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To whom it may concern

Re: Interfaith Centre of Melbourne event for 2018 World Interfaith Harmony Week

A significant event marking World Interfaith Harmony Week took place in Melbourne, Australia on 24 February 2018. The title of the event was "Who and Where are We in a Changing World? Faith leaders speak on Creation Stories and the Meaning of Life in our Universe". This event was organised by the Interfaith Centre of Melbourne and was held at Deakin Edge, Federation Square, Melbourne.

The religions represented included the three Abrahamic faiths as well as Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and the Australian indigenous spiritual tradition. As one who attended the event, I would like to express my appreciation of the opportunity to experience some of the wisdom of these diverse faiths and to witness the respect and reverence with which the faith leaders engaged with each other and their respective traditions.

Clearly, a great deal of thought, sensitivity and effort went into the preparation of this event. The format and choice of speakers worked well and, overall, the event seemed very successful in evoking an understanding of universal principles grounded in particular contexts. This was present from the very beginning when the indigenous welcome to country extended the sense of belonging through a very tangible sharing of gum leaves from the local area.

From very different perspectives, the speakers set out to address their own faith traditions' approaches to creation, the values emanating from them and the ways in which they give meaning to lives in a changing world. A recurring theme throughout the presentations was the love of God / the Good and the implications for love of the Neighbour. A related theme that emerged was the challenge posed by free will and the need for God-given potential to be nurtured. Some speakers articulated this in terms of the imperative to care for others / those in need and this was brought very close to home with the observation that many of the faith communities represented had themselves been subjected to some sort of discrimination in the local context. The imperative of nurturing both the social environment and the natural environment seemed to be generally accepted.

The event organisers arranged for the perspective of scientific knowledge to be referenced via a video clip of a view of earth from space as recorded on a moon mission. In my opinion, this was inspirational because it could trigger consideration of both the scientific account of creation and the notion of perspective *per se*. Several speakers referred to the scientific narrative in their

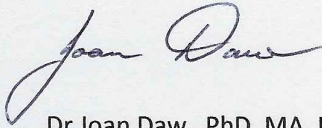
presentations. Also, several speakers emphasized the significance of perspective – indicating their belief that religions look at the same truth but from different perspectives. One speaker pointed out that the perspective used by a particular faith tradition can influence the very type of questions that are asked in the first place – paralleling the type of answers adopted.

I believe that this World Interfaith Harmony Week event offered an enriching experience for those present – including the speakers. As one presenter noted, in the process of preparing to share insights from his faith tradition with those of other faiths, he had, in fact, enriched his understanding of his own tradition.

The Interfaith Centre of Melbourne is to be congratulated on the organisation of this event. In particular, Rev Helen Summers, is to be commended for the way she managed the myriad of tasks leading up to the event and brought it all together to make it such a success. Rev Summers achieved this with a compassion, competence and serenity which instils confidence in others and puts everyone at ease – even in the most culturally diverse environments.

I have known Rev Summers for about fifteen years and have great admiration for her initiative and dedication in founding the Interfaith Centre of Melbourne in 2000. Since then, Rev Summers and the Board members have been bringing together religious and spiritual leaders and their communities for interfaith dialogue, ceremonies, and to experience diverse artistic and cultural events to foster harmony and understanding.

I thank Rev Summers and the Interfaith Centre of Melbourne for organising the event for 2018 World Interfaith Harmony Week and, indeed, for all their inspirational work over many years.



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