

Blending of the Gods: The United Religions Initiative Global Charter Signing

By Carl Teichrib

* This article is based on the author's experience while attending the URI Charter signing summit.

Dressed in the garb of their "faith traditions," supporters of the global interfaith agenda stood in a large circle on the Carnegie Mellon University campus, located in historic Pittsburgh. Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, Wiccans, New Agers, Muslims, followers of Judaism and Zoroastrianism, along with devotees of a multitude of religions joined together as native spiritualists invoked the "great spirit" and "cleansed" the circle with smoke from a smudge pot. Once the smudge had made it around the group, indigenous drummers from India led the procession to the University Center. The United Religions Initiative global charter signing summit was officially opened.

Watching the processional from the sidelines, it struck me that this organization, the URI, was nonexistent only five years ago. And while the present charter summit was not large in terms of attendees, it was designed to make a long-term impact on the global religious scene. We had gathered to make history.

The Pittsburgh URI summit was a six-day event starting on Sunday, June 25. The actual charter signing, officially launching the world body, was held on Monday, June 26—the same day that the United Nations charter signing took place back in 1945. This was not a coincidence. The United Nations, through the vision of UN official Robert Muller and the events surrounding its fiftieth anniversary, was the guiding force behind the creation of the URI. Cementing this link, a letter of support from the San Francisco chapter of the United Nations Association was read on Sunday, and at the Monday charter signing, a congratulatory conference call came from the UN. Unfortunately, due to technical difficulties, the telephone connection failed.

Many other links between the URI and the United Nations exist. Currently, the URI and UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) are partners in the United Nations sponsored International Year for the Culture of Peace, and in a concurrent peace program called Manifesto 2000. The URI also has a "Cooperation Circle" inside the UN.

Cooperation Circles, or CC for short, are at the heart of the URI agenda. CCs are self-organized groups that are "locally rooted and globally connected." According to the URI, "Cooperation Circles support the spirit, values and vision expressed in the URI Charter's Preamble, Purpose and Principles and carry out this vision in a multitude of ways." Networking CCs "provide opportunity for worldwide collective interfaith actions." In essence, CCs are local church-like interfaith settings where URI members come together in inter-religious worship and interfaith community planning. It's the URI at the grassroots level.

On the global level—besides working with the United Nations—the URI is partnering with various interfaith world organizations. At the Charter signing, it was admitted that global inter-religious organizations such as the Council for the Parliament of the World's Religions, are larger, have deeper linkages, and work within broader mandates. In the spirit of global cooperation, the United Religions Initiative is striving to interface with these more established inter-religious bodies. Already a CC has been created "to bridge the work of the Council for the Parliament of the World's Religions and the URI."

In order to globally steer the URI, a Global Council is being organized. At the Pittsburgh summit we were introduced to the Interim Global Council, which was set-up to solidifying the official development of the URI as an international organization. According to a URI document given out at the summit, between June 2000 and June 2001, a process will be put in place “to select the 41 members of the first globally selected Global Council.” Although the document stated that the Global Council’s “central spirit is not one of control,” in casually discussing this issue with summit attendees, I was told that “control” was a real area of concern. Three URI members I talked with—one from Eastern Europe, one from the Caribbean, and a New Ager from the US—privately admitted that the URI has a real potential to become a controlling factor within the universal interfaith movement. These three attendees—*who supported the summit*—recognized the URI and its Global Council as a potentially dangerous element in suppressing genuine religious freedom. As the URI Charter’s Preamble explains, “We unite to support freedom of religion and spiritual expression, and the rights of all individuals and peoples as set forth *in international law*” [emphasis mine].

The URI Charter Principles also allude to the creation of a controlling interfaith power structure. Principles 13 to 16 state,

We have the authority to make decisions at the most local level that includes all the relevant and affected parties. (13) We have the right to organize in any manner, at any scale, in any area, and around any issue or activity which is relevant to and consistent with the Preamble, Purpose and Principles. (14) [The Charter is broad enough that almost any religious, “spiritual,” moral, or ethical issue could be construed to be relevant to the URI Charter Preamble, Purpose and Principles.] Our deliberations and decisions shall be made at every level by bodies and methods that fairly represent the diversity of affected interests and are not dominated by any. (15) We (each part of the URI) shall relinquish only such autonomy and resources as are essential to the pursuit of the Preamble, Purpose and Principles.

URI members also agree through the Charter not to “proselytize” each other. In other words, members will not witness to, or proclaim that their religion is the “truth,” lest a member of another religious tradition become offended. This is interfaithism; the idea that all religions are pathways to the same mountaintop called “God.” It is the blending of all spiritual expressions, “truths,” and “gods” into a belief of global religious tolerance—“unity in diversity” is the motto.

Of the approximately 250 who participated, “Christianity,” broadly defined, had the most representation. On June 26, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reported that numerous “Christian” denominations, including Roman Catholicism, did not support the URI agenda. This created a controversy, and at the Monday evening Charter signing ceremony, the Rev. P. Gerard O’Rourke, Director of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of San Francisco Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs office, gave a firm rebuttal to the Post-Gazette article.

I want to correct something that I saw in your paper today in this city. I am here officially as a member of the Catholic Church, and this is where I should be...I am officially here. It’s where the Church should be right now—and it is here. Bless you all.

Immediately following the Charter signing, I asked Rev. O’Rourke about the role of the Vatican in the global interfaith agenda. He told me that the Roman Catholic Church had received guidance from Pope John Paul II—through his words and his inter-religious activities—that interfaithism is to be vigorously pursued. O’Rourke reminded me that the Catholic church, since the 1962 Second Vatican Council, had dedicated itself to advancing global

inter-religious cooperation. He also told me that at least seven other Roman Catholic priests, each highly respected within Catholicism, were present at the URI charter signing and had offered their support to its goals.

There can be no doubt that the global interfaith agenda is speeding up. Bishop William Swing, the Episcopalian founder of URI, sees his inter-religious organization playing a long-term role in the “new world” agenda. At the summit, Mr. Swing expressed his hope that fifty years from now, thousands from around the world would come to Pittsburgh and celebrate the URI’s fiftieth anniversary—much like the United Nations did in 1995. What the final role of the URI will be is not entirely known. And while the organization is presently small, it is strategically aligning itself within the framework of the global village.

But how does Jesus Christ fit into the URI agenda? Not surprisingly, I never heard the name of Jesus mentioned at the summit. Nor could His name be brought up. After all, it was Jesus Christ who made it clear in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” The exclusivity of Jesus Christ is in direct contradiction to the goals of the URI, its Charter, and interfaithism in general. Not only does Jesus Christ claim to be the only way to God, negating all other “ways,” but He commands His followers to “proselytize”—“teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost...” (Matthew 28:19). And in Acts chapter one, Jesus proclaims that His message will be preached “unto the uttermost part of the earth.” Jesus Christ is not politically correct in the new global order.

As mankind works to build a “peace” based on distorted New Age and interfaith agendas, we who have the peace of Christ must maintain a steadfast determination to follow the will of God—recognizing the exclusive Lordship of Jesus Christ and proclaiming His message of salvation to all the world—regardless of what the cost might be. May we not be slack in this high calling.

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