

Royal Palace
Amman, Jordan

5th April 2009

Don Leonard.

On the occasion of *Bringing the World Together: Leonard Swidler, The Man and His Work*, and the even better occasion of the celebration of your 80th birthday, allow me to send my heartiest greetings and wishes for your continued health, happiness and shared wisdom across the world and that you may long remain a source of inspiration to us all.

In this troubled world, your role in these past forty years – that we hope may go on indefinitely – has been one of a unique and path-breaking perception of the necessity to continue the gentle art of conversation, to maintain interreligious dialogue as you have, gracefully branching out from the Catholic Church to embrace all religions and peoples across this globe. In a world of conflict, you were one of the first to cross borders and bring down barriers in an invaluable testimony to the power of God's love in a world that may seem to have forsaken His infinite wisdom, lost in other tempests far from celestial inspiration.

You have led generations into the art of building contacts and human relations through interreligious and cross-cultural dialogue, encompassing human need. I, for one, have long looked to your erudite works and words on human rights and dialogue and your further enlightenment in the ever more dynamic fields of business and social ethics as a guide in this age of globalisation and the reformulation of the relevant ethics that touch the development of every life across the world.

It gives me great pleasure to add my sincere congratulations on the establishment of the *Leonard and Arlene Swidler Chair in Interreligious Dialogue* at the Department of Religion at Temple University, as further concrete proof of the relevance and value of your living legacy. I also find it heartwarming that this has been made possible through the benevolence of corporate interests that advocate religious tolerance and innovation and business ethics, thus proving that you have made your mark even on the normally less philosophical arenas of big business interest – a model for us all to emulate worldwide.

Your path of global and ethical human outreach is ever more vital to us all as mankind seems obsessed with retrograde armed conflicts

rather than increased spiritual awareness on global limitations that should be brought to bear on conflict resolution. The insight of religious men into world affairs is essential. It is essential that the wisdom of ages be brought to bear on policy matters at every level, bringing people together at a humanitarian level. This can lighten the darkest reaches of the desperate loss of benevolence in world affairs as decision makers lose themselves in the temporal, rather than all that is of true worth in human endeavour. The further away this aim seems, the closer it must be held.

I remember our first meeting in Jakarta, Indonesia in 2000, at the International Scholars Annual Dialogue that you organised on the theme of *Religion-State Relations and Building Democracy*. I spoke then of Islam and Humanity and still do, even in these post 9/11 days, whose policy repercussions we are all still suffering. I remain a believer that it is of paramount importance to continue to reach out to each other, for mosque to respect church and synagogue – and for that respect to be reciprocal. I believe that people of peace must be part of a cultural outreach in dialogue, for perhaps that is the only remaining way to close the chasms between us which have led us to this endless and destructive spiral of conflict, tension and war we see around us, destroying the very fabric of our societies.

Current perceptions have betrayed both ignorance of and malice towards the true nature of religion and the beliefs of the other. Human variety is considered to be one of the proofs of God. Muslim tradition holds that diversity, for example of our appearances, languages and so forth, is among His signs. So whilst Islam conceives of itself as the completion of previous religious traditions, it does not demand sterile uniformity. Rather, it commands that human beings respect and learn from each other's differences.

Let the enlightenment of religious faith offer us the means to lessen apprehension in personal challenges of the soul and global challenges of human security and spiritual welfare.

With warmest personal regards, and once again all best wishes to you on your 80th birthday.

Your sincere friend, as ever
El Hassan

El Hassan bin Talal