Synthesis III was a grand experiment in creativity and good faith. We entered the laboratory as a diverse collection of leaders, thinkers, and social architects who have spent years, each in our own way, questioning the mind-set of a civilization that knows, and can do, better. The human mind, particularly in the West, generally operates from the belief that progress is achieved by recognizing and choosing between competing objects, ideas, and forces. Although some say that this ingrained combination of dualism, dogma, and discrimination has expedited the development of advanced technology and economic power, it has also produced social institutions and cultural attitudes that have distorted the intrinsic human preference for harmony and universal satisfaction. It became clear in our early conversations that Synthesis participants had come to give a living voice to at least one uncompromising assumption: that it is both necessary and possible for humanity to achieve a prevailing consciousness that holds the welfare of all living beings as its highest good, that protects the weak while honoring the strong and that will assure the health of the earth for all future generations. This sensitivity lies at the center of religious experience but is also reflected in the noblest expressions of social, artistic, and scientific insight.

The goal of Synthesis has always been to assist in the emergence and expansion of this universality of consciousness. The Synthesis process is, quite simply, a way of setting the intention to inspire “moments of awakening” -- to the contradictions, as well as the consonance, in our own "mind-sets," and to catalyze the growth of a more spacious awareness that can accommodate opposing ideas and beliefs, reconciles differences, and nurtures a creative integration from which new possibilities emerge. Through our focused dialogues and exchanges, we were able to identify and suggest ways to address some of the contradictions and complexities that continue to restrain humanity’s natural impulse to see the world as one and all beings as deeply interconnected.

The Process of Design
With some of these underlying notions in mind, the Association for Global New Thought set out to develop a transparent and self-reflective methodology for stimulating synthesis
at the level of consciousness itself. We needed to consider such questions as the use of silence, music, and meditation; how to create an ideal setting under limiting physical conditions; the role of love; the astronomical importance of diversity; the notion of pilgrimage and preparation; the degree to which participants must be included in the design process by showing us the importance of what emerged in real time and helping us to respond accordingly; the extent and nature of preparation by participants in advance of the meeting; the fine-line between speakers’ giving their full voice, but not “presenting”; the role of video and recording media; whether to leave the process "open" or have a design in place throughout or split the difference; how to describe and assess shifts in consciousness (before and after); how to generate maximum creativity in the exchanges; the nature of opportunities and materials that could be provided in advance so that we would become familiar with each other’s life and work; and how best to include His Holiness in the process.

No big deal…

**The Need for Synthesis**

All human thinking and, hence, all human behavior, is generated through the apparatus of what might be called a worldview or **mind-set**. A mind-set is the interconnected network of interpretations, assumptions, beliefs, insights and conclusions that is held in place by investment and attachment. One of the greatest stimulants to personal creativity is the encounter with a different mind-set. Though similar we may be in our core ideals in general, the fact of the matter was that, in Castelgandolfo, universal principles and practices kept emerging quite specifically in a field of diversity where, in other settings, the opposite effect has been felt.

This points to a critical clue. The need to work with the energy of our differences has never been greater. Therefore, we must create more opportunities to model to ourselves and to others that, in a practical way, it is at the very edge of our differences that the greatest possibilities for human evolution emerge. To achieve genuine “breakthrough,” in contrast to temporary concession, requires the systematic development of a mind-set that both encompasses and transcends, includes and discerns. This is a kind of **meta-mind**—an intelligence that resides more within a group or holistic experience than in an individual ego. This is synthesis, and at the same time, it is the empowerment of evolutionary leadership.
Stages of the Synthesis Project

The first step in this process was to stimulate and facilitate authentic conversation (and unspoken interactions) among people of great intelligence and sensitivity with the intention of nurturing synthesis in our respective mind-sets. From this compassionate stance we were hoping to identify the conditions in which synthesis could be achieved, to mark its stages and to determine the obstacles that rose in its path. We know now that it requires a progression of gatherings to develop clarity about this model.

The next step was to set the intention that demonstrations of synthesis would arise in a field of safety, love, and spiritual democracy. Very subtly, we began to show ourselves how to discern the motivations that would lead a person to pursue--or resist--the transcendence of his or her own mind-set.

