

# Salaam

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Quarterly to Promote Understanding



*A Christmas Tea Party!*  
*Pope Francis' Church without Frontiers*  
*Is Dialogue Evident with Pope Francis?*  
*Is Dialogue Possible between Christians and Muslims?*  
*A Christian in a Milad Conference*  
*Caring for Our Common Home: A Dialogue with Creation*  
*Love to understand and understand to love*  
*Interreligious Festival of Light*  
*Mother Mary: Christians and Muslims*  
*Learning about Other Religions*  
*Seminar on Challenges and Opportunities in Christian-Muslim Relations*

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**ISLAMIC STUDIES ASSOCIATION**

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**“..... that they.....  
may be one.....”**

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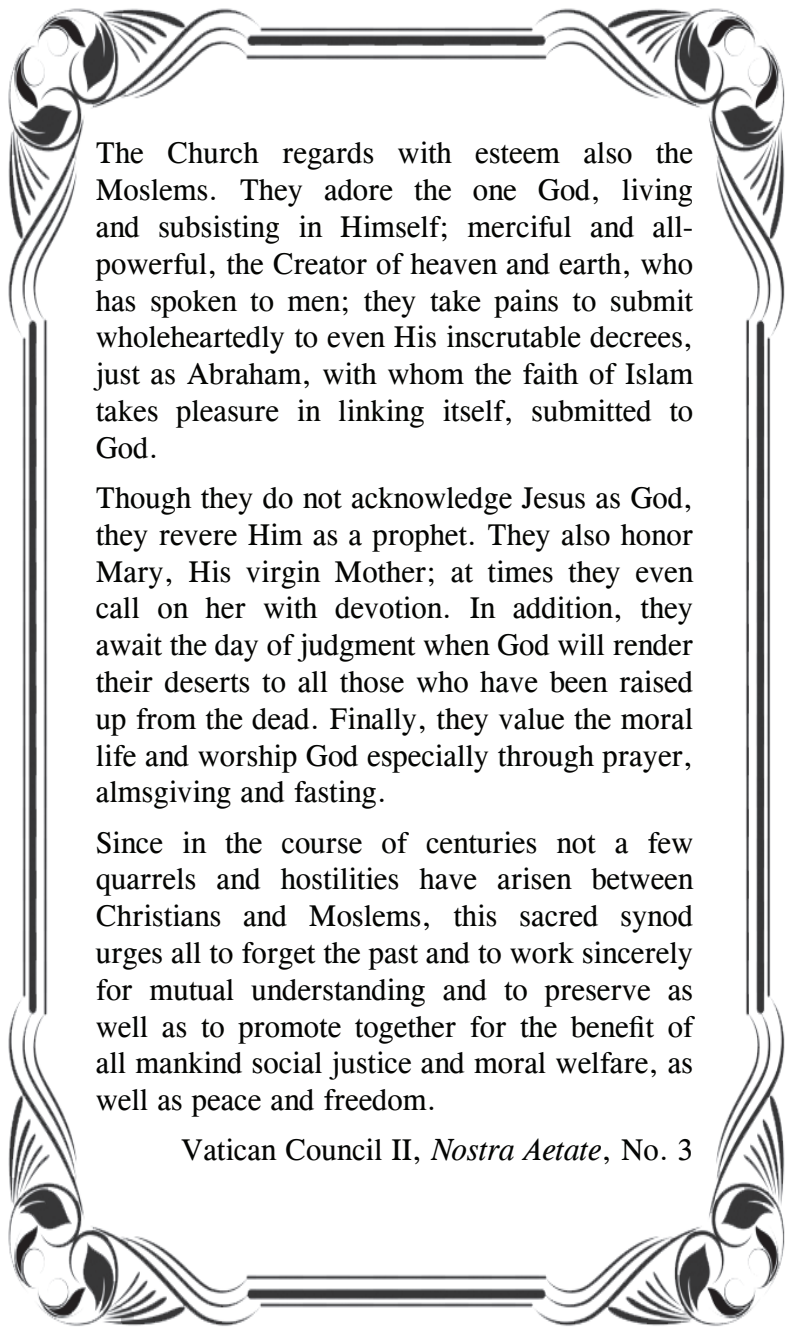
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The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God.

Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgment when God will render their deserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom.

Vatican Council II, *Nostra Aetate*, No. 3

# Editorial

I wish all the readers of *Salaam* a happy and peaceful 2022.

Over the last two years, we have learnt important life-lessons from this pandemic. One is that we are all interconnected. The pandemic affected all people, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, people living in urban areas and those living in villages, men and women, without any discrimination. The virus affected us all. The lesson is that we are all interconnected and we must care for one another. A second lesson is that we are not safe alone. Our safety is interlinked. Finally, the pandemic has brought out or highlighted many compassionate people who are reaching out to serve others. It is beautiful to see that humanity is alive. It has inspired many of us to do our bit. We should learn from the pandemic, that we are all brothers and sisters, that we must care for one another, and that we must be united in addressing our common issues.

I spent Christmas at a small parish in Behror, on the way to Jaipur. A day before Christmas, I read the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Quran and the first chapter of Mathew's Gospel. Something beautiful struck me: how God cares for Mary. In the Quran, we read that Mary gave birth to the child as announced by the angel Gabriel. She is unmarried. She was worried about how she would present the child to the people. It happened exactly like that.

Carrying her child, she brought him to her people. They said,  
'O Mary, you have indeed done something terrible! (Q. 19, 27)

Her relatives were furious and accused her of immorality. She gestures towards the child, and the child speaks, defending his mother. A vulnerable child is defending his mother—something very beautiful.

In the Gospel of Mathew, we find Mary pregnant. Joseph, the man whom she was engaged to, was a man of justice and obedient to God. He was very worried how the woman he was engaged to was pregnant before marriage.

...an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:20)

A silent man, Joseph does not speak a word. A silent, obedient person protects the dignity of Mary. From both these narratives one can draw insightful conclusions as we as Muslims and Christians engage in the Quran and the Bible. What does the Word of God tell us in today’s context? What does it say to us with regard to protecting the dignity of the poor and the vulnerable people?

I wished more Muslims read the Holy Bible and Christians read the Holy Qur’an. Some time ago, while reading medieval commentarial tradition in Islam, I found a heartening reference to a Muslim reading the Bible. Al-Biqai (d. 1489 CE) in his great commentary on the Quran, *nazm al-durar fi tanasub al-ayat wa l-suwar* (String of pearls concerning the harmony of verses and suras) included biblical material. He was criticized for this by his fellow scholars. Al-Biqai affirms that reading the Bible is in line with Islamic tradition (ref. Walid A. Saleh, *In Defence of the Bible: A Critical edition and an introduction to al-Baqai’s Bible treatise* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 57-191. Al-Biqai uses a long passage from the Book of Jeremiah and comments upon the passage in the following words: “a speech that is sublime in style, exquisite in its tenderness, such that it crushes the livers, renders the hearts, and makes the eyes swell with tears” (Ref. Walid A. Saleh, “sublime in style, exquisite in its tenderness: The Hebrew Bible Quotations in al-Biqai’s Quran commentary,” in *Adaptations and Innovations: Studies on the interaction between Jewish and Islamic thought and literature from the early Middle*

*Ages to the late twentieth century*, Dedicated to Professor Joel L. Kramer, eds. Y. Tzvi Langermann and Josef Stern (Paris: Peeters, 2007), 331.

A group of third year students did their seminar with me on Blessed Charles de Foucauld (who will be canonized soon). This seminar gave me an occasion to re-read one of my favorite books on the Blessed titled: *A Christian Hermit in an Islamic World: A Muslim's View of Charles De Foucauld* by Ali Merad.

Charles De Foucauld was a pioneering figure in the field of Christian-Muslim relations. As an adolescent, De Foucauld lost his Catholic faith. While taking a risky exploration of Morocco, he witnessed Muslims' devotion to prayer. His heart cried out: "My God, if you exist, let me come to know you." At the age of 28, under the guidance of his spiritual director he rediscovered God. He declared his faith in the following words: "As soon as I believed in God, I understood that I could not do otherwise than to live for him alone."

As an ordained priest he moved to live in Beni Abbès and later at Tamanrasset among Muslims in the Sahara deserts. He wanted to be among those who were, "the furthest removed, the most abandoned." He wanted all who drew close to him to find in him a brother, "a universal brother." In a great respect for the culture and faith of those among whom he lived, his desire was to "shout the Gospel with his life".

The writer Ali Merad observes that for Charles de Foucauld the best Christian witness among Muslims is to seek to imitate Christ. De Foucauld sought to imitate Christ with extraordinary generosity and deep devotion among Muslims in Morocco. Merad notes that for a Muslim, to imitate one's prophet is the most perfect form of living one's faith. As a student of Christian-Muslim Relations, I readily agree with what he says.

Drawing from the Muslim devotion to Muhammad, it should be said that the best way to share the Gospel of Christ with Muslims is to be a living witness to Jesus among them. It is a great challenge to each disciple of Christ, especially those who are called to a lifelong ministry among Muslims. The challenges may be monumental, but I feel deep consolation. There are great models of the past, like Charles de Foucauld, Louis Massignon, and Jacques Jomier to emulate, but also some wonderful contemporary models whom I have met and whose guidance and support I have received—people like Paul Jackson, Chris Hower and Christian Troll. With much gratitude and love I cannot but surrender myself to the Lord who I believe has called me to live this mission of being a witness among our Muslims brothers and sisters.

In the New Year, a friend of Islamic Studies Association, Prof. Alan Brill came visiting me. He is the Cooperman/Ross Endowed Chair for Jewish-Christian Studies and Director of Graduate Studies at Seton Hall University (USA). I invited a Muslim scholar, Khurshid Khan, over for the conversation, and we had a triologue—a Jew, a Christian and a Muslim—in which we shared about our work and had a meal together.

