

# Salaam

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Quarterly to Promote Understanding



*On Being the Other:  
Following Charles de Foucauld's Call to Go Deeper*

*The Ultimate Happiness*

*The Evils of Political-Religious Fundamentalism*

*Interreligious Studies, A Cradle of Dialogue*

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

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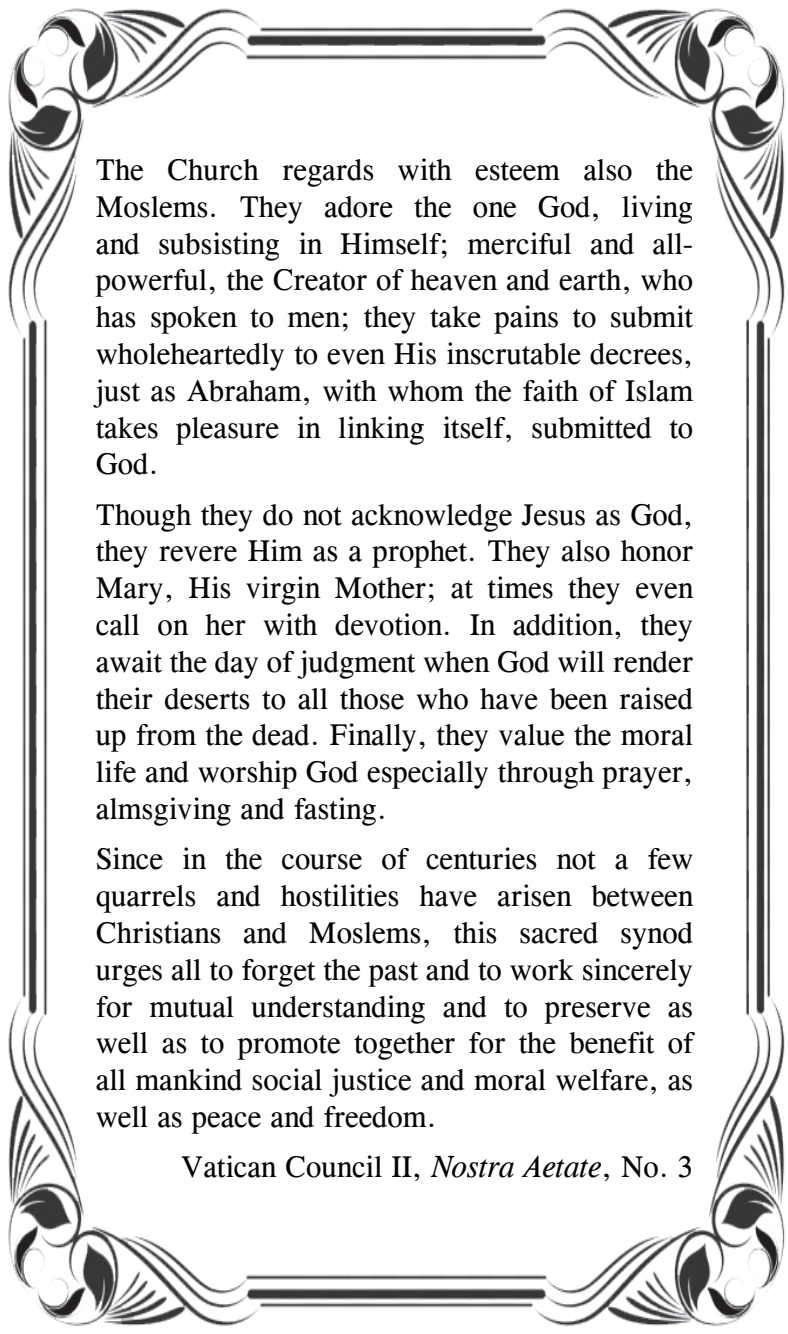
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## CONTENTS

Editorial	1
On Being the Other: Following Charles de Foucauld's Call to Go Deeper <i>By Rosemary Peters-Hill</i>	3
The Ultimate Happiness <i>By Nikseng M Sangma</i>	16
The Evils of Political-Religious Fundamentalism <i>By Salah Aboujaoude SJ</i>	20
Interreligious Studies, A Cradle of Dialogue <i>By Ambrogio Bongiovanni</i>	25
Book Review Article: ( <i>The Language of the Taj Mahal: Islam, Prayer and the Religion of Shah Jahan</i> ) <i>By Khurshid Khan</i>	30
Book Review: ( <i>Finding Jesus among Muslims: How Loving Islam Makes Me a Better Catholic</i> ) <i>By Joseph Victor Edwin SJ</i>	36



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 brothers and Sisters:

As I write this editorial, we are still in the Christmas season. I wish you all: Shalom aleichem! Pax vobiscum! As-salaam alay-kum! Peace be with you! I hope this Christmas peace greeting finds you safe and well.

The Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem sent their Christmas greetings to all faithful on 21 December 2022. I choose a few sentences from the message and share it with you as we celebrate the mystery of Love in Flesh.