The closing step, and current enterprise, is to attempt to give practical definition to the synthesis process so that it can be offered into other environments, validated to be of service, and given other applications in the spiritually ripening global arena.

Possibilities for Future Work of the Synthesis Family

Most of us familiar with conferences and meetings are well aware that temporal forums, bringing together colleagues (new and known) from diverse locations and with non-negotiable responsibilities of their own, rarely survive the good intentions in the last day’s list of “Action Items.” There is no judgment in this; but wouldn’t it be exciting if there were a way to accomplish a significant goal together, with fresh attitudes toward participation and without detracting from the existing work of our lives and organizations?

If the invention of new models for leadership and synergy is one of the overarching goals of the Synthesis Dialogues, the challenge and freedom to be original is at once daunting and exhilarating. Like all the meetings that came before us, Synthesis II participants also achieved a high degree of agreement and strategic resonance in discussing possible actions to support during our final session together. Some of these are listed below with limited notation (please contribute your notes for the editing of this DRAFT document).
What would be the basic elements that would allow us to fulfill some of these goals?

**Need:**
• A dedicated communication system.

**Resources:**
• synthesis@agnt.cim3.net
• www.synthesis.org
• mail & email directory and bio information booklets
• advanced web tools and tutorials
• electronic communications manager: Ken Fields

**Need:**
• Coordinating leadership not attached to “owning “ gain or outcome

**Resources**
• The AGNT office is willing to undertake this role as part of its evolving mission

**Need:**
• To invite motivation among participants that does not create unrealistic expectations that infringe on existing responsibilities

**Resources:**
• A clear memory of what our time in Castelgandolgo felt like and accomplished.
• Compassion and permission for each of us to give our unique gifts freely, and in a context that honors our best judgment at any given time and in any circumstance.
• A shared vision that connects pragmatically with many of our existing projects and activities, therefore optimizing opportunities in which we stand to better achieve success working in concert, than alone.

**Need:**
• Administration, funding, and logistical planning that will ensure the efficacy of our time and energy spent.

**Resources:**
• Without the need to create another cumbersome organization or entity to serve as a container, the laboratory of “Synthesis” could proceed with the Work on the strength of the values we have already so well established as an outcome of our Dialogues—wisdom, trust, discipline, integrity, compassion, finely tuned intellect, and a yearning to manifest sooner, rather than later, the profoundly held purposes and values to which we feel called as the cornerstones of our collective lives. (Let’s face it—we have all implemented and successfully conducted projects the hard way. Why can’t we do it simply, and in a way that flows? If it’s time to “stop business as usual,” perhaps this applies as much to the process in which we engage as to the product achieved in the end!).

On the Map of Synthesis

Proposal #1: A Pilgrimage of the Family of Abraham

(.. taken from Evolving Draft submitted by Bill Ury)

In the Footsteps of Abraham:
A Call for Wisdom

We are inquiring into the potential of a pilgrimage retracing the journey of the patriarch Abraham for the purposes of remembrance, healing, and reconciliation. The vision is of a sacred walk, led by religious leaders from the heart of the three Abrahamic faiths — Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, accompanied and encouraged by leaders of other religions. A walk in the spirit of Abraham might lay down a path of permanent pilgrimage for all those who seek peace and reconciliation in the Middle East and around the world.

Abraham is revered as a common spiritual ancestor by over three billion people — Christians, Muslims, and Jews — who live in all corners of the earth. Conflict in the Middle East among the children of Abraham has become a global symbol of intractable strife. Without underestimating the difficulty, a pilgrimage in the footsteps of Abraham,
Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael, and Isaac might have the symbolic power to stir the moral imagination of people everywhere and to initiate a process of healing ancient wounds.

**ABRAHAM PILGRIMAGE MEETINGS IN BARCELONA**

We recently sent out a group communication to those of you working out of the Pilgrimage research office at Harvard, to Bill Uru and Mark Gerzon in Boulder, to AGNT and Rome Synthesis Dialogues attendees who will be in Barcelona, and other colleagues to whom we have spoken in a preliminary way about this project.

