

Salaam

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Quarterly to Promote Understanding



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

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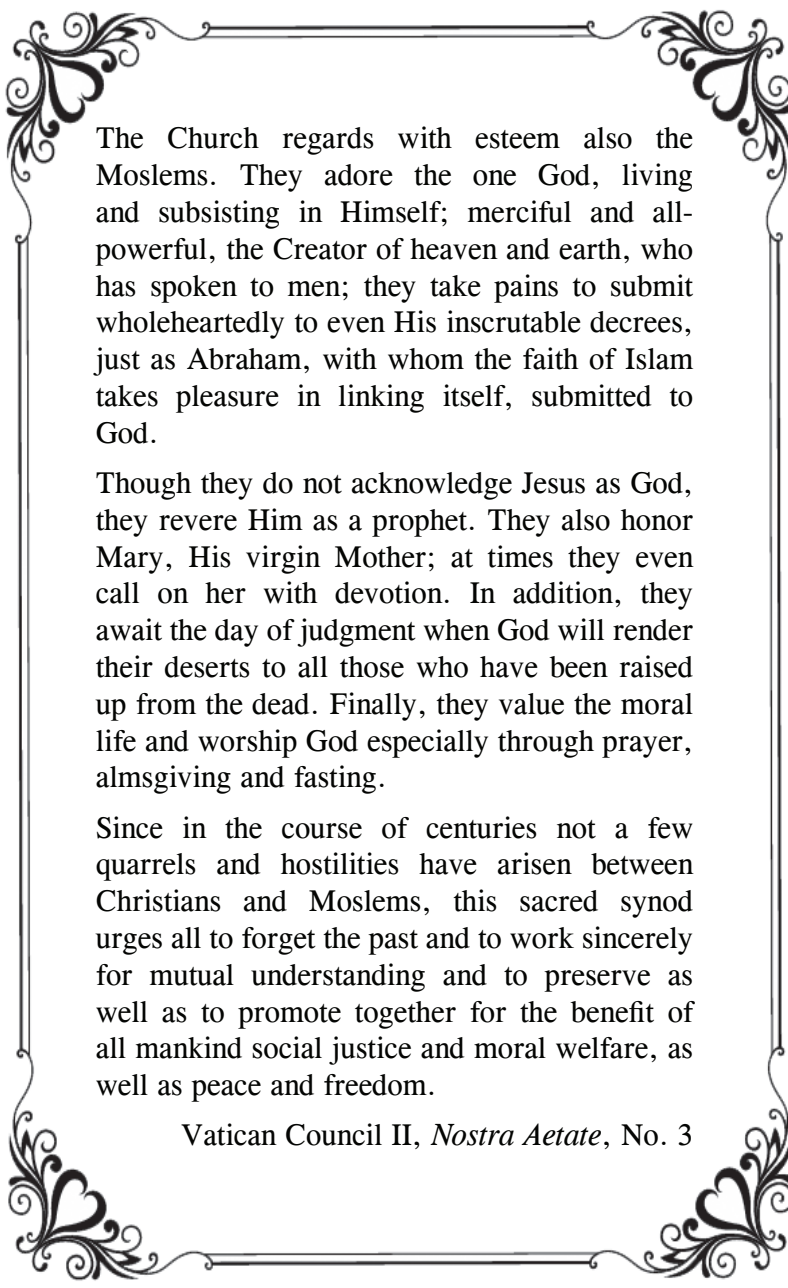
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The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable 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

In December 2024, I travelled to Rome to participate in the meeting of the Commission on the Role and Responsibilities of Women in the Society of Jesus. While there, I also taught a course on Christian-Muslim Relations for the licentiate students in the Department of Missiology at Urbana University. Each evening, I enjoyed engaging in discussions with Professors Wasim Salman, Francesco Zannini, and Gaetano Sabetta, with whom I share a long-standing connection.

Fr. Wasim Salman, who hails from Damascus, has been teaching contemporary Arab-Islamic thought at the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI) since 2016. A Syrian-Italian scholar, he holds a doctorate in theology from Gregorian University (2009) and another in Arabic philosophy from the University of Tor Vergata (2016). He is also a member of the editorial board for *Islamochristiana*. He is currently the director of PISAI, Rome.

Francesco Zannini is another esteemed academic who taught Contemporary Islam and Islamic Law at PISAI in Rome. He previously served as a Professor of Islamic Studies at the National Major Seminary in Dhaka, Bangladesh. He dedicated several years to editing the magazine, *Encounter – Documents for Muslim-Christian Understanding*, and has authored numerous essays and articles on the history of Islam and interfaith dialogue.

Lastly, Gaetano Sabetta is a Professor at the Faculty of Missiology at the Pontifical Urbaniana University, where he focuses on interreligious and intercultural dialogue. His research spans the theology of religions, interreligious theology, and dialogue. Having lived in India, he earned his first theology degree from the Vidyajyoti Institute of Religious Studies in Delhi.

Living as missionary disciples: Our discussions centred on what unites us: our scholarship in Christian-Muslim Relations and our commitment to living as missionary disciples, as highlighted in *Evangelii Gaudium* (No. 120). We reflected on our vocation as both priests and lay theologians engaging with Muslims. The phrase “sent among Muslims” particularly resonated with us, especially the word ‘among’ which carries profound missiological importance. We are not “sent against” or merely “sent to,” but truly “sent among” Muslims. As the Church embodies the sign and sacrament of communion with God and the unity of the entire human family, she sends her children among Muslims to witness to God’s wonders in their lives.

The missionary disciples are tasked with making explicit the kingdom values that many of our Muslim brothers and sisters already practice. The document, *Gaudium et Spes*, encourages missionary disciples to engage in open dialogue with everyone: Catholics, other Christians, adherents of different religions, and even those who may oppose or challenge the Church. This dialogue should be all-encompassing and thorough, with the ultimate aim of fostering “genuine peace in the world.” (*Gaudium et Spes* 92).

The lives of these missionary disciples should be imbued with ‘joy’ and ‘hope’. They should not appear as if they’ve just returned from a funeral (EG. 10) or lead lives that resemble a perpetual Lent without the joy of Easter (EG. 6). Pope Francis encourages us to embark on a new phase of evangelization characterized by joy (EG. 1) As individuals centred on Christ, our experience of salvation should inspire us to cultivate a deeper love for both Christ and humanity, driven by hope. We felt our presence among Muslims must reflect the Gospel joy and hope.

The intersection of religion and political power: Our conversation shifted toward the intersection of religion and political power. As educators, we often encounter students who assert that for Islamic societies to evolve into genuinely democratic entities, traditional Islamic doctrines must be reformed and infused with Christian

ideals. Those familiar with the history of Christian-Muslim relations will recognize that, prior to Vatican II, such notions were quite common, with the Dutch Jesuit J. J. Houben being a notable proponent of this perspective.

While it's true that early Christians refrained from establishing a religio-political system, believing instead that the Church should guide lives through Gospel principles, Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, laid the foundation for a religio-political community. Consequently, Christians (many Muslims too) view Islam as a comprehensive legal framework, where *Sharia*—rooted in the divinely prescribed teachings of the Qur'an and the *hadith* (traditions of the Prophet Muhammad)—hold significant sway. As scholars of Islamic Studies understand, *Sharia* grew through a consensus within the *umma* (the community of the Prophet Muhammad), driven by the intellectual contributions of legal scholars. This framework has considerable political implications, particularly in challenging Muslim rulers who do not adhere to it. Over time, *sharia* became more rigid and less adaptable, often failing to respond to the evolving needs of society.

