said about love and mercy as specifying the nature of God in Islam and the Christian understanding of the love of God as explored, for example, in the encyclicals of the present Pope. We had two Christian speakers in the afternoon. The style was very different but they both complemented well the morning contributions.

SR. M CATHERINE, CHESTER—MID-GBI

It gave me great satisfaction on at least two levels to be present on this day of the conference. The first, the social level, was to discern a mini-community, the delegates who had "gelled" well together, and the happiness and excitement of encountering old friends and being introduced by them to new ones. It could have been a reunion of students who had all embarked on a spiritual life.

The second level to be engaged was at first the intellectual—that of absorbing the four excellent talks presented to us by both the Muslim and the Christian speakers. The former two, *"My Mercy Encompasses All"* and *"Images of God in the Qur'an"* were particularly illuminating and encouraging, as I still rather struggle to engage with Islam and have tended to find what I could grasp of the God of the Qur'an very much coloured by those claiming to represent Him who shout most loudly.

Dr Mohammad Shomali's talk brought irresistibly to my mind echoes of both C S Lewis and, even more unexpectedly, Dame Julian of Norwich. When he explained that only those people who keep on saying to God "I do not need or want your grace" actually go to hell, it brought back the memory that, according to Lewis, *"it is to those people who will have none of God, that he finally says, 'Very well; your will be done'"* Dr Shomali said too that rich people who are able to help, often do not wish to; and the poor are much more disposed to help but unfortunately lack the means, while God is supremely willing to help and save and, at the same time has all the resources of wisdom and power that He needs for doing so. The Julian text associated with this idea comes in Ch 31 of the *"Revelations of Divine Love"*: *"Very comfortingly he said to me, 'I may make all things well, I can make all things well, I will make all things well, and I shall make all things well. You will see for yourself that all manner of things will be well.'"* The two—Christian writer and Muslim speaker—seemed to cast light on each other, corroborating each other's spiritual assurances to me. I can believe that the Lady Julian and the Prophet Muhammad are comfortable with each other in heaven.

BR MATTEO NICOLINI-ZANI, BOSE—MID-ITALY

Since this was the first DIM/MID European annual meeting that I attended as a delegate of the Italian commission, for me it was first of all a precious opportunity to get to know all the other delegates and to understand the activities, the problems, and the challenges faced by other commissions. If I should try to sum up in one word what I experienced most during these days I would say: hospitality—hospitality received from different partners and at different levels.

Ealing Abbey, the monastic community that hosted the meeting, and particularly Fr Andrew and Fr Dominic welcomed our small group with a warm hospitality. The community offered us space and time for our meetings and conferences; they welcomed us to join in everyday common prayer, prepared special food for us, and assisted us with transportation. The

excellent organization was possible thanks to the previous preparation and continuous assistance of Sr Lucy Brydon, the coordinator of the British-Irish commission, and of Fr Daniel Pont, the European coordinator. Thank you so much to both of them!

I was particularly struck by the high-quality conferences given by the four speakers on Wednesday and by the meetings we had during our four days in London. On Tuesday, I was moved by the sensitiveness shown by the three Canons we met at Westminster Abbey. I learned that they really try to keep alive the Benedictine tradition of hospitality started in Westminster by the first monks who lived there for a few centuries and that they strive to make the Abbey, a Christian space of worship, a place of meeting and hospitality for different religious people. Sitting together in a circle, we enjoyed the gift of sharing with them some of our spiritual experiences in the field of monastic interreligious dialogue. On Thursday we experienced a really deep sense of hospitality at the Sikh Gurdwara and at the Hindu Mandir. We realized how the attitude of hospitality that is common to Asian people is deeply rooted in a true spirituality of welcoming the other, which springs out of the Sikh and Hindu spiritual sources as blessing water for all peoples and for all faiths.

(The comments are arranged in the order in which they were received by Sr Lucy)



SHRI SANATAN HINDU MANDIR

WEMBLEY, LONDON

THE BACK OF THE MANDIR

Extreme right: Sr Mary John, new editor of *Monastic Encounter*

(This gives some idea of the exquisite beauty of the carved stone. After scientific tests on ten different kinds of stone, this honey-coloured type was especially chosen as the most suitable for the English climate. Unfortunately the pigeons love it, too.)