We will use the occasion of many of gathering in Barcelona to have a face-to-face expository meeting about the concept and viability of the Project under discussion these past several months-- that a walk in the spirit of Abraham might lay down a path of permanent pilgrimage for all those who seek peace and reconciliation in the Middle East and around the world.

When:
Thursday, July 8 from 5-6:30 pm
Friday, July 9 from 5-6:30 pm

Where: We will be meeting in the Multi-use room of the International Conference Center in Barcelona, hub of the July 7-14 Parliament of the World’s Religions.

**Purposes:**
- To convene around summary points of Pilgrimage project and Synthesis
- To decide how to talk informally to other potential participants onsite about the Pilgrimage project and invite principals from faith traditions to July 9th meeting
- To share news about PWR programs and personnel
- Research: Who attends what programming relevant to Pilgrimage at PWR event throughout the week?
Goals:
• To inspire and receive important feedback
• To receive ideas and in context of task force areas mapped previous day
• To collect contact information and plan for further regular communication

- Agenda Points for July 8th mtg

I Questions:
1. Who is our audience for the Pilgrimage?
2. How would impact be felt at the communities level?
3. Many other questions

II Map task force areas
1. Steering and admin
2. Event, meeting and call coordination
3. Strategy and Design Team for overall project
4. Strategy and Design of the Walk itself - content and structure of each day
5. Religious and interreligious affairs--current and historic; third side religious support
6. Logistic, regional, and routing
7. Advisors, spokespersons, endorsements, and organizational networks
8. Legal; diplomatic; security
9. Funding
10. Media, technology, communications
11. News and press, editorial functions, public relations

III Tri-Tradition Advisory Networks
Need well-connected advisor from each religion to recommend and educate appropriate key participants and organizational contacts:
1. Silvio Daneo? (Vatican, Pontifical Council, int'l Christian Councils)
2. Jim Kenney? (IEP21... International Muslim network and projects)
Don Mitchell? (diverse Muslim dialogue program Purdue/Notre Dame/ U of Indiana and the State Dept.)

3. Judaism? (broad-based as possible)

IV What is role in active solidarity of other religions?

V Communications:

VI Funding

Support from the Synthesis Participants in Castel Gandolfo

A few nuggets:
(..taken from Bill’s June 14 email memo to the list with added notes from Barbara)

The Dalai Lama, hearing the idea, said: "The idea of a joint pilgrimage is a great one."
He said he himself had explored the idea of interreligious pilgrimages since 1975. Barbara is investigating whether we might use a quote of support
like this from him. (an email was sent to Tenzin Geyche as they travel in remote Ladakh before proceeding to Parliament of the World’s Religions in Barcelona).

Jawdat Said, a Syrian Muslim of great integrity and a passionate advocate of nonviolence, offered his strong support and offered to put us in touch with civil society organizations in Syria that could help. His niece Afra Jalabi, an Arab-Canadian journalist of rare talent, also offered her support.

Marwat Khan, a leading Pakistani jurist very active in the World Congress on Religion and Peace, was strongly supportive of the children of Abraham coming together. He pointed out that the Kaaba was built by Abraham.
Emran Akhtar, a Pakistani healer, offered his healing talents.

Achok Rinpoche, a leading Tibetan lama, offered to bring some Buddhist Monks well acquainted with the rigors of pilgrimage.

Yifa, a Chinese Buddhist nun, offered the same.

Lisa Palmieri-Billig, of WCRP in Italy and Vatican Representative for the Anti-Defamation League, is already working in the area of interreligious pilgrimage. She pointed out the advisability of including technical experts and civil leadership to help local people create strength and independence. She recently attended an interreligious conference on Media and Truth. Her idea about pilgrimage and media involves asking journalists, in advance, to help readers, listeners, and viewers understand both sides of the conflict as a way of facilitating a higher level of dialogue and compromise. Together, journalists could comprise the Third Side of the conflict.