Students often overlook the fact that *Sharia* serves as a guideline to adapt Islamic behavior in various contexts. It is inherently flexible and can be tailored to fit local doctrines. However, even among Muslim scholars, there exists a certain tension in the understanding of *Sharia*.

Pope Francis and Muslims: Our conversation also touched on Pope Francis and his approach toward Muslims. The key takeaway is that the Pope acknowledges the significant differences between Christianity and Islam. Yet, he encourages Christians to set aside elements that may lead to conflict and instead focus on collaborative efforts for the common good. It is important to understand that he does care about these differences; he recognizes that ignoring the doctrinal distinctions could lead to a dilution of faith.

Pope Francis embodies a dual awareness in his mission. On one hand, he reaches out to Muslims, seeing them as brothers and

sisters rather than adversaries. On the other hand, he remains open to learning from them and sharing experiences that foster mutual growth. His efforts aim to present the essence of Islam to Christians while also sharing the love of Christ with Muslims. Through these actions, he highlights the notion that we are equals, and no faith is superior to another.

Talking of Pope Francis filled us with joy as he illuminates the path toward solidarity and reconciliation. He emphasizes that both Christians and Muslims have much to learn from our conflict-ridden past and the importance of transforming rivalry into collaboration. By reminding believers that we originate from God and ultimately return to Him, he encourages us to discover a new way to coexist in harmony, building peaceful societies rooted in justice. In a world often clouded by bitterness and animosity, Pope Francis urges both communities to step into each other's shoes, empathize with each other's pain and suffering, and ultimately find a way to reconciliation. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to professors Francesco Zannini, Fr. Wasim Salman, and Gaetano Sabetta for generously sharing their invaluable time and insights in our recent discussions. These conversations not only enriched our understanding but also fostered a deeper sense of connection among us. Through our dialogues, we not only discussed important concepts but also prayed for one another and strengthened our support for each other in our shared mission of outreach and engagement with diverse communities. It is in these moments of genuine sharing that we find the true essence of collaboration in our mission to all people.

Joseph Victor Edwin, SJ

FOSTERING INTERFAITH DIALOGUE TODAY

A Pivotal Dimension of Mission

By James H. Kroeger

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), convoked by Saint Pope John XXIII (1958-1963), sought a profound transformation of the entire Church. The fundamental vision of the Church in Vatican II has been variously termed “communion ecclesiology,” “missionary ecclesiology,” and “dialogue ecclesiology.” Saint Paul VI (1963-1978), who succeeded John XXIII and continued the Council, noted that this vision of a renewed Church would be achieved as the Church entered into dialogue on four levels: 1) within the Catholic Church itself, 2) with other Christians (Ecumenism), 3) with people of other living faiths (Interreligious Dialogue), and 4) with the world and all humanity. Paul VI described these four levels of dialogue as represented by four concentric circles.

It is enlightening to imagine these “four dialogues” as a series of four interconnected circles; there is a Vatican II document for each circle. The innermost circle is dialogue within the Catholic Church itself [*Lumen Gentium* (LG) = Church]. The next circle represents dialogue with other Christians [*Unitatis Redintegratio* (UR) = Ecumenism]. The third circle shows dialogue with peoples who follow various world religions [*Nostra Aetate* (NA) = Interfaith or Interreligious Dialogue]. The largest, outermost circle symbolizes dialogue with the world and all people of good will [*Gaudium et Spes* (GS) = Church in the Modern World]. This current presentation highlights one key area of dialogue: Interfaith Dialogue.

Promoting Dialogue. In appreciating the Church’s invitation to engage in dialogue with the followers of other living faiths, it is helpful to imagine Pope Paul VI’s four circles of dialogue. This dialogue with other religions or other faiths is the *third* area or circle of engagement. Some recent Church milestones illustrate the role of dialogue in contemporary Christian living.

The Second Vatican Council and recent Popes have affirmed that interreligious dialogue is integral to a comprehensive understanding of the Church's mission in the contemporary world. This perspective emerges from the Council document *Nostra Aetate* (NA) which exhorts Church members to enter into "dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions" and to "recognize, preserve and promote" the "spiritual, moral, and sociocultural values" in these faith traditions (NA 2).

Popes Speak on Dialogue. Pope Paul VI in his first great encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964) promoted dialogue as the way forward for mission; his insights remain a sure guide for us today. He established a new department in the Vatican which now bears the name: Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue (former name: Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue). Certainly, Paul VI, a man of humility and openness, who visited Asia for ten days in the autumn of 1970 (his longest apostolic journey), concretely showed the way forward by following the "road of dialogue."

In his mission encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (55-57) Pope John Paul II affirmed that "Interreligious dialogue is a part of the Church's evangelizing mission. Understood as a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment, dialogue is not in opposition to mission *ad gentes*; indeed, it has special links with that mission and is one of its expressions" (RM 55). As a missionary in the Philippines, I personally recall that John Paul II met with the Muslim community from Mindanao in Davao City on February 20, 1981 during his Philippine sojourn.

Clearly, Pope Francis continues this same interfaith dialogue perspective. In his beautiful *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*) in sections 250-254, Francis speaks about interreligious dialogue; he asserts that "Evangelization and interreligious dialogue, far from being opposed, mutually support and nourish one another" (EG 251). Francis believes that "Interreligious dialogue is a necessary condition for peace in the world, and so it is a duty for Christians as well as other religious communities" (EG 250).

During his February 3-5, 2019 visit to the United Arab Emirates, Pope Francis met with Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar; together they mutually signed the document “Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together.” More recently (September 5, 2024), in Jakarta, Indonesia, Pope Francis visited the Istiqlal Mosque, the largest mosque in Asia. Together with Grand Imam Nasaruddin Umar, a joint declaration was signed; it asserted that “interreligious dialogue ought to be recognized as an effective instrument for resolving local, regional, and international conflicts ... [and] promoting a culture of respect, dignity, compassion, reconciliation and fraternal solidarity.”

Dialogue Encounters. Probably, the best approach to implementing the dialogue vision of *Nostra Aetate* is to learn from personal engagements in interfaith encounters. Allow me to narrate some experiences (you must also supply your own personal encounters). A few years ago, while I was waiting in a Manila office before formal business hours, I found myself in a fascinating conversation with a charming young lady. Although presently employed in Manila, she originates from Jolo, southern Philippines. In the course of our friendly chat, she proudly told me how her name “Mary Ann” reflects her family which is part Muslim and part Christian.

She narrated her background: “When my parents were choosing my name, it was my Muslim grandfather who insisted on ‘Mary’ because of his admiration for Mary, the mother of Jesus (‘*Isā*’) the prophet. Furthermore, he urged that my second name be ‘Ann’ in honor of Mary’s mother. Thus, while acceding to my parents’ decision that I would be baptized a Christian, he believed that my Muslim heritage would not be lost because of the name he had chosen for me.” She concluded her story: “I’m very happy that my own name symbolizes who I am—both Christian and Muslim.”