I quote:

The birth of Christ was the glorious manifestation of God Incarnate, the Word-Made-Flesh, full of grace and truth. It revealed to humanity the deep and abiding love of God for all his people: that the Almighty would deign to be born among them, both fully human and fully divine.

For us, “being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (Deus Caritas Est 1). May we become more aware each day of Christ born into our hearts, dwelling in us and in our neighbour.

.....

Recently a journalist friend of mine, Zia Us Salaam shared the life story of a Muslim who spent his life in deep devotion to God and people. Zia Us Salaam writes: “Haji Abdul Qayyum devoted 54 years of his life to Madrasa Husain Bux, a historic seminary in Old Delhi where our freedom fighters often gathered. He was an honest muezzin. For many years he maintained files of the madrasa. For around half a century, he would get up a couple of hours before sunrise, offer his Tahajjud prayers, recite the Quran. In between, he would make sure

that worshippers had warm water for ablution, the ground under their feet would be without a speck of dust and the prayer mats sparkling clean. On Fridays, he would be a one-man army to clean the mosque for around a thousand worshippers.

Honest to his last bone, he spent his life in a one room house attached to madrasa. He supplemented his income by running a small shop near Jama Masjid. With limited income, he gave good education to his kids and never discriminated between sons and daughters. One of his daughters is a PhD and teaches in Delhi University. His son in law is a Ph D in Hindi.

Yesterday, Muezzin Sahab breathed his last. In the fitness of things, he offered his Tahajjud prayers in the wee hours. A little later, he went for ablution before men gathered for Fajr prayers. As he sat cleaning himself for compulsory prayers, he had a heart attack, and collapsed right there. A few minutes later, he passed away right in front of the hauz he had maintained with dedication for over 50 years. In the afternoon, after Zuhr, his funeral prayers were said in the same madrasa and Haji Abdul Qayyum left the seminary one last time, his bier being followed by hundreds of well-wishers. He was a man of great virtue and an unsung hero in the madrasa's attempt to provide quality education to the poor. May Allah grant him eternal life".

I felt a deep serenity in my heart as I thanked God for such wonderful witnesses to God in our own times. I couldn't but remember what the Holy Father Pope Francis wrote in his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (No. 252): "We must never forget that they (Muslims) "profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, who will judge humanity on the last day" ... how Muslims both young and old, men and women, make time for daily prayer and faithfully take part in religious services. Many of them also have a deep conviction that their life, in its entirety, is from God and for God. They also acknowledge the need to respond to God with an ethical commitment and with mercy towards those most in need".

I wish all you readers a grace-filled new year 2023!

**Joseph Victor Edwin SJ**

# ON BEING THE OTHER: FOLLOWING CHARLES DE FOUCAULD'S CALL TO GO DEEPER

By Rosemary Peters-Hill

Un-countried, the French say: *Dépaysés*. We are new in Morocco and *dépaysés*. Not exactly homesick; more like – lost. And we are. Like, a *lot* lost. I've been researching Morocco for so long that I felt I knew the country already when we boarded our plane in New Orleans. Every experience since arriving in the *Maghreb*, however, has proven me very wrong. I know a Morocco, but not this one. Mine is back roads, grain and altitude, aggregate and riverbeds and wild jujubes and a certain kind of barley; reports of absent travellers, the silence of an outside observer. This one bustles with noise and colors and the smells of coriander and oil and cumin; sheep's heads redolent with smoke, cooking over charcoal in the middle of a half-paved street for a holiday we did not know existed; football jerseys in every color for teams we have never heard of; grey-white colonial buildings with crumbling plaster, juxtaposed against the labyrinthine hallways and staircases hidden behind carved wooden doors. This Morocco has walls tagged with political graffiti featuring tricolor birds, Arabic letters swirling artfully through and around one another, an incongruous horse's head that reminds me of *The Godfather*.

Irony strikes me with every step: I am here to complete a book about Charles de Foucauld's year exploring the hinterlands of Morocco in disguise as a rabbi. I have traced his route across and across the map, and a cartography of cities, rivers, lakes, and territorial boundaries decorates the back of my mind: my own personal inner screensaver. But I didn't expect to

get turned around so thoroughly, or so frequently, in a city we will call home for twelve months. We learn quickly that no matter how we attempt to provide the precise location of our apartment building, a taxi driver will look at us quizzically in the rear-view mirror. *Sahat al-Golan*, I say impatiently, over and over to real or feigned incomprehension, then finally – *l'arrêt du Tram en face de la Cathédrale* ('the tram stop right by the Cathedral'). Is it my "h" in *Sahat*? There are 3 palatal-velar "h" sounds in Morocco, plus a glottal stop, and I make mistakes. Did I get the wrong phoneme? Have I caused offense with an unfortunate slip of the consonant? *Sakhat*? *Sah'hat*? *Sa'-(h)at*?