Dyani Ywahoo, a Cherokee elder, spoke of how pilgrimages were "profound medicine" for Native Americans. They have gone on pilgrimage, tracing the roots of their dispersal, to return to their original fires. She spoke of how healing these pilgrimages had been. It might be good to research these a bit.

Lawrence Carter, dean of the chapel at Morehouse College, offered his support in his network of the Assembly of Churches, a global organization.

Elisabet Sahtouris mentioned that her friend, Rama Vernon, founder of WOVA (Women of Vision in Action) would be convening two conferences next year for women in the Northwestern and Southeastern countries of the Middle East. She suggested we look for connections.

Silvio Daneo, a member of the Focolare with over thirty years of interfaith organizing, and who worked hard to organize our meeting, offered his time and assistance in working
with the Vatican, fundraising, traveling to the Middle East etc... Silvio was present when the Pope organized a virtual pilgrimage retracing the footsteps of Abraham in the Vatican. He will be in Barcelona.

**David Sluyter** a senior program officer of the Fetzer Foundation offered his help. A possible fundraising advisor, he will be in Barcelona.

More support from **Azim Khamisa**, a Muslim American, and from **Jim Keen**, a professor at Antioch, and many others present. Marc and Barbara had other conversations which they will report on.

The group of convening ministers, from the **Association of Global New Thought**, were enthusiastic. Barbara can tell you more, but from my lunch meeting with AGNT, I came away with strong sense that they are willing to support the pilgrimage strongly in their networks and to empower Barbara to spend a portion of her time on this project. She will first provide a memo to her Leadership Council for their discussion and approval, as a basis for proposing AGNT's focal role. AGNT President, Dr. Michael Beckwith, spoke of a friend of his, Carl Anderson, who before he died had painted a picture of Michael walking on pilgrimage in the Middle East. Michael spoke of how his friend Stevie Wonder would like to come.

(../continued: taken from Evolving Draft submitted by Bill Ury)

The Abraham Pilgrimage Study, an initiative currently housed at Harvard University, seeks your wisdom and counsel.

Here are some initial questions on which we respectfully seek your counsel:

- How could such a pilgrimage be designed, as a ritual and symbolic act, so as to nurture mutual respect and mutual blessing among the children of Abraham?
• Where in the ancient narratives of Abraham and his family, as told in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, might the seeds of reconciliation be found?
• What kind of inclusive practices could create a spirit of deep listening, respectful dialogue, and shared prayer among the pilgrims?
• What practical arrangements would you suggest for travel, routes, hospitality, border crossing, safety, and respect for local communities?
• How could the story of such a pilgrimage be told publicly in ways that people around the world could feel connected to the pilgrimage process?
• To whom would you suggest we speak?
• What other questions would you suggest?

The Abraham Pilgrimage Study is an inquiry just in its beginnings. In these difficult times, humanity seems more than ever in need of acts of spiritual imagination. We are deeply grateful to you for your guidance and wisdom.

Proposal #2: Human Shields: Intervention of World Leaders to Stop Immanent Warfare

Bro. David Steindl-Rast shared with the group, and in a handwritten summary delivered to Tenzin Geyche Tethong, an idea that involves asking globally recognized religious and political leaders to go to areas of immanent violence and lend their support. Bro. David pointed out that if in March of 2003 such a body had been in place, we might well have averted the war in Iraq which was heavily protested in the U.S. and other nations worldwide. If leaders such as the Dalai Lama, Mrs. Ela Gandhi (who has already agreed..), Jimmy Carter, and others of formal stature would be ready and equipped to travel to a “hot spot,” it is probably that violence could be spared. (Although it is chilling to think that the U.S. government has shown no signs of reversing its current policy of ignoring world public opinion, even if nonviolent objection issued from such a universally recognized level of leadership).
Tenzin Geyche responded that the Shield idea, for which a colleague of Bro. David’s might provide funding, was aligned with a similar proposal to His Holiness by Vaclav Havel of Prague; he will provide contact information in the hopes that the two could explore the possibility of collaboration.

It should also be noted that there are many points of interface between the Human Shields project and the Pilgrimage. We should seek to collaborate wherever possible to the benefit of both proposals.