I Will Ask Allah. Friends, permit one more narrative of a personal encounter that reveals the deep faith of Muslims. Several years ago, while I was a professor at the Regional Major Seminary in Davao City, southern Philippines, I received an emergency phone call in

the early morning informing me that my younger sister in the United States had been in a serious automobile accident involving a truck. Her injuries were life-threatening and the next forty-eight hours would be critical. I immediately told the sad news to my fellow faculty members at the seminary; we prayed for my sister during the morning Mass. It wasn't long before everyone—including the kitchen staff—had heard the news.

When I finished teaching my two morning classes, I was surprised to see Utol waiting for me outside the classroom. Well known to all, Utol served as our “fish-supplier,” personally delivering quality fresh fish three times a week. Utol lived in a small Muslim coastal village near the seminary. In the early morning, he would collect the evening catch from his Muslim neighbors and distribute the fish to several regular customers, including the seminary. Utol may have finished only one or two grades of school and couldn't read or write well. After years of laboring in the tropical sun, his complexion was very dark. Too poor to afford a dentist, he was missing several teeth. His hands were callused and scarred from years of fishing.

Utol began speaking to me in Cebuano, the local language. “The cooks in the kitchen told me what happened to your sister. I am so sorry to hear the sad news.” I replied: “Thank you very much for your concern and expression of sympathy. You are very thoughtful; you waited for me for nearly two hours. You should be at home sleeping, as I'm sure you were up all night fishing.”

Utol continued, “I want to tell you that I will pray to Allah for your sister's recovery. Allah will help her, I am sure.” “Thank you. Thank you,” I said, holding back my tears. As Utol turned to go, he assured me, “With Allah, all will be OK.”

I was deeply moved. What faith! What trust in divine providence! What beautiful words, coming from the mouth of a man who obviously prays! And, yes, my younger sister lived for another thirty years.

Implementing Dialogue. Undoubtedly, Vatican II and *Nostra Aetate* provide a strong and constant affirmation of the pivotal role that dialogue is to play in society and the Church today. Thus, it becomes imperative to understand its principles and to practice it in daily life. Certainly, some will ask: “How can I engage constructively in promoting authentic dialogue?”

This question brings this writer to offer a series of ten brief guidelines; one might call them a “*Dialogue Decalogue*.” For these guidelines I draw on my own personal experience as well as the writings and insights of others, particularly the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC). Each of these “ten commandments” deserves greater elaboration; however, they are simply offered here as “beginners’ guidelines.” They could also become the basis for further group discussion.

Rule 1: The primary purpose of dialogue is to learn—that is, to change and grow in our perception and understanding of reality, to build relationships, and then to act to promote harmony and mutual respect.

Rule 2: Interreligious dialogue must be a two-sided project—within (*intra*) and between (*inter*) religious communities. There must be dialogue with coreligionists—with fellow Catholics, as well as with followers of other faith traditions.

Rule 3: Each participant must come to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity. Conversely, each participant must assume complete honesty and sincerity in the other partner. In brief, if there is no trust, then no dialogue occurs.

Rule 4: In interreligious dialogue we must not compare our *ideals* with our partner’s *practice*, but rather, we compare our *ideals* with our partner’s *ideals*, our *practice* with our partner’s *practice*.

Rule 5: All participants must define themselves. Only the Muslim, for example, can define from the inside what it means to be a Muslim. We seek to appreciate the other’s “self-understanding.”

Rule 6: Each partner should not only listen to the other partner with openness and sympathy, but also attempt to agree with the dialogue partner as far as possible, while still maintaining integrity in one's own religious tradition. Dialogue does *not* require a "compromise" in one's faith.

Rule 7: Dialogue takes place only between equals. Therefore, for example, if the Christian views Hinduism as inferior, or if the Hindu views Christianity as inferior, there will be no dialogue.

Rule 8: Dialogue takes place only on the basis of mutual trust. Thus, it is *not* wise to begin with difficult problems or differences in faith. Seek first to establish trust; then, gradually, more thorny matters can be addressed.

Rule 9: Each participant eventually must attempt to experience the partner's religious framework "from within." John Dunne speaks of "passing over" into another's religious experience and then coming back enlightened, broadened and deepened.

Rule 10: Seek God's guidance to bless your efforts to promote interfaith understanding and harmony.

Conclusion. Sixty years after the proclamation of *Nostra Aetate* by Vatican II on October 28, 1965, significant progress has been achieved, both on theological and practical levels. However, much more needs to be achieved, both locally and globally. *Nostra Aetate*, one of the shortest Council documents, has ignited a significant spark that continues to grow among numerous peoples of living faiths.

However, everyone needs to realize that interreligious or interfaith dialogue is a difficult undertaking; it has its frustrations as well as its rewards. It is, in fact, a "faith journey," requiring patience and commitment. However, it is *not* optional, because, as John Paul II has noted, it is an integral part of the Church's evangelizing mission. We are most grateful to have the Church's ongoing guidance and encouragement to assist us in this challenging endeavor. And, as Christians, we know we need God's guidance; thus, we frequently and fervently pray: *Veni, Creator Spiritus*. Come, Holy Spirit!



Revitalizing Interfaith Dialogue: Ibn Arabi's Framework as a Path Beyond Syncretism and Proselytisation

By Mohammad Asad Khan

Modern interfaith dialogue is increasingly criticized for its lack of depth—a condition that stems, in large part, from an underlying indifference. Many voices leading these conversations are not deeply rooted in religious conviction. Their focus is often diverted toward socio-political concerns, with the primary aim of preserving social harmony. In such contexts, the dialogue quickly loses its potential for genuine religious or spiritual exploration, instead becoming a means of preventing religious differences from sparking conflict.

The Limits of a Pragmatic Approach

While the pursuit of social harmony is undoubtedly a noble objective, reducing human existence solely to the ethical impulse of maintaining peace overlooks an essential truth: humans are innately religious creatures. Our lives are not merely governed by rational ethics or political expediency; they are animated by a deeper, transcendent longing for connection with the divine. When interfaith dialogue is conducted without a firm religious foundation, it risks devolving into a pragmatic exercise devoid of transformative spiritual engagement.

This is especially evident in the Indian context, where a significant number of participants in contemporary interfaith dialogue come from the left or broadly secular backgrounds. Although there is nothing inherently wrong with a pragmatic or ethical approach, it does signal that such dialogue is emerging from a place of limited religiosity rather than from deep, devout commitment. As a consequence, the conversation often falls into two pitfalls: religious indifference and the danger of syncretism—a blending of traditions that, while superficially inclusive, may ultimately dilute the distinctive insights each faith offers.

Worship as the Foundation of True Religious Engagement

A return to a more authentic spiritual discourse begins with revisiting the core purpose of human existence as outlined in the Qur'an. The holy text clearly states that the purpose of the creation of jinn and men is the worship (*ibādah*) of Allah. Classical interpreters of the Qur'an have long understood this worship to be intrinsically linked with knowledge (*ma'rifah*) of God. In essence, true worship is not merely a ritualistic or ethical performance; it is an active, dynamic process of coming to know the Divine.

To unpack this further, it is important to consider the Arabic root of the word *'ibādah*. The term is derived from the root, which carries connotations of being paved or subdued—much like a road made suitable for travel or a camel smeared with tar to render it docile. This linguistic imagery evokes the idea of servitude, yet there is a profound difference when it comes to human worship. As Imam Raghīb notes in his *Mufradāt Ġarīb al-Qur'an*, *'ibādah* can occur in two modes: one without volition (*bil-taskhīr*) and one with volition (*bil-ikhṭiyār*). All creatures, except for jinn and men, worship God without choice, simply following the natural order. Human worship, however, must be chosen freely—it is an act of obedience (*iṭa'ah*) that leads toward salvation in the hereafter.