Or did we just do it the wrong way for this driver? People don't tend to give addresses here, but nearby landmarks. Postal codes are a colonial extravagance. It is enough, we discover, to write the number and street name, then Rabat, then our neighborhood – Morocco does not require the Napoleonic numeration of districts and boundaries. We are the opposite of James Joyce's Stephan Daedalus, learning to locate himself in all of space: we are *de*-located. *De*-placed. Not "dis," wrongly or violently torn out of our familiar, just – not where we were. We are other. *ou-KHAR-oun*, I practice saying under my breath. (It's not a sound I can say "under" my breath at all, though: it rushes *through* my breath, the guttural velar sound – خ /kh/ – like wind across a dry prairie.)

Just two weeks ago we boarded a plane in thrilled apprehension. We had read Paul Bowles, salivated over fresh fried sardines with Anthony Bourdain and the king's Gnawa musicians. We had watched YouTube videos of the itinerant Gnawa, processing from town to town with their bell-hats and throaty melodies. But our first lesson about Morocco is



about unexpected complications, more about ourselves than the country. It begins in the air between New Orleans and Nova Scotia: our not-quite-two-year-old begins projectile vomiting during the first leg of the flight. Neither my husband nor I had room to pack unplanned-emergency clothing. As the Toronto airport offers limited wardrobe-replenishing options, we buy matching t-shirts emblazoned *CA-NA-DA*. My husband also picks out a plaid baseball cap embroidered with maple leaves, and a little stuffed moose for our pale toddler. Then I get sick on the flight overseas. I am pregnant, as we discovered two weeks prior; and there's a problem, I can tell from dark spotting in Royal Air Maroc's inflight lavatory. By the time the plane touches down at Charles de Gaulle, I am wearing both a vomit shirt and what I will forever refer to as "miscarriage pants." I will wear these for days to come, it turns out, because the airline has lost our luggage.

By the time we arrive in Rabat I have so little energy I can't even go with my husband and toddler to the beach, because it involves a mile of walking. They head out, toddler clutching his stuffed moose, husband wearing a now many-times-hand-washed *CANADA* t-shirt and his plaid hat, and I lie on a couch in our rented living room and stare at the ceiling, like the woman in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," tracing designs in the ceiling plaster and inventing narratives and personalities for them. "Monstres fantasques," I remind myself in a mutter, quoting a Montaigne essay read ages ago, my first year of graduate school: "On Leisure."

In case this *essai* falls low on your reading-list radar, let me summarize: the unoccupied mind will end up inventing crazy things, unpredictable monsters. In fact, one of my current

monstrous phantasms – since I am confined to this apartment and this burgundy-colored couch – involves inventing an alphabet of *monstres fantasques*: appalling albatross, barbarians of boredom, capricious chimeræ, dastardly dæmons, eccentric enormities, fabulesque fiends ... I get all the way to temperamental teratism when the opening of the apartment door calls me to action and I sit up to greet my guys – leisure time over, no monsters here.) They return with a gust of salt-stung joy, a cap for the toddler, a play plastic phone from the *suq* they explored on the walk back from the beach.

The next day I find an English-speaking OB-GYN (obstetrician-gynaecologist). She goes by “Dr. Khadri,” the professional title added on to her first name. She listens to my account of spotting, eyes narrowed in focus, then tells me to get on the table. I do. She looks at me with some humor in the corners of her mouth: “*undressed, Madame,*” she clarifies, and it is not the last time I will feel idiotic in this setting. Over the months of this pregnancy I will become acquainted with Dr. Khadri’s manner: unemotional and humor-inflected, non-sense, a keen listener. “You have started aborting,” she states matter-of-factly, and my knees go to water. “The yolk-sac has partially detached.” She prescribes progesterone, magnesium, bedrest, aspirin, and abstinence. Then she ushers us out and calls her nurse (*Fatimazahra!*), and the door to her inner cabinet clicks closed. We walk slowly back to the tram stop, me afraid to jostle my belly, holding on as if I could hold the yolk-sac in place from the outside. The tram is crowded and we have a stroller, which makes people grumpy; but a man in a wool beanie takes our baby’s hand, kisses his pudgy fingers, then touches his own hand to his forehead – and gets up, gesturing to me to take his seat. It is a moment

of kindness in a confusing day – such a small thing really, and it is huge.

There is a tiny “I” trying to grow inside me and running up against the challenge of his own *otherness*: *other* to my body, *other* to the prospect of his future. *Oukharoun*, I whisper-sing to him, hoping he will hear an elongated American “croon” more than the elisive Arabic “other.” I am his mama and I am his *other*, a body that has brought him to life and might not be able to keep him alive. I think of a hundred feminist articles I read in graduate school that stylized the role of a woman into the grammar of the child’s later neuropsychology: “(m)other.” I scoffed, once; but now I feel it, I get it. It’s not psychoanalytical; it’s *visceral*. He is within me, not-me, frail little heart-shaped fish negotiating the terms of his existence with parts of my inner body I cannot communicate with. Will he slip his grip along the filaments of cellular matter and deoxyribonucleic acid, hand-over-handing in a ropey glissade, letting go? Will he let me fight for him, when *fighting* means lying still so he can hold on more easily? He is a *sans-papiers* ( undocumented immigrant) in my entrails, a foreigner whose sheer existence fills me with terrified joy; he knows the workings of my womb more intimately than I do. *Stay*, I plead, cajole, late at night, palms pressed flat into belly-swell. Not once, even unplanned, even as surprising as he is, has he been unwanted. I kneel in the dark apartment and beg God to flood him with love. Palms up, arms outstretched like St. Francis, I ask the Lord to help my body keep this life alive. Then I press my palms against my belly again. At night, every night, I talk to the baby with one fetal hand in God’s world. *Stay*, I croon.

