

Salaam

ISSN 0970-5384

Quarterly to Promote Understanding



Charles de Foucauld, Sidi Edriss, the Blessed Mother, and 'the Blue People'
Healing the World's Wounds Together
An Alternative Approach to Christian-Muslim Marriage
A Story of Interreligious Friendship
Reflections on Interfaith Conversation
Christian Presence Among Muslims
Pilgrimage to the shrine of Jesuit martyr - Fr Herman Rasschaert
I too have a Story
A Prayer

ISLAMIC STUDIES ASSOCIATION

Vol. 44

April 2023

No. 2

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

INFORMATION

SALAAM is a Quarterly published by the Islamic Studies Association. Articles and Book Reviews meant for Publication should be emailed to victoredwinsj@gmail.com

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SUBSCRIPTION RATES

ONLY FOR INDIA

Annual Subscription (4 Issues) : Rs. 100.00

Life Subscription : Rs. 1500.00

Please do not send subscription by DD and Cheque.

Method of Payment

By transfer of money through Bank

Name: Islamic Studies Association

Bank: Canara Bank

Account Number: 0346101008770

IFSC CODE: CNRB0000346

SAVING ACCOUNT

By Money Order to

Victor Edwin SJ

Editor, Salaam

Vidyajyoti

23, Raj Niwas Marg,

Delhi-110 054

Views expressed in the articles are those of the respective authors and do not necessarily represent those of the Editor or the Editorial Committee.

Design and Print: Bosco Society for Printing & Graphic Training, Okhla New Delhi- 25,
Email: boscopress@gmail.com

(For Private circulation only)

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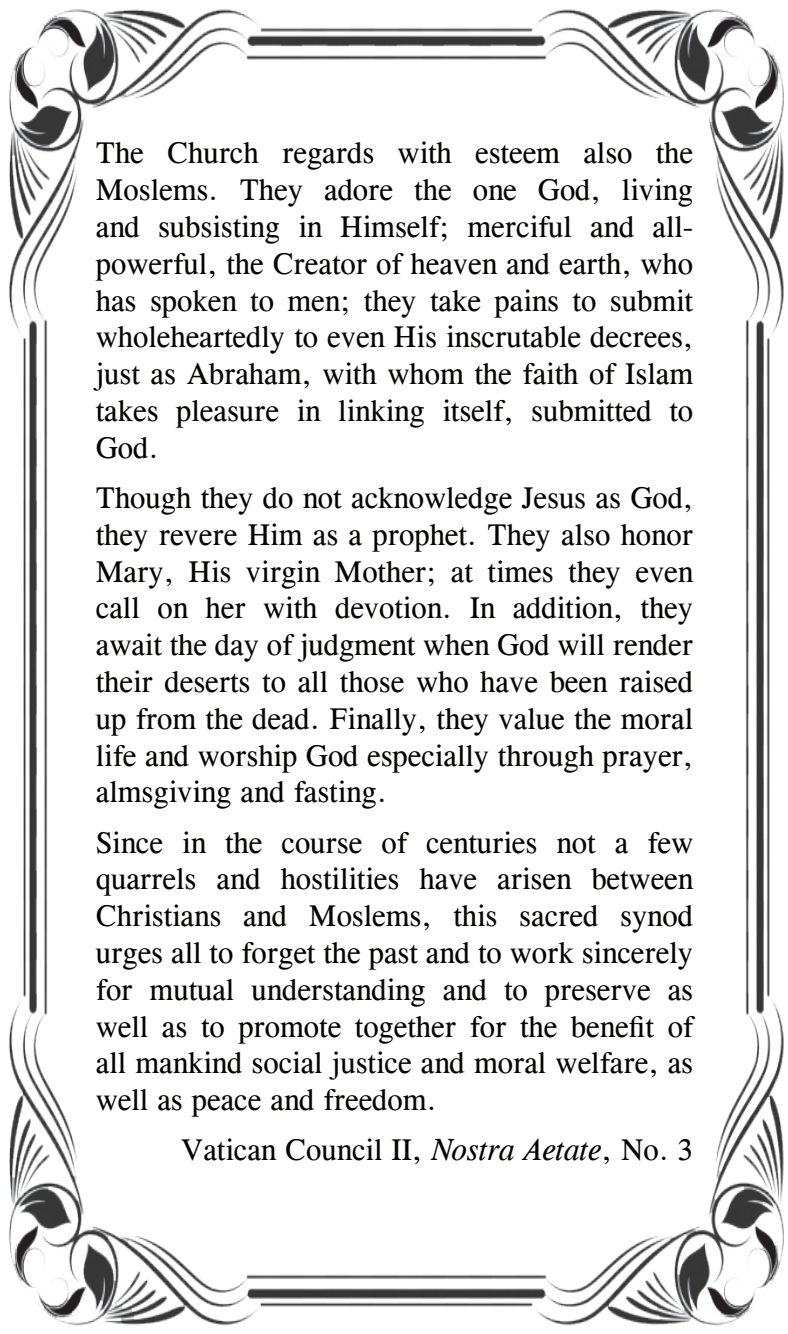
April 2023

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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

Dear Readers

Our Muslim brothers and sisters around the world have begun the holy month of Ramadan. On this auspicious occasion, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in its message to ‘Muslim brothers and sisters’, called upon all Muslims and Christians to strive to promote together a ‘culture of love and friendship’ in the context of ‘the culture of hate’.

The culture of hate is nurtured through the numerous “negative attitudes and behaviours towards those who are different from us”, including “suspicion, fear, rivalry, discrimination, exclusion, persecution, polemics, insults, and backbiting” through social media, said the message.

The message encourages both Muslims and Christians to nurture respect, goodness, charity, friendship, and mutual care for all. Such nourishing relationship should be promoted by a “sound education” of new generation. A sound education for future generations is formed in the family, at school, in places of worship, and on social media.

A couple of weeks ago, I asked a Muslim friend of mine: “What is the prayer in his heart and lips?” He wrote to me: O Allah, make us reach the month of Ramadan and bless us in Ramadan.

Many Christians may know that Muslims throughout the month of Ramadan abstain from eating and drinking during the day. A Muslim colleague told me that his father taught him, his brothers, and sisters that the holy month invites the faithful not only abstain from eating and drinking, but also restraining minds, hearts, eyes, ears, hands, tongues and other senses and desires. It is reorienting oneself to God and striving to do the will of God.

Muslims believe that the Qur’an was revealed in the month of Ramadan. Another Muslim friend told me that they believe that

during the month of Ramadan, the angel Gabriel came to meet with Muhammad, the prophet of Islam and read the Qur'an with him. This belief motivates them to read, recite, and listen to the recitation of the Qur'an. One may find many Muslims sitting and listening to the recitation of the Qur'an in the mosques, especially in the nighttime.

The month of Ramadan evokes the spirit of generosity in Muslims, and they are charitable. While they deprive themselves of food and drink and experience hunger, they are deeply aware of the pangs of hunger. They are sensitised to the suffering of the poor. They feed the poor.

This year the month of Ramadan coincides with the Lenten season. In the Lenten season, the Church teaches us to fast, pray and give generously to the poor. May the holy season of Lent and the holy month of Ramadan help both Christians and Muslims respectively to come closer to the Lord and to one another.

I'm happy to inform you that a book edited by me titled: "Brothers to All - The Life and Witness of St. Charles de Foucauld" was released at the South Asian Theologians Forum Meeting (Pune, 22 - 23, January 2023) by Fr. Samuel Simmick SJ. Fr. Jeyaraj Rasiaiah SJ (former Provincial of Sri Lanka Jesuits) received the first copy. In the blurb for the book, Cardinal Michael Fitzgerald noted that Charles de Foucauld, the 'Universal Brother' led a hidden life in the open desert. 'Brothers to All' helps to make this hidden treasure known". The book was published by Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York.

On the 31 January 2023, I had an opportunity to take Bishop Hermann Glettler, Bishop of Innsbruck, Austria and a couple of Jesuits, members of the Faculty of Theology for a visit to Jāmi' Masjid (Friday Mosque), Delhi. It was built by the Mughal emperor Shajahan (d. 1666) between 1650–56. Jama Masjid also called "Masjid-i Jahān Numā" ("world-reflecting mosque"). The vast open courtyard in front of the Mosque, which could accommodate more than 25 thousand worshipers, the large interior space of the prayer hall, the two 40 meters tall minarets and the three large marble domes arising from the prayer hall are breath-taking. This amazing place

of worship has been part of the lives of many thousand Muslims over the centuries. I felt a gentle silence descending upon my heart as we silently stood at the courtyard and prayer hall. A friend of mine explained the structure and traditions of the Mosque. We had the opportunity to visit a small Museum at the Mosque where some rare manuscripts of the Holy Qur'an are preserved. It was a fruitful experience of meeting our Muslim friends at the Mosque.

Professor Gaetano Sabetta (Vice Rector, Urbaniana University, Rome) delivered the 6th Victor Courtois Memorial Lecture: "Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations in Europe - A Way Forward" at Indian Social Institute, Delhi on 1 February 2023. Here's the essence of his lecture: Getting to the heart of the encounter between Islam and Europe, and subsequently learning about the relationship between Muslims and Christians in the European context, is fundamental to tracing a fruitful path to follow in this complex scenario in which these three living and pulsating realities move. This road will reveal the problematic nature of Islam in relation to Europe and assess the contribution that Islamic-Christian dialogue can make to the former in terms of mutual understanding, reciprocal enrichment and the development of European Muslims, a crucial category. This can be pursued through an intercultural and interreligious process. It is a middle way between the failure of multiculturalism and the disaster of assimilationism. Interreligious and intercultural engagement between Christians and Muslims in Europe aims precisely at developing this middle way, even if there is no lack of difficulties and misunderstandings.

After the lecture, six practitioners of dialogue: Professor Akhtarul Wasey, Professor Khurshid Khan, Ms. Naaz Khair, Dr. Rajat Malhotra, Mr. Basit Jamal, and Mr. Behzad Fatmi were honoured with a shawl and a plaque.

In the middle of February, I travelled to Ranchi and then to Chennai to give a course on Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations for the students of Jesuit Formation Centre for Theology (JFCT). As part of the course the students of JFCT, Ranchi made a pilgrimage to the shrine of a Jesuit martyr Herman Rasschaert, who is revered by the Adivasi Christians as an *apostle of peace* and *messenger of*

communal harmony. A news item and reflection on this experience is published in this number of Salaam.

In Chennai, along with twenty Jesuit students of Theology from the Jesuit Formation Centre for Theology, Arul Kadal, I went on a visit to the *Bhukari Alim Arabic College* for meeting the faculty and students. Dr. P. S. Syed Masood Jamali, the principal of the college welcomed us affirming that Christians are closer to Muslims for we share common grounds in our faith and practice. The Qur'an says: "you will find the nearest of them in affection to the believers those who say, "We are Christians." That is because among them are priests and monks and because they are not arrogant" (Qur'an 5:82).

The training at the College not only equips the students to serve the Muslim community in their faith and practices but also creates career opportunities that fetches them a decent job. The principal informed the Jesuits that the students acquire working knowledge in Arabic that helps them to understand the sources of their faith: the Qur'an and Hadith. The curriculum of studies while faithful to the basic components of madrasa training, the study material opens them to the pluralistic world of today. The students are not isolated in the post-modern world; they robustly discuss social and moral issues in seminars, said the Principal. He also recognised that their exposure to Christian faith and practice is not adequate.

It was a 'stepping out into the Muslim world' experience for the Jesuits. After the initial comments and formal conversation that lasted for around 90 minutes the students entered conversations of sharing of and listening to their faith experiences. We Christians felt grateful for the Second Vatican Council that opened dialogue with the followers of other religions. We remembered that here in Chennai, in 1986, Saint Pope John Paul II made the most beautiful and profound statement: "By dialogue, we let God be present in our midst; for as we open ourselves to one another, we open ourselves to God". It was truly an experience of learning.

Christopher Lamb in his "The Call to Retrieval: Kenneth Cragg's Christian Vocation to Islam" points out that Kenneth Cragg in his writings returns continually to one consistent theme ... the need

for contact, for communication, for relationship, between human beings estranged from one another, and between humankind and God. Christians cannot remain content to sit in a mental bunker and fire dogmatic missiles at strangers. Whatever their understanding of the beliefs of the others they must feel the urge to be in personal contact with them, to speak and listen face to face.

In the middle of March, there was another joint initiative on Dialogue of Life, organised by Mission Law Education (MLE) and Islamic Studies Association. It was a motivational seminar for law students who are supported by MLE. The seminar was held on 18 March 2023 at St. Xavier's School, 4 Raj Niwas Marg, Delhi. Ms. Naaz Khair, Advocate Mohammad Ali Ansari and Joseph Victor Edwin SJ welcomed the participants and explained the dynamics of the programme.