Early Muslim commentators remind us that worship is more than mere obedience. Ibn Kathīr, quoting Ibn Jurayj in his tafsir of Sūrah Adh-Dhāriyat (ayah 56), explains that the command “*li ya 'budūni*” should be understood as “*li ya 'rifūni*” – that is, to worship God is to know Him. Worship without knowledge is hollow. As Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah notes, the highest stage of love culminates in a state of servitude (*al-ta'abbud*), where love for the Divine transforms into an all-encompassing submission. In this light, both love and knowledge become essential pillars of authentic worship.¹

¹ altafsir.com, Tafsir Ibn Kathir

Ibn Arabi's Transformative Epistemology

Central to overcoming the superficiality of modern dialogue is Ibn Arabi's mystical framework—a paradigm that not only emphasizes the importance of knowledge but also provides a method for transcending the limitations of any single tradition. Ibn Arabi delineates a threefold gradation of knowledge of God:

1. **Intellect (*Aql*):**

This level involves rational inquiry and logical reasoning. While the intellect is indispensable for understanding the world, its capacity is inherently limited by the confines of human language and cultural conditioning.

2. **Prophetic Revelation (*Wahy*):**

Revelation serves as the divine communication that grounds believers in a particular religious tradition. It offers a fixed narrative that provides stability and direction. However, because revelation is inherently tied to the specific historical and doctrinal context of a community, its scope is ultimately circumscribed.

3. **Direct Unveiling (*Kashf*):**

The highest form of knowledge, according to Ibn Arabi, is direct mystical unveiling. *Kashf* represents an unmediated encounter with the Divine—a direct tasting of spiritual reality that transcends intellectual and revelatory limitations. Through this direct experience, the seeker comes to know God in a complete and transformative way.²

Ibn Arabi's insight is profound: it is only by engaging in the process of *kashf* that one can truly overcome the barriers imposed by adherence to a single religious tradition. In other words, to understand “the other” is not to dilute one's own faith through syncretism, but rather to enrich one's own understanding of God by recognizing the underlying unity that connects all sincere spiritual seekers.

² Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 255.

Moving Beyond Horizontal Love

Modern discourse often extols the virtue of loving one's neighbor—a horizontal form of love that is essential for social coexistence. Yet, Ibn Arabi teaches that horizontal love, while valuable, must be grounded in a vertical love of the Divine. Without this vertical dimension, the love for one's neighbor remains incomplete, lacking the transformative power that arises from a direct, personal connection with God.

For Ibn Arabi, every individual is an extension of the Divine. This means that true engagement with another person is not merely an act of social courtesy, but a sacred encounter—a manifestation of the love that flows from one's relationship with God. The modern emphasis on horizontal love, when divorced from its vertical counterpart, risks reducing the neighbor to a mere social function rather than recognizing their inherent spiritual worth. Only when love is rooted in a deep, vertical engagement with the Divine can it fully transform interpersonal relationships and elevate interfaith dialogue to a higher plane.

Confronting the Hidden Impulse for Proselytization

A further challenge in contemporary interfaith dialogue is the covert tendency toward proselytization. All too often, dialogue masquerades as a neutral engagement while its underlying aim is to convert others to a particular tradition. This token approach does little to promote genuine understanding; instead, it reinforces divisions by reducing dialogue to a contest of doctrinal superiority.

Ibn Arabi's framework offers a way to neutralize this impulse. By emphasizing the importance of direct mystical experience, his approach compels individuals to move beyond mere intellectual assent or superficial adherence to ritual. When one has experienced the Divine through *kashf*, the boundaries between traditions begin to blur, revealing that each path—though different in its expressions—ultimately points toward the same transcendent reality. Thus, the pursuit of genuine, transformative knowledge of God precludes

the need for proselytization. It encourages a humble, open-ended engagement where the aim is not to win an argument, but to share in the universal quest for truth.

A Call for a Revitalized, Spiritually Grounded Dialogue

The challenge for the devout religious person in today's pluralistic society is clear: How can one engage with the perceived "other" without falling into the traps of religious indifference or succumbing to the impulse to convert? Ibn Arabi's epistemological framework, with its integrated approach through intellect, revelation, and mystical unveiling, provides a robust foundation for such engagement. It invites believers to transcend the confines of their inherited traditions and to embark on a journey of personal transformation that is both deeply individual and profoundly communal.

By striving for *kashf*—the direct tasting of the Divine—the devout are better equipped to recognize that every sincere seeker, regardless of tradition, is engaged in the same quest. In doing so, they can approach interfaith dialogue not as a battleground for competing truths but as a shared space for mutual enrichment. The realization that understanding "the other" is integral to understanding God more fully can transform dialogue into a sacred pursuit, one that honors both the diversity and the unity of the human search for meaning.

Conclusion

Modern interfaith dialogue is at a crossroads. On one hand, its prevailing focus on socio-political concerns and ethical pragmatism has led to a form of engagement that is superficial and disingenuous. On the other hand, the two-pronged risk of syncretism and proselytization threatens to compromise the distinctive spiritual insights that each tradition offers. The remedy, however, lies in returning to the core purpose of human existence—worship of and knowledge of the Divine.

Ibn Arabi's mystical framework, with its emphasis on direct unveiling (*kashf*) as the pinnacle of divine knowledge, offers a transformative path forward. It challenges us to move beyond mere horizontal expressions of love and engage vertically with the Divine, thereby infusing our interactions with a depth that transcends doctrinal boundaries. In doing so, it not only saves us from the perils of religious indifference and superficial syncretism but also invites us to experience a more authentic, spiritually grounded interfaith dialogue.

For the devout, this approach is both a challenge and an invitation—a call to enrich one's own spiritual journey while fostering a more genuine encounter with the sacred in every other tradition. Ultimately, revitalizing interfaith dialogue through the lens of Ibn Arabi's teachings promises a richer, more integrated vision of human coexistence—one where diverse voices converge in the shared, timeless quest for divine truth.



REPORTS

A Delightful Afternoon at The Shrine of Hazarat Innayat Khan

On December 13, Laura and I visited the shrine of Sufi Inayat Khan to meet Dr. Farida, the shrine's dedicated and scholarly Sufi caretaker. Laura, a graphic designer from Mexico, actively volunteers for various Jesuit projects that aid the underprivileged in her home country.

Dr. Farida welcomed us warmly at the porch of the shrine, where we settled into some comfortable chairs. She began by introducing Sufism as the spiritual dimension of Islam. "Every soul yearns for union with God," she explained, emphasizing that the 'Sufi way of life' nurtures this personal spiritual journey and creates space for it to flourish.

According to Dr. Farida, every seeker requires a living master who has already navigated the spiritual path. She posed the question of how one finds such a guide and answered it herself, noting that when the seeker is truly ready, God sends the Master to them.

"Zikr," she explained, refers to a spiritual practice in Sufism that means "remembering God." It reflects the essence of the verse, "Remember God often" (Q. 33:40). In zikr, practitioners engage in the repetition of brief prayers based on one of the 99 beautiful names of God. This can be done silently or through accompanying bodily movements, such as chants, hymns, and dances, all aiming to foster an immediate awareness of God's presence.