By day, I force myself into no-nonsense academic mode. We are in Morocco in the first place because of my research. I

am writing about Charles de Foucauld (not yet a saint our Rabat year), preparing a critical edition of his *Reconnaissance au Maroc, 1883-1884*. It's the only one of his books published during his lifetime, an ethnography/travel memoir/conversion narrative about his experiences exploring the then-closed country, of whose territory only one-fifth (the *blad al-Makhzen*, or government-administered region) fell under the authority of a central sovereign. The rest of the Moroccan space, oceanfront to Atlas peaks, mountains to desert (*sa'hra, I practice, over and over; it voyages endlessly across the soft palate*), was governed by ancient tribal accords, resistant to the Sultan's power. The *blad al-Siba*, the dissident territory, was populated mainly by nomadic Amazigh peoples, who spoke not Arabic but rather Tashelhit or another variant of Tamazight. Charles de Foucauld, entering the *Siba* for the first time in autumn of 1883, made a point of documenting tribal territories, rapiers, dress and arms. He noted how many horses or camels they had, how many troops they could muster if attacked. He had to make notes in a 2"-x-2" notepad concealed in the palm of one hand, scientific instruments hidden in the folds of his clothing.

I grapple with the deceptively simple title of his memoir. In the beginning of his incognito exploration, *reconnaissance* was a military term: Foucauld tasked himself with making a sort of blueprint for French occupation. But if it were a strictly military journey, his book would be titled *Reconnaissance du Maroc* – reconnaissance *in* or *of* Morocco. The preposition *au*, though, opens the memoir up to new horizons. Reconnaissance to Morocco? My vocabulary for clandestine military operations is admittedly limited, but the preposition is wrong in both English and French. I worry this detail over and over, propped

up on stiff pillows in our living room. *What if it's not military?* a little voice keeps suggesting, and I keep shooing it away. I am embroiled in a prepositional tussle: Jacob with his angel. *I will not let thee go*, I tell the title, sensing that a significance beyond language subtends the grammatical detail.

The director of the Fulbright commission in Rabat has already made clear he thinks my project does not pass muster, that I could have completed it in a library back home... I am intentionally over-polite. *It began as a military mission*, I explain; *but by the end of the year Foucauld had so taken Morocco into his heart that he had already decided to return to the desert*. As for the library ... I have an appointment at the national archives, I tell him. He rolls his eyes. "Morocco is *not* the country of archives."

"Depends how you define archives," I smile. *Ding!* The angel blesses me finally, and I excuse myself to scribble the idea before I can forget.

*Archives*: collections of texts, maps, correspondence, city plans, news clippings, etc., that document the history of a place or institution. The word can also mean the *place* for these documents. As of 1835, the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* includes a figurative meaning: *cet homme est une archive du savoir* (this man is an archive of knowledge). That is – an archive can be a person, someone who recognizes the necessity of honoring the memory of a place. (*Reconnaissance*: understanding, awareness.) And through *that* understanding comes an understanding of their own identity in a new way, seeing themselves in their rawest, most elemental form. (*Reconnaissance*: recognition.) Self-recognition like that is both burden and gift. I imagined the person feeling thankful toward the place that had brought them awareness and self-

knowledge. (*Reconnaissance*: gratitude.) In May of 1883, Charles de Foucauld embarked on a mission of reconnaissance, which turned into a pilgrimage through a space he sought to honor by documenting it; in the process of archiving the place – and its customs, languages, dress, shifting borders, exchanges between traditions and cultures – he encountered a new way of being himself, and recognized in himself the first stirrings of a call to *go deeper*. Morocco pared away the scales that had been keeping him from understanding his connection to the desert, to God. He remained grateful, to both God and the desert, until the day he died: he incarnated the archive of a specific Morocco, a country fragmented into innumerable subdivisions of memory keepers, the histories of dunes and families intertwined.

