



News Story

Hindus Worship at Fatima Altar!

Source: *The Portugal News*, the-news.net

Hindus worship at Fátima altar

<http://the-news.net/cgi-local/story.pl?title=Hindus%20worship%20at%20Fátima%20altar&edition=all>

Last October The Portugal News reported on the Interfaith Congress held at Fátima, one of Catholicism's most sacred sites, where representatives of the world's leading religions allegedly explored the possibility of opening the shrine to a whole variety of faiths. While the newspaper received many letters and emails congratulating it for reporting on the congress, it was also criticised by some groups who claimed that Fátima would remain exclusively Catholic.

Now, however, we can report that the first steps in developing Fátima as a multi-faith centre could have been taken. On May 5th, SIC and SIC Notícias carried a report on a Hindu religious service held in the Chapel of the Apparitions at the shrine.

SIC's broadcast appears, to some extent, vindicate The Portugal News' October report. Sixty Hindus led by a high priest had travelled from Lisbon to pay homage to the Goddess Devi, the divinity of nature. SIC's reporter described how before leaving Lisbon the Hindus had gathered at their temple in the city to pray to and worship various statues of Hindu gods.

Arriving in Fátima the pilgrims made their way to the Chapel of the Apparitions, where from the altar a Hindu priest led prayer sessions. A commentary on the service was given by the TV reporter who explained: "This is an unprecedented unique moment in the history of the shrine. The Hindu priest, or Sha Tri, prays on the altar the Shaniti Pa, the prayer for peace." The Hindus can be seen removing their shoes before approaching the altar rail of the chapel as the priest chants prayers from the altar's sanctuary.

During the newscast the Rector of the shrine Father Luciano Guerra says: These meetings give us the opportunity to remind ourselves that we live in community".

After worshipping their gods and praying in the chapel the Hindus are shown being escorted to an exhibition hall where a model of the controversial new basilica currently being constructed is on display. In a setting described as ambassadorial by the commentator, each Hindu is personally greeted by the Bishop of Leiria - Fátima, who bows to the Hindu priest repeating his gesture of greeting. The Hindu priest is then seen clothing the Rector of the Fátima Shrine and the bishop with a Hindu priestly shawl.

“On the shoulders of the highest representatives of the Church in Fátima, the Hindu priest places a shawl with the inscriptions of the Bagavad Gita, one of the sacred books of Hinduism,” the reporter tells his viewers.

The newscast finishes with scenes of the Hindu priest lighting a candle at the shrine while his followers dance outside the Chapel of the Apparitions chanting praises to their gods. The TV commentator concludes by saying: “In 1982, a Guru, a high priest of Hinduism, came from Bombay to Fátima.....He signed the book of honour right after Pope John Paul II and on the same page as Mother Teresa of Calcutta.”

In other reactions to the Hindu ritual, a long-standing member of the Leiria-Fátima diocese was less accepting of the opening of the sanctuary to other cults and religions, telling the Jornal de Leiria: “I understand the opening of the site to other religions. But I disagree with the practise of non-Catholic rituals at the sanctuary’s holiest site”.

Bishop of the Diocese, D. Serafim Ferreira e Silva, has a different opinion. He told the regional newspaper: “We don’t want to be fundamentalist, but sincere and honest”.

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