Dr. Farida also discussed the various stages a seeker must navigate on their journey toward achieving the ultimate goal: a union of love with God. She highlighted that the lower soul, known as nafs-e-ammra, is often dominated by the 'ego' and influenced by the

adversary of humanity, the evil one. To progress to the next stage, one must confront and overcome the ego.

The journey of overcoming the ego leads the Sufi practitioner to a crucial stage known as *nafs-e-lawwama*, where one begins to recognize their own faults. At this point, the conscience takes the reins and guides the individual on their path. Through an inner process of purification, the practitioner moves closer to the light, emptying themselves of all ego and self-importance. In this enlightened state, the Sufi becomes attuned to the inner law—the divine principles that are inscribed in every human soul. As the journey progresses, the practitioner reaches *nafs-e-mutmainna*, the stage of a contented soul, where profound peace and fulfilment can be experienced.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Farida for taking the time to engage with us and illuminate the fundamentals of Islamic mysticism. Her insightful explanations and deep knowledge offered us a valuable understanding of this profound spiritual tradition.

Joseph Victor Edwin SJ



Islamic Studies Association Kick Starts The New Year with a Seminar on Interreligious Dialogue in the Indian Context

On January 2, 2025, the Islam Studies Association (ISA) hosted a half-day session on “Interreligious Dialogue in the Indian Context” for a small group of students and professors from Marquette University, Milwaukee, at St. Xavier’s School in Delhi. The students and their professors are visiting India to explore the rich diversity of its peoples, cultures, and religions.

Prof. Khurshid, a close friend and associate of ISA, delivered an insightful presentation on the 'Sufi Culture of India.' She emphasized that Islamic mystics engaged with one another from the heart and held deep respect for everyone, regardless of their backgrounds. She explained that true humanity thrives when we connect sincerely with one another. Moreover, she highlighted the Sufi principle of maintaining purity of intention in every action, whether in prayer or work, which encourages individuals to grow into authentic beings. She shared a poignant story about Sufi Sheikh Hazrat Nizamuddin, who advised on the importance of being focused on God while remaining connected to the world. He illustrated this by observing women skillfully balancing multiple pots of water on their heads, engaging with each other in conversation while keeping their concentration. The Sheikh used this imagery to convey that, like these women, we can achieve 'God Consciousness' while staying rooted in daily life. Prof. Khurshid encouraged everyone to embody the idea of 'having roots and taking wings.'

Ms. Naaz Khair, a committed social activist and development professional, shared her experiences working with marginalized communities across various states in India. Through numerous examples, she underscored the significance of addressing 'people's issues'. She stressed the importance of coming together regularly for thoughtful reflection, deep listening, sharing, as these foster new insights and innovative approaches to effecting change in people's lives. Naaz highlighted how being open to listening and trusting one another, particularly valuing feminine insights and perspectives in decision-making, revitalizes our dedication to supporting the disadvantaged.

Joseph Victor Edwin SJ, who teaches Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations at the Jesuit-run Vidyajyoti, noted that interreligious dialogue primarily creates a space for individuals with substantial differences to engage in meaningful conversations. He contrasted

this with traditional debates, which often lack the essence of authentic dialogue. Edwin remarked that effective discourse in interfaith contexts requires an open-minded approach that genuinely appreciates and seeks to understand our differences. He also stressed that participants must relinquish claims to exclusive truth and set aside any supremacist attitudes they may hold.

Edwin emphasized that the primary goal of interreligious dialogue is to foster mutual enrichment through shared learning and experiences. This transformative process enriches our understanding of ourselves and our faith, as we reflect on our beliefs in light of new knowledge gained from engaging with others.

The event concluded with Ms Nithya and Mr. Uddhav leading a session on the spirituality of Yoga, guiding the group through simple asanas. Attendees enjoyed tea and snacks afterward, while the accompanying professors' children happily played in the schoolyard.

Joseph Victor Edwin SJ

Course on Christian-Muslim Relations Includes Visits to Historic Mosques

Arul Kadal, a Jesuit theological centre for formation located in Chennai, organized a two-week course focused on Islam and Christian-Muslim relations conducted by Joseph Victor Edwin SJ. This program included visits to two historic mosques in the city: the Walajah Mosque in Triplicane and the Thousand Lights Mosque in Royapettah. Further we engaged with Kombai Anwar, a documentary filmmaker, as well as Janab Asrar and his colleagues from the Centre for Peace and Spirituality, Chennai branch. These experiences provided significant opportunities for profound learning, dialogue, and reflection.

At the Walajah Mosque, a Sunni mosque, we participated in iftar, the evening meal that breaks the fast during Ramadan. The spiritual ambiance during iftar, coupled with the communal prayers that followed, fostered a sense of religiosity and a shared humanity within me. This sentiment was further enriched by the knowledge that a group of Hindus from the Sufidar Trust has been serving iftar meals to approximately 2,500 attendees for the past 40 years. I found great solace in the wisdom of those who strive to cultivate fraternal relationships in the face of narratives filled with hatred, intolerance, and division.

At the Thousand Lights Mosque, a Shia mosque, we had the opportunity to meet Agha Shabir, a Shia Imam, who shared insights into the beliefs and practices of Shia Muslims, who constitute about 15% of the global Muslim population. Despite observing the fast himself, Agha Shabir exhibited remarkable hospitality towards the visitors. In addition to learning about Shia beliefs and practices, I observed that Shia adherents approach their faith with a deep conviction and their readiness to suffer for faith and justice.

We had the opportunity to view Kombai S Anwar's insightful documentary, 'Yadhum,' which explores the culture of Tamil Muslims. Engaging in a focused discussion with Anwar regarding the lessons conveyed in the film, I came to understand that Islam can coexist harmoniously with various religions and cultures without compromising its core tenets, thereby enhancing the unity of humanity.

My discussions with Janab Asar and his colleagues from the Centre for Peace and Spirituality (CPS) allowed me to appreciate the narrative framework established by Maulana Waheeduddin Khan, the founder of CPS. This organization diligently strives to present Islam in a peaceful light while maintaining its fundamental truths about God and the human experience.

This course has led me to a clear conclusion: in our contemporary post-truth context, intensified by populism and societal polarization,

there is a pressing need for a theological framework to guide our mission today. This mission must be firmly anchored in the belief in one Triune God and it should encompass the wisdom to acknowledge the divine presence within the sacred traditions of Islam, Hinduism, and other belief systems.

Jenith Xavier SJ

Muslims in India Today

The Islamic Studies Association in Delhi, along with the New Friendship and Brotherhood Dialogue Society, organized a meeting that brought together theology students from Vidyajyoti Institute of Religious Studies and a group of Muslim scholars and intellectuals. The discussion centered on the socio-political issues confronting Muslims in India and was skillfully moderated by Ms. Seema Durrani, an advocate practicing at the Delhi High Court.

Dr. Masud ul Qasmi, a prominent Islamic scholar, well-versed in the subject, offered an in-depth analysis of the difficulties confronting the Muslim community, supported by various case studies. His illustrations revealed a widespread climate of suspicion towards Muslims and specific instances of targeted scrutiny.