Proposal #3: Conscription, Poverty, and Media

Ela Gandhi shared an account of these three pressing issues as evidenced in the societies of South Africa. Others noted that these are monumental, international issues; Mrs. Gandhi would like to work with others who are interested in pursuing any aspect of these critical themes. Please use the Synthesis list for your communications.

Proposal #4: Participation of Youth in Synthesis Questions

Dr. Vinu Aram suggested that we modify and seek responses from young people in our various countries to the five essay questions posed to Synthesis participants in philosophical preparation for the Castelgandolfo Dialogues. It would be fairly easy to make these questions available, in translation, to those of you who have access to children and youth groups. Responses could be emailed to the AGNT office for use in future correspondence, publications, and video/audio tape proceedings.
**Proposal #5: Teen Circle Days**

Chalanda Sai Ma Lakshmi Devi’s idea was to provide, in multiple locations, a means of calling forth discussion circles for teens in which they could sit for a full day and express their gifts and insights, as well as hopes, fears and frustrations with the world they are inheriting. These circles could be taped and shared with teen circles in other nations, religions and cultures.

**Proposal #6: Education from the Heart**

Prem Baba discussed, and asked support for a program already underway in his spiritual community in Brazil that Synthesis could amplify. The program teaches children to learn based on compassion, character, values and heartfelt ideals as a context to evolve the information-processing model that is now disseminated to our children in their schools as knowledge and education.

**Proposal #7: Inventory of Our Collective Networks**

Rev Howard Caesar, member of the AGNT Leadership Council, reminded us of the very critical benefit of assessing the “power in numbers” that our collective organizational networks could provide. Let’s explore this further… communicate with the AGNT office via our listserv as to the scope of individual and groups with which you are able to communicate in a quantifiable and reliable way. This inventory, and a way of mobilizing communications within it, is do-able and would benefit any of our projects and proposals if it was available for agreed purposes and within an efficient timeframe.

Craig Hamilton, later in the discussion on strategy, encouraged us not to “skip over” this suggestion of how many networks we could engage to eventually achieve a major shift on various issues.
Proposal #8: Transforming the Media

Most participants had thoughts about the need to make revolutionary changes in our local, national, and global media. James O’Dea, President of the Institute of Noetic Sciences, remarked on the recent conference IONS co-sponsored with La eCsa de Maria entitled: “Who Is Paying Attention?: Consciousness in the Media,” including representatives of the new media in the U.S. This growing movement is unfolding in other similar gatherings, such as a “Media That Matters” conference in Canada.

Janis Claflin, V.P of the Fetzer Institute’s Executive Board, expressed the close alliance that Fetzer’s broad-based new mission: Love and Forgiveness, might have with a variety of media initiatives. She noted the idea of Golden Rule stories from all religions and cultures as a vehicle for reconciliation and understanding.

Proposal #9: Politician School

Prem Baba introduced the idea that there should be a school to train politicians to adopt a higher level of discourse and more sophisticated principals and practices for leadership. He felt that the Synthesis group reflected a collective background of expertise and thinking that could help develop a curriculum, especially in that the ethic of nonviolence in governance was such a prominent theme in our conversations. This school would be based on shared human values, and would greatly benefit from support by certain areas of the media.

Portable Synthesis Models: A related idea from Prem Baba was the notion that the Synthesis Dialogues could be unfolded as a portable model and carried into multiple
countries. Inside these countries, local and national leaders could be contacted and invited into meaningful gatherings that would form the basis for new collaborations.

**Proposal #10: World Future Council**

Sulak Sivaraksa described the progress of an initiative underway called the World Future Council. The idea is based in His Holiness’ own call for a council of secular leaders from all fields who could form a global advisory, research and implementation council with recognized authority for new models in every field. The WFC began to develop, partly out of discussions at Synthesis II in Trent, Italy, 2001 and now has had several meetings out of which descriptive documents, flow charts, and strategic and organizational designs have been published.

**Proposal #11: Economics/Business/Finance and Spirituality**

Alfredo Sfeir-Younis brought up a new topic that establishes the grounding connection between the institutions and policies that govern the real-time sustainable, mechanical operations of our planet, and the need for spiritual ethics and practices to be infused within them.