The speakers of the day, Professor Arman Ansari, Dr. Vinay Kumar, and Advocate Zakir Choudary in their address shared with the students the challenges that they faced in their life journeys. They emphasized the importance of education for the empowerment of the poor. They also highlighted our collective responsibility for contributing to the building of a just society. Father Varkey Perekatt SJ, member of Islamic Studies Association encouraged the students to persevere in their studies. He also presented study materials to all students.

The readers may be pleased to know that Vidyajyoti Institute of Religious Studies (Faculty of Theology), where Islamic Studies Association was established, celebrated the golden jubilee of its existence in Delhi. It was the vision of Father Pedro Arrupe, the Superior General of the Society of Jesus that St. Mary's College (Kurseong) be transferred to Delhi so that a more effective witness to Jesus Christ in the context of diverse cultures, religions and the other social changes would be possible. May the Jubilee year inspire us to deepen our commitment to give witness to Jesus Christ and to proclaim the joy of the Gospel.

I wish you happy reading.

Joseph Victor Edwin SJ

Visitations:
**Charles de Foucauld, Sidi Edriss, the Blessed
Mother, and ‘the Blue People’**

By Rosemary Peters-Hill

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?”

— Luke 1:39-42

When you’re struggling your way through 47 days of Lent, or through the month of Ramadan (which has just started this Wednesday late in March 2023), joyfulness can feel counterintuitive. Ramadan, from r-m-d *to burn*, is a time for depriving the body of its vices and comforts, “burning” off excess to get down to the most authentic architecture of the soul. Lent demands three principal things from Catholics – prayer, fasting, and almsgiving – and while clothing the naked and feeding the hungry can come from a place of joy and love, and prayer is a deep well that sustains and nourishes, fasting is ... well ... *joyful* is not the first word that springs to mind. Both periods are almost outside of time, engraved in the structure of our year as children of God, but so different from the rest of the calendar that when they have come to their end the past 4 (or 7) weeks feel a bit like a fog we just walked through.

So I begin this essay with full knowledge that it will be read during these periods of paring ourselves down and away from earthly comforts, and that the paradox of praying a joyful mystery during a time of fallow creates a strange rupture in the logic of the calendar. But beyond what they demand of us, Ramadan and Lent are both

about the opportunity to deepen our connection to the Lord, and to one another, as brothers and sisters and children of God. The exigencies of fasting and physical deprivation can crack us – and if we do not fight the cracking, if we allow it to be an aperture rather than a fissure, we can *open* ourselves to receive joy, a joy greater than mere comfort or happiness. And thus, knowing that the feast of the Annunciation is just days away and the time when Mary heads into her own desert to be with Elizabeth, I offer this reflection on the joyfulness accessible in austerity and poverty, in fasting and almsgiving.

§§§

It is challenging, in 2023, to speak or write about the colonial period of any country in terms that might hint at a shred of positivity. France’s legendary “conquest of Algeria” in 1830 caused over a century of harm and resulted in a bloody struggle for independence that France only recognized as a war in 1999, nearly 40 years after its conclusion;¹ and even then, “liberation” brought decades of lingering damages to Algeria’s infrastructure, economy, government, religious life, and social organization. Homelessness and unemployment were rampant.² France so thoroughly *detrified* the country over the 132 years of occupation that localized ethnic identities had nearly disappeared, alliances formed for mainly political bases. The military overthrew the first independent government in 1965, just three years after the hard-won liberation from France, and Algeria between 1965 and 1989 was under authoritarian military rule which, in the 1990s, erupted into revolts and a catastrophic civil war.³

We should not put these historical facts aside, even while celebrating the canonization of Charles de Foucauld. Still in his sainthood, people have (rightly) objected to his role in the history of colonial occupation and the politics of assimilation that subjected

¹<https://www.france24.com/en/tv-shows/france-in-focus/20220205-a-war-without-a-name-france-s-controversial-colonial-past-in-algeria>

²The homeless numbered in the hundreds of thousands, and unemployment affected seventy percent of the population.

³John Ruedy explores these foundational decades in *Modern Algeria, Second Edition: The Origins and Development of a Nation* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005).

native peoples to the injustice of an inferior status. Foucauld does not make the position any easier to discern. He held complex and contradictory views on the colonies: while deploring the way colonialism functioned in practice, he nonetheless believed in an ideologically pure colonialism that could “elevate” colonized nations – leveling the playing field, so to speak, so colonizers and colonized would recognize each other as equals.

Beautiful thought. And yet ... Foucauld wrote in one letter that while the French Protectorate established over Morocco in 1911 was “better than nothing,” he prayed France would “take Morocco as a possession” so that the *tricolore* could “fly over that country”; and further prophesied, “Soon Morocco will become the head of our magnificent northwest African empire which will be united from the Mediterranean to Chad.”⁴ In a 1911 letter to his lifelong friend Gabriel Tourdes, Foucauld wrote, “[Colonel Laperrine] has *given* the Tuaregs and the central Sahara to France and linked Algeria to our Sudanese possessions;⁵ the Sahara no longer separates Algeria from the Sudan, but rather unites them.”⁶ His language (“possession,” “our,” “given”) naturally entails the power dynamics of superior v subordinate, and represents the space and its inhabitants as lesser, as objects for the French to exchange and control. Even if that dynamic did not reflect Foucauld’s final position on colonial rapports, those on the receiving end of such statements were less than appreciative.

⁴Letter to Lieutenant Brissaud of the 2e Tirailleurs Algériens, 1912. Reprinted in Georges Gorrée, *Au Service du Maroc: Charles de Foucauld* (Paris: Grasset, 1938), pp. 191–92.

⁵Emphasis on “given” and translation are my own. Also note: “Sudanese” in this context does not refer to the country of the Sudan, but rather to the horribly nicknamed “nigrities”: the name *sudan* itself comes from *دوساً / as-wadʿ*, Arabic for “black”; thus “sudanese” here refers to *ن ادوسلا دالاب / beled asudānʿ*, “black countries.” The so-named Sudan territory stretched across West and Central Africa between the Sahara and the Atlantic coast. The “French possessions” included Senegal and the French Sudan (now Mali), as well as French Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire, Dahomey, Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso), Ghana, and Chad.

⁶Charles de Foucauld, letter of 16 June 1911. In *Lettres à un ami de lycée, 1874-1915. Correspondance avec Gabriel Tourdes* (Paris: Nouvelle Cité, 1982), p. 174.

It is, however, important to keep in mind what the connection of those spaces meant – for French colonists, for native Algerians, and for neighboring countries and tribes. For one, it meant the Sahara, that vast desert named Desert, was no longer *just* desert: there was another side to it, and it was possible to reach that side. Whether for purposes of expansion, discovery, warfare, or trade, the connection offered previously unfathomable opportunities. It is hard to imagine, in an age when you can contact someone across the world with a fingertip and *zoom* has become a professional activity – the impassability of the Sahara in 19th-century North Africa. Over the years since the conquest of Algiers, several explorers had attempted to “link” territories of the south-eastern Sahara with northern Algeria, Morocco, and West Africa – and had met with disastrous ends. One extremely notable such disaster was an expedition led by Colonel Paul Flatters. Flatters had the lukewarm approval of colonial officials to lead an expedition with the objective of conducting a survey to determine how a trans-Saharan railway might run. He did not anticipate that inhabitants of the destination might not desire a railroad cutting into and through their territory – which, in the southeastern corner of Algeria, consisted of mostly mountains and pastures, through which tribes moved periodically, following agricultural seasons. The Flatters expedition fell prey to the Tuareg of the Aït Ayr clan, who robbed and sacked his camp, poisoned his cameleers and hacked his band to pieces. The remaining members of the Flatters party, in a desperate bid to survive, resorted repeatedly to cannibalism – even to necrophagia, as members of the party died of injury, starvation, or thirst – before straggling back with no European survivors. Of the 93 men who had departed Ouargla with Colonel Flatters (one of the first to be killed), fewer than a dozen returned. “France’s humiliation was complete,” one historian wrote succinctly: “Never before had a European power been crushed so thoroughly by a native force.”⁷

So that the French in Southern Algeria greeted enthusiastically their expanded colonial reach is a dramatic understatement. European powers had focused their efforts on trans-Saharan communications

⁷Fergus Fleming, *The Sword and the Cross: Two Men and an Empire of Sand* (New York: Grove, 2003), 39

– establishing trade routes, taking more territories adjacent to extant colonial posts, expanding into the eastern parts of the Sudan and down into sub-Saharan Africa – for over thirty years by the time Foucauld wrote the perplexing letter I quoted above. It was not the first time he would mention the “glorious” vision of a French empire extending all across Africa, nor would it be the last. But this time, he reflected on not the politics or nationalism of the colonial enterprise, but on the *opportunities for connection* that this new development provided. That last sentence could even be read as a colonial version of his great spiritual insight: that as no desert limits an empire, there are no insurmountable differences between people. What he came to later in his spiritual life was shaped in part by this colonial insight: everyone is part of God’s sacred Creation, so you have to love your “others” within the differences. The real “draw” to Christ, Brother Charles came to understand, lay not in preaching his word, but in *living* it.

His vision has outlived its visionary and taken root. In 2005, when then-Pope Benedict XVI published the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* [*God is Love*], Foucauld’s beatification (from approximately five weeks earlier) was still quite fresh in the mind. The Holy Father wrote, “Whoever exercises charity in the name of the Church will never try to impose the faith of the Church on others. He knows that love in its purity and gratuitousness is the best testimony of the God in whom we believe and by whom we are moved to love. The Christian knows when it is time to speak of God and when it is right to be silent ... and let love speak only.”⁸

Perhaps this spiritual revelation sparked St. Charles de Foucauld’s particular devotion to, and identification with, the Mystery of the Visitation. Several of his spiritual writings focus on the charism of the Visitation, on the beauty of that deed: go out to others and be with them, in the grandeur of God’s infinite possibility. This exhortation foretells Jesus’ instructions before his Ascension: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, ... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:18-20).

⁸His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (Vatican City, Vatican: Dicastero per la Comunicazione – Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005), n.31c.

Jesus' commandment to his disciples personifies the early Church, but takes its primary example from the Blessed Mother. Just after receiving the angel's announcement, now alone in the human reality of her new role of expectant mother, doesn't waste any time, but immediately sets out on a journey to her kinswoman Elizabeth. She *hastens* to be present for her cousin, though nothing about this vocation is familiar, though the annunciation creates a break between her former life and whatever lies ahead. She journeys out to Elizabeth, bringing *joy*.

The final words of Matthew 28:30 are "I am with you always, to the close of the age." It is Jesus' promise to his disciples who, in the merely human reality of a world he changed then left, I imagine still mourned the physical closeness they had lived with Jesus, even in the wonder of the Resurrection, even in their increasing faith and mission. Mary is, again, a precursor for their experience. The angel visited her and then departed (Luke 1: 38). What must she have felt, this teenager, betrothed to a widow, in that moment when she was suddenly alone again – never to be alone again? Did she wonder if the life she known was like a fragile shell of a life, something to be cracked and shattered? Did she fear what lay beneath that fissured outer layer? I'd have run to family too. But of course, the Lord was with her, always already, too, to the close of the age, long before the announcement in Scripture – and long after. In one of the most fascinating findings of materno-fetal medicine, genetic samplings show that a child's DNA remains within their mother's cellular makeup even after leaving the womb. "Within weeks of conception, cells from both mother and fetus travel back and forth across the placenta, resulting in one becoming part of the other," writes Katherine Rowland.⁹ Indeed, "studies have found fetal origin cells in the mother's bloodstream, skin, and all major organs."¹⁰ Those fetal cells can remain detectable in the mother's genetic makeup for weeks, months, even years after giving birth. So Jesus is already a part of Mary, biologically *and* spiritually, when she

⁹Katherine Rowland, "We Are Multitudes," in *Aeon*, 11 January 2018 (<https://aeon.co/essays/microchimerism-how-pregnancy-changes-the-mothers-very-dna>), §4.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, §5.

goes to Elizabeth. He is in her blood and breath and the flutter of cilia against her cheekbones as she wakes.

I am writing this early in the morning, on a day when I can work at home; this early hour gives me a little quiet time before my kids – two extremely energetic small humans – get up and need all the things. As the day unfolds, I will put on headphones for music only I can hear, and walk the dog; come back to a house only my small family of four lives in; open my personal computer to work, check the calendar on my iPhone, maybe order something online without having to speak to or see another person. It's an isolated, individual-centered way of living. Partly because of Covid, which locked us all up separated from one another; partly because I've always been a little bit of a hermit; and partly because of the way the culture I live in is structured. Rowland: "The Western self is a bounded, autonomous entity, defined in no small part by its presumed distinction from the other." My little life on earth reflects a Western mindset that dates back at least to Descartes and Montaigne, a steady and increasingly insular process of defining the individual.