He pointed out the historically secular voting behavior of Muslim citizens, noting their consistent support for mainstream secular parties over divisive leaders from their own ranks. By examining recent electoral patterns—especially in the Delhi elections and previous national elections—he observed a link between the consolidation of majority votes and the electoral success of certain minority-focused parties. He argued that bloc voting among Muslims may not be a practical approach in the current Indian political context.

The speaker further claimed that the way forward for Muslims and other marginalized groups is to uphold constitutional values.

He stressed that protecting the Constitution should be seen as a religious obligation for Muslims. However, he recognized that the degree to which these values resonate with the broader population, both Muslim and non-Muslim, remains uncertain.

During the interactive segment, attendees expressed concerns regarding the status of Muslims in states like Kerala, Assam, and Tamil Nadu. They also addressed the ongoing lack of access to modern education within the community, as well as financial challenges and government policies impacting foreign funding.

The meeting highlighted the socio-political challenges faced by Muslims in India, emphasizing the need for a commitment to constitutional values as a means to navigate these difficulties. Participants recognized the importance of constructive dialogue and collaboration to address the pressing issues within the community. The meeting wrapped up with a collective commitment to promote constructive dialogue and seek solutions to these urgent issues.

Muhammad Asad Khan

National Conference: Dimensions of Dialogue In India

The Department of Islamic Studies at Maulana Azad National Urdu University in Hyderabad, in collaboration with the Henry Martyn Institute, hosted an International Conference titled “Dimensions of Dialogue in India” on February 3rd and 4th, 2025. This event took place in the Library Auditorium of the University.

I received an invitation from the organizing bodies to present a paper concerning the Human Fraternity Document, which was co-signed by Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayyib, the Rector of Al-Azhar University in Cairo. My presentation, entitled “Human Fraternity Document: A Kairos Moment in the History of Christian-Muslim Relations,” was delivered yesterday.

Additionally, I had the honor of being a guest of honour and was invited to provide introductory remarks at the conference's opening session. Later in the day, following presentations from several esteemed scholars, I participated in a panel discussion focused on the various aspects of interreligious dialogue in India.

I express my profound gratitude to God for a day rich in dialogue and shared learning experiences.

Joseph Victor Edwin SJ

Prophet Muhammad's Vision For A Pluralistic Society

The Muslim Students Organization of India hosted a seminar titled "Prophet Muhammad's Vision for a Pluralistic Society" at the India Islamic Cultural Centre on February 19, 2025. The event featured speakers, including Professor Arvinder Ansari from Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, and Joseph Victor Edwin SJ from the Vidyajyoti Institute of Religious Studies, Delhi.

Edwin highlighted the Church's respect for Muslims and their beliefs, referencing Vatican documents and recent papal statements, particularly those of Pope Francis.

He shared his personal journey as a Church servant and a student of theology and Christian-Muslim relations, emphasizing the respect he has developed for Muhammad, the prophet of Islam. Edwin discussed how he guides his students in understanding the essence of interreligious dialogue and its practical application. He also noted how the teachings of the Holy Qur'an regarding diversity and the differences among peoples and their faiths influenced the life of the Prophet Muhammad during his era. Professor Ansari further elaborated on various Qur'anic verses that advocate for diversity.

The guest of honor, Syed Farid Nizami Saheb, Gaddi Nashin of Dargah Hazarat Nizamuddin, New Delhi, eloquently spoke about the virtues of the Prophet Muhammad. The seminar was presided over by Professor Syed Liaqat Hussani Moini Chisti, Gaddi Nashin of Dargah Ajmer Sharif, who underscored the importance of peace and coexistence among all communities.

Joseph Victor Edwin SJ

Jesuits At Iftar

The Jesuit scholastics from Arul Kadal, the Jesuit Formation Centre for Theology in Chennai, participated in an iftar at the historic Walajah Mosque located in Triplicate, Chennai. This visit was an integral component of their course on Christian-Muslim Relations.

During the month of Ramadan, Muslims observe fasting from dawn until sunset, concluding their fast with the evening meal. This period is marked by a deep commitment to honoring God through prayer, fasting, and acts of charity.

As a Christian, I experienced profound joy in sharing the iftar with Muslims, engaging in prayer alongside them. One of the attending Jesuits remarked that the Church emphasizes the importance of fostering universal fellowship among all individuals (GS 39).

Notably, for over four decades, Sindhi volunteers from the Sufidar Trust, inspired by the teachings of Dada Ratanchand—a refugee from the Partition who established himself in Chennai—have been providing iftar meals at this 220-year-old mosque during Ramadan.

Joseph Victor Edwin SJ

The Holy Qur'an Resonates with Humanity

Asrar bhai, a volunteer from the Centre for Peace and Spirituality (CPS) in Chennai, articulated that the Holy Qur'an resonates deeply with the hearts of individuals. The members and volunteers of CPS, who are predominantly Muslims, draw inspiration from the teachings of Maulana Wahiddudin Khan, a prominent Islamic thinker from South Asia.

Asrar, along with his colleagues, visited Arul Kadal to engage with a group of young Jesuit theology students during a course on Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, led by Joseph Victor Edwin SJ, a lecturer in Theology and Christian-Muslim Relations at Vidyajyoti Institute of Religious Studies, Delhi. .

Their presentation to the Christian audience was structured into three segments: the Qur'an as the living voice of God; Muhammad as an exemplary model for humanity; and the efforts of Maulana Wahiddudin Khan in promoting peace.

In their initial discussion on the Holy Qur'an, they emphasized that its core message revolves around the Day of Judgment and the omnipotence of God. They argued that the imagery within the Qur'an serves to orient humanity towards God, who commands good and prohibits evil. The Qur'an encourages individuals to reflect on the grandeur of the universe and to align their will with divine intentions.

When addressing the figure of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, they highlighted the profound devotion Indian Muslims have towards him. Muhammad embodies a model of excellence not only for Muslims but for all of humanity. They provided numerous examples from his life to illustrate this point.

Additionally, they discussed Maulana Wahiddudin Khan's teachings aimed at fostering peace among diverse communities. He

emphasized the importance of presenting Islam to the contemporary world in a peaceful manner and urged Muslims and individuals from various backgrounds to collaborate in creating a harmonious global society. Engaging and fruitful discussion followed the presentation.

Joseph Victor Edwin SJ

Jesuits Visit Shia Mosque

Students from Arul Kadal, accompanied by their Dean of Studies, Fr. Bhaskar SJ, and the course instructor for the Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations course, Joseph Victor Edwin SJ, visited the Thousand Lights Mosque to meet with the chief cleric, Agha Shabbir. In our interactions with Muslims, the Shia perspective is often overlooked; however, Edwin emphasized the importance of addressing this aspect, which led to the organization of the visit.

Despite observing a fast, Agha Shabbir engaged in an extensive discussion with us regarding Shia beliefs and practices, addressing numerous questions and revealing new avenues for constructive dialogue between Christians and Shia Muslims.

Our Correspondent

Jesuits at the Centre for Peace and Spirituality

Jesuit theology students Manish, Basil, and Prakash from the Vidyajyoti Institute of Religious Studies in Delhi delivered their theological insights regarding the life and peace mission of Maulana Wahiddudin Khan to members of the Centre for Peace and Spirituality, an organization founded by Maulana Saheb In a meeting held at the Delhi CPS Centre today (8 February 2025).

An esteemed Islamic scholar, Maulana Saheb articulated a contemporary interpretation of Islam rooted in the Quran and Sunnah. He amassed a significant body of knowledge through

books, articles, and multimedia lectures, illustrating the relevance of Islamic teachings in today's context.