The word *archive* derives from Greek αρχίον, itself a development from αρχη, *beginning*. Arguably the most famous occurrence of αρχη, from a scriptural point of view, appears in John 1:1:

**Εν αρχη** ην ο λογος και ο λογος ην προς τον θεον και θεος ην ο λογος.

In the beginning there was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

I wrestle with the concept of a new Foucauld. The “beginning,” for him, rushed across the desert on starling wings. His fascination with – and near conversion to – Islam is well documented; he returned to the Catholicism of his ancestors through the unabashed faith of the desert Muslims. His entry into the great desert marked profound change in his mind and soul. From this moment, Foucauld

became the archive, and Morocco the αρχή – the *beginning* of his vocation, the aperture into communion with those seen as *most other*. Through exploration, Foucauld’s eyes opened to a world beyond his imagining, identities so endangered, so rare and distinct, that they required urgent preservation. Not for “the glory of France,” but for their *own* sake. From his Tuareg-French Dictionary, Hoggar Dialect that translated the nuanced Hoggar language for the French recruits who never joined him, to the Compendium of Tuareg Poetry and Song, indigenous poems and songs reflecting this people’s traditions, which he collected to ensure they would be preserved, studied, and honored – all his subsequent writings represent his indefatigable love for these Tuareg, the forgotten-by-time, the “farthest from God.” He *loved* them. He sought with every prayer and action and recorded word to protect and honor them – to love them in their blue-dyed skin. When he lost his life doing it, his death brought global attention to the lives of these *others* from the remotest corner of Algeria. He made no converts, but made his own life into the archive of their traditions and faith and connection to the land, and in doing so made sure more generations would love them, too, and love all the “others” – would maybe recognize that, in Creation, there *are* no others, no “farthest from” where the Lord is concerned.

I came to understand, living in the nation that had agenced the transformation of a womanizing, indolent rich kid into a hard-working man living a vow of poverty, how Morocco can change you. For Foucauld, exploration began a process that kindled a new spirit within him.

And for me, writing about St. Charles de Foucauld soon found me balancing my laptop on the growing curve of my pregnant belly. When I returned to Dr. Khadri's waiting room, I felt self-conscious and anxious: I was hyper-visible and under-verbal in this place, this situation: the only woman not wearing an *abaya*, the only one without a *hijab*; the only expectant mother who would return to work three weeks after giving birth, nursing her newborn on a pillow while typing her manuscript over his head as he slept. I felt my difference with every pair of espresso eyes that turned toward me, then flickered quickly back down to the phones or magazines that had held their attention moments before. I did not know the best way to hail a taxi, or haggle over the price of toddler shoes in the *suq*, or the proper way to say "God be with you" when dropping coins into the waxen cups of homeless men and women in the park where we took our toddler a few times a week. Every *mashallah* I managed eyed 20 lost occasions where I should have proffered *tbarkallah* or *bismillah* (or even *wallah*??). It was a humbling year: exciting, eye-opening, painful, frustrating, a year that saw us back in Rabat a summer later, and the summer after that, and the one after that. It became a place we loved; a place we knew we were loved.

Dr. Khadri passed an ultrasound wand over my belly. We listened together to his bright-light fluttering heartbeat, and then she looked me directly in the eye and – and it was the only time in the seven months she treated me – grinned. "You are going to have a little Moroccan," she said; and then: "he must have come a long way to meet you."



I was the other, in that waiting room, in that office. And the stern OB-GYN who knew nothing about this pregnancy except my fear – she didn't know we had decided *not to not-try*; or that my age made me cry; or that I had waited until I had earned tenure before I even entertained the idea of starting a family; or that three separate doctors had told me it was unlikely, or would require fertility intervention, or would not happen at all. She did not know about the phone call that came two days before we boarded the plane to Casablanca, the voice of my Louisiana OB-GYN announcing the results of the chromosomal testing we had done, telling us the baby, a boy, had markers of Down syndrome and that *before we terminated* we should do an amniocentesis; and how we had not had the time even to begin grasping everything the new knowledge would mean for our family before we got on a plane in Toronto and thought we were losing him ... Dr. Khadri knew nothing of our ups and downs. She didn't need to: she just *loved* my baby, my almost-lost. She loved him with secular sentences peppered with *Allah*, in the way of Moroccans, and in the medications she prescribed to help bolster my body's ability to welcome this brand-new life into a brand-new world. I felt her love as she greeted the innermost *me* of myself, the scratchy screened cavern that looked like an old TV where this tiny moving creature was the star of a show I didn't know yet.

"Al-hamdoulillah," I murmured, watching enraptured as the amphibian inside me wriggled and swam – *al-hamiduli-Allah*, the blessing be to Allah. It is not my language,

not my faith, but was the breath that came to my voice in that moment. Did it matter what language I used to praise God? I knew only the feeling of that word deep in my being, a word of love I could utter without shame or hesitation. I came to cultivate a space for it within myself, a space I could access when I needed a reminder of the everyday holiness that is so much a part of Morocco: God in the architecture of the city and the structure of the daytime hours, God as the architect of all human experience; praise for his Creation whatever our place in the divine economy.

Dr. Khadri's hand grazes my shoulder gently, a little pat as she leaves the room. I came to Morocco with the idea that my heart and spirit were already aligned with the spirituality of St. Charles de Foucauld, that I would love the people of this country and this faith "despite our differences" – and I soon learned the arrogance of that mindset. Had I planned to *learn* from them? Had I thought to ask questions about their beliefs, the sacred texts that guide their faith practice, their traditional celebrations – or did I just walk through the *suq* with my DSLR, taking pictures without permission? The sheep's heads, hot coals, the sloe-eyed youth laughing at my attempts to parse out *dar al-bahr*, "house of the sea." The doorways and geometric tile patterns. The barefoot children playing football in the streets of the Oudayas, uphill from the ocean. This is *their* here, I admonish myself, flushing to realize that I have indeed been emulating Charles de Foucauld, but only the earliest version of the future saint: the cocky, pre-conversion adventurer who could put on a disguise and take it off when it became inconvenient.