Its presumed distinction from the other. It is different, living this period of stolen solitudes, from living every moment full of elated expectation and caution and self-denial when my body was growing a human. On nights when pregnancy insomnia had me pacing the old hardwood floors where I once rode an orbital sander like a Segway to peel back layers of scuff and damage, I would place my hands either side of my belly and talk to the growing baby. We conversed until my walking put him to sleep and his sleeping allowed me to sleep, finally, our states of being interlinked. I cried when he was born. *Sobbed.* I held this beautiful tiny person in his white and blue blanket close to my heart and rocked him, marveling, but also mourning. "I miss you," I told him. How did I even know who I was anymore, without his rhythms rhythming my days? My husband looked at me askance: "honey, he's right here," he said, but I wept, bereft. Because he wasn't right *here* anymore, within my body; we no longer breathed the same oxygen, and the biggest challenge of mothering a newborn (everyone told me) would be making sure I did not wake him once he finally slept. No more midnight heart-to-hearts, no more 2 a.m. Irish ballads, no more giggling whenever

the shape of his foot moved like a windshield wiper beneath my skin. But having a baby and raising a person are complementary stages of the same vocation, the two faces of a caryatid. I learned to hold him differently. I learned that of all the nicknames I have ever had over my life, and they are many, “Mamama” was my favorite. And knowing that he lingers in my bloodstream and the genetic code that makes me who I am now is both comfort and reminder. Like Mary, I am no longer who I was. My children grow, and they stretch and challenge me, and push me beyond what I thought I was capable of, beyond what used to be a limit and is now an expansion. I am a different *self*. “This unfolding field of research suggests that we humans are constituent beings, made of many. [Like] Walt Whitman’s multitudes, we need a ‘new paradigm of the biological self’.”¹¹ I submit that any new paradigm should reach outward as well as inward, recognizing the individual as both a unique genetic code and part of a network of similarly coded genes who hold each other up.

Little Charles, the scion of the de Foucauld lineage, grew up as the epitome of privilege, from aristocratic birth to the fortune he inherited while still a teenager. He abused that privilege in tangible ways – lavish late-night feasts, paid escorts, an excess of champagne; and intangible ones – indolence toward studies, insubordination toward superiors, disregard for consequences, disrespectful treatment of women. Even setting out through Morocco disguised as a Jew represented privilege: if his borrowed “Jewishness” became onerous he could, as he wrote in the Avant-Propos to *Reconnaissance au Maroc*, “just chuck it aside.” Real Jews did not have that luxury, even should they experience that desire. Real Jews were forced to live within the *mellahs*, specific parts of town separate from Muslim residences. And yet, at the heart of all these experiences lay a wound that no feast, carousing, or disguise could heal – a burden and debt of memory he could not just chuck aside. He lost his mother, Élizabeth de Morlet, in 1864 – and if we think about fetal cells remaining in the mother’s DNA for years, perhaps we can understand that part of little Charles died with her. His father Édouard de Foucauld de Pontbriand died

¹¹Ibid., §8.

later that year, and his paternal grandmother as well: Charles was an orphan by the age of six. He lost nearly everyone who loved him within the first ten years of his life and, a few years after that, lost the grandfather who had become father, mother, and guardian for him. In the absence of loving family he got only money. But no amount of money could fill the emptiness within him. It took the kindness of “others,” both foreign and closer to home, to show Charles how to be who God created him to be.

Before being a de Foucauld, beyond being a boarding school student or a failed soldier, Charles de Foucauld was a child of God. That was his first identity, the one written out in Scripture – “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you went forth from the womb, I sanctified you” (Jer. 1:5); Isaiah – “thus saith the Lord who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel, ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are mine’” (Is. 43:1); the Psalms – “the Lord Himself is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people” (Ps. 100:3); St. Paul’s letter to the Romans – “whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s” (Rm. 14:8); St. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians – “you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God” (1 Cor. 3:23); and many other passages besides. This is what Charles de Foucauld came to understand, and sought to live. Not just for himself or by himself, but in his ministry and connections with other people, especially those who had nothing.

At the heart of the mystery of the Visitation lies the unadorned love that recognizes no “others,” whether by borders or skin color or age or class or gender identity. In hastening to Elizabeth, Mary celebrated her kinswoman’s joyful expectation, and rejoiced in their shared poverty. Both women knew and accepted that their will and plan was nothing before the Lord’s, and rejoiced in living beyond the self alone. The purity of that trust, that abandonment into the Lord’s hands, gave both Mary and Elizabeth joy, a connection that transcends the known, familiar, comfortable world. The word “poverty” itself links the holy women: derived from two Latin roots, *paucus* (“little”) and *parare* (“to bring forth, produce”), poverty literally evokes both childbirth and the awareness of one’s own small nature in a larger schema – and there is nothing like

bringing a life into the world to make one's own small nature very evident. The mystery of the Visitation produces a cooperation with the Lord's will, in joy. It is a mystery of holy emergence.

Foucauld wrote, "the salvation of one's neighbor is as important as the salvation of one's self. Every Christian must be an *apostle*. That is not advice; it is a command – the command of charity."¹² That very command resonated in Mary's heart at the mere mention of her cousin's name and pregnancy. The Blessed Mother did not need words; she *lived* charity. She went out to Elizabeth as naturally as she accepted the angel's words – in an automatic movement of absolute love.

§§§

This "going out to" was not a new phenomenon in Brother Charles' life.¹³ One early such encounter happened in Morocco. During his travels, he stopped in Bou el-Djad (today: دج جلا يبا, Bejaâd), an important cultural center on the old Zaer road between Fez and Marrakech, and home of an important zaouïa (religious community, but also house of learning) in Cherkaoui territory. Foucauld, welcomed warmly by the local holy man Sidi ben Daoud, experienced profound fraternal charity and connection with the Sid's grandson Sidi El Hajj Edris. Edris took painstaking care of Foucauld and his companion Mardochee, ensuring their comfort and wellbeing – even bringing them out of the *mellah* and into his

¹²from *Charles de Foucauld: Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbit Books, 1999), pp. 80-81.

¹³As early as his St-Cyr days, he was put on house arrest for leaving the school in disguise as a beggar, hopping a train to a neighboring town, and sleeping in a bale of hay. Though it's tempting to see that episode as just another youthful escapade, it suggests that St. Charles de Foucauld was already willing, then, to step out of his richness and privilege, even if just as an experiment. In addition, he chose a disguise certain to contradict the way people knew him: no fine clothes adorned his body, no steamer trunks of personal effects accompanied him, no paid-for ticket stood in his breast pocket. Instead, he dressed shabbily and slept rough. Did he get a kick out of the experience? Almost certainly. Still, his choice stands, I think, as an indicator of the vocation he would ultimately discern and live to its impoverished fullest.

own house. As their friendship grew, Foucauld revealed his true identity to Edris, who in turn entrusted the explorer with a letter to the French Consul. “Sidi Edris signs this document, folds it, seals it with his seal, and hands it over to me, recommending secrecy and prudence: he is putting his head into my hands; a great risk to run, if the letter gets lost and comes to the eyes of the Sultan.”

Foucauld’s description of this encounter and the time spent with Sidi Edris was not published in the original edition of *Reconnaissance au Maroc*, precisely because its inclusion could put his friend at risk. Instead, it remained a manuscript note, an adventure narrative within an adventure narrative, only included in a 1939 re-issue of the book. “Sure of S. Edris, henceforth I was on the same footing with him as a friend. I returned his confidence and, as he had put himself into my hands, I put myself into his,” he wrote of his decision to reveal his true identity to Sidi Edris. Foucauld’s awareness of the mutual danger he and Sidi Edris ran through their mutual confidences was already a kind of visitation – but it was neither automatic nor immediate. Foucauld even admitted, “his excessive attention had made me distrustful.” Sidi Edris’ subsequent gestures of friendship and affection toward Foucauld opened the latter’s eyes to a different way of conceiving hospitality and greeting, welcome and the tending of relationships beneath their surface, even in challenging circumstances. For instance, Edris himself accompanied Foucauld and Mardochee through the Tadla,¹⁴ as far as Kasbah Beni-Mellal. “I was to be as a brother to him, and he would go to the end of the world to please me.” Foucauld found Sidi Edris a charming companion and wealth of inside knowledge:

All I know about the zauiia of Abu-el-Jad, Sidi Ben Daud’s family, the population of the Tadla, came from him. From him I got nearly all the information printed in this volume ... about the Wady-Um-er-Rebia basin. He also dictated what one reads ... on the Sultan’s campaign in the Tadla in 1883; he had

¹⁴The Tadla is a historical geographic region of Morocco, in the center of the country. Its name comes not from Arabic but rather from Amazigh, and means “the sheaf” – a reference to the agricultural fertility and potential of the area between the High and Middle Atlas ranges.

followed the expedition of Marrakesh to Meris-el-Biod as Sidi Ben Daud's representative to [Sultan] Muley el Hasen.¹⁵

In addition to being a guest in Sidi Edris' home, then, the young Foucauld received the gift of Edris' insider knowledge about Morocco. For a Muslim to welcome a Christian's presence in the heart of his family and home, and then to share important information about a part of Morocco no Europeans/Christians have previously been able to explore, represented a rare and substantial trust. And Sidi Edris' hospitality toward Foucauld – even before knowing the true identity of “Rabbi Josef Aleman” – was immediate and total. He did not hesitate to make the traveling Jews his guests, to shower them with gifts; and, once he knew the truth of Foucauld's identity and mission in Morocco, to welcome them even more fully. His welcome, and the special treatment he gives Foucauld, was all the more significant as he revealed details about a country suspicious toward any European – precisely for the reason that Europeans in Morocco represented the imminent threat of political occupation and the loss of native sovereignty. Foucauld's own “Avant-Propos” to the *Reconnaissance* illustrated the pressing need for donning a disguise while traveling in Morocco: “They fear the conqueror even more than they hate the Christian.”

Foucauld was both [potential] conqueror and Christian; yet Sidi Edris trusted him with specific geographical features, traditions, histories, and the local mentality regarding the expected French invasion looming on the horizon. He even stood guard for Foucauld while the Frenchman sketched the countryside and its landmarks.

¹⁵The quotations in this section are drawn from René Bazin's ground-breaking 1921 biography *Charles de Foucauld. Hermit and Explorer*, published only five years after Foucauld's assassination. Louis Massignon, Foucauld's good friend, commissioned the well known novelist to write the life of the future saint, and gave Bazin the papers collected from Foucauld's hermitage in Tamanghasset. Bazin researched with meticulous care, and produced a massive and luminous study of Foucauld's life, scholarship, and spirituality. Bazin's book earned immense, immediate popularity. “[I]n 1921, when ... *La vie de Charles de Foucauld explorateur en Maroc, eremite du Sahara* was published, it sold 10,000 copies in two months, and in two years 200,000.

About his letter to the French Consul, to Foucauld he said simply, “If the Sultan had any knowledge of it, he would cut out my tongue.” This trust showed the young Foucauld a new kind of kinship – a fraternal love that transcended differences real or perceived, that brought forth greater connection because it worked through an emptying of the self in its unconditional welcome of the other. Perhaps Edris lies behind Foucauld’s greatest spiritual vocation and example: that of universal brother.

In August of 1904, after Foucauld’s authorization to leave the Trappist order and answer his vocation as a hermit, the traveling French hermit-priest received an astonishing letter, addressed to “L’officier Foukou,” at his dwelling in Tamanghasset.

Lately, I asked the French Consul here about you. He told me that you are in Jerusalem in the Holy Land in the honest service of God, and that you have sacrificed your time to the Eternal.

I congratulate you, and I am certain that the world no longer interests you: and this is essential for the present and the future. [...]

For ever your devoted servant,

HAJJ-DRISS-EL-SHERKAUI¹⁶

One can only imagine the warm recollections that must have come to Foucauld, in the new life he occupied, upon receipt of Sidi [now a marabout himself] Edris’ letter. In January of 1904, Foucauld had moved from Beni-Abbès to the south-eastern region of Algeria where no Catholic priest was stationed. The move meant living among the Tuareg, a people considered “the furthest from God,” who had never been evangelized and had only rarely had contact with the missionaries (Christian or military) sent to keep the south-eastern area of Algeria safe from conflicts already brewing in Egypt. In the early days of his time in the Hoggar, he was very alone indeed: “To reside alone in a country is good. You have activity

¹⁶Quoted in René Bazin, Charles de Foucauld: explorateur au Maroc, ermite au Sahara (Paris: Plon, 1921), p. 58.

even without doing much because you become ‘of the country’,¹⁷ he wrote at one point; and “Time not taken by walk or prayer is spent studying their language.”¹⁸ The overture from El-Hajj Edris, the surprising friend who gave him life-changing hospitality in Morocco two decades prior, came at a moment when he once again found himself in “closed” country¹⁹ among a people if not actively hostile to him, at least suspicious about his presence among them. This letter, another Visitation in a later stage of life, offered the memory of (1) welcome in a foreign place; (2) the kindness and honor he received from a Muslim “brother” during his adventure in North Africa; and (3) the reminder of hospitality as a real, concrete good in the world, a discovery that sparked a new understanding of how to live his own vocation. Edris, who had loved him in person all those years ago, remembered him still with love – a love not for *who* Foucauld was, but *because* he was.