It is one thing to say that we Christians, Muslims and Jews should come together and work for peace. It is good to hear that. However, I think that it needs deeper reflection than this. I think that triologue between Muslims, Jews and Christians must be made an occasion to celebrate the most cherished faith convictions and practices. Such conversations provide the context for learning through mutual witness. I think that is the most important thing. And our conversation would be engaging and fruitful if it also brings in situations of conflict into our conversation—issues of land and statehood related to Israel and Palestine and the coexistence of the three sets of believers in Jerusalem. I think it is not enough only to be friends and build a bond of love between one another or only to



repent for the past hurts or the past violence against one another and in the present, necessary though these are. It is also not just about listening and learning from one another. The most important thing is that we should find ways to collaborate with God's work of healing, reconciliation and bringing peace. We must collaborate as brothers, sisters and friends. We have an important task in the world today. We must work with all peoples for co-existence, reconciliation, peace and harmony. We really need to work harder together.

I wish you all happy and peaceful days and months ahead! May God protect all of us!

Joseph Victor Edwin SJ



“...I should like now to greet the young Muslims who are with us this evening. I thank you for your presence, which is so important. Together with the young Christians, you are the future of this fine country and of the Middle East in general. Seek to build it up together! And when you are older, continue to live in unity and harmony with Christians. For the beauty of Lebanon is found in this fine symbiosis. It is vital that the Middle East in general, looking at you, should understand that Muslims and Christians, Islam and Christianity, can live side by side without hatred, with respect for the beliefs of each person, so as to build together a free and humane society...”

*Benedict XVI, Apostolic Journey to Lebanon, Message to Young People, Square across from the Maronite Patriarchate of Bkerké, September 15, 2012 (excerpt)*

## A CHRISTMAS TEA PARTY!

By Nigar

The Christmas of 2018 was a very memorable one for me. Sarah, my friend since our college days, had invited me and two other friends of ours over to her house for evening tea on Christmas day—a really interfaith Christmas tea party! We were all excited as we were meeting after a very long time and had so much to share with each other.

We friends landed at Sara's home: a very pretty home, very simple and very tidy. A cute Christmas tree adorned a corner of the drawing room. On the dining table, Sara had laid out rose cookies, some savouries and delicious homemade fruit cake. We girls wished Sara and her family and sat around the table munching the goodies, which were oh so yummy! What impressed me more than anything was the very homely warmth of Sara's home. I felt immensely positive vibrations. Sara and her family were very devout people and led their lives meaningfully, keeping God at the centre.

We girls chattered and shared little tidbits from our lives as we munched on the goodies and showered heaps of praise on Sara for her culinary skills. After coffee, we decided to set off to our homes as it was close to sunset time. Sara also offered to take us all to meet with her mother, who lived with her brother.

Before we set out, I suggested that we offer our gratitude to God and to Sara for inviting us over. I thanked God and sought His blessings on Sara and her family and all our dear friends and their families. After this we set off to meet Sara's mother.

After the very happy time we had together, we went out to fetch autos for us to reach our respective homes. I was thrilled that we were able to make it for Sara's Christmas tea.

Reaching home, as I got about doing some work, my father told me that he had had some pain in his chest for over two days. Assuming it would go away, he had not worried about it. But that day, he told me that the pain was still there.

Although the symptoms now were not alarming, I did not want to take chances. So, I booked a taxi and took him to a hospital. It was around 8 pm then. They took him into the emergency room and asked me to wait outside.

My heart was racing with fear, more so because outside there was another family whose father had just passed away in the same emergency room and they were mourning. This added to my dread. I hoped and prayed that there was nothing serious with my father. After some time, the doctor called me in and said that my father was fine and it was just a catch that had caused the chest pain.

What a relief it was for me!

It was pretty late at night when we got back home. I could not hold back my tears as I thanked God that night in my prayers that my father did not have to stay in the hospital on Christmas night.

I began to feel the positive vibrations that I had gathered at Sara's house. The prayerful ambience of her home had rubbed off on me too. I began to feel the grace of God descending on me and my father. I felt that God had removed the distress that I was feeling, and by His making my father well, I felt God's mercy.

While I strongly believe in the power of prayers, I also believe that Sara's Christmas tea had spiritually energized me to handle the challenge I had to face at the hospital that night. Words cannot express this here. It can only be felt in the heart!

That Christmas of 2018 will remain as a positive memory with me, a holy night and a silent night with my old father sleeping at home on his bed at home and not on a hospital bed!

I wish all my friends celebrating Christmas this year (2021) a very peaceful and blessed time!

May all creatures in this world stay safe and healthy!

Amen! Ameen!

# POPE FRANCIS' CHURCH WITHOUT FRONTIERS: ADDRESSING THE REFUGEE CRISIS AND FORCED MIGRATION THROUGH CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM FRATERNITY

By Marnie D. Racaza

Cardinal Michael Czerny, the undersecretary of the Migrants and Refugees Section of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, emphasized that moving is “built into our genes” and that “migration has been part of human life since the beginning.”<sup>1</sup> While it is true that moving is innate in human beings, many of the narratives in the migration realities require preferential attention and response because of their deplorable conditions. In their 2020 report, *International Organization for Migration* laid out the major migration and displacement events since their report in 2018. According to the report, the number of international migrants globally in 2019 has reached to 272 million, with nearly two-thirds being labour migrants. This comprises 3.5% of the world’s population which means that majority of the people globally are still residing in the country where they were born.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, the report also presented the statistics and conditions of refugees, internally displaced persons, and stateless persons. In 2018, the global refugee population was 25.9 million; the internally displaced persons due to violence reached to 41.3 million; and the number of stateless persons was 3.9 million.<sup>3</sup> The report enumerated the events that have caused great hardship and trauma as well as loss of life: the displacement of millions of people due to conflict (such as within and from the Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen, the Central

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Reese, “Moving is built into our genes; it’s part of us,” *National Catholic Reporter*, March 6, 2017, <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/faith-and-justice/moving-built-our-genes-its-part-us> (accessed on December 9, 2020).

<sup>2</sup>International Organization for Migration, *World Migration Report 2020*, [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr\\_2020.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr_2020.pdf), (accessed November 25, 2020), 2.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.

African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan), extreme violence (such as inflicted upon Rohingya forced to seek safety in Bangladesh), severe economic and political instability (such as faced by millions of Venezuelans), and large-scale displacement triggered by climate and weather-related hazards which occurred in many parts of the world including Mozambique, the Philippines, China, India and the United States of America.<sup>4</sup>

According to Henri Nouwen, “When millions of people experience the same event or series of critical events in the world, these events become occasions to read the signs of the times.”<sup>5</sup> With millions of people displaced in the world, indeed the migration or refugee crisis is a sign of the times that needs to be read and discerned. This is a concern particularly close to the heart of Pope Francis. In his 2018 World Day of Migrants and Refugees message, he confided that the lamentable situation of migrants and refugees is a sign of the times which he has strived to interpret with the Holy Spirit, ever since he visited Lampedusa in 2013.<sup>6</sup> This 2013 trip in Italy’s migrant island of Lampedusa, which was his first official trip as pope, painted the image of Pope Francis as a “migrant pope”<sup>7</sup> who has expressed preferential option for and commitment to accompanying migrants in empathy and solidarity.<sup>8</sup>

Months after the trip in Lampedusa, Pope Francis released *Evangelii Gaudium* and in this apostolic exhortation he first mentioned an image and vision of a Church inspired from the stories, situations, and struggles of the migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers: Church

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 2.

<sup>5</sup>Henri Nouwen, “Discern the Signs of the Times,” *Discernment* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013), 90.

<sup>6</sup>Francis, “Welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating migrants and refugees,” *Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees* (2018), August 15, 2017, [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco\\_20170815\\_world-migrants-day-2018.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20170815_world-migrants-day-2018.html) (accessed on December 7, 2020).

<sup>7</sup>J. Kevin Appleby, “The Migrant Pope,” *America* (July 6-13, 2015).

<sup>8</sup>Jonathan Y. Tan, “Pope Francis’s Preferential Option for Migrants, Refugees, and Asylum-Seekers,” *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 43 (2019): 58.

without frontiers. He then urged all countries to generously open their borders to create new forms of cultural synthesis rather than being fearful of losing their local identity.<sup>9</sup> Pope Francis recognizes that the Church without frontiers can create significant contributions in responding to the challenges and concerns faced by the people on the move. Since the start of his papacy, Pope Francis has always been consistent in including the conditions of the migrants and refugees in many discourses, reflections, and prayers, in exhorting people to protect and promote the dignity of people on the move, and in doing concrete actions showing fraternity. He uses the platform of the Church with its global reach to propose a response that involves all of society<sup>10</sup> and entails fraternal collaborations with other communities and institutions. One of such institutions is the religion of Islam.

In his historic trip to the United Arab Emirates on 2019, during an interreligious meeting at the Founder's Memorial in Dubai, Pope Francis co-signed the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb<sup>11</sup> who is the most authoritative voice of Sunni Islam. It is a document that exhorts all persons who have faith in God and faith in human fraternity to unite and work together by adopting a culture of dialogue as the path.<sup>12</sup> Explicitly mentioned in the document are the orphans, widows, refugees and those exiled

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<sup>9</sup>Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, November 24, 2013, [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html), (accessed on December 8, 2020), 210. Hereafter referred to as *EG* with paragraph number.

<sup>10</sup>David Holdcroft, "Migration and the Renewal of the Church: The Theology of Francis through the Lens of Forced Migration," *Grace & Truth* 2 (2017): 29.