The students' presentation emphasized Maulana's ability to address the challenges of modernity while articulating Islamic principles in a dialogical framework. They highlighted the enduring significance of Maulana's message for contemporary society, which resonates with the Qur'anic injunction to "work with one another in promoting goodness and piety" (Qur'an 5:2).

Their presentation was recorded for future dissemination to members of the Global Centre for Peace and Spirituality.

Joseph Victor Edwin SJ, who teaches Theology and Christian-Muslim Relations at Vidyajyoti, noted that Maulana Saheb's teachings underscore the necessity of coexistence for the well-being of humanity. Edwin, who mentored the students in their exploration of Maulana Saheb's writings, remarked on their diligent and nuanced engagement with his work.

Joseph Victor Edwin SJ

Human Fraternity in Action: Insights From the Human Fraternity Forums in India and Lebanon's Interreligious Context

On March 11, 2025, a webinar entitled "Human Fraternity in Action: Insights from the Human Fraternity Forums in India and Lebanon's Interreligious Context" was collaboratively organized by the Islamic Studies Association (ISA) in Delhi and the Religion and Security Council (RSC) based in Rome.

The event featured prominent speakers, including Fr. Cyril SJ, a Jesuit priest from the Madurai Province and a peace activist from

Tamil Nadu, alongside Emiliano Stornelli, the founding Chairman of the Religion & Security Council (RSC). The discussion was facilitated by Sch. Julius Tudu SJ, a theology student from Delhi.

Emiliano Stornelli recounted his experiences in promoting interreligious dialogue and cooperation in the multifaith context of Tripoli, North Lebanon. He underscored that peace-building is not merely a one-time event but rather a continuous endeavor that necessitates structured resources in addition to motivation and genuine intentions. He noted that peace models effective in one community may not be applicable in another, highlighting the need for context-specific strategies for reconciliation and interfaith cooperation.

Fr. Cyril introduced a peacebuilding model that involves engaging children in educational institutions and training centers to cultivate values of peace and coexistence from a young age. He emphasized the potential of organized educational programs to nurture a culture of harmony and dialogue. Additionally, two young students shared their insights from participating in interfaith peace initiatives, illustrating how youth-driven efforts can effectively bridge divides and enhance mutual understanding among diverse communities.

The conversation underscored the significance of peacebuilding initiatives and the necessity for systematic strategies aimed at fostering coexistence and social stability. Participants of the webinar contributed perspectives on the essentiality of interfaith harmony and the pivotal role of education in cultivating a peaceful society. Nonetheless, concerns were voiced regarding the possible misinterpretation of child-focused peace initiatives by certain fundamentalist factions, who may view these efforts as attempts at religious conversion. This concern highlighted the complexities and sensitivities inherent in interfaith peace initiatives, emphasizing the necessity for clear communication and transparency to avert misunderstandings.

The webinar highlighted the shared responsibility of various faith traditions to advocate for justice, reconciliation, and the dignity of all individuals. The discussions reinforced the importance of constructing bridges rather than barriers, promoting dialogue instead of division, and transforming religious and cultural differences into opportunities for enrichment rather than sources of conflict.

The session concluded with Fr. Joseph Victor Edwin SJ, who serves as the Secretary of the Islamic Studies Association in Delhi, expressing gratitude to the guest speakers and participants for their valuable contributions and the exchange of innovative ideas.

Julius Tudu SJ

**Together, We can Become Better
Instruments of Peace: Pilgrimage to Mazar of
Fr. Herman Rasschaert SJ**

On March 15, 2025, the first-year theologians from the Jesuit Formation Centre of Theology in Ranchi embarked on a journey to Kutingia to visit the mazar (tomb) of Fr Herman Rass, SJ, who was martyred for peace during the communal violence that erupted in the area in 1964. This visit was a key component of our course on Christian-Muslim dialogue. Once we arrived in Kutingia, we went to the mazar of Fr Herman, where we celebrated the Eucharist, led by Fr Francis Minj SJ.

Fr Herman Rasschaert, a Belgian Jesuit missionary, arrived in India in 1947, coinciding with the country's newfound freedom from British rule. After arriving, he was sent to Sitagarha for language training. A few years later, on November 21, 1953, he was ordained a priest. He dedicated his life to serving the tribal community and, before he was assigned to Kutungia, he served as a parish priest in Khunti, Torpa, and Karra. His work among the tribes brought him immense joy and fulfilment. His enthusiasm for the Mundari tribe

kept him energetic and passionate, drawing many tribal people and others to him for various needs.

However, the greatest challenge for him lay ahead when Fr Herman was transferred to Kutungia, located in the remotest part of present-day Jharkhand, one of the states of the Indian Union. Working tirelessly among the Munda tribe, he often cycled for kilometres daily to visit people in faraway settlements. Nonetheless, his fervent missionary efforts earned him the love and trust of the community. He would greet visitors with a smile, making everyone feel welcome whenever they came to see him.

On March 23, 1964, a nightmare unfolded as communal tension raised its ugly head with the arrival of refugees from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) into India. Violence erupted around Gerda, a hamlet that fell under his parish Kutungia. Upon hearing reports of the bloodshed, Fr Herman rushed to the scene, determined to calm the situation. He made a courageous appeal for peace, striving to protect the lives of innocent people caught in the chaos. Tragically, during this communal violence, he was killed by rioters, becoming a martyr for peace.

Fr Herman devoted his life to serving others, a selfless commitment that ultimately cost him his life. His sacrifice echoes the love of Christ Jesus, who gave his life for humanity, shedding his blood on the Cross as an expression of ultimate love. Fr Herman stood as a peacemaker, shedding his blood to promote harmony between two religious communities. His legacy serves as a poignant reminder to be peacemakers as we continue to encounter many instances of hatred and communal violence, where innocent lives continue to be tragically affected.

His sacrifice inspires us as Jesuits to uphold his legacy of peace, aligning with the teaching that “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Mt. 5:9). As Jesuits, we honour Fr Herman by actively engaging in efforts to promote peace wherever division and animosity arise. Through these endeavours, we can instil hope and unity among our communities. Today,

Jesuits increasingly emphasize interreligious dialogue as a vital approach to fostering peace and harmony in a world that is often wounded. Fr Herman remains a guiding inspiration on this journey, encouraging us to work fearlessly towards uniting people, and this enduring impression is what he left with us at Gerda.

Today, it is our turn to carry on his legacy with the same passion and energy, focusing on fostering unity through inter-religious dialogue. We owe a debt of gratitude to Joseph Victor Edwin SJ for broadening our understanding of interfaith dialogue in today's context. While the images captured on our phones at Kutungia may fade over time, the impact of Fr Herman will endure forever. Together, we can become better instruments of peace.

Sonu Marandi SJ

Education, Faith, and Social Change: An Academic Engagement with Professor Khurshid Imam

On February 22, 2025, students from Vidyajyoti Institute of Religious Studies, Delhi, under the guidance of Joseph Victor Edwin, SJ, engaged in an insightful discussion with Professor Khurshid Imam, a distinguished scholar of Hebrew at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Delhi.

The session provided a valuable opportunity to reflect on the current socio-political landscape of India, particularly concerning the experiences of minorities and the increasing influence of certain ideologies within the country's educational framework.

Professor Imam highlighted how the concept of the "Chosen People," a significant element of Jewish religious identity, has historically contributed to a subtle division between communities, reinforcing notions of superiority and inferiority. He drew parallels to the Indian context, where caste and class divisions continue to shape societal structures. The overemphasis on particular religious

ideologies, he observed, influences public perceptions and attitudes, further deepening societal fractures.

Reflecting on his own academic journey, Professor Imam recounted his unexpected path, a destiny rather than a choice that led him into Hebrew studies in Israel over 25 years ago. His time in Israel exposed him to firsthand experiences of discrimination against non-Jews, along with deeply distressing events. Yet, amidst these challenges, he remained a bridge of harmony, fostering mutual understanding among the people he encountered.

The discussion extended to the current political climate in India, where minorities increasingly face marginalization and exclusion. Professor Imam cautioned that what is visible today is merely the tip of the iceberg, hinting at deeper underlying tensions. He also expressed his concern over the declining scholarly rigor and openness to diverse perspectives at JNU, a stark contrast to its historically rich intellectual environment. Particular attention was given to the New Education Policy (NEP) and its potential long-term implications.

He suggested that the Muslim community could take greater strides in the educational sector, much like Christian institutions, to strengthen their representation and contributions.

Despite the prevailing challenges, Professor Imam remains hopeful, believing these turbulent times to be temporary. His vision for a better society is rooted in inclusivity, respect for all religions and communities, and a commitment to academic scholarship as a means of positive social transformation. He emphasized that his faith has been a source of resilience and optimism, inspiring him to work toward a more just and harmonious society.

Adding to the richness of the conversation, Muhammad Ashad Khan, a PhD scholar, also shared his perspectives and concerns, making the discussion a deeply thought-provoking and meaningful exchange of ideas.

Julius Tudu SJ

Islamic Studies Association organises Eid Milan with a public discussion on Social Justice for Social Harmony

Islamic Studies Association, Delhi in collaboration with the Mission Law Education, Delhi, hosted a thought-provoking Socio-legal discussion themed "Social Justice for Social Harmony" on April 6, 2025, at 2:00 pm on the campus of St. Xavier's School, Delhi on the occasion of Eid Milan. Eid Milan is an occasion for Muslims and their friends to celebrate the joy of Eid ul Fitr, a feast that Muslims celebrate after the fasting month of Ramadhan. The gathering as it provided a space to celebrate the spirit of Eid, reinforcing values of compassion, solidarity, and gratitude, it was done meaningfully emphasizing the importance of education and through education, social harmony and peace founded on justice.

Adv. Anastasia Gill, Adv. Md. Ali Ansari, Adv. Julius Tudu, Ms. Khursheed Khan, Ms. Farheen Anwar, and a renowned magician Ishamudin Khan were the speakers at the event.

The event commenced with a keynote address by Adv. Md. Ali Ansari, a seasoned practitioner and educator in the legal field. Reflecting on his decades-long service to the profession, he expressed deep satisfaction in witnessing his former students rise as accomplished lawyers and civil judges. He lauded Mission Law Education for nurturing aspiring law students and enabling them to become instruments of justice and social transformation.

Ms Farheen, one of the beneficiaries of the Mission Law Education initiative, shared her remarkable journey of resilience. Despite her physical challenges, she succeeded in pursuing education and finding meaningful employment. With humility, she acknowledged the support she received and now stands as an embodiment of courage and determination, inspiring countless others.

Adv. Julius Tudu in his address highlighted the subtle yet pervasive forms of discrimination entrenched in society. He warned against the rise of communal narratives propagated by extremist elements

and urged the audience, especially the law students, to remain hopeful and take proactive roles in fostering an inclusive and just society.

In a heartfelt narrative, Adv. Anastasia Gill recounted her childhood dreams of becoming an advocate for the marginalized. She called upon the participants to become agents of social change, using their legal knowledge as a tool for justice and equity.

Prof. Khurshed Khan, a long-time supporter of the Islamic Study Association, emphasized the transformative power of education. Drawing from her own life and the values instilled by her mother, she encouraged students to remain focused and faithful in their academic pursuits, underscoring the long-term impact of committed learning.

A unique highlight of the event was the thought-provoking display of magic by magician Ishamudin Khan, who used his art not merely to entertain but to awaken social consciousness. Through his magic, he communicated powerful messages on social issues, engaging the audience in both wonder and reflection.

One of the most meaningful moments of the event was the distribution of law books to students who aspire to become lawyers. They are supported by the Mission Law Education.

The event concluded with words of gratitude by Fr. Victor Edwin SJ, who expressed deep appreciation to all participants, and speakers. The gathering was not only an occasion for intellectual engagement but also a celebration of shared values and collective commitment to building a just and harmonious society.

Julius Tudu SJ



Reflections on a Day of Soulful Conversations and Spiritual Exploration

Today's (25 January 2025) meeting with Fr. Victor Edwin was profoundly enriching, filled with moments of heartfelt dialogue and quiet contemplation. We discussed my future paths, particularly regarding doctoral studies, and he offered valuable guidance on navigating these next steps. Over lunch, our conversation turned to the idea of universal salvation and its diverse interpretations within religious thought.

One compelling aspect of our discussion was the role of mystical experiences in interpreting religious texts. Mystics, through their lived experiences, provide glimpses into the infinite depths of God's word. We explored how figures like Ibn Arabi, Fakhruddin Iraqi, and Mansur al-Hallaj, deeply rooted in Islamic scripture and tradition, challenge the dominant perception of Islam as exclusivist. Their work demonstrates a profound devotion to scripture while offering new insights shaped by their spiritual encounters and exegetical traditions.

Later, at the mazaar of the great Mirza Abdul Qadir Bedil, we engaged in contemplative prayer and reflected on our spiritual journeys. Bedil, through his Persian poetry, exemplifies the essence of authentic interfaith dialogue. He seamlessly integrated the deep spirituality of India into his work, not as an imitation or appropriation, but as a genuine internalization of another tradition. His creativity reflected a profound engagement with his own heritage while embracing the wisdom of others.

Fr. Edwin also introduced me to the Ignatian spiritual practice of the "examination of conscience," a method of cultivating gratitude and self-awareness in daily life. This practice involves observing passing thoughts and actions, discerning whether they lead closer to God or to the self's lower inclinations. It resonates with the Yogic

concept of sakshi bhava (witness consciousness) and the Islamic practice of muraqabah (spiritual watchfulness), highlighting the universal nature of mindfulness across traditions.

While it is true that religious traditions differ in their concepts and perspectives, a deeper resonance often emerges when one ponders the mystical experience. One can be inspired by the Qur'an's call to personal responsibility and surrender to the Divine while simultaneously moved by Christ's sacrifice on the cross, Krishna's divine song, or the meditative calm of a Buddhist chant. Though this way of thinking may appear contradictory or even eclectic, I see these as a reflection of the boundless mercy and vastness of God.

In the end, it is our limited concepts that struggle to capture the Divine's infinite reality. The mystic journey reminds us that God's mercy transcends all boundaries, offering an invitation to embrace the unity within the diversity of spiritual paths.

By Muhammad Asad Khan





Let us rejoice in our risen Lord who has conquered death and secured our eternal salvation. Let us embrace the power of his resurrection in our daily lives, allowing his victory to transform our defeats into triumphs.

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