For St. Charles de Foucauld, it took the experience of being “other” himself for him to see how to “visit” the people supposedly other to him, and to understand the true grace of this mystery. In a culture more about community than individuality, he saw connection brought forth every day. He had been especially moved by the story

¹⁷Letter to Père Guérin, apostolic Prefect, 2 July 1907.

¹⁸ Letter to Marie de Bondy, 25 June 1904.

¹⁹By “country” here I mean the region inhabited by the nomadic Tuareg, Hoggar country. The constitution of 1848 designated Algeria as an official French territory. Algeria as a whole, therefore, was “French”; but its internal political organization was a complex matter. The country was divided into two “sections,” *civilian* in the north, *military* in the south. The civilian section was centered around Algiers and the ports, its population mostly European settlers/colonists. The military section – largely countryside and made up almost entirely of native Arabs and Imazighen – was further divided into three provinces, ruled by local chiefs whose authority the French military governors recognized. The military section represented roughly $\frac{4}{5}$ of the country, and the military presence – while important in what it represented to the former sovereignty of both tribal organization and Algeria as a nation – had neither the resources nor the effectives to cover every location of the Saharan space.

See James Heartfield, “Algeria and the Defeat of French Humanism,” Chapter Six of *The ‘Death of the Subject’ Explained* (Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University, 2002).

of a Tuareg woman who, after the Flatters party was ambushed, had not only tended to any wounded French soldiers remaining alive, but also opposed their killing. Foucauld read about this woman at the very moment he had begun to feel overwhelmed by the improbability of converting any Muslims to Christianity.

Shortly after, he overheard a Muslim woman saying “isn’t it a shame that this holy man will not go to Heaven?” This remark came as a wake-up slap upside the soul. From the perspective of her creed, Foucauld – even as a monk in holy orders, even as a marabout, would be denied access to Heaven because he did not follow the Prophet; while from the perspective of his creed *she* would be denied access because she did not follow Christ! It was a turning-point in his vocation: it was a Visitation. And it changed his whole demeanor toward the North African peoples whom he already loved, with whom he was fascinated – it brought him to a place of genuine humility and a feeling of poverty that he could share with them. Not just the material poverty of the desert among this outcast ethnic minority; but also a true poverty like Mary and Elizabeth shared, a readiness to *bring something forth*.

Entering Notre-Dame des Neiges, Foucauld signed over his inheritance, renounced his late-night feasts, and gave up his name and the family title that tethered him to centuries-old aristocracy and a long tradition of French nobility. In giving up that previous life, his true identity finally shone through, and the paring-down of things let him bask in the eternal everything. That hurdle surmounted, he saw how much he still possessed that set him apart from the poorest of the poor, that separated him from the life of Jesus in Nazareth. He stripped his life down to its skeletal architecture and kept burning away whatever separated him from the people he was called to serve.

He wished to create a brotherhood founded on love with no limits, subject to neither country nor creed. The opportunity to crack himself open and welcome others in gave him his famous determination: “I want all the inhabitants to get used to looking on me as their brother, the universal brother.”²⁰ It delighted him when local natives

²⁰Letter to Marie de Bondy, 7 January 1902.

began calling his chapel “the fraternity.” This fraternity, however, failed to thrive: no brothers came to join Foucauld. “I am still alone. Several people have let me know that they would like to join me, but there are difficulties, the main one being the ban imposed by civic and military authorities on any Europeans travelling in the region because of the lack of security.”²¹

Still, even if no one joined him in the calling of his desert ministry, Foucauld was rarely truly solitary. “My vocation normally involves solitude, stability and silence. But if I believe that, as an exception, I am sometimes called to something else, like Mary I can only say, *I am the handmaid of the Lord*.”²² And thus Mary’s “Fiat” shaped his own response to the angels who visited him, those desert messengers (αγγελοι). “From 4.30 am to 8.30 pm, I never stop ... receiving people: slaves, the poor, the sick, soldiers, travellers and the curious.”²³ He turned no one away, recognizing in the act of hospitality the emulation of Jesus’ own love for the outcasts, the needy, the injured and ill. “Whatever you did to the least of my brethren, you did unto Me” (Matthew 25:40). Given the life he now knew he was called to in this place, he bowed his head before God and freely gave his *yes* to these “least.” Jesus was not ashamed to call the “least” his brothers, to see them as parts of himself; Foucauld would not be ashamed either. Upon leaving Beni-Abbès, when he moved south to the mountainous Hoggar region, Foucauld’s every day became one long Visitation. “For the moment I am a nomad, going from camp to camp, trying to build up familiarity, trust and friendship.”²⁴ The life of the desert brought him into fraternity with the Tuareg. He went out to them whenever and however they needed him; and when they needed to come to him, he opened his doors wide and without question.

Because, before the Tuareg are “blue people,” before they are nomads or shepherds or part of a suppressed ethnic minority in North Africa, or memory-keepers for a fascinating language with a unique oral tradition, they are children of God. Charles de Foucauld

²¹Letter to Henri de Castries, 12 March 1902.

²²Letter to Henry de Castries, 17 June 1904.

²³ Letter to Marie de Bondy, 29 August 1902.

²⁴ Letter to Henry de Castries, 15 July 1904.

yearned to live among them, know them, love them and be one with them. He hoped to bring souls to Christ, and after several years when he still had no converts he grew despondent ... but he had come to know that his own personal mission, his unique vocation, was further-reaching than his own life. He went out to them, as Jesus had told his disciples to do, as Mary naturally and unquestioningly did when she learned Elizabeth was pregnant. “Seek out the good of others more than your own good, as the Blessed Virgin shows in the Visitation. Comfort, support, and lift people up, by all the means in your power,”²⁵ Foucauld wrote. On numerous occasions in his spiritual journals and letters from Tamanghasset, the former soldier/future saint prayed for the grace to live as Jesus lived: in poverty, tireless in giving himself to others, working with his hands and the tools God had given him to build the kingdom of Heaven on Earth: but prayer, surrender, trust, and love.

Lifting up the Tuareg, on a practical level, meant turning away from France’s official assimilationist politics and finding a place to meet the Tuareg in *relationship*. He prayed for more French citizens to come to the Hoggar, but specified the condition that they must learn Tamacheq, the Tuaregs’ language. Other missionary endeavors sought to assimilate the indigenous populations, insisted on educating them according to the French model and using only the French language. These practices (not at all unique to North Africa) denied colonized peoples the dignity of their ethnic and cultural identities, and the indwelling dignity of their human personhood as children of God. Foucauld saw the evil in that model and held firm to the need to adapt oneself to the needs of the natives, rather than the other way around. That was his “ideal colonialism,” a relationship built on fraternal love and respect, with no conditions of *sameness* imposed.

Finally, Foucauld’s life with the Tuareg – the need for periodic relocation depending on climate or political unrest, the work of going out to and staying with a people not out of some kind of visible altruism but genuinely as their servant, loving them as they were – put into motion another key element of the Mystery of the

²⁵ St. Charles de Foucauld, *Pensées et Maximes*. Moers, Germany: La Colombe, 1953.

Visitation.

This feast-day is also that of travelers: teach us, Mother, to journey as you journeyed, readily and totally forgetting material things, the eyes of your soul fixed ceaselessly on Jesus alone, Jesus whom you bore in your womb; contemplating him, adoring him, considering him ceaselessly, passing through crowds as if in a dream, seeing anything that is not Jesus as through fog; but Him, brilliant, shining, resplendent in your soul like a sun!²⁶

Foucauld, who once refused to unveil his true self, now refused to hide it. He opened his chapel, home, and heart to the poverty and lack all around him. “I am ready to go to the ends of the earth,” he vowed, for the souls God had entrusted to him.²⁷ Like the Christ he sought to imitate in all things, Foucauld would lose his life among the people he most wanted to help – not by “saving” them through force, but by honoring them through love. Ultimately, that love is the legacy of his practice of visitation: like the Blessed Virgin, he carried Jesus in his heart and brought the Lord to those who would benefit the most from his encounter, “not through words or an invitation to conversion that would in any case have been impossible, but simply through the presence of the Son of God” within him. “Just as Mary sanctified John by going to his home and bringing Jesus himself, the living Gospel, within her, a soul that is filled with Jesus can bring salvation. With regard to the Visitation, ... as soon as [Mary] is filled with the Holy Spirit she is full of love, and this is what happens to every soul: it possesses love to the extent that it lives in Jesus.” (Nazareth, 2 July 1898)²⁸

Whether we celebrate the Visitation on 31 May, 2 July, or any Monday/Saturday as we pray the Joyful Mysteries, whether we journey for twenty-eight days or forty through the desert of waiting, one way to journey with St. Charles de Foucauld is to enact the charity and generosity, the love within acts of poverty, of which

²⁶ Charles de Foucauld, *Considérations sur les fêtes de l'année*. Paris: Éditions Nouvelle-Cité, 1995.

²⁷ Letter to Père Guérin, apostolic Prefect, 27 February 1903.

²⁸ *Considérations*, op.cit. p 472.

Mary and Elizabeth give the example. Like Elizabeth, let us honor our own “Mary”s – those who Visit – in recognition of the presence of inexplicable completing grace. Like the Blessed Mother, let us honor our own “Elizabeth”s – those we Visit – with psalms of gratitude and praise, allowing our hearts to stretch across distances and stations and bless those we encounter. Like Sidi Edriss, let us be Visitation hosts, welcoming the traveling stranger into our home and heart and giving them the best of what we have. And like St. Charles de Foucauld, let us allow the charity that transcends all divisions to crack us – not *broken* but *open*, so that the work of Lent and Ramadan, of every season, can strip away what holds us back and fill the space with the peace of Christ. Ramadan Mubarak. May it be a blessed burning. A burning of blessing.



AL-BATIN

The Hidden One

Hearing the World's Cries, Healing the World's Wounds Together: Muslims and Christians in Global Civil Society after COVID-19

By Leo D. Lefebure

The Present Situation

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a truly global catastrophe, radically disrupting the usual routines of people around the world and causing numerous deaths and enormous suffering. Countless families grieve the loss of loved ones, and patients continue to suffer ongoing effects of the virus. In addition to the physical suffering caused by the virus, rampant disinformation in some countries has caused distrust of vaccines and fierce hostility towards leaders advocating public health precautions. Some have searched for scapegoats, blaming all persons of Asian descent and subjecting them to verbal and physical abuse. While some communities enjoy expert medical care, other populations suffer from the lack of adequate medical resources. No one knows exactly how or when our world will emerge from this crisis. Both medical treatment and the medical care have seen enormous progress, but new variations of the virus pose fresh challenges. Continuing uncertainty about the future course of this pandemic makes planning more difficult and creates widespread anxiety. The pandemic demonstrates both the vulnerability of our interconnected world and the importance of responding in collaboration with others in a responsible global civil society.

The COVID pandemic has revealed painful divisions in our world, including a new awareness of medical inequity, wealthy countries gaining rapid access to vaccines, while developing nations have limited supplies and few facilities for providing the vaccines. Many people have lost their jobs, and those who are poor suffer the most acutely. Often the more affluent can work remotely online with relatively little disruption to their economic situation. Many in the service or tourist or travel industries have seen their economic livelihood come to an abrupt halt.

The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic comes at a time when the human community urgently needs to work together to address the deepening crisis of ecology, climate change, and the destruction of biodiversity. Every week new scientific reports document the ongoing destruction of many forms of life and warn of dire consequences of the warming climate. If temperatures continue to rise at the rates currently predicted, human life in vulnerable regions will become increasingly difficult or impossible. Never has responsible citizenship in a global civil society been more pressing. But at this time when we need to collaborate, national and interreligious rivalries and resentments frequently make cooperation difficult. Often people see themselves as citizens of only their own nation, not of the international community or the entire community of life on this planet.

The Role of Religious Traditions

Islam and Christianity, teach values and practices for respecting differences, sharing resources, peacemaking, and conflict transformation. Inspired by these teachings, religious actors can be agents of understanding, generosity, and healing. However, it is important to acknowledge that the role of religions in shaping global civil society historically has been and continues to be ambiguous. In violation of their traditions' best principles, some religious and national leaders have fostered distrust and hostility, using religious identities as markers of conflict and intertwining racial, religious, and nationalistic stereotypes. Some religious practitioners have brandished their traditional identities as ideological weapons against others. Constructing citizenship based on ethno-religious nationalism is a tremendous curse in some regions. In my context of the United States this menace often manifests as white racist Christian nationalism, which violates the teachings of Jesus Christ by targeting others, including Jews, Muslims, and all persons of Asian or African descent, as scapegoats. Every religious tradition and every nation faces these dangers; responsible global citizenship demands that we firmly reject these temptations.