We carry deserts within us: wounded spaces, abandoned constructions ramshackle to begin with, fractured joists whose fragments no longer hold up the floors they were built for. Hills of sand, the foundation eroding beneath our feet. *Sah'ra*, the phoneme of eternity within the undecipherable present. Foucauld's *Sahara* came beneath the immeasurable expanse of dark sky: a night of wonders in the Sahara itself. Mine, though? came in the office of an OB-GYN who had the kindness to leave the ultrasound monitor on so I could look at the life I did not lose.

I was the other, and they loved me nonetheless. They loved my family, our toddler, our baby who decided to stay. In the afternoon stillness of the examination room I wiped tears with the backs of my hands, feeling my own rough knuckles beneath my eyes, unable to look away from the sight of our tiny baby's tiny heart, grateful for how far he had come, how far Morocco had already brought us, for all the endless skies ahead.



# THE ULTIMATE HAPPINESS

By Nikseng M Sangma

This essay speaks about the ultimate happiness in life according to Abu Hamid Muhammadu'l Ghazali. The thirst for understanding the essence of things was his persistent habit from his early years and in the prime of his life. This yearning was a personal instinct and a natural disposition. In this paper, I will reflect on real happiness according to St. Augustine of Hippo for integration of both sets of ideas for enriching the spiritual life.

## **Abu Hamid Muhammadu'l Ghazali**

Hamid Muhammadu'l Ghazali, generally known by the honorary title of *Hujjatu 'l-Isam*, the 'proof of Islam', was a native of Tus near Meshhed, in Khurasan, Iran. Left an orphan at a relatively early age, he was brought up by a Sufi friend of his father and afterwards studied at a college in his native city. Subsequently, he went for further studies to Nishanpur city. He seems not to have been attracted in his earlier years by Sufism. He was a man of extraordinary gifts, and he soon found his way to the Seljuqi court, and under the patronage of the minister *Nizamu'l-Mulk*, he became a teacher in the *Nizamiyya* college at Baghdad. There he sank into complete agnosticism. He studied philosophy, and at the end, he found that it was a vain thing. His restless mind and sceptical mentality could give him no rest. He longed for the truth. He tried philosophy and found it wanting and finally turned to Sufism.

In the book '*The Alchemy of Happiness*' Ghazali reflects on ultimate happiness. Its constituents are four. They are, firstly, knowledge of the self; secondly, knowledge of God; thirdly,

knowledge of this world as it really is, and lastly, knowledge of the next world as it really is. In this paper, I limit myself to knowledge of the self and knowledge of God that help one to attain the ultimate happiness. Knowledge of the self is the key to knowledge of God. It is not about outward shape, body, face, limbs, and so forth. Real self-knowledge consists in knowing about the origin and the destination of our life, and happiness and misery in life. The first step to know the self is to be aware of the composition of ourselves, that we are of body and heart or soul. The body may be figured as a kingdom, the soul as its king, and the different senses and faculties as constituting an army. Reason may be called the vizier. The aim of moral discipline is to purify the heart from the rust of passion and resentment, till, like a clear mirror, it reflects the light of God. The highest faculty in man is reason, which fits him for the contemplation of God. By means of it, he masters everything and can pass in a flash from earth to heaven and back again and can map out the skies and measure the distances between the stars and the other planets.

Man needs to purify himself more from fleshly lusts and concentrate his mind on God. If he does so, the more conscious will he be of intuitions. This is the due discipline. A person with such due discipline is able to rule his body. Such persons acquire the real knowledge of God. This gives them real happiness. In this, souls feel the special delight. They are sure that nothing is higher than God. An important part of our knowledge of God arises from the study and contemplation of our own bodies, which reveal to us the power, wisdom, and love of the Creator. Knowledge of the soul plays a more important part in leading to the knowledge of God than the knowledge

of our body and its functions. This is to expound the greatness of man's soul. He who neglects it, suffers its capacities to rust or to degenerate the soul or the heart and is a loser in this world and in the next. We can arrive at some knowledge of God's essence and attributes from the contemplation of the soul's essence and attributes. God's greatness immeasurably transcends our cognitive faculties. We can only form a very dim and imperfect idea of it, and it must be accompanied by devotion and worship. Love is the seed of happiness, and love for God is fostered and developed by worship. Such worship and constant remembrance of God imply a certain degree of austerity and curbing of bodily appetites. He who transgresses these limits wrongs his own soul and is ignorant of God. He who ignores the real nature of the soul will find that his soul may end in future misery. Such a person may not receive the ultimate happiness. So, knowledge of the self and knowledge of God can help one to attain ultimate happiness in life.

### **St. Augustine of Hippo**

St. Augustine has a special place in the Church. Born in 354 in northern Africa, his mother was very devout, and was later canonized by the Catholic Church (Saint Monica). She prayed for her son seemingly continuously, but for the first 30 years of his life, he seemed bent on a different path. Highly intelligent and schooled in rhetoric and speech, he sought intellectual comfort for his religious beliefs in the Manicheans. The Manicheans held that the flesh is evil and is a prison for the pure and good soul. This sect professed to be Christian but hardly deserves the name.

In his book **Confession** St. Augustine speaks about the pursuit of the happy life. The happy life is the life with knowledge of God. The universal feature of what people seek in life is to be happy. The true and greatest joy, argues Augustine, is joy in God. The obstacle to their pursuit of it in God is nothing but a lack of will. Augustine bolsters this argument with the further proposition that the joy universally sought in the happy life must be joy in the truth. Thus, we know how to seek the happy life not because we remember any particular joys but because we remember the nature of truth itself. In the end, Augustine feels he finds no safe place for his soul except in God. He had to do his best against the bombardments of sin from all sides and have the faith that God will have mercy on him. For Augustine ultimate happiness lies in the knowledge of God.

## **Conclusion**

From the above-mentioned figures, we can draw rich inspirations for our spirituality. Both speak about the source of ultimate happiness, that is, God. Both refer to knowledge of God for real happiness in life. Both speak about a sinful life that blocks one from having knowledge of God and does not allow one to have real happiness in life. Both speak about the knowledge of the self. The difference is that St. Augustine speaks about the knowledge of God on the basis of personal experience of God. Abu Hamid Muhammadu'l Ghazali speaks about knowledge of God based knowledge that comes from meditations.



# THE EVILS OF POLITICAL-RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

By Salah Aboujaoude SJ

*“Religious fundamentalism and fanaticism are obviously nothing new. Religious persecutions, massacres in the name of faith, inquisitions and religious wars are nothing new. One would even have the feeling that, in the history of religions, it is non-fundamentalism and tolerance that are the exceptions”, Yves Michaud.*

Despite the diversity of its schools, religious fundamentalism is characterized by an ideological understanding of religion that necessarily leads to intolerance, which could take many forms. Embracing a specific interpretation of the sacred text, fundamentalism propagates a teaching that claims to have the complete truth about human life, society and existence and, therefore, claims to have categorical answers to the various questions that man or society would ask in all areas. No wonder that division within the same religion and discrimination against other religions and violence - which could be psychological, verbal or, in some cases, physical - become recurrent and even unavoidable results of fundamentalism. These results are exacerbated when fundamentalism takes on the mission of proselytizing. In fact, its followers, having undergone an indoctrination that nurtures the emotional side of their being rather than the critical spirit based on the scientific mind, believe they are entitled to judge the behavior, beliefs and traditions of others, and distinguish themselves by an attitude of blind obedience to their authority, which alone reflects, in their eyes, the divine will.



In the case of political-religious fundamentalism, however, these characteristics take on a particularly dangerous dimension for both individuals and societies. That's because the indoctrination of followers advocates the production of an eschatological project in the present time. As a result, history becomes an endless battlefield and the slide towards violence and even war becomes an ever-present possibility.

### **The primordial place of the enemy**

Political-religious fundamentalism cannot imagine life without conflict as long as the realization of the fundamentalist project is inseparable from the elimination of an enemy. However, this existential conflict plunges political-religious fundamentalism into a cycle of endless hostility since the enemy not only cannot be defeated or eliminated because his existence is inseparable from life itself, but must also always exist because the very cause of this fundamentalism is intimately linked to his existence.

In the light of what is said, this enemy of existential importance for politico-religious fundamentalism, has two main faces: a first realistic and actual face represented by the person or the party or the intellectual current or the State to which this fundamentalism is hostile, and a second face that remains unknown because it belongs to what exists only as an indispensable condition in fundamentalist political-religious thought. The imaginary adversary opens up an ambiguous eschatological dimension since its elimination cannot occur in space and time. The impact of this eschatological background is nevertheless enormous on relations with other people who, in the eyes of the fundamentalists, occupy a lower place than them, otherwise they are classified as enemies. Thus, any

real reconciliation, any cooperation as equal participation in a common work, and any friendship seem to be hindered. In fact, the factual and eschatological dimensions are closely intertwined, leaving the followers of political-religious fundamentalism no room for an objective and pragmatic understanding of human conflicts, which is indispensable for the conclusion of compromises and the meeting of interests.

### **The problems of building social and political links**

The eschatological fundamentalist vision of the present time leads to a compulsory theoretical and practical classification of people into enemies and supporters. This discrimination becomes the basis of all relations with others and the basis of all policies towards the world outside the fundamentalist community. The lack of objectivity of this view is coupled, however, with a very dangerous and naive simplification of human existence, history and the formation of societies. Indeed, these issues are so complex that they make social, political and cultural structures composite realities that are difficult to define or at least to reduce to a single vision or definition.

It follows that the emergence of a society based on agreement and convergence of interests becomes difficult, if not impossible, as long as political-religious fundamentalism is based on a rigid doctrine that explains existence in all its dimensions and makes emotion prevail over reason in the relationship with reality. The fundamentalist community believes itself to be self-sufficient and the bearer of the only valid project for human life. And as much as the fundamentalist discourse is fanned against those who hinder the realization of the divine project, the unity of the community is strengthened,

as its internal differences and contradictions are weakened and faded by the focus on the external enemy. In other words, this fundamentalism leaves no room for the mechanism of contracting on the basis of equality and acceptance of diversity and dialogue. The transition from the natural condition to the political state through a rational encounter on common interests becomes blocked.

### **The role of the official religious authorities**

Fundamentalism presents itself as the original and complete form of religion. This claim creates confusion among the official religious authority as to how to deal with fundamentalism. This authority is anxious to avoid a division within its community; consequently, it prefers not to provoke a controversy with fundamentalists who could gain popularity among believers thanks to their rigor and claim to bring salvation to people abandoned by both political and religious authorities; they appear as the alternative to both authorities. More often than not, the religious authority finds itself in a weak position in the face of the popular, offensive and emotional fundamentalist discourse. But, at the same time, this authority cannot allow fundamentalism to degenerate into a source of societal instability, especially since its silence would be unacceptable to the political authority, which finds fundamentalism a threat to civil peace and to its very existence.

It is important to stress here that fundamentalism places the responsibility on the religious authority to clarify the objectives of the message of its religion itself. Does its religion contain a message of peace, tolerance, cooperation and unity based on pluralism in order to best serve every human being and all humanity, or does it contain a message of conflict, division and

discrimination? If the latter is the option of fundamentalism, then the religious authority has no choice but to promote the former. This same authority could effectively use its networks of schools, universities and cultural centers to propagate the principles of democracy, which presupposes secularism, as this gives religion its rightful place and its positive role in the life of man and society. Nelson Mandela rightly points out that “education is the most powerful weapon one can use to change the world” (Nelson Mandela).



# INTERRELIGIOUS STUDIES, A CRADLE OF DIALOGUE

*Interview with Prof. Ambrogio Bongiovanni*  
*Director of the Gregorian Centre for Interreligious Studies*

By Paolo Pegoraro

“People involved in interfaith dialogue are occasionally perceived as somewhat naïve. In reality, those working in this field are expected to be fully knowledgeable of its problems, tensions and diversities. When you master the skill of dealing with and navigating across differences, then something truly important can be achieved”, says Professor Ambrogio Bongiovanni, newly appointed Director of the Centre for Interreligious Studies at the Gregoriana, and extraordinary Professor at the Faculty of Missiology. Bongiovanni has three decades of experience in India, working in the area of cooperation. He also serves as President of the MAGIS Foundation, a missionary work of the Euro-Mediterranean Province of the Society of Jesus.”

**Professor, what is the state of health of interreligious dialogue?**

“Even when it seemed that dialogue was heading for a standstill, or that certain factors were hindering the process, such as fundamentalism - be it political, religious or secular - the culture of dialogue continued to grow and develop. And Church Magisterium documents that have given renewed impetus to dialogue were made possible because Pope Francis recognised the fertile grounds that had been preserved and the seeds of dialogue scattered in various contexts, which needed to be nurtured, strengthened and allowed to germinate.”

**Indeed, many processes were revived at the institutional level. At the same time, however, there is a feeling that something is missing....**

“That is because the culture of dialogue should be promoted also at grassroots level. This does not mean downgrading the content or quality of the dialogue, but rather ensuring that it is individually experienced at all levels. Educational opportunities and meaningful encounters are needed to ensure that this different approach to the complexity of human reality becomes part and parcel of culture and living in our globalised world. I would have some doubts if the dialogue were carried out only at the institutional level, because institutions may occasionally have multiple goals, which ultimately amount to putting up a facade restricted to the diplomacy of reciprocity. But I am optimistic because I see so much goodwill, commitment and sacrifice in the pursuit of dialogue, despite threats and setbacks. There are martyrs of dialogue. Charles de Foucauld or the monks of Tibhirine followed the law of love right to the very end. Indeed, the law of love overturns calculations and the principle of reciprocity, for it opens us up to a different perspective. For this reason, the Golden Rule of dialogue can be nothing other than the primacy of love.”

### **Where does the Centre for Interreligious Studies stand in this context?**

“I believe that the Centre can be compared to an antenna which receives and sends out messages. Our reality is still small, when compared to other consolidated academic centres, yet it has great potential. Admittedly, the structure as well as student numbers are important data for an academic unit, but our dynamism, flexibility, along with the possibility of offering non-structured areas of learning are equally important. The fact that personalities from the diplomatic world, perhaps operating in non-Christian contexts, turn to us is a significant sign.”

**The Centre offers its expertise not only to the outside world, but also to other academic units of the Gregoriana. How does this type of academic unit interplay with other disciplines, interact with them, challenge them and enrich them?**

“Interreligious studies are not only about studying from an exclusively theological perspective, they require greater inