

April 20, 2009



COUNCIL FOR A
PARLIAMENT OF THE
WORLD'S RELIGIONS

Tribute for Professor Leonard Swidler

It is a great privilege to be able to join in this felicitation of Professor Leonard Swidler. Len has been one of the most spirited and fervent supporters of the Parliament of the World's Religions since its modern incarnation in 1993. The Parliament itself goes back to 1893 when the World's Columbian Exposition convened in Chicago. Thanks in large measure to that epochal event, the religious face of the U.S.A. and of the world changed dramatically in a new dawn of religious pluralism. From 1966 onwards, when he began to teach at Temple University, Len has been one of the prophets and champions of this religious pluralism in his multiple roles of teacher, scholar, journal editor, founder of the Dialogue Institute, and tireless promoter of interreligious and intercultural communication in settings around the world from Europe and the Americas to Africa and Asia.

At a time when some academicians sniffed their noses at the "popular" nature of the Parliament, Len, by contrast, realized its great potential. On the one hand, scholars had a great deal to learn from interreligious activities on the ground, and the Parliament represented the widest and most inclusive context for such activities. On the other hand, Len also saw that there could be fruitful two-way communication and learning between the practice and the theory of interreligious dialogue. To cite just a couple of examples which have been especially influential for the Parliament and the world, Len worked with Hans Kung to draft a "Declaration toward a Global Ethic," a document seeking the ethical commonalities of the world's diverse faiths. That document, which was formally signed at the Chicago Parliament of 1993, has provided a template for interfaith understanding in multiple contexts from classrooms around the world to the United Nations. It has played an important role in the U.N.'s working towards declaring 2010-2020 a "Decade for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue." Len's "The Dialogue Decalogue," published first in his *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* in 1983, continues to be one of the most cited and discussed texts in the field of interreligious studies.

It is with deep pride that the Parliament of the World's Religions congratulates Len also on the endowment of the Leonard and Arlene Swidler Chair in Interreligious Dialogue at Temple University, ensures that the pioneering work done by Len will continue. So we join in this celebration and are very pleased that one of our trustees, Professor Sol Katz, will be present to represent the Parliament on this joyous occasion.

Ad multos annos, dear Len.

Professor Joseph Prabhu, CPWR Trustee
Parliament of the World's Religions