Core Teachings: The Straight Path of Islam and Christian Discipleship

To avoid the threats of maladaptive notions of citizenship, it is important to draw upon the wisdom of our religious traditions to challenge the relentless pursuit of power and profit and call all people to collaborate for the greater good of our planetary community. The teachings of the Islam and Christianity take on fresh importance and urgency in our current situation. Both traditions teach us to acknowledge the reality of suffering with compassion and mercy; however, ignorance or negligence of others' sufferings, disregard for other forms of life and the denial of climate changes, for example, make the qualities of compassion and mercy all the more urgent today. Both Islam and Christianity warn against the dangers of idolatry; they advise us to recognize our mistaken self-understanding and our unrestrained demands as the source of unnecessary suffering; at a time when uninhibited greed and the quest for dominance are destroying our planet, these teachings have vital importance. Christian teaching, specifically, hold ignorance, concupiscence, and malice, as the roots of sin. Both the Islamic and the Christian creeds warn us that we are prone to self-deceptions that cause untold suffering. Islamic and Christian spiritual guides admonish us that it is often difficult to see the good and put it into practice. Self-deception can lead to false ways of seeking happiness and security. When sinful efforts do not work out as we expected, we are tempted to respond with anger and hatred and may seek scapegoats for problems we ourselves have caused.

In a world where hope may seem naïve, both the Holy Qur'an and the Bible promise us that we do not have to live forever imprisoned in sinful patterns, and both holy texts set forth a practical path to liberation. For Christians, the grace of God given in Jesus Christ purifies our hearts, illumines our minds, and calls us to new forms of union with God, with other humans, and with all creatures. Christians familiar with the writings of St Paul (see 1 Cor. 10:13) will find resonance in the teaching of the Holy Qur'an that God is the Compassionate, the Merciful: "God tasks no soul beyond its

capacity. It shall have what it has earned and be subject to what it has perpetrated. ‘Our Lord, take us not to task if we forget or err! Our Lord, lay not upon us a burden like Thou laid upon those before us. Our Lord, impose not upon us that which we have not the strength to bear! And pardon us, forgive us, and have mercy upon us!’”

In the face of the present crisis, the foundations of the Islamic and Christians faiths, together with other religious and secular teachings, challenge us to acknowledge suffering wherever it occurs, to empathize with those afflicted, and to respond with compassion from the central values of each path. The wisdom of the Holy Qur’an’s teachings resonates deeply with aspects of the Christian tradition, as well as with many other religious paths. In interreligious dialogue therefore we need to advocate for constructive alternative perspectives and values for global civil society.

In contrast to the worldwide problem of indifference to the suffering of others, the Holy Qur’an challenges us to hear the cries of pain throughout the world and respond to heal those suffering with compassion. In the Christian tradition, Jesus Christ and his mother Mary of Nazareth are figures of compassion and healing, and the Islamic traditions honors both Isa and Miriam as well, as in the Surah Maryam (Qur’an 19).

Reverence for God in and through Creation

Pope Francis took the name of his encyclical on care for creation from the prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi, *Laudato Si’*, which prays that God may be praised by and through all creatures. Psalm 19 prays: “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge” (Ps 19:1-2). In a similar vein, The Holy Qur’an tells us: “The seven heavens, and the earth, and whosoever is in them glorify Him. And there is no thing, save that it hymns His praise, though you do not understand their praise. Truly He is Clement, Forgiving” (17:44). Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq comments on this passage: “From an Islamic point of view, the

whole environment—the universe—is a living organism in its own way, every element of which is deeply engaged in worshipping the Creator. There exists a strong relationship between the Creator and the creation, which achieves its perfection only when developed properly, in harmony.”

Constructive Response

One constructive model for religious leaders who seek to contribute to global citizenship is the meeting of Pope Francis with religious and scientific leaders at the Vatican on October 4, 2021: “Faith and Science: Toward COP26.” The Holy See, together with the Embassies of Great Britain and Italy to the Holy See, convened this assembly in preparation for the 26th United Nations Conference on Climate Change (known as COP26) in Glasgow, Scotland. These interreligious and scientific leaders issued a cogent appeal that sets forth a path for religious practitioners who want to be responsible global citizens. The leaders profess their “desire to walk in companionship, recognizing our call to live in harmony with one another and with nature.” They call our attention to a fact that should be obvious to all but that is repeatedly ignored or violated: “Nature is a gift, but also a life-giving force without which we cannot exist. Our faiths and spiritualities teach a duty, individual and collective to care for the human family and for the environment in which it lives. We are not the limitless masters of our planet and its resources.” Warning that humans often view the natural world as open for exploitation without limit, they view the current crisis as not simply technological but as involving ethical and spiritual values of the greatest importance.

The Joint Appeal notes that the warnings from the scientific community are becoming more and more ominous and that we do not have unlimited time. In accordance with Pope Francis’s earlier statements, the religious and scientific leaders stress that the poor suffer most acutely from the ecological crisis, especially women and children. They make an urgent appeal to care for the marginalized and for future generations: “We must think long-term

for the sake of the whole of humanity, now and in the future.” They interpret the present crisis of COVID-19 as a time for conversion of attitudes and values: “As the COVID pandemic rages, 2021 presents a vital challenge to turn this crisis into an opportunity to rethink the world we want for ourselves and for our children.” This demands reshaping economic thinking, respecting human dignity, and surrendering the illusion that perpetual growth is a value. The leaders call on all levels of society, from the family through religious and educational institutions to financial and governmental systems, to go through an ecological conversion and construct “a culture of care and cooperation.” They close with a moving appeal to care for the earth, our common home: “Future generations will never forgive us if we squander this precious opportunity. We have inherited a garden; we must not leave a desert to our children.”

Pope Francis added a personal message to the assembly. In words very similar to the Qur’an’s teaching that all things are interconnected and dependent on God, Pope Francis commented: “Everything is connected; in our world, everything is profoundly interrelated . . . no creatures are self-sufficient; they exist only in dependence on each other, complementing one another and in the service of one another.” In light of this fundamental reality of interconnectedness, Pope Francis called for the development of love to create bonds and draw people into deeper relationships in order to care for our common home and for ourselves. Pope Francis concluded by calling for respect for creation, for all humans, and respect between religious faith and science.

Communion of Subjects

One of the most tragic factors shaping the ecological and environmental crisis is the practice of viewing natural and human resources as exploitable without limit. Driven by the pressure of relentless economic expectations, humans often press further and further for profit and power with little sense of the impact they are having on the entire community of life on our planet. Global citizenship demands that we expand our range of vision beyond our

personal gain to embrace the concern for the entire community of life on this planet.

The late Catholic theologian and geologist Thomas Berry was a leader in uniting concern for interreligious understanding with care for the earth. He challenged followers of all religious traditions to become truly global citizens by viewing the natural world not as objects to be exploited but as a communion of subjects. He recalled the wonder that very young children have before the variety of creatures: “We can hardly communicate with them in any meaningful way except through pictures and stories of humans and animals and fields and trees, of flowers, birds and butterflies, of sea and sky.” Children experience friendship with a wide variety of creatures and can invite adults to do likewise.

Francis of Assisi shared this familiarity, as well as many Muslims. Muslims honor Solomon (Suleiman) for his ability to converse with various species.

To return to the theologian mentioned above. Thomas Berry insists that our identity is strictly interdependent with all other beings: “Indeed we cannot be truly ourselves in any adequate manner without all our companion beings throughout the earth. This larger community constitutes our greater self.” Scientists can explore their greater selves in and through their quest for knowledge. However, he lamented that Western society has prioritized human survival and well-being, exploited other forms of life, and thereby cut ourselves off from the communion of subjects on our planet. Berry warned of the massive species extinction that is currently underway because of this shortsightedness. In language that agrees strongly with Islamic values, Berry affirms, “Humans and the universe were made for each other. . . . We are ourselves only to the extent of our unity with the universe to which we belong and in which alone we discover our fulfillment.”

Because of the convergence of perspectives and values regarding ecological well-being, Muslim-Christian dialogue has a distinct

contribution to make to shaping a global civil society. Both traditions challenge us to broaden our horizon beyond our own selfish interests and beyond our national identities. Both traditions teach the interdependence of all beings in the universe and the need for wisdom and compassion. The voices of the Holy Qur'an and Jesus Christ both warn us of the destructiveness of selfish actions and invite us to a world of generosity, gratitude, and compassion.



AL-HUQUE

The Truth

An Alternative Approach to Christian-Muslim Marriage

By Helene Ijaz

Interreligious marriages are discouraged by many religious leaders in Christianity and Islam out of concern about the long-term effect on the faith life of adherents to their religion. Islam and the Roman Catholic Church have laws to prevent and/or regulate such marriages. According to Canon Law, a Roman Catholic who wishes to marry a person of another religion must declare “that he or she is prepared to remove dangers of defecting from the faith and ... promise to do all in his or her power so that all offspring are baptized and brought up in the Catholic Church” (1125.1). Jesus is not known to have commented on interreligious marriage, and the strictures against it in the Catholic Church did not come from Jesus but the Catholic institution and tradition.

The Qur’an recommends that Muslim men marry Muslim women but says they may also marry Jews and Christians. Jews and Christians, like Muslims, are considered *People of the Book*, who share revealed scriptures perfected in the Qur’an.

Do not marry unbelieving women (idolaters), until they believe: A slave woman who believes is better than an unbelieving woman, even though she allures you. Nor marry (your girls) to unbelievers until they believe: A man slave who believes is better than an unbeliever, even though he allures you. Unbelievers do (but) beckon you to the Fire. (2:221)

According to Islamic Law (*Shari’ah*), in a marriage between a Muslim man and a Christian woman, the woman is allowed to practice her faith, but the children arising from the union must be raised Muslim. In case of a divorce or her widowhood, the woman may lose custody of her children and has no entitlement to inheritance, a fact which may indirectly encourage her to convert to Islam. The Qur’an is silent on marriages between Muslim women and Jewish or Christian men; but the principal schools of Islamic jurisprudence all agree that under no circumstances may a Muslim

woman marry a non-Muslim man, unless he converts to Islam. A Muslim woman who marries a Christian without him converting to Islam is considered to commit apostasy, which in some Islamic jurisdictions is punishable by death. The same applies to a Muslim man who converts to Christianity or who marries a woman who is neither Muslim, Jewish, nor Christian.

The religious rules on interreligious marriage in Islam and the Roman Catholic Church treat their own religion as the only true religion and membership in it as the exclusive path to eternal salvation. They seek to ensure that their religion dominates in a marriage and deny equal treatment and religious freedom to the outgroup spouse. These rules are divisive and may create a disconnect between a couple's love for each other and their perceived duties to their religion. The rules in Islam may encourage a Christian man seeking to marry a Muslim woman to engage in a conversion of convenience. The rules in both religions appear to be counterproductive to a couple developing an authentic relationship with God and a loving, unitive, and mutually respectful relationship with each other.

There is a need for an alternative approach to interreligious marriage that more effectively responds to the emotional and spiritual needs of interfaith couples. The key to such an approach can be found in the wisdom teachings of Jesus and the Qur'an. In the Christian tradition, Jesus is the Word of God (John 1:1) and, in the Islamic tradition, the Qur'an is the literal Word of God that conveys guidance (*hidaya*), which is also provided through Muhammad. The teachings of Jesus and the Qur'an provide principles for a spiritually informed life and for developing healthy human relations. They have implications for an interreligious marriage.

Jesus called upon us to "seek the Reign of God" (Matt. 6:33) and to "have life to the full" (John 10:10). He said that, to live under the influence of God, we must "love God with all [our] heart, with all [our] soul, and with all [our] mind and ... love [our] neighbor as [ourselves]" (Matt. 22:36-40). The heart is our emotional and spiritual center, the link between us, others, and God. It is the source of our thinking, feelings, and actions (Matt. 12:34-40). The heart is defined by relationships. To live from the heart means to be

nourished in our relationship with others by our relationship with God.

Love originates in the heart. It empowers us to think beyond the self and show empathetic openness to others. It enables us to connect with others on a deep level, enter into each other's world, and respond to each other's needs and aspirations with kindness and in a loving, compassionate manner. Love strives for unity with others.

Love of God and love of others are intertwined. Love of God helps us to recognize a reflection of God in other people and God's footprint in the events of daily life. It encourages us to see beyond material values and discover spiritual values, and heightens our awareness of God and our understanding of the meaning of life.

Love is defined by the Golden Rule: "Do to others as you want them to do to you" (Matt. 7:12). The Golden Rule treats mutual respect as a key principle for human relations. Mutual respect implies love and justice. Love demands that neither side in a relationship is harmed in any way, and each person is free to express their identity, limited only by the same rights of the other person. Justice requires that both parties are treated fairly.