His second suggestion was that we badly need a substantial proposal to protect the bodies of ancient and perennial knowledge contained, especially, in the indigenous traditions. Certain of such archive projects are underway now (Ven. Dhyani Ywahoo cited an example from the Native Americas and possible ways to collaborate..) and it is impossible to overstate the importance that such an archive of indigenous knowledge would have for our next generations.
Strategic Thinking

Taken from our final afternoon of meetings, with His Holiness still present, here are some thoughts that emerged from the group:

Bill Ury: Synthesis could become a laboratory for large-scale social change. For example, Pilgrimage would be explored as a conscious symbolic action that could be a media story evoking powerful positive images of our interconnected origins.

James Keen: Jim endorsed the practical suggestion that we should take advantage of interactive tutorials offered by Kenneth Fields to demonstrate the use of electronic media tools for communications. This is mostly a matter of de-mystifying the technology.

Elisabet Sahtouris: Elisabet pointed out, if we were discouraged, to look at the most recent example of George Bush’s visit to Rome during which the news reported that nonviolent demonstrators were able to contain the feared violent demonstrations without losing the focus of their ideological objections.

His Holiness, the Dalai Lama: We should not only share among ourselves what we have discussed here, but use of communication tools to get insight from outside this group.

Also—with regard to a School for Politicians: “Unless they have some kind of emergency, their interest [in such an idea] would not be so high. Human values are not their top priority.”

His Holiness also referred to this idea as part of a pamphlet he wrote three decades ago in which he described a model of conflict resolution at an international level that sought to develop closer personal relationships among leaders.

Dr. A.T. Ariyaratne: Those in the world who have been struggling so long to make change have no common place to go to meet, rest, be nourished and supported. He mentioned
that there must be a guilty feeling, even on the part of the Chinese, for what they have done. How valuable it would be to create a utopia without borders as a place for everyone to come. Ari also reiterated how important it was that we all work to help preserve Tibetan culture.

His Holiness, the Dalai Lama: Brother Wayne has always promoted how important it is for interspiritual people to take the issue of Tibet seriously, and this has been very beneficial. There are so many simple things we can do—like holding a weekly prayer for Tibet in our own religious communities.

Some excerpted ideas from His Holiness’ final remarks:
We must all make a deliberate effort to cultivate positive intentions. Every day is a Birth Day—the opportunity to make another day purposeful and meaningful—and we should celebrate! It is a new chance to create some kind of pleasure or joyfulness, and this feeling of happiness comes as a result of our purpose. Above all, each day is a chance for a new intention to do no harm to others.

The new work we have created here—there will be new obstacles to the new work. Synthesis people must “safeguard your determination.” The way to do this is to think of everything holistically (in context; with perspective), because when the problems and the solutions are so complex, it helps to remember from a wider point of view that, naturally there WILL BE obstacles. With this in mind, people’s determination will not be shaken and they will not fall to becoming demoralized.

Finally, His Holiness said that a group of qualified people should go to Tibet and talk to the people there. Even better, some trusted individual (such as Jimmy Carter? Nelson Mandela? Ela Gandhi?) should go to Tibet and try to help because this kind of visit would command attention worldwide.

(In follow-up, Barbara submitted to Tenzin Geyche an email invitation from Bill offering to assist professionally).
CONCLUSION

Although many of us have heard these words before, in conclusion I would like to share again this passage that, to me, is a blessing befitting to the time we spent together in Castelgandolfo, and the times yet ahead of us…

A Hopi Elder Speaks

"You have been telling the people that this is the Eleventh Hour, now you must go back and tell the people that this is the Hour. And there are things to be considered. Where are you living? What are you doing? What are your relationships? Are you in right relation? Where is your water? Know your garden. It is time to speak your Truth. Create your community. Be good to each other. And do not look outside yourself for the leader."

Then he clasped his hands together, smiled, and said,

" This could be a good time! "

June 21, 2004
Barbara Fields Bernstein
Co-founder & Director, Synthesis Dialogues I, II & III
Executive Director, Association for Global New Thought