<sup>11</sup>Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, "The Document on Human Fraternity," *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*, <https://www.usccb.org/committees/ecumenical-interreligious-affairs/document-human-fraternity> (accessed on December 10, 2021).

<sup>12</sup>Francis and Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, *A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, February 4, 2019, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco\\_20190204\\_documento-fratellanza-umana.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-umana.html) (accessed on December 6, 2021).

from their homes and their countries, victims of wars, persecution, and injustice, and peoples who have lost their security, peace, and the possibility of living together.<sup>13</sup> The declaration is an appeal to put an end to wars and condemns the scourges of terrorism and violence, especially by weaponizing religion.<sup>14</sup> It pointed out that these tragedies are consequences of a deviation from religious teachings, a result of political manipulation of religion and from misconstrued interpretations done by some religious groups for the purpose of achieving political, economic, and worldly objectives.<sup>15</sup> Most often, these mindless and violent movements are the leading causes of migration, displacement, and statelessness. Inspired by this encounter between two prominent religious leaders and the many international, regional, national and local initiatives to promote interreligious and intercultural dialogue, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed February 4, the date when the document was signed, as the International Day of Human Fraternity.<sup>16</sup> A year after this historical religious event, Pope Francis promulgated another social encyclical entitled *Fratelli Tutti* in which the themes of fraternity and social friendships enshrined. The papal letter mentioned on several occasions the plight of migrants, refugees, and displaced people and to respond by welcoming, protecting, promoting, and integrating them.<sup>17</sup> The pontiff expressed that the document was significantly influenced by his encounter with the grand imam, a religious leader who is not Christian. This may be a breakthrough in Catholic thought and in

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Amedeo Lomonaco and Linda Bordoni, “1st anniversary of Document on Human Fraternity,” *Vatican News*, February 3, 2020, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-02/pope-grand-imam-document-human-fraternity-anniversary.html> (accessed on December 10, 2020).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*.

<sup>16</sup> “Human fraternity for peace and cooperation,” *United Nations*, <https://www.un.org/en/observances/human-fraternity> (accessed on December 10, 2021).

<sup>17</sup> Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, October 3, 2020, [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html) (accessed on November 25, 2020), 129. Hereafter referred to as *FT* with paragraph number.

interreligious relationships, significantly advancing the Christian-Muslim relations in the long term, especially in addressing a wide range of the conflicts and injustices that mar the globe today like the refugee crisis and forced migration.<sup>18</sup>

Pope Francis also showed profound acts of compassion toward and solidarity with forced migrants to amplify his message about their conditions. He had Christmas gifts delivered to residents of a migrant shelter near Vatican, visited a Jesuit-run refugee shelter in Rome, sent Easter cakes to Christian refugees in Iraq,<sup>19</sup> and washed the feet of eleven migrants during the Holy Thursday celebration in 2016 which included four Nigerian Catholic men, three Coptic women from Eritrea, three young Muslim men from Syria, Pakistan and Mali and a young Hindu man from India.<sup>20</sup> He went further by taking three families of Syrian refugees back to Rome after visiting the frontline of Europe's migrant crisis at a camp in Greece in 2016<sup>21</sup> and welcomed thirty-three refugees, including fourteen minors, sponsored by the Vatican in 2019.<sup>22</sup>

Pope Francis and Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb acknowledge in the document the equality in rights, duties and dignity of all

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<sup>18</sup> David Hollenbach, "Pope Francis' Encyclical and Solidarity with Muslims," *Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs*, October 14, 2020, <https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/pope-francis-encyclical-and-solidarity-with-muslims> (accessed on December 6, 2020).

<sup>19</sup> Appleby, "Migrant Pope," 25.

<sup>20</sup> Gerard O'Connell, "Pope Francis washes the feet of 8 men and 4 women of different religions and countries," *America: The Jesuit Review*, March 24, 2016, <https://www.americamagazine.org/content/dispatches/pope-francis-washes-feet-refugees-different-religions-and-countries> (accessed on December 9, 2020).

<sup>21</sup> Philip Pullella and Karolina Tagaris, "Pope returns with 12 refugees after visit to Greek island," *Reuters*, April 16, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-pope-lesbos-idUSKCN0XD09D> (accessed on December 9, 2020).

<sup>22</sup> Claire Giangrave, "Pope Francis welcomes refugees to a new life in Italy," *National Catholic Reporter*, December 4, 2019, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/pope-francis-welcomes-refugees-new-life-italy> (accessed on December 9, 2020).



people, and the call to live together as brothers and sisters.<sup>23</sup> In his book *Humanity in Crisis*, David Hollenbach, SJ emphasized that humanitarian principles, human rights, and religious norms relativize borders or frontiers because all people share a common humanity. This shared humanity means that every person is a member of a single human community that extends across frontiers or borders separating countries and cultures from each other.<sup>24</sup> Concern for humanity means that responsibilities reach across borders and to act in accord with humanity is to act with inclusive concern toward all men and women, with special concern for those who face persecution, oppression, poverty, violence and other forms of suffering. He argued that the borders separating people according to their ethnic, religious, cultural or national differences do not set the boundaries on the moral duty to uphold and protect human dignity.<sup>25</sup>

Francis suggests how a new, transformative collaboration between Christians and Muslims might set a model of other forms of interreligious partnership and concretely exhibits how interreligious collaboration can be a model for wider forms of global cooperation needed today<sup>26</sup> like responding to the growing and intensifying displacement, suffering, and homelessness of millions of people in the world.



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<sup>23</sup> Cf. *A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*.

<sup>24</sup> David Hollenbach, S.J., “Borders and Shared Humanity,” *Humanity in Crisis: Ethical and Religious Response to Refugees* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2019), 63.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Hollenbach, “Pope Francis’ Encyclical and Solidarity with Muslims.”

## IS DIALOGUE EVIDENT WITH POPE FRANCIS?

By Alniño B. Eder

*“Before the bishop blesses the people, I ask that you pray to the Lord so that he will bless me: the prayer of the people asking the blessing for their Bishop. Let us make, in silence, this prayer: your prayer over me.”* These were the first few words of Pope Francis after his election in March 2013. Being the “first” in many ways, the pontiff shocked the whole world, when, before giving the traditional *Urbi et Orbi* blessing, he first bowed down in silence and asked for the blessings of the faithful. Since then, Pope Francis continued to surprise everyone with his refreshing and unconventional gestures and words as the highest leader of the Catholic Church. One of them is his effort of reaching out to others including our Muslim brothers and sisters. This paper aims to discuss and highlight Pontiff’s efforts in establishing dialogical relations with Muslims.

It is an undeniable fact that Pope Francis is one of the most traveled Pontiffs in history. Although the world is facing the threat of the COVID19 pandemic, he did not stop from showing his solidarity with our suffering brethren around the world. Since the beginning of his pontificate, Muslim territories were included in his itineraries. The following are the snippets of Pope Francis’ trips to meet our Muslim brothers and sisters.

First on the list were the Palestinian territories as well as Jordan and Israel in May 2014. King Abdullah II received him with a warm embrace. Pope’s itinerary in these places included meeting with the Syrian refugees, pilgrimage to the Holy Land and Bethlehem, a silent prayer near the separation wall erected by the Israelis, and visits to the holy sites of Islam and Judaism including the Al-Asqa mosque and the Western Wall. It was followed by another visit, this time to Albania in September 2014. Here, Pope Francis lauded

the peaceful coexistence of Catholics, Orthodox, and Muslims in the country, which he considered as a precious gift. In November 2014, he flew to Turkey where he visited Istanbul's Blue Mosque. Together with a senior Islamic cleric, the Pontiff prayed in clasped hands, a gesture of fraternity with our Muslim brothers and sisters. This is reminiscent of what his predecessor, Benedict XVI, did when he visited the same place in 2006. Aside from that, Pope Francis also met the Christian community, which is comparatively small in number (some 80,000) from the vast 75 million Muslims in the land.

After a year, the Holy Father spent almost 26 hours in a country devastated by sectarian violence – the Central African Republic (November 2015). In Bangui, he visited a mosque where he renewed his call against hatred, revenge, and violence because Christians and Muslims are “brothers (and sisters)”. In October 2016, Pope Francis expressed his joy that multiculturalism and complementarity of cultures were evident in a predominantly Muslim country like Azerbaijan. Although his visit to this territory was brief, he left a remarkable memory to the people of this land by emphasizing their effort of mutual collaboration and respect.

Six months later, in April 2017, Pope Francis became the second pontiff of the modern time to set foot in Egypt, seventeen years after Pope John Paul II. Here, the Holy Father emphasized that the culture of encounter, dialogue, respect, and fraternity are important elements of true faith. He also visited Al-Azhar University and met with Muslim religious scholars and leaders there. He also met with Christians who comprise ten percent of country's 92 million populations.

Meanwhile, towards the end of that year, in December, Pope Francis visited Myanmar and Bangladesh where he asked for forgiveness from the Muslim Rohingya refugees. *“In the name of all those*

*who have persecuted you, who have harmed you, in the face of the world's indifference, I ask for your forgiveness*”, he said in front of the sixteen Rohingya refugees. He also encouraged the Buddhist clergy to help combat the culture of prejudice and hatred in the land. Pope Francis stayed in the region for four days.

The most celebrated Papal visit to a Muslim country happened in February 2019 when Pope Francis set his foot in the United Arab Emirates. He was the first Pope who visited the region and was reminiscent of what the great saint, Francis of Assisi, did 800 years ago with the Sultan Malek al-Kamil of Egypt. He was welcomed by the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed and the Grand Imam of Al Azhar University, Dr. Ahmed el-Tayeb. His itineraries in the peninsula included an interfaith meeting where he and el-Tayeb signed *“A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together”* and a series of meetings with the Muslim elders at the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque and with the Crown Prince at the presidential palace. Pope Francis also met and blessed the congregation gathered at St. Joseph, UAE’s first Catholic Church. He concluded his three-day visit in the peninsula in a multi-lingual Papal Mass with an estimated 180,000 attendees at Zayed Sports City. The following month, Pope Francis landed in Morocco *“as a pilgrim of peace and fraternity”*. King Mohammed VI greeted him despite the inclement weather during that time. In his visit, he stressed that, *“Christians and Muslims believe in God, the Creator and the Merciful, who created people to live like brothers and sisters, respecting each other in their diversity, and helping one another in their needs”*.

The most recent visit of Pope Francis to a Muslim country happened in March 2021 in Iraq. Despite the threat in security and the risks of COVID19, the Holy Father visited Iraq to be in solidarity with his suffering Christian flock, to call for peace and reconciliation, and to contribute to Christian-Muslim relations. Again, Pope Francis was

the first Pope to visit the land, although his predecessor, John Paul II, made earlier attempts. The highlight of his three-day pilgrimage was his visit to Ur, Abraham's birthplace; and his meeting with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani in Najaf. Al-Sistani is considered as the most influential leader of the Shiite Muslims while Najaf is the third holiest pilgrimage site for Shiite Muslims, next to Mecca and Medina. In that meeting, Pope Francis commended the efforts of the Shiite Muslims in defending the most vulnerable and persecuted. In response, al-Sistani encouraged all Christians in Iraq to live with all Iraqis in security and peace while enjoying in full all their constitutional rights. Pope Francis also visited the Assyrian Catholic cathedral in Baghdad where 50 individuals were killed during the 2010 terrorist attack. He encouraged Christians to bear witness to the love of Christ in every time and place because that is the message of the Gospel. It was a moving experience to see the gathering of people - Catholic and non-Catholics together with Pope Francis, in a place marked by the ruins of violence, war, and terrorism of the past.

Pope Francis' gestures translate *Nostra Aetate*, the Church's declaration on the relation of the Church to Non-Christians, into action. The document reads:

*The Church regards with esteem also the Muslims. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; the merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. (Nostra Aetate, 3)*

The Church, since the time of the second Vatican ecumenical council, "*urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual*

*understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom*". The Holy Father is faithful to this call and through his actions and efforts towards our Muslim brethren; he shows that peace is possible and attainable.

In his recent encyclical letter, *Fratelli Tutti*, he emphasized that "*approaching, speaking, listening, looking at, coming to know and understand one another, and finding common ground: all these things are summed up in the one word 'dialogue'*" (Fratelli Tutti, 198). The components of dialogue that he mentioned were all evident in the way he encounter our Muslim brothers and sisters. He takes the initiative of crossing the boundaries of geographical location, cultural differences, security, and even the threat of this pandemic. He took those risks to engage in meaningful conversation with them. Whenever he visits a Muslim territory, he always emphasizes that he is there to bring a message of peace. Pope Francis is very clear in his objectives – he is going in these places not to proselytize and teach these people but to encounter them. His starting point is always the other's culture and beliefs and not his own. He shows that dialogue is respectful, strives for consensus, and seeks the truth.

The purpose of dialogue is not to win an argument or to prove that I am right and the other person is wrong. It is about meeting in the middle and finding the common ground, as the Holy Father emphasizes. He is teaching us that dialogue is important if we want to encounter and help one another. Building that "culture of encounter" is about having the passion to meet others, to seek points of contact, to build bridges, and to plan and execute a project with inclusivity (cf. *Fratelli Tutti*, 216).

The challenge now for us Christians is to join Pope Francis in embracing a culture of dialogue and encounter. While maintaining that we have the fullness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, we also acknowledge that salvation is not exclusive to Catholics. Instead,

*“the plan of salvation also embraces those who acknowledge the Creator, and among these, the Muslims are first: they profess to hold the faith of Abraham and along with us they worship the one merciful God who will judge humanity on the last day”* (Lumen Gentium, 16). We are called to become the modern-day agents of evangelization and propagators of the faith. We remain steadfast in our faith in Jesus Christ and the gospel we proclaim yet we are also called to be *“open to understanding those of the other side party and knowing that dialogue can enrich each side”* (Evangelii Gaudium, 251).



“When the religious sense reaches maturity it gives rise to a perception in the believer that faith in God, Creator of the universe and Father of all, must encourage relations of universal brotherhood among human beings.”

***Benedict XVI, message for the XX anniversary interreligious prayer meeting for peace, Assisi, Italy, September 2, 2006***

# IS DIALOGUE POSSIBLE BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS?

By Richard Niyukuri

## Introduction

In our experience, life without dialogue is the dullest one. There exist different forms of dialogue: first, there is a *dialogue of daily life*, where people openly share their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupation while trying to live together in peace and harmony. Second, *dialogue of action*, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people; third, *dialogue of theological exchange*, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of the respective religious heritages, and fourth, the *dialogue of religious experience*, where Christians and Muslim learn to appreciate each other's spiritual values.

While we recognize that dialogue is important in our relational life, we find different obstacles to dialogue. It is not easy to practice dialogue. However, knowing its importance, we keep on trying our best. What is the foundation of dialogue? Is it really possible to dialogue with people, especially with those from other faiths? Who are our models in such a dialogue? What attitudes should we have to conduct a fruitful dialogue? Is dialogue between Christians and Muslims really possible? In the following passages I will tackle the above questions.

## Foundation of Dialogue

God revealed himself to us as a relational God. Christians affirm that God is one, and God's nature is triune: Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. God created us in His own image and likeness. Thus human nature is marked with relationality. God extended to us, his creatures, a relationship in the person of Jesus Christ who became



flesh. God continues to journey with us in an unbreakable dialogue. In dialogue between the three persons of the Trinity, the creation is made good. In this sense, we are created to be in dialogue and relationship with God, our creator, with each other, and with the whole creation. It follows that, without dialogue, we cannot do anything good in our life. As created in the image of God, we reflect His marvelous work. We admit that only through dialogue we can produce what is good.

Jesus, the visible embodiment of the Father's love, shows us how important is to dialogue with others. His earthly life was characterized by love without frontiers. Such love enabled him to break the boundaries that were marked between the Jews and the Gentiles. He engaged in dialogue with the Gentiles many times in many places. For instance, he interacted with the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mark 7:24-30) and the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-42). When he was not welcomed in a Samaritan village, James and John asked him if they could call fire down from heaven to destroy them; however, Jesus turned and rebuked them (Lk 9:51-56). Moreover, the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke and the praise of the Roman officer's faith in Matthew are other striking examples of Jesus' openness towards non-Jewish people. Although his interaction with non-Jews was viewed as a scandal, he never stopped; he proclaimed the good news of salvation to all irrespective of social and religious status.

### **Our response to the call to dialogue**

Despite the call of God to dialogue with people of other faiths, especially with Muslims, the Church is often reluctant to engage with them. Some Christians and Muslims continue to nurse and spread prejudices. We forget the prophetic voices that call upon Christians to live in peace with people of other faiths. Saint Francis of Assisi is a beautiful model for us. In 1219, during the fifth Crusades, St. Francis accompanied the armies of Western Europe to Egypt. His desire was to speak peacefully with Muslim people

about Christianity, even if it meant dying as a martyr. When Francis of Assisi and Malek al-Kamil met, both quickly realized that the other already knew and loved God. Both men were transformed by the encounter. This encounter of the Sultan and the Saint is a wonderful paradigm for interfaith dialogue for our time.

The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Lumen Gentium*), no. 16 proclaims: “*The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place among them are the Muslims who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one merciful God who, on the last day, will judge mankind.*” On this solid theological ground, the Church can call for a dialogue that leads to forgiveness and mutual understanding. Since God is the beginning and the end of all things, we are all called brothers and sisters; we ought to work together without violence and without deceit to build up the world in a spirit of genuine peace. On this, Pope Francis is giving us an example through his meetings with Muslims. He promotes, in many of his messages, encyclicals and speeches, a dialogue that excludes no one. From him, we see that dialogue with Muslims is not only possible but also essential.

### **Our attitude for a better dialogue**

We, Catholics, are called to practice dialogue of life. We should be eager to dialogue with others by way of love alone, which excludes nobody. Despite differences in religions, we can find common grounds in our different experiences of God. Dialogue demands that we truly listen to the other; but, before we can listen, we must see the other as a precious human being created in the image and likeness of God. Reading *Nostra Aetate*, we find that, in our time, dialogue is an essential characteristic of living our faith. We dialogue with Muslims in order to understand them, appreciate them and enrich each other.

In our life, we realize that dialogue is possible. We Christians and Muslims worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful

and almighty, the creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to men (Nostra Aetate no. 3). On this, we adore the same God, albeit in different ways. We belong to God, the Creator. We all have the same Spirit in us, although with different interpretations. We recall that the one God, that Muslims and Christians worship, desires the salvation of all. It follows that we are all one human family. We realize that we all are the birds of same feathers. We should not be afraid to dialogue with Muslims.

Interreligious Dialogue is not to forget our faith, but get enriched in our respective faiths. I remember once we had an interreligious dialogue with Muslims in our community. One Muslim was given time to share about his religion. He started asking one sister who was sitting in front of him in this way; “Do you believe in God”, the sister answered, “Yes”. The Muslims continued, “Do you submit yourself to the will of God?”, “Yes”, answered the sister. Then he said, “So, you are a Muslim”. The sister was confused as I too felt uneasy. We believe in God and submit ourselves to His will; however, we are Christians; we are not Muslims. To find some common grounds in Islam and Christianity does not mean that one has to renounce his religion. We are aware that there are profound differences in our faith convictions. We learn from each other to be faithful to our respective faiths. We should open our listening hearts and minds as we give heed to the sharing of the other. We should put aside prejudices and biases in order to be enriched by the faith of the other. We should learn from our past mistakes by entering a new era of conversation. We should encompass all positive and constructive relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed to mutual understanding and enrichment, in obedience to truth and respect for freedom. We are required to be patient. We are called to listen to what the Spirit can also suggest to others. They can offer useful hints for reaching a deeper understanding of what the Christian already possesses in the revealed deposit as Saint Pope John Paul II suggested in his homily on Pentecost Day 11 June 2000.

We are reminded that dialogue does not depend on success in achieving mutual understanding and enrichment, rather it flows from God's initiative in entering into dialogue with humankind and from the example of Jesus Christ whose life, death, and resurrection gave to the dialogue its ultimate expression. We need to listen to the Lord so that we may be able to listen to others in their diversity. Moreover, we recognize that the Spirit of God leads every man and woman from within. The Spirit that moves us is the same that moves the Muslims. Keeping aloof from others is tantamount to rejecting the Spirit of God that inhabits every person. By giving ear to Spirit that moves us, we, Christians and Muslims, can journey together as pilgrims towards a new horizon of peace and harmony among all peoples.

## **Conclusion**

The need for dialogue remains a priority in our society that is wounded by violence and hatred. Dialogue comes from God and brings people to God. Dialogue is fruitless and frustrating if it is not based on God. Dialogue is fruitful in when it is filled with love and sacrifice. In other ways, dialogue will be just a slogan, and never a way of life if it is founded and rooted on love.

“...It is not possible to build bridges between people while forgetting God. But the converse is also true: it is not possible to establish true links with God, while ignoring other people. Hence it is important to intensify dialogue among the various religions, and I am thinking particularly of dialogue with Islam. At the Mass marking the beginning of my ministry, I greatly appreciated the presence of so many civil and religious leaders from the Islamic world...”

*Francis, Address to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, March 22, 2013 (excerpt)*

## A CHRISTIAN IN A MILAD CONFERENCE

By Joseph Victor Edwin SJ

I feel very grateful to be here to speak on this occasion of Milad. I am honored as a Christian to be invited to speak on the beloved Prophet of Islam, on the occasion of the celebration of his birth.

I am a Catholic priest, a Jesuit. I consider myself as a student-scholar. I have a long way to go. So, I say I am a student-scholar. I teach Christian Theology and Islam and Christian-Muslim relations at Vidyajyoti College of Theology in Delhi and in other places in India. When I began my journey studying and exploring Islam and interfaith relations, my mentor pointed out to me that if you have to study deeply Islam and Muslims, you must first of all cultivate a respectful attitude towards the Prophet of Islam. As a primary step, he asked me to read the books of Montgomery Watt: *Muhammad and Mecca* and *Muhammad at Medina*.

I read these books very carefully. What I learnt was that the author, with great respect for Muslim beliefs, approaches both Western and Muslim sources and gives a good analysis of the social factors that influenced the life and teachings of the Prophet of Islam. I read the book *Muhammad, Prophet and Statesman*. In this book, the author gives an excellent socio-historical analysis of the development of the life and the message of the Prophet of Islam. Then, I read Syed Ahmad Khan's essays on the life of Prophet Muhammad. I found this book difficult to read because the author connects with several subjects and gives long quotations. But I found it very helpful for me, a Christian. This book brought me closer to understanding the Prophet of Islam. Then, I read a number of biographies of the Prophet, both in English and in Tamil, my mother tongue. So, all these readings helped me to grow in respect for the Prophet. This is the first step that I took.

Secondly, I started working to promote better Christian-Muslim relations in different places. Wherever I went, I made good contacts

with Muslim brothers and sisters, including everybody and excluding none. I began to see the Prophet of Islam in and through the eyes of my Muslim brothers and sisters. I learnt that Muslims see him as a perfect man, a perfect believer, and pray for peace to be upon him. They see the Prophet as someone who actualized the Holy Quran in his life. By actualizing the holy Quran in his life, he has become a beautiful model for Muslims. And not only for Muslims, is he a beautiful model, a mercy for this world. He stimulates the Muslim world to strive to the heights of mysticism and submit to the right way in the conduct of all worldly affairs. I learnt from my Muslim brothers and sisters that they see the Prophet as an ideal man, the greatest mystic and a wise statesman.

The name of the Prophet of Islam is proclaimed five times a day with the profession of faith announced in the call from the minarets of mosques and it penetrates deeply in the hearts of Muslims, reminding them about how closely connected is the personality of the Prophet with the message of Islam, which they are called upon to share with others. So, dear friends, this was the second learning I received. I learnt that growing in respect for the Prophet (peace be upon him) is growing in respect for the message of Islam.

And, on the third level, while attending many *milad* functions like this one, I witness to Muslims' tender and loving devotion to the Prophet of Islam. The poetry in praise of him and speeches on the excellence and the contemporary relevance of the Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him) moved me towards a love for the Prophet of Islam.

Moreover, as a teacher of Christian-Muslim relations, I have noticed that many Christian students often frame Muhammad merely as warrior, political leader, and law giver. They are not sensitive to the deep devotion and tender love that Muslims have for their prophet. I draw their attention to how the Qur'an addresses Muhammad. The Qur'an says: 'truly thou art of an exalted (*azim*) character (Q.68:4). Further I point out to them that Qur'an uses the same adjective to itself, the mighty (*azim*) Qur'an (15:87). The exalted character of

Muhammad is clear from the fact that he had assimilated the Qur'an into his very being. Often Muslim students point out that after the death of Muhammad upon asking to comment upon the character of Muhammad, his wife Aisha said: 'his character was the Qur'an.

Moreover, Muslims, especially those who follow the mystical paths, consider that Muhammad is the first link in the spiritual chain that they aspire to reach. His ascension through heavens into divine presence, which the Sura 17 of the Holy Qur'an alludes to, is the prototype of mystic's spiritual ascension into the intimate presence of God. A line by Allama Iqbal says: 'For the courageous, the heavenly throne is only one step away.' This is a message that the Night of Ascension has for Muslims.

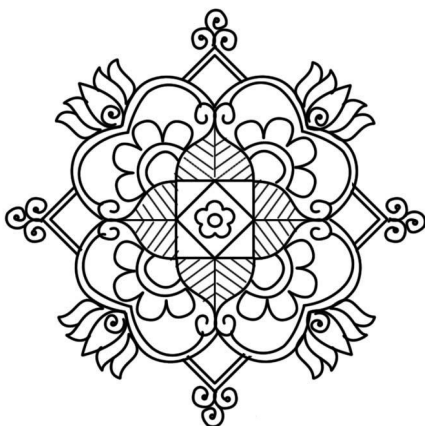
Many Muslims believe that the Ascension of Muhammad to heavens remarkably reveals that the gulf between the finite and Infinite can be bridged. Thus, Muhammad's personality has gained a great importance for spiritual lives of Muslims. Christians are hardly aware of this important dimension to the Muslims' devotion to Muhammad. Muhammad is the ideal spiritual leader whom Muslims love to imitate. Many Christian students find it difficult to understand the quality of mystical love Muslims feel for Muhammad. I believe that feeling the heart of Muslims and their love for their prophet might help Christians to open up for mutually enriching conversation.

Finally, I end my conversation with you by quoting from the biography of the Prophet by Fethullah Glen which touched my heart:

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is like a spring of pure water in the heart of the desert, a source of light in an all-enveloping darkness. Whoever appeals to this spring can take as much water as needed to quench their thirst, to become purified of all their sins, and to become illumined with the light of belief. Mercy was like a magic key in his hands, for with it he opened hearts that were so hardened and rusty that no one thought they could be opened. But

he did even more; he lit a torch of belief in them. (M. Fethullah Gulen, *The Messenger of God Muhammad* p. 91-92. The Light, Inc. New Jersey 2005).

So, friends, this is how I reflect my love for the Prophet of Islam. Thank you, dear brothers and sisters.



“In this context, and precisely here in the land of encounter and dialogue, and before this distinguished audience, I wish to reaffirm the Catholic Church’s respect for Islam, for authentic Islam: the Islam that prays, that is concerned for those in need. Recalling the errors of the past, including the most recent past, all believers ought to unite their efforts to ensure that God is never made the hostage of human ambitions. Hatred, fanaticism and terrorism profane the name of God and disfigure the true image of man.”

*John Paul II, address on Culture, Art and Science, Astana, Kazakhstan, September 24, 2001*



## CARING FOR OUR COMMON HOME: A DIALOGUE WITH CREATION

By Bryan Avila

*“Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another.” (Laudato Si, 42)*

Dialogue, by definition, means an engagement between persons who hold diverse views. It is more than an exchange of information, but the personal dimension stands in the foreground. When we speak about what matters to us, this creates inner personal bonds with others. This holds particularly true for discussions on religious and ethical topics, which concern everyone, touching our innermost being and identity. Moreover, it has to be taken into account that an inherent tension characterizes dialogue: it requires on firm and reflected identities of those who participate in it. Religious convictions are not to be left behind but are the basis of interreligious dialogue. Thus, identity and convictions enhance dialogue and may even be deepened and intensified in the dialogical process. However, unfortunately, the care for creation often falls low on the list of priorities for many Christians.

We believe that all in creation is interconnected, and there is a deep relation between God, the self, others, and creation. Interconnectedness means personal encounters and dialogue that demand respect for others and their freedom. We must rediscover how our culture of dialogue and our search for peace are deeply connected with our understanding and experience of dialogue with creation. It is not only on the level of science and development but also on the spiritual and ethical dimension of life where cultures and religions have an important role.

## **Ecology Today**

In 1988 Time magazine' "Man of the Year" was Earth itself. This Earth has been there for millennia and has wounded by human beings. It has been pushed and prodded, shaped and reshaped, sometimes beyond recognition. Global climate change is one of the significant threats to ecology. It has already damaged and will continue to damage the balance in the world with very alarming effects like the rise of the ocean level, the lashing of more intense storms, and the worsening of droughts. We are now standing at a climate crossroads: the world has already warmed 1.1°C since the Industrial Revolution. If we pass 2°C, we risk hitting one or more major tipping points, where the effects of climate change go from advancing gradually to changing dramatically overnight, reshaping the planet.

This climate change and many other environmental threats pose many future questions and challenge us to reflect on moral and religious responsibilities towards mother earth. One important answer is that humanity needs to rediscover and appreciate nature as part of the creation of God.

## **Christianity and Laudato Si**

The story of creation in the book of Genesis has a constant emphasis that God considers creation to be "good." God created humans in his image... male and female he created them (Gen 1:26-27). Earth and its resources were given as a gift for humnunity. Unfortunately, people forget that creation is part of God's love and the nature is charged with the grandeur of God. Earth visible embodiment of God's dialogue with humanity. The notion that humans have 'dominion over all living things on earth' (Gen. 1:28) is not a licence for 'exploitation' as it is now happening all around, but it is a responsibility. We need a paradigm shift from dominion to stewardship.

With Pope Francis's leadership, the Catholic Church responded to the problem through his encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si*. An integral ecology is one of the key concepts of *Laudato Si*. It emerges from the understanding that everything is connected and that "today's problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis." We are part and always be part of nature. "Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live (LS 139)," writes the Pope. However, in our times, I think the biggest problem that we are facing is losing the sense of connection with one another, with the cosmos and with God. And the effect of this disconnection is very evident in the environmental crisis we are facing right now. I also believe that we do not need to look outside to see the problem; we need to look at what is happening inside us. "The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast" [Benedict XVI, *Homily for the Solemn Inauguration of the Petrine Ministry* (24 April 2005)]. The external things are just mere reflections of what is inside.

### **Islam on Creation and Ecology**

The Islamic world is sensitive to the importance of 'dialogue with creation'. Muslim scholars present the voice of Islam related to dialogue with creation starting from the Qur'anic concept of stewardship (khalīfa in Arabic/ successor). Surah 2:30 says: "I am setting on the earth a vice-regent (khalīfa)" and in the same line of message, a Hadith says: "Verily, this world is sweet and appealing and Allah placed you as vice-regents therein, he will see what you do." The Qur'an always reminds to maintain balance in all things: "Do not mischief the earth after it has been set in order" (Surah 7,85).

Nana Firman, a co-founder of the Global Muslim Climate Network, recalled that in early 2015—before Pope Francis made known his intention to produce *Laudato Si*—Muslim environmental leaders were drafting a statement supporting the UN climate negotiations to occur in Paris at year's end.

She spoke of launching a campaign of clean energy for mosques in the Middle East and North Africa, joining the battle to fight rampant deforestation in Indonesia, and the need to take action in low-lying Bangladesh, which is threatened the rising of sea-level. More challenges await in drought-prone sub-Saharan Africa, she acknowledged.

They also train imams as environmental scholars to speak from the pulpit to the community and to the public. Firman believed that: “When people come to the mosque, they see solar panels and they learn about why they are important. All of this is connected to our faith. We are stewards upon this Earth.”

### **Final Thoughts**

Earth is our common home. In these critical time, we must act, we must act together. As Pope Francis wrote, “All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents (LS, 14).”

We cannot focus our attention only on the love of God and the love of neighbor without also emphasizing the love for creation. In principle, the love for creation is already included in the concept of love of God and neighbor, but today we have to make a bigger effort to emphasize it. If we only understand and appreciate that everything is connected, we will realize to take a stand and do our part in saving and protecting our home. Like Emma Restall Orr wrote that “the important element is how all things are connected. Every thought and action sends shivers of energy into the world around us, which affects all creation. Perceiving the world as a web of connectedness helps us overcome the feelings of separation. This connection with all life increases our sense of responsibility for every move, every attitude, allowing us to see clearly that each soul does indeed make a difference to the whole.”



## LOVE TO UNDERSTAND AND UNDERSTAND TO LOVE

By Midhun J Francis SJ

The Jesuits maintain a longstanding relationship with the Muslims of India. Jesuits were at the Mughal Court engaging with the Emperor Akbar and his courtiers in plain polemics. Times have changed. Religion is not perfect in and of itself, but when a person follows God's will in his/her life, he becomes a real believer in God. The "Document human fraternity," co-authored by Pope Francis and The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, is the strongest proof that the Muslim Brotherhood recognized this beautiful concept as well "The pluralism and the diversity of religions, colour, sex, race and language are willed by God in His wisdom, through which He created human beings." they proclaim together. This is a celebration of life in all of its glory.

*A New Spirit in Christian-Muslim Relations in India: Three Jesuit Pioneers* is a new book from Joseph Victor Edwin, a teacher of theology and Christian-Muslim relations at Vidyajyoti College of Theology, Delhi. The Muslim attitude toward Christianity has been characterized by discussion, tolerance, collaboration, criticism, disagreement, and hostility from time to time and place to place. Victor introduces us to three Jesuits who spent their lives with such compassion for Muslims in their hearts. This book is divided into five chapters, is a valuable resource for all involved in Christian-Muslim relations and religious dialogue.

### Getting to know one other

The most important aspect of any relationship is getting to know one other is the lesson that one learns from the first author **Victor Courtois**. Courtois is a Belgian priest who worked in India as a missionary in Bengal. Courtois's attitude towards Muslims was grounded on his thorough understanding of the Qur'an and his affection for his Muslim. In other words, his profound compassion

for Muslims and deep reverence for their sacred book, the Holy Qur'an underlined his engagement with Muslims. Courtois viewed believing Christians and Muslims as brothers and sisters in a big family of God the Father. Courtois stressed the importance of Christians and Muslims being brothers and sisters. He was not a spectator but a participant in the lives of Muslims. He was certain that spiritual development would be accomplished if Christians and Muslims knew and loved one other from the depths of their hearts. This indicates that for a more authentic way of life, Christians and Muslims must appreciate one other's spiritual inspiration. He wanted Christians to explain Christianity to Muslims in a simple and beautiful way. Similarly he wanted Christians to listen to Muslims.

### **Respect one another's differences**

The second author that Edwin studies is **Christian W. Troll**. Troll is a theologian and one of the foremost Christian scholars on Islam and he is from Germany. He studied South Asian Islam deeply as a scholar and a brother to Muslims. He taught at Vidyajyoti College of Theology for over a decade, and then later taught in Birmingham and in Rome. He urged Christians and Muslims to recognize that there is only one God and that they worship the one albeit differently. Both declare God's remarkable oneness. Thus monotheistic faith as well as their worship of God, brings them into contact with God, which enables them to truly respect one another's differences. Troll was a scholar with profound knowledge of Muslims and their religious and political views as well as a historian with a keen comprehension of Christian-Muslim relationships, because of which he was able to discuss Christian-Muslim relationship at a deeper theological level.

At a spiritual level, he employs the virtue of the 'art of discernment' as a primary basis. This art necessitates an open mind to God and an inner freedom to carry out God's plan in one's life. This method enables a Christian to recognize God's presence in numerous aspects of Muslim faith and culture, as well as the absence of the Holy Spirit in many other aspects. He witnesses to his Christian beliefs in every religious discourse. Simultaneously, he demonstrated the

open mind of one “sent among the Muslims.” He felt that in order to penetrate the Muslim world, Christians must first comprehend the Qur’an’s position and portrayal among Muslims. Similarly, for a genuine theological interaction between the two groups, Muslims must acknowledge the importance of the Bible in the lives of Christians. Mutual respect and understanding are required for effective religious conversation. Muslims and Christians “know each other as part of their holy mission,” Troll believed. We must recognize that God is the one who brings Christians and Muslims together, and that their encounter is a gift from God.

### **In loving one another we open ourselves to God**

The third author, **Paul Jackson** is a Jesuit missionary and Islamic scholar who relentlessly worked for Muslim-Christian dialogue in India. He explored Indian Muslim cultural heritage by translating from Persian into English hundreds of letters Sheikh Sharafuddin Maneri, a Sufi saint from Bihar, India. This unique writing, as well as his interactions with Muslim scholars, earned him a place in the hearts of many Muslims of Bihar and other parts of India. When a completely dedicated Christian converses with a fully committed Muslim, Jackson believes they open themselves up to God. The Holy Spirit, he claims, maintains and sanctifies this relationship between Muslims and Christians.

Let us carry on the magnificent mission begun by these missionaries respecting the freedom religion of all people and proclaiming the values of compassion, love, and peace. If you want to love, you must understand. You must love if you want to understand.



## INTERRELIGIOUS FESTIVAL OF LIGHT

By Ronald Antony SJ

We live in a world where the search for the self is reduced to external comfort and financial stability. Spirituality is just seen as a commitment bestowed on us by our religious identities. The spiritual life is narrowed down to external religious practices to seek the needed help of the Almighty to face the uncertainties of the daily life or faithful continuation of the religious traditions of our forefathers to relate with the roots nostalgically. The differences between various religious traditions become more apparent and stronger when spirituality becomes mere external religiosity. The public dialogue between these tradition sends prematurely in arguing about what we eat, what we wear, what we celebrate, where we pray and whom we vote for, rather than on the deepest desires of humanity imbibed in our spirit and the interconnections at which our mutual paths meet. Fundamentalist and fascist forces have utilized this opportunity to deepen the wedge further for their gains.

In such a context, the interreligious celebration of Light in the heart of the city of Chennai at Aikya Alayam, an Inter-faith Dialogue Centre was a fresh breath of air for all the participants of various religious backgrounds. Aikya Alayam organized the event on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2021 in line with its founding vision since 1975 of Late Fr Ignatius Irudhayam SJ to bring together people of various religious traditions who are highly knowledgeable and faithful practitioners of their religion, to meet their counterparts of other religions and converse in a friendly manner on equal footing in all things concerning the faith. Following the teachings of Vatican II, Aikya Alayam believes that God in His goodness shares His life and blesses all human beings barring none. In His way, He has revealed Himself at various times in different lands through a variety of cultures. Each culture has appropriated certain traits of



God's munificence. When these cultures meet, they complement and nourish each other. Jalaluddin Rumi, a Sufi poet of the thirteenth century writes "The lamps are different, but the Light is the same: it comes from beyond. O thou who art the kernel of Existence, the disagreement between Moslem, Zoroastrian, and Jew depends on the standpoint." The Interreligious Festival of Light was such an occasion envisioning and integrating the symbolic and theological meaning of light in various religious traditions and cultures. Fr Raj Irudhaya SJ, the Director of Aikya Alayam, highlighted this in his inaugural and welcome address pointing to the thoughtful placement of this event to commemorate the festivals of light in various traditions and cultures such as Ramazan, Thirukarthigai, Diwali, Christmas, etc. celebrated in November and December.

The theological and symbolic interpretation of light in various traditions are based on the centrality of light and its impact on nature and in our lives. A video presentation on the various festivals of light in different cultures and religions by scholastics Jerald and Ronald gave an understanding of how light plays an important role in traditions across the world. Light is the source of life in this world. Hence, all religious traditions use light as an analogy for God who is the source of everything. Rathinam, a Yoga Teacher represented Hinduism in the event and shared his views on "Light in Hindu Tradition". He shared how light represents God and our deep devotion to the Almighty in the Hindu tradition. When people were distanced from the devotion to God in terms of prescribed rituals and prayers, Vallalar, a Hindu sage from Tamil Nadu introduced a new form of worship that democratized the devotion to God. This form of worship is known as Jothi worship. Jothi means light. There is no need for a ritual, memorized prayer, or presence of a priest. It just needs a pure devotion in heart to find faith in God represented in the form of Jothi. In that pure Jothi, God who is the source and object of worship gets united in the devotion of the faithful. This

purifies and illuminates the heart and soul of the devotee. It will bring prosperity, good relationship, righteous values, grace, and peace in life.

Amrith Kaur, a social worker, represented the Sikh community and shared the wisdom of Sikhism given by Guru Nanak on the theme “Light in Sikhism”. The real devotion is to be conscious of the omnipresent God and to live our lives illuminated by the values given. God is one and is for all humanity. In God, there is no discrimination in the name of caste, colour, gender, creed, language, money, power, etc. Imbibing this spirit of oneness, Guru Nanak has given a way of life in his teachings. Sikhs across the world live this truth through the practice of Langar i.e., sharing and serving food for all, serving others selflessly, etc. without any difference and discrimination. Only love and respect for humanity are valued. Spirituality should be reflected in our lives amidst all the challenges of the world by following three principles. 1) Living a truthful life and earning honestly. 2) Living in devotion to God through prayers, reading holy books, and serving the community. 3) Sharing of everything one has earned. Accumulation of food leads to diseases. Similarly, the accumulation of wealth leads to the corruption of spirit. The real joy is not in accumulating but sharing with the people in need. Through our social and spiritual life, we are called to proclaim the oneness of God. The theology students of Arul Kadal performed a skit reemphasizing the insight that our hearts have to be illuminated to face the challenges of the times and stand for the people in need beyond our comforts and religious differences.

Rakesh Kader, a Jain practitioner, and businessman represented Jainism and shared his views on the teachings of Mahavira under the title “Light in Jainism”. Light gives us delight. Light attracts us and conquers the darkness. Mahavira said that external light removes the darkness outside, but the inner spiritual light illuminates us and

guides us to lead a righteous life. We are called to be enlightened. A teacher helps us transform ourselves from darkness to light and from ignorance to wisdom. Every religious tradition gives the wisdom of great men and women who have been illuminated by the deep realities of life. They give us knowledge of life that is beyond our intellectual knowledge. The inner light of us will be purified and illuminated by the words of great gurus of all traditions. Knowledge of life is unlimited and should be reflected in our hearts continuously. The wisdom will naturally impact us and reflect in our lives. Each of us is called to be a seeker of wisdom and truth and integrate them into our lives.

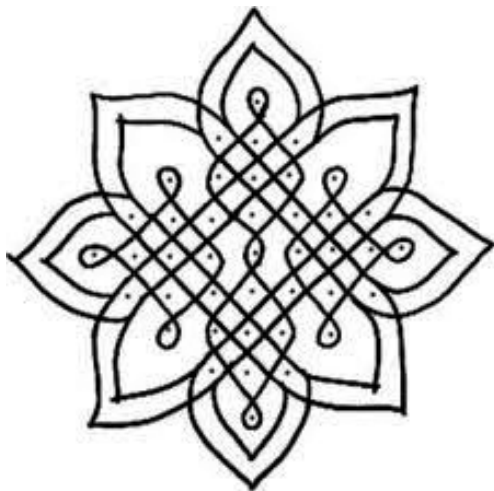
Peer Mohammad, an Islamic practitioner shared his views on light from the perspective of Islamic tradition. The Holy Quran declares, “God is the light of the heavens and the earth, his light is like a niche in which is a lamp, the lamp in glass and the glass like a brilliant star, lit from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the East nor the West whose oil would almost give light even though no fire touched it. Light upon light; God guides to His light whomsoever He wills.” (The Holy Quran, 24, 35) This light of God is the wisdom to find the righteous way of life. Irrespective of the religious tradition, the righteous way of life prescribed is the same. The world is created in justice and truth. The scriptures of all religions call us and guide us to its central theme of truth and justice which emanates from God, the Almighty. This path towards truth and justice through our righteous way of life is the uniting factor amidst all the differences. We are called to follow the path of righteousness irrespective of the challenges we face. All religions call us to have faith and that faith should be reflected in our actions. This is the light that illuminates our lives and enlightens us.

Solemn prayer service by the participants of 100 hours of Theology course for the laity in Arul Kadal reflected on the meaning of light from the Christian perspective. In Genesis, God begins to create

everything with the words, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. (Genesis 1:3-4) Hence light reflects the presence of God and His power. He guided the Israelites from Egypt, by day in a pillar of cloud to show them the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could march by day and by night. (Exodus 13:21) Thus, light is the symbol of guidance from God. In Gospel, Jesus says, “I am the light of the world; anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12) John writes, “What has come into being in him was life, the life that was the light of men; and light shines in the darkness, and darkness could not overpower it.” (John 1:4-5) The life of Jesus guides us into the path of God as the light in the First Testament guided the Israelites. Jesus doesn’t stop there. He calls us to be affected, transformed, and illuminated in his light to be the light of the world. He says, ‘You are light for the world. A city built on a hilltop cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp to put it under a tub; they put it on the lamp-stand where it shines for everyone in the house. In the same way, your light must shine in people’s sight, so that, seeing your good works, they may give praise to your Father in heaven. (Mt 5:14) He gave us the commandment to love one another as He loved us. (John 13:34) We are called to be born new in His unconditional love which does justice and to share that love with everyone. That is how we become light of this world which is immersed in darkness. A video presentation by Scholastics Vimal, Albin, and Bosco showcased real-life heroes who made a difference in the lives of the people and iterated the call to be a light in this world.

The interreligious festival of light was marked with wonderful insights from various traditions and meaningful cultural programs in an atmosphere of brotherhood and sisterhood filled with compassion for others. It was followed by a fellowship meal. The event illuminated our hearts and transformed us to be optimistic towards

humanity amidst all the hatred nurtured in the broken world. In the Imitation of Christ, Thomas Kempis prays, “O everlasting Light, surpassing all created luminaries, flash forth thy lightning from above, piercing all the most inward parts of my heart. Likewise, we departed with a prayer that this light we experienced in our hearts may shine everywhere.



“I am thinking too of the great cultural influence of Syrian Islam, which under the Umayyad caliphs reached the farthest shores of the Mediterranean. Today, in a world that is increasingly complex and interdependent, there is a need for a new spirit of dialogue and cooperation between Christians and Muslims. Together we acknowledge the one indivisible God, the Creator of all that exists. Together we must proclaim to the world that the name of the one God is ‘a name of peace and a summons to peace’ (Novo Millennio Ineunte, 55)!”

*John Paul II, on his arrival in Syria, May 5, 2001*

# MOTHER MARY: CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS

By Lakshmi Menon Bhatia

Institute of Dialogue with Cultures and Religions, Loyola College, Chennai and Islamic Studies Association, Delhi organised a webinar on Mother Mary: Christians and Muslims on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2021. The webinar was presented by Professor Rita George-Tvrtković (Associate Professor of Theology, Benedictine University, Illinois, USA).

Prof. Rita George Tvrtkovic in her lecture highlighted the representation of Mother Mary both as a bridge between Christians and Muslims and also a barrier to mutual relations between these two sets of believers. She used various documents ranging from the 5<sup>th</sup> century Byzantine records to the Spanish Cantigas to illustrate her point. She also pointed out that in an outburst of missionary zeal; the Dominican scholar like William of Tripoli (d. 1291) in line with Thomas Aquinas believed that faith cannot be imparted to the other in intellectual fencing matches. He affirmed that the points in common to both religions such as ‘doctrines on Jesus and Mary’ could be used as ‘stepping stones’ (bridges) for better understanding between Christians and Muslims. William of Tripoli did praise the piety of Muslims and their reverential fear of God despite being critical of Islam in his writings (Treatise on the Saracen State).

Further, Professor Tvrtković pointed out that Mother Mary has been represented as per the various socio political interests and compulsions of those times. The Portuguese in medieval times represented Mother Mary as a barrier for Muslims and as someone who only represented the interests of the Christian Faith. She was also pulled into various Intra religious tussles between the Catholics and other branches of Christianity.

Prof. Tvrtkovic then went onto highlight various shared shrines that are dedicated to Mother Mary across the world, where people of multiple beliefs gather in Faith. These range from shrines in Syria, Lebanon to India and show how uniting is her holy Presence. The works of the French Catholic Scholar of Islam, Louis Massignon who coined the term “Abrahamic Faith” in the late 1950’s once again throws light on Mother Mary’s role as a bridge between the Christians and the Muslims.

This enlightening presentation was followed by a discussion moderated by Fr. Maria Arul Raja. The 50 odd participants from all across the world share their thoughts and views and raised some important questions. The discussions ranged from queries about why God couldn’t be known by a similar name across traditions, to how could Shared shrines be used as a starting point as dialogue spaces and what can be the associated risks as well as opportunities for the same. It was also shared as to how the Sufi understanding of Islam can help one bridge the gaps in the understanding regarding Mary and Jesus and the two faiths.

The Session was moderated by Professor Mary Arul Raja SJ, the director of IDCR, Chennai. The Session began with Sanskrit Prayers dedicated to the Divine Feminine in the form of Goddess Saraswati & Goddess Gouri from the ancient Vedic Tradition and ended with a vote of thanks by Joseph Victor Edwin SJ, secretary of Islamic Studies Association.

“Then [we refer] to the adorers of God according to the conception of monotheism, the Muslim religion especially, deserving of our admiration for all that is true and good in their worship of God.”

*Paul VI, Ecclesiam Suam 107, August 6, 1964*

# LEARNING ABOUT OTHER RELIGIONS

By Herman Roborgh

I grew up in a Christian family and studied Christian theology. I also studied Islam at University. For the past five years, I have been teaching a subject called “world religions” at a Muslim university in Lahore, Pakistan but usually visit Australia once a year.

I named my course in Lahore: “The Wisdom of World Religions” and it deals with Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity. The course takes about 16 weeks to complete. All my students are Muslims.

My first duty as a teacher is to respect the religion of my students by showing them that my knowledge of Islam is in keeping with what they themselves actually believe. It’s not just my personal view of Islam.

The next challenge is to teach world religions in such a way that my students become attracted to find out more about these other religions. If my students do not have a desire to know more about other religions they will eventually come to consider the study of other religions as unnecessary and useless.

A lot of my time is taken up trying to remove misunderstandings and presuppositions and even some misconceptions. I do this by suggesting possible connections and parallels between the subject matter of my lectures and the Islamic belief of my students. For example, all the religions say that human beings continue to live after death in some way. So I look for connections between what each religion says about death and the after-life.

As a teacher of world religions, I need to prepare myself well and I cannot depend on a collection of facts and figures. Sometimes I



come across a particular Scripture verse or a doctrine that is strange and difficult to understand. When this happens, I cannot just repeat what is written in books but I need to find a reasonable way of explaining the meaning of this particular verse or doctrine. For example, the title “Son of God”, which Christians use for Jesus Christ. I explain to my Muslim students that this title does not refer to any kind of physical relationship between Jesus and God. On the contrary, by calling Jesus “Son of God” in the Gospels, Christians were saying something about the unique and intimate relationship that Jesus experienced in his relationship with God.

One thing I have learnt from this experience is that it is not much use arguing and debating about religious beliefs. It is much more important to keep listening to the other’s point of view. Every person brings his or her own understanding and experience of religion and so there is always another perspective that I need to consider. I am also discovering that the truths of world religions contain aspects that can perhaps never be fully explained in human words. Sometimes we just need to accept what others believe without fully understanding why they believe as they do.

Learning about other religions has helped my students and me as their teacher to think more deeply about our own religious ideas and traditions. Maybe the greatest benefit I find in the study of other religions is that this kind of study brings me back to my own religious tradition and makes me reflect on my own beliefs and practices. It is not possible to avoid this kind of reflection on one’s own religion. However, this is what keeps the whole project of learning about other religions alive and interesting.



## SEMINAR ON CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

By George Victor SJ

On 19th January, 2022, the Jesuit Secretariat for Service of Faith, Delhi, and the Islamic Studies Association, Delhi, organized a webinar on Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Global Challenges and Opportunities.

The webinar was presented by Prof. Heru Prakosa S.J., who is one of the six new Consultors to the Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims at the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCDI). He also serves a Counsellor for Dialogue with Islam at the Secretariat for Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue of the Jesuits. He teaches at the Faculty of Theology at Sanatana Dharma University in Jogjakarta, Indonesia.

Having vast experience in the field of Christian -Muslim studies, Fr. Heru provided a panoramic view of and a wider perspective on different experiences, challenges, concerns and opportunities in the present context for interreligious dialogue. He focused on the openness of the Church to other religions and pointed to the key text *Nostra Aetate*, which, he said, opened the door for other religions and created room for dialogue. He referred to the letter *A Common Word* signed by Muslim scholars to the then Pope Benedict XVI and twenty seven other Christian leaders, an important document from the Muslim side. He also reminded his listeners the looming shadows cast on humanity by war and violence in the name of religion.

Fr. Heru highlighted three main challenges and opportunities in the context of dialogue between Christians and Muslims. First and foremost is context. Fr. Heru drew the attention of his listeners to Latin American theology to show how one could develop dialogue in Asia. Gustavo Gutierrez showed that theology should start with contextual historical processes and be oriented towards committed spiritual and pastoral actions of Christians in a particular context.

In other words, Gutierrez understands and does theology as critical reflection on praxis in the light of the Word of God. In the light of Gutierrez's reflections, we can affirm that in a theological process, one discovers the deeper aspirations and desires of people and is forced to confront their struggles and sufferings, since praxis says a great deal about people, their deepest convictions and who they are striving to become.

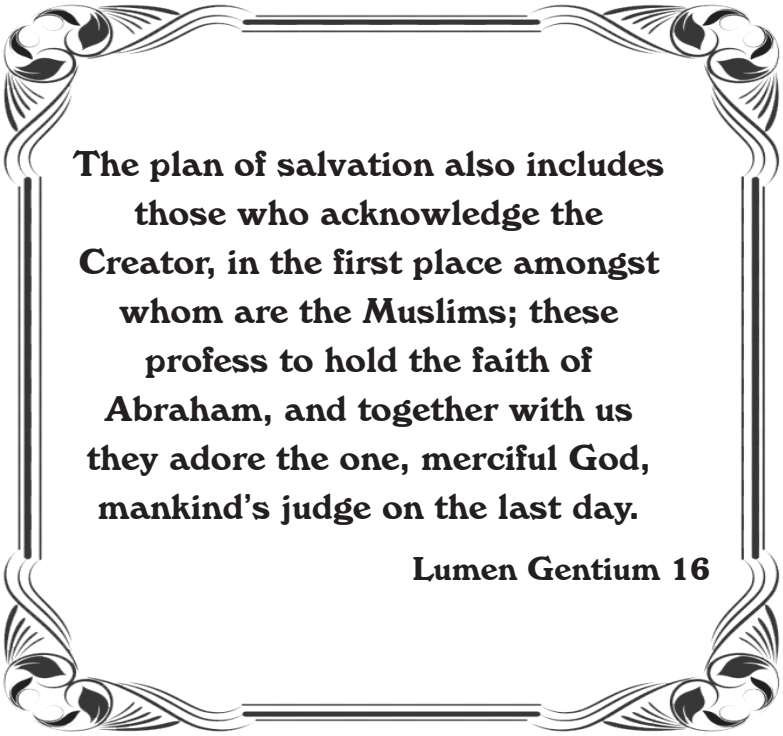
In the Asian context of widespread poverty, diversity of religions and multiplicity of cultures, dialogue is a new way of being the Church (Ecclesiam Suam, 1964), said Fr. Heru. In such a context, reciprocal communication, mutual friendship and respect, as well as joint efforts for the common good, all in the service of a common search for the fuller realization of the truth, must inspire us further to deepen our commitment to Christian-Muslim relations, Fr. Heru opined.

Secondly, Fr. Heru touched upon the spiritual legacy of Louis Massignon and his mentor Blessed Charles de Foucauld for Christian-Muslim relations. Both these pioneers rediscovered their faith in the light of the religious life of Muslims. They 'shouted the gospel from the roof-tops', using the phrase of Foucauld, by their 'kenosis': lives given in service of Muslims.

Thirdly, Fr. Heru called upon his listeners to build partnerships for shared goals towards the common good. He focused on religious collaboration in academics and dialogue. This collaboration can help address issues such as poverty, injustice and terrorism.

A lively exchange of thoughts and reflections confirmed that the lecture was well received by Fr. Heru's listeners.

Joseph Victor Edwin SJ, Secretary of the Islamic Studies Association, moderated the session and pointed out that for sustained dialogue between Christians and Muslims, practitioners of dialogue must nurture a critical or historical understanding of religions as well as an understanding of the each religion as its believers themselves understand it.



**The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims; these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day.**

**Lumen Gentium 16**

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