To live from the heart requires *metanoia* (Mark 1:15; Matt. 4:17), an inner transformation and a major change in thinking and action. It entails transcending our narrow egoic thinking with its focus on social and material values, dualism, and its suspicion and devaluation of otherness. It involves a process of spiritual growth and evolution shaped by humility, "poverty of spirit" (Matt. 5:3).

Faith is an integral part of living from the heart. Jesus consistently referred to faith as an essential requirement for becoming whole as a person and for entry into the Reign of God (Luke 8:13-15; 18:38-42; John 11:25-26). Faith means to boldly step into the unknown and open ourselves to otherness. It empowers us to trust in God and other people.

In his Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), Jesus describes guiding principles for a heart-based way of living. The Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-12), unlike the Ten Commandments, do not contain prohibitions

but describe virtues that promote a deeper awareness of God and of life. They include awareness of our need for God; loving-kindness, compassion and humility; fairness and justice, and mercy and forgiveness. They teach how to transform the inner person.

The key message of the Qur'an is self-surrender (3:85), the surrender of our entire being to God and centering our way of life in Allah. This requires humility (17:37; 25:63), transcending the ego, and abiding by God's commandments. It entails refraining from making distinctions between others and ourselves to make ourselves look better than others; letting go of the notion that our views and assumptions are more important than those of others, and using power and control to affirm our superiority. The essence of religion is to align our will with God's will. The Arabic word "islam" means both *submission* and *peace*.

The purpose of religion is to train people to become fully human. The heart is our "true self:" the center of life, consciousness, intelligence, and intentionality. It is the organ of faith, which links Spirit with human action. All spiritual learning takes place in the heart. The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "Faith is a knowledge in the heart, a voicing with the tongue, and an activity with the limbs."

To become fully human, we must restore our innate wholeness by purifying the heart. We must seek to understand the Transcendent and how it interacts with the physical world, and be guided by God. We must learn to see with the eye of the soul, the "Eye of Certainty" (*Ayn al-yaqeen*) (102.7). Spiritual learning enables us to achieve *taqwa*, an ever-deepening awareness of God and insight into the essential nature of things, including self-knowledge and an understanding of the meaning of life.

Diversity is the essence of creation. It is God-willed and God-created. The purpose of human diversity is to get to know one another (49:14). The Qur'an is explicit that "there is no compulsion in religion" (2:256).

The central principle advocated by the Qur'an for a spiritually informed life is justice (4:135). Justice is founded on human

equality and compassion. It seeks to create balance between human rights and responsibilities, and freedom from discrimination and oppression. It promotes peace.

Jesus and the Qur'an both agree that living from the heart emulates the nature of God. Jesus describes God as a merciful and forgiving father, who lovingly embraces those who repent and return to him. The Qur'an defines compassion and mercy as the most prevalent attributes of God. Every chapter in the Qur'an, except for one, begins with the verse "In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

The teachings of both Jesus and the Qur'an focus on God instead of a religion, as becomes apparent in the *Lord's Prayer* and the *Al-Fatiha*, the most important prayers in Christianity and in Islam. The two prayers transcend religious doctrines, rules, practices, and traditions. They emphasize awe and praise of God, surrender to God's will, and reliance on God's help and guidance in our effort to pursue the right path of life and on God's compassion, mercy, and forgiveness.

A heart-based approach to interreligious marriage focuses on relationships instead of religious laws, a couple's relationship with God and with each other. It is rooted in the heart, the source of love, compassion and justice, and transcends the dualism of the ego and its negative assumptions about religious otherness. It promotes the equal treatment of the religions of husband and wife in an interfaith marriage; enables both to practice their religion, and encourages them to learn about each other's faith and respect each other's differences. It empowers both spouses to become enriched through interaction with each other's religion, while practicing their own faith; to grow intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually, and build a balanced, mutually loving relationship. A heart-based approach to interreligious marriage manifests in a growth of consciousness and ego-transcendence by husband and wife and leads to a unitive relationship between them. It provides a model for other interpersonal and intergroup relations involving individuals from diverse backgrounds and/or with diverging views or beliefs.

A Story of Interreligious Friendship

By Father George Griener, S.J.,
Dr. Theo. & Hafidh Imran Ghani, M.A.

O mankind, we created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may come to know one another. In God's eyes, the most honored of you are the ones most mindful of Him: God is all knowing, all aware [Quran 49:13].

It was narrated that 'Abdur-Rahman bin Abi Laila said: "Sahl bin Hunaif and Qais bin Sa'd bin 'Ubadah were in Al-Qadisiyyah when a funeral passed by them, so they stood up, and it was said to them: 'It is one of the local people.' They said: 'A funeral passed the Messenger of Allah and he stood up, and it was said to him: It is a Jew. He said: 'Is it not a soul?'" [Sunan an-Nasa'i:1921].

As a first generation, Muslim American with ancestors born in Kolkata, New Delhi, Dhaka, and Karachi, my parents and teachers fostered a love for God, the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, and Muslims. In these formative years, I also formed friendships with those outside my faith tradition and remember innocently asking my Quran teacher, "Are Muslims allowed to be friends with non-Muslims?" He recited the Quran verse quoted above and said, "Yes, you may befriend a non-Muslim as long as they do not disrespect Islam or hurt Muslims."

Now, as an adult, I believe Quran 49:13 not only allows friendships with non-Muslims, but it also encourages them. The *Study Quran* states, "That people have been divided into diverse *peoples and tribes* that they *may come to know one another* indicates the manner in which differences in tribe, race, ethnicity, language, nationality, and religion can be sources through which human beings gain a deeper appreciation for the reality of the human condition."¹ Moreover, the Prophet Muhammad's life, peace be upon him, is

¹Seyyed Hossein Nasir, Caner Dagli, Maria Massi Dakake, and Joseph Lumbard, eds., *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015), 1262.

laden with examples such as the quoted hadith above where he stood up for a Jew's funeral procession out of respect for all human beings.

The purpose of this article, however, is not to issue a fatwa (religious edict) as the topic of interreligious friendship is nuanced and often polarizing in our increasingly fractured world. Rather, our aim is to inspire people of faith to consider making room for interreligious friendships by demonstrating how the Christianity of my dear friend, Father George Greiner, has matured my Islam. Moreover, George will also be sharing his reflections on our friendship.

My Friendship with Father George: Imran's Reflection

During my undergraduate studies in Islamic theology, I attended a lecture by a guest speaker at the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University in the city of Berkeley, California. The scholar, trained in sociology, presented data and made glib conclusions about all Muslims that I felt did not represent the diversity of Muslims across the world. Since the events of 9/11, Muslims in America have become accustomed to misrepresentation; hence, I did not raise any objections and began to leave once the lecture was over.

As I exited the lecture hall, a spry gentleman and I made eye contact upon which he smiled and warmly said, "Hello, my name is George." I introduced myself, and we exchanged pleasantries before I gestured to leave. George stopped me and said, "Imran, I just wanted to apologize on behalf of the Jesuit School for the lecturer tonight. He does not represent our view of Muslims. Please, I'd love to get to know you better over lunch some time."

George's apology felt like a warm hug, and I was intrigued to meet someone who wanted to organically connect with Muslims. I am glad I accepted his invitation as that first lunch has led to long-term friendship that includes thoughtful conversations, laughter, and even tears. I cherish my friendship with George and would like to enumerate three reasons how his knowledge and practice of Christianity have made me a better Muslim.

First, George inspires good character in me. The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, was a paragon of virtue and taught humanity to cultivate excellent character by exhibiting honesty, kindness, patience, and love. He was so attentive and caring that many people felt as though he loved them the most (Bukhari: 4358). I used to wonder what this kind of love felt like until I met rare people like George. Every time we talk, I feel as though George loves me the most among the hundreds of people in his life. Although I know this is not true, I can now relate to the Prophet Muhammad's, peace be upon him, companions because I have a living example of someone who displays this rare prophetic trait. I know, however, that George follows the teachings of Jesus, the Messiah, and aspires to espouse the teachings of the Christian faith. Is this a contradiction? The Quran, in reference to the Holy Bible and Torah, often declares that it confirms many Christian and Jewish teachings (Quran 3:3). Hence, I find no contradiction seeking to emulate George's Christian values that are also in line with Islam.

Second, George inspires me to pursue education. Although he insists that I only refer to him by his first name, George is an ordained Jesuit priest and holds a doctoral degree in theology. He is professor emeritus of historical and systematic theology and teaches a variety of theology courses that engage challenging topics such as neuroscience, Church history, and philosophy. Islam, too, holds education in high regard as Muslims have a long history of acquiring and developing all forms of knowledge. The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, taught that God facilitates the journey to paradise for the person who sets out on the path of knowledge (Tirmidhi: 2646). George always encourages me to pursue the life of reading, writing, teaching, and reflection and has even edited some of my articles. Hence, as a person who facilitates my path in seeking knowledge, I believe God works through him to facilitate my journey to paradise.

Third, George fosters in his community the kind of cosmopolitan society the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon, built in seventh-century Arabia. At the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, George not only builds bridges with other Christian seminaries but

also with faculty, administrators, and students among the Jewish studies, Hindu studies, Buddhist studies, and Islamic studies centers. Indeed, it is rare to find such ecumenical and interreligious cooperation, and as a former student in this community of diverse seminaries, I can attest that the root of these institutional alliances is genuine interreligious friendship. It is not an easy task in our polarized world, and sometimes divisive voices do emerge in the community. That is why I was so appreciative when George initially approached me and made sure that I felt welcome. The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon, established a community in seventh-century Arabia where Muslims, Christians, and Jews lived harmoniously. While there was conflict at times as many tried to undermine unity and the Prophet Muhammad's, peace be upon him, authority as political leader, but it was the commitment of far more individuals to build bridges of interreligious friendship. Today, George's example has taught me that individual commitment to interreligious friendship still plays a vital role in building a truly cosmopolitan world.

Let us now hear from George about why he believes and engages in interreligious friendships.

My Friendship with Imran: Father George's Reflection

In 1595, Matteo Ricci, one of the earliest and most well-known Jesuit missionaries to China, composed a short volume which he presented as a gift to Prince Jian'an Wang of Nanchang, who had entertained Ricci at dinner. The volume was on friendship and bears the English title, *On Friendship: One Hundred Maxims for a Chinese Prince*.² For his essay, Ricci had drawn on long standing European-Christian reflections on friendship. In China, *On Friendship* became an instant 16th century "best seller," reprinted, copied, even plagiarized hundreds of times. The staggering popularity of Ricci's essay would greatly contribute to his reputation as a Western Sage.

Almost a quarter century ago, James Fredericks of Loyola Marymount University published a foundational essay:

²Matteo Ricci, *On Friendship: One Hundred Maxims for a Chinese Prince*. Tr. with Introduction by Timothy Billing. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

“Interreligious Friendship: A New Theological Virtue.”³ If Roman Catholics had shied away even from ecumenical conversations in the early part of the 20th century, a decree of the II Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate*, had opened the door to interreligious conversations.

Fredericks, long engaged in these conversations, had come to realize that authentic dialogue presumes mutual respect and openness, the readiness to listen and understand, to accept the partner with care and love, and, perhaps most importantly, what Fredericks speaks of as “the vulnerability to the truth.” “Remaining vulnerable to the truth is a responsible act that cannot honestly be pursued without the assistance of the other.” Truth is encountered not only in propositions and creedal formulas, but in the integrity and authenticity of living lives of care, compassion, generosity. That is a knowledge that goes beyond cognitive categories to embrace and appreciate the other in their whole world of values, commitments, affections, and lived faith.

Finally it has to be noted that Pope Francis has promoted a culture of dialogue, a commitment to “promoting friendship and respect between men and women of different religious traditions.”⁴ Perhaps his 2020 encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* in one his clearest articulations of a culture of dialogue, in which he refers to the historic *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* that he had signed with the Grand Imam al-Tayyeb during his visit to the United Arab Emirates February 2019.⁵ *Fratelli Tutti* draws the reader into the central concerns of Pope Francis: the interconnectedness of every man, woman and child on this earth, along with our own

³ 35 (1998) *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*.

⁴ Pope Francis, *Address of the Holy Father Pope Francis in Occasion of the Audience with the Ambassadors Accredited to the Holy See*. March 22 2013. [/http://www.archivioradiovaticana.va/storico/2013/03/20/pope_francois_friendship_and_respect_between_religious_traditions/en1-675219](http://www.archivioradiovaticana.va/storico/2013/03/20/pope_francois_friendship_and_respect_between_religious_traditions/en1-675219). Cf also Roberto Catalano, “Pope Francis’ Culture of Dialogue as Pathway to Interfaith Encounter: A Special Focus on Islam,” *Religions* 2022, 13, 279. <https://doi.org/10.390/rel13040279>.

⁵ “A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together,” available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-umana.html

connectedness to the world and environment in which we live.

With this very cursory introduction to the importance of interreligious friendship, I would like to turn to the friendship I enjoy with Imran Ghani.

My faculty status at the Jesuit School of Theology has provided regular interaction, co-teaching, and joint thesis committee membership with faculty of other Christian seminaries of the Graduate Theological Union as well as those of the Centers for Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish and Islamic studies. And our own students often come from families of mixed religious traditions. Our first candidate for the Doctorate in Sacred Theology was a Jesuit from Indonesia whose Mother was Roman Catholic and Father a Muslim. So, I have grown comfortable with interactions that are ecumenical or interreligious, and have established at least academic peer relationships with people of many faiths. Friendship, however, is not the same thing as academic association.

Imran has related how we first met, following an insensitive and belligerent presentation in our school chapel on the topic of Islam by a visiting scholar to which we had invited students from Zaytuna College. At the end of the presentation, even without consultation among ourselves, two or three of us Jesuits spontaneously sought out Zaytuna participants to apologize and create a more welcoming atmosphere. Those we spoke to were gracious enough not to shun our outreach or respond with resentment or what would have been legitimate anger. I think it was that first expression of graciousness on their part which allowed me to be healed from my own chagrin and embarrassment over the talk.

Shortly before I got to know Imran, I had lost a very close Jesuit friend, a younger Jesuit from Hong Kong who had just finished his first year of teaching at Marquette University, Milwaukee: Lúcas Chan. Imran was taking an evening course at the Jesuit School and after class would drop by my office to see if I was in. I was still grieving the loss of Lúcas, and Imran would listen with sympathy and warmth, offering support and understanding. I felt unselfconscious in relating my sorrow to him and he showed openness and warmth in return. It was an expression of deep friendship.

At the end of May 2017, I invited Imran and his brother Omar (who had recently moved to San Francisco) to accompany me on a day outing to Mt. Shasta in northern California. It was a Saturday, but I had not realized that it would also be the first full day of Ramadan... and it would be a full day's drive up and back. It was a day of discovery for me. On the drive up to Shasta, Imran and Omar spoke of their own spiritual hopes for the Month of Ramadan, what they hoped to gain, what—in my categories—would be the blessings and graces of the experience.

There was an openness and freedom in articulating their hopes unapologetically. I found a deep resonance in what I might look for approaching the Season of Lent. We didn't stop to eat or drink that day, but we did stop for prayer, often in roadside parks or clearings which offered the opportunity to pray with some privacy. Finally, at sunset, we found a place to bring the day's fast to a prayerful close. Back in the Jesuit community, we shared a meal...like brothers. The day had been for me one of prayerful discovery.

May 2022 a tragic shooting occurred in Uvalde, Texas, leaving 21 grammar school children dead. The sad event had really affected Imran, and he decided to drive from his home in Austin down to Uvalde—about 2 and a half hours each way – on a Sunday and attend Mass at the Church where many of the grieving family members would likely be gathered. He wanted his presence to be an expression of solidarity with those who were suffering. This choice of his to be in solidarity with those families had a deep impression on me: I was moved and deeply grateful for having Imran as a friend, as a human being whose heart reached out to strangers from a different religious tradition. But then, maybe they were not strangers to him, but brothers and sisters whose lives had been wrenched apart by such a tragedy, brothers and sisters he wanted to stand by and support.

One of my doctoral students was a Korean Presbyterian Pastor. We had learned much from each other about commitment to ministry, discipleship, preaching, pastoral care. (I had once remarked that I teach my students theology, and they teach me how to be a Christian!) A few years ago, his Father died in Korea. One evening, he and I were standing on the corner near the school when Imran neared us

jogging uphill. He saw us, stopped, and said to KyungRae: “I am sorry to hear about your Father’s death. I am praying for you and your family.” His promise of prayer meant a lot to both of us, an expression of deep solidarity.

When I think of Pope Francis’ invitation to people of all religious traditions to come together in support of the suffering, I am reminded of Imran’s consistent ability to stand in solidarity. His friendship invites me to an even deeper openness to the suffering of the world.

We are grateful to the Lord that He willed from His infinite love and mercy for us to meet, form this wonderful friendship, and grow in our relationship with God. We encourage readers to reach out to their brothers and sisters of all faiths to build bridges of understanding and heal ourselves through genuine friendships regardless of caste or creed.



Al Badi

The Unique One

Reflections on Interfaith Conversation between Imran Ghani and George Griener SJ

By Students of Jesuits Formation Centre for Theology, Ranchi

The students of theology at the Jesuits Formation Centre for Theology at Ranchi listened to the interfaith conversation while they attended the course on Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations. Imran's family atmosphere nurtured him to love others. Imran especially mentioned his mother who taught him the essential values of Islam. This aspect of loving others is true in all religions and no religion teaches us to hate people. Imran spoke about the core point that unites all religions which is love. In loving one another we will not only have better communication and know one another but could feel with one another. He also mentions that his Imam encouraged him to have friends among people of other faiths.

Imran shared his conviction of the oneness of humanity by pointing out the verses of the Qur'an, saying that God created humanity from a single man and a single woman and made humanity into peoples and tribes. The implication is that we must come to know one another. This is what made me think and feel that dialogue is the right platform for acquiring such kind of knowledge and reality. Thus, the call for dialogue is the demand of the time as all human beings are created by one God. And by knowing one another we also come to know God more and more who is inexhaustible. Thus, our quest is always to strive towards experiencing depth of spirituality said Imran.

Father Griener, reflecting on his first meeting with Imran, pointed out how important it was for him to engage in a conversation with him, especially in the aftermath of 9-11 when Islamophobia was raging. The occasion was a lecture at the School of Theology in which Griener was teaching. A number of Muslim guests were present at the lecture. The speaker displayed certain traces of prejudice against Muslims in his presentation. Fr. Griener and a few Christian friends at the end of the lecture reached out to Muslim guests apologizing

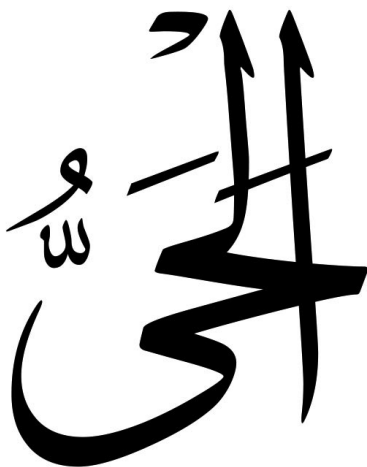
for the insensitive comments of the lecturer. Griener's approach to asking pardon from Imran was very symbolic, though not for publicity but for truly seeking unity and reconciliation as children of the same God. After 9/11, many Muslim brethren were looked at negatively with lots of animosity in America, but Fr. Griener's pardon gesture extended warm hearts to Muslim brethren and Griener affirmed through his gesture that Christians and Muslims are children of one God and thus 'we are brothers and sisters'.

Recalling the event, Imran said: "I sensed another human being". According to Imran, after the 9/11 incident Muslim face even more discrimination. Meeting Griener was a different experience for him. Imran responded generously to the reconciling gesture of Griener. Over the years they have worked together as partners in dialogue. The prejudices and preconceived ideas about Muslims make it difficult to engage in dialogue with Muslims. Further, it becomes difficult if false narratives about the Muslim community are created portraying them as somebody to be feared by generalizing the misdeeds of some Muslims. The role of the media in demonizing the Muslim community cannot be ignored either. A person whose vision is colored by prejudice and hatred cannot meet the human in the other person. We can sense a human being in the other person when the other person also senses a human being in the other. True dialogue is possible only when there is a genuine search for truth and openness from both sides as Imran and George have.

Listening to the conversation between Griener and Imran, one is reminded of the teachings of *Nostra Aetate* (NA). NA points out that today, more than ever before, all peoples "form but one community", and all people come from God and return to God (NA 11). God provides for all and God's goodness and saving designs extend to all men and women (NA 1). Both Imran and Griener recognize that the life of the other "is imbued with a deep religious sense" (NA 2).

The teaching of St. Pope Paul VI in his encyclical *Ecclesiam suam* (ES) encourages Christians to enter into dialogue with peoples of

other faiths. ES encourages Christians that the “Church should enter into dialogue with the world in which it exists and labours, she has something to say, a message to deliver, a communication to offer”. Further, the Encyclical encourages Christians to recognize and respect moral and spiritual values ... (and prepare) to enter into, and take initiative for (promoting) common ideals such as defending religious liberty, human brotherhood, culture, social welfare and civil order. Listening to the Griener – Imran conversation has shown a way to enter into dialogue with our Muslim brothers and sisters.



Al Hayy

The Eternally Living One

Christian Presence Among Muslims: Story of Bob McCahill

By Joseph Victor Edwin SJ

Why have you come to live among us?

Many years ago, I stayed at the guest house of a Sufi *khankha* (hospice) in Bihar (India) for a couple of weeks for an exposure. A *madrassa* (Muslim religious seminary), a *Masjid* (a mosque) were attached to the *khankha*. The *Sheikh* (the Sufi master) of the *Khankha*, who knew my mentor and guide Father Paul Jackson SJ, welcomed me joyfully and let others know that I, a Christian, would be staying in the *khankha* for two weeks for an exposure to Sufi culture, prayer, and life. Thanks to him, I had free access in the campus to go and meet people for a conversation.

An elderly gentleman asked me: being a Christian what was the purpose of my staying at a Sufi hospice. I stated: "I affirm the universal and active presence of God, and as a candidate who is preparing to become a Catholic priest, I have come to meet Muslims and learn about their faith traditions".

A few asked me further: How does 'meeting-Muslims-and-speaking-to them' help in my training to become a Christian priest? I said something to this effect: as a student of theology, I look at Islam not as a kind of neutral object of my intellectual curiosity but with a sincere admiration to its cultural, textual, and ritual world with all sympathy and respect. I learn to discover ways to engage with Muslim brothers with sincere admiration for those teachings in Islam that dignifies the human person. My love for Muslims is founded on the teachings of the Church expressed in the words of the document *Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the relationship of the Church to non-Christian Religions* in the Second Vatican Council, particularly those words that gives the reason for Church's 'high regard for the Muslims': 'They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth'. Though over "the centuries many quarrels and dissensions have arisen between Christians and Muslims" I told them that the Church

now appeals to all “to forget the past and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding; for the benefit of all, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values”.

In this article, I share with the readers the inspiring life story and mission of my friend Father Bob McCahill, a Maryknoll priest who has been living among Muslims in Bangladesh for the last 47 years serving them with love as a disciple of Jesus.

Recently, I asked him a few questions about his mission in Bangladesh. His responses were revealing. Here are the questions and his response.

When Muslims in Bangladesh ask why you, a Christian, have come to live among them ...

Bob’s reply: I simply answer with the fact: “God inspires me to do so; I belong to God”.

you might have been asked umpteen times over these two scores and seven years, Why did you leave your country and family? What is your response?

Bob’s reply: “The whole world is my country; my family is humankind”.

Bob, if they ask you, “What do you gain from doing it?”

Bob: “Happiness and peace. We are supposed to help others in their time of need. We do as Jesus did.”

Bob, do they suspect you wish them to leave Islam in order to become Christians?”

Bob’s reply: “Many may, until they see and understand I came only to serve.”

They see and understand ... I came to serve

Bob cycles five days a week to meet the sick, most of whom are illiterate, sick for years without much hope, and convinces them and

their family members that healing is possible. Once they are willing to get to the doctor, Bob arranges for their medical treatment in the government hospitals. He accompanies them, stays with them, serves them, and ensures that they get proper treatment; when they are healed, he helps them return home. For the last forty-seven years, Bob is busy in God's healing mission. He told the present writer that his inspiration comes from the Crucified and Risen Lord. Further, he said that every day, he is energized by the words of the Gospel: Jesus went about doing good (Acts 10: 38). His call, he says, is to imitate his Lord. Every year he sends a letter before Christmas to all his family members and friends around the world sharing the graces that he received in the previous year in his missionary work. His letters are collected and published by Orbis publication titled *I Am Indeed Your Brother: A Servant of Jesus Among Allah's Poor* (Orbis Books, 2018). In this little essay I reflect on the two-fold nature of his work.

As his friend, and having read all his letters and met him a few times in Dhaka, Delhi, Bombay, and Patna I have observed some of the important qualities for a missionary in Asia. He avoids controversies while meeting his Muslim brothers and sisters. Controversial discussions are counterproductive. He does not engage in conversations to prove 'a truth'. He simply seems to stress the fact that *Mission* means meeting the Risen Christ and Coming of the Holy Spirit through service to the poor and the sick. His daily schedule indicates that. When asked about his daily schedule, he said in an UCAN interview (6 July 2022), that he wakes up at 3. 00 in the morning every day. He recites his daily prayers and celebrates Mass before travelling to villages to meet the poor and sick. In a fraternal conversation, I wanted to hear him saying this. He told me that he wakes up at 3. 00 am and gets ready to celebrate Mass, often inside his mosquito net with a lighted candle. After the Mass, he prays for an hour, *a silent conversation at the feet of the Lord*. Then he is ready to meet *any sick person who needs treatment* in his neighbourhood and distant villages.

God inspires me to do so; I belong to God!

It is pertinent to hear his words: “Never in my life of 19 years had I thought for one moment about a religious calling. At the beginning of my second year of college (Seattle Univ.) things were going well. I had a part time, well-paying unionized job, my marks/grades had always been good. Despite the rosy scenario I felt lousy and miserable, because I did not know what I was going to do with my life. Here I was taking courses to prepare for a career in law, but with no intention of following through. It bothered me to think of my rudderless future. Then on the final day of the annual students retreat as I walked towards my off-campus room, I was stopped by a most unusual idea/ inspiration/grace. It was 31 October 1956. Clarity detonated in my mind: Become a priest; become a missionary. That was the remarkably clear, plain and wordless message. God *spoke* to me: *My love is all you will ever need, Trust Me, Give Me your everything.* What a feeling! I knew it was God. Attracting me powerfully. Deeply I sighed, repeatedly that day and in the days ahead. God was touching me; how grateful I was to be given a purpose in life. At the very time I knew it was God attracting and moving me I also felt completely free. There was no coercion to seek missionary priesthood. I knew I could say “No thanks to that” and there would be absolutely no recrimination. Simply put, God was offering me that which I most desired, a purpose in life, and I understood implicitly that I would be an utter fool to say no. I grabbed the inspiration given me by God and did not let go. That was 61 years ago and I recall with tremendous gratitude, every day, God’s merciful touch of an aimless sophomore. Still, God gives me purpose”. True to character, his father received that message with encouraging words: “That’s fine son. Your mother and I both are all for it.”

A Brother to all men and women

A few reflections are not out of place before we read the testament of love that Bob has shared over the years. First, God’s intervention in Bob’s life and his response reflects the certain glimpses of Saint Charles Foucauld. St. Charles Foucauld lived and died among Muslims imitating the hidden life of Jesus in Nazareth before he began his public ministry. Foucauld writes about God’s intervention in his life: “As soon as I believed there was a God, I understood that I

could not do anything other than live for him. My religious vocation dates from the same moment as my faith.” 31 October 1956 we are told by Bob that God intervened powerfully and gave him a lifelong motivation to follow His will. God’s interventions in the life of his people are decisive. They are neither occasions for bargaining between God and man nor deals that involve compromises. Simply God intervenes and calls. The one who received the call of God surrenders oneself in total freedom. In those interventions the power of love is overwhelming. Religious vocations that date from such interventions focus only on God. God becomes the only center of the lives of those who allow themselves to be swept by such interventions. Foucauld, after his conversion to Catholic faith, understood that the Incarnation as an inclusive gift that made all brothers and sisters in God’s family. Bob too experiences in himself such ‘an inclusive gift’ that makes him a brother to all men and women whom he meets in Bangladesh.

The whole world is my country; my family is humankind

Secondly, Bob’s life as a missionary is marked by discernment in Spirit situated within the Church. He moved as the Spirit moved, from the University to the novitiate of the Maryknoll; from the United States to the Philippines; from Mindanao to the Bangladesh and here in these South Asian Nation 13 towns in 47 years. Bob goes about doing *good* to the *anawim* of God. Bob is one such beautiful model loving God at the active service of people. The Eucharistic Prayer for use in Masses for various needs reminds us that all disciples of Jesus should always show compassion for children and for the poor, for the sick and for sinners, and become a neighbour to the oppressed and the afflicted.

Thirdly, we find Bob’s conversations with his collaborators and the beneficiaries of his service are deeply spiritual. His conversations are not about some ‘spiritual-stuff’. However, it is about freedom and dignity of human persons. We find him giving attention to the spiritual movements both in himself and in his neighbours. In such quality of attention, his life is transformed into an act of reverence giving and receiving hospitality. His conversations create an atmosphere of trust and welcome and thus recognise in one another the features of our heavenly Father.

Pilgrimage to the shrine of Servant of God and martyr, Fr Herman Rasschaert, SJ: A Reflection

Sixteen Jesuit students of Theology from the Jesuit Formation Center for Theology (JFCT), Ranchi made a pilgrimage to the shrine of Servant of God and martyr, Fr Herman Rasschaert, SJ to Kutungia in Simdega Diocese of Jharkhand on 26 February 2023. The pilgrimage was an integral part of their course on Islam and Christian-Muslim Dialogue.

Fr Herman Rasschaert SJ was stoned and axed to death while he valiantly tried to protect the lives of Muslims while the rampaging communal mobs were slaughtering hapless Muslims. The Church of Chotanagpur reveres Herman Rasschaert, SJ, as an apostle of peace and martyr for communal harmony.

According to the account of Louis Francken, SJ: “In 1964 there were serious Hindu-Muslim conflicts in Eastern India, including Jharkhand. The impact of these disturbances spread even to the rural areas and the isolated villages in Kutungia were also caught up in the conflict. On the morning of March 24, 1964 Fr Herman could hear the frenzied cries of mobs attacking the small hamlet of Muslim families in Gerda. Fr Herman Rasschaert put his life at stake in an attempt to save the lives of Muslim families under siege. The frenzied mob killed him and all the people who had taken refuge in this hamlet.”

Fr George Valentine Ekka, the parish priest of Kutungia, where the martyr lies buried, highlighted the relevance of Fr Rasschaert’s martyrdom for our times, saying - “The promotion of Justice and transformation of the world is the constitutive dimension of the evangelizing mission of the Church. Defending the dignity and lives of human persons is integral to the mission of the Church. Fr. Rasschaert’s martyrdom continues to inspire us to defend the dignity and lives of people in the present context.”

Paulus Minz, one of the students of JFCT pointed out that the

promotion of Justice and inter-religious dialogue are two privileged forms of evangelization in the present context. He alluded to Fr Stan Swamy and Fr Herman Rasschaert, as two witnesses of the Gospel of peace, justice, harmony, and love.

Reflection

Fr Herman Rasschaert, SJ is very relevant for us today – as a model for communal harmony who defended the life of the people and human dignity. He strongly upheld the value of human life. For him, killing was destruction and a violation of human dignity. It is to this principle of life that Fr Herman defended the life of people and paid the price of martyrdom

From where did Fr Herman gather such tremendous courage to go to the angry crowd who held swords and knives covered with blood on their hands and had killed thousands already? Certainly, only a man filled with the divine love of God can only do this otherwise it is impossible. He turned hatred into love. Dying for others is the greatest sacrifice that Christ set the way for the believers. Soon after the death of Fr Herman, the offenders recognized him and were seized with the fear of killing the priest of God, and a missionary, and fled from the spot. His death put the mob violence to an end. As students of Christian-Muslim relations, we could not but think of *Al-Hallaj* who said worship must be completed with the ablution by the blood. The ablution by blood completes the prayer, commitment to God, and submission to God. It inspires us and strengthens us to confront our own fear and to take up our cross.

Fr Herman's example is relevant for us today in the context of the persecution of Dalits, Muslims and Adivasis in different parts of India. Fr Herman encourages us to work for the dignity of the Dalits, Muslims and Adivasis of our time. We need to join hands with the people of goodwill in protecting the human dignity of Dalits and Muslims and protecting the right of Adivasis by restoring their rights to water, forest, and land from the corporates who disturb the harmony of Adivasis and their very existence.

Today, Fr Herman's ablution of the blood bears witness to the peaceful co-existence of Muslims and Christians in Gerda. We witness today how hatred is rampant in the world, more so fanaticism which is on the rise. Today we need to challenge ourselves with this question, - 'who was this man Fr Hermen Rasschaert, who was even ready to die for us in Chotanagpur?' When Fr Herman's father came to Gerda for the death anniversary of his son, he did not shed tears and instead took the soil from the grave of the martyred son to Belgium as a commemoration of the son who truly lived the Christian faith to the fullest. If the Church has become global, it is because of the blood of the martyrs.

It is said that a Jesuit missionary from India came to a meeting with Fr Kolvenbach, Father General of the Jesuit order, and apologized for his perspiration and body odor. Fr Kolvenbach said that he values the sweat of the missionaries, after the blood of the martyrs. Tertullian once wrote that '*the blood of the martyrs is the seed of faith*'. He firmly believed this faith conviction and always maintained that 'the Lord has called me to labour hard, even when I am sick and weak.'

Fr. Rasschaert stood for human dignity. He did not see the people of other religions as 'other,' but as children of God. Today it is easy to talk of peace, love, and justice but when it comes to going to the field – it becomes a great challenge. Am I open to this challenge- to what it means for me, a religious man? Accepting that challenge entails knowing that, we are not meant to serve Christians alone – but all humanity – all children of God.

Unless the grain of wheat dies, it remains a single grain. But if it dies, it bears great fruit. What Fr Herman did for the communal harmony between the peoples of Jharkhand has inspired many to be lights of peace and harmony. As students of theology, Fr Herman's life and martyrdom invite us to work for justice, peace, and harmony. It is a challenge to step out of our own comfort zone and take up something dangerous and difficult. However, when we are in communion with God and strive to witness the values of Christ,

Christ will enable us. Such work requires our greater courage and commitment; it requires persons of discernment and persons filled with the love of God to work for human dignity and rights. We also need to be persons of intellectual and spiritual depth, and possessing deep integrity. Today the Society of Jesus works also towards the mission of peace, reconciliation, and justice. Fr Herman who lived an apostolate of peace, justice, and human dignity throughout his life, encourages all of us to work for reconciliation and peace in our present context, a mission made all the more urgent in a time of polarization by fractious cultures and media that divide and create enmity.

Ar Raqeeb

The Watchful One

I TOO HAVE A STORY



Friends, I too have a story;
My story is of endless struggle.
Hostile accusations and charges are heaped against me.
I hear them say, you are a terrorist!
Where shall I get wings and fly away and find peace?

Friends, I too have a history;
My history is of endless resistance.
Words and assumptions keep me in bondage.
I am not a terrorist!
When shall I get freed from weeping in the corner of my shed?

I too have a story of love and peace,
Taken by surprise a woman asked:
Woman, what do you want, your eyes are sad.
She listened to my heartbroken pleadings and biddings.
Never anymore do I want to wake up with the sounds of riots
and dreadful bombs, the yelling of men and women and the cry of
children.

Never anymore do I want to live in fear, the fear of agony and prison chains.

I am not a terrorist. We are not terrorists.

The woman silently came closer to me and whispered:

The charges against you are vanity, bigotry and vicious hate.

Your chains will be broken.

That day my dream rose high and I thought my evil days are over.

Not only mine but of so many of my kind.

We sat down and she bowed over my written memories clinging to my heart.

She said: Your story will not be dumped in the dustbin of history.

We sat musing and wondering.

Passers by laughed at us in scorn.

Approach and mockery found no response in us.

The Divine Creator became part of our conversation.

She smiled and whispered silently:

Your delight is my delight, your hopes and dreams are also mine.

Touched by our love again She smiled and murmured:

Ours is a history of giving and receiving, of Love and Peace.

From then on my journey has begun to cut asunder all hate divides, claims, and greed.

My thinking unfolded in endless seeking peace and harmony.

Friends, there is no time to be lost. ~ *Francoise Bosteels*

Prayer

Loving and Merciful God, you are our Father and Mother, Friend and Guide! You are the source of all goodness, light, and life.

Although you are called by different names by the followers of different religions, you are One, Transcendent and Immanent God.

In you, we have our common origin and destiny; in you we live, move, and have our being.

We thank and praise you for creating us in your image and likeness

We thank and praise you for making us reflectors of your goodness, light, and life.

We thank and praise you for putting in our hearts a deep striving for peace, harmony, and fraternity.

Forgive us Lord for we have turned into merchants of evil, darkness, and death instead of being messengers of goodness, light, and life.

Forgive us Lord for sowing the seeds of hatred, division, and discord instead of spreading the seeds of peace, harmony, and fraternity.

Forgive us Lord for building alienating walls instead of building reconciling bridges.

We beseech you Lord, help us to be rooted in our own religions so that we can appreciate rays of truth in other religions.

We beseech you Lord, help us to reach out to our brothers and sisters of other faith in genuine spirit of loving dialogue.

We beseech you Lord, make us realize that being religious today is being interreligious.

We make this prayer in Your Holy Name, Amen!

Fr. Edwin Rodrigues SJ

6th Victor Courtois Memorial Lecture
(Indian Social Institute, 1 February 2023)

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Vidyajyoti
23, Raj Niwas Marg,
Delhi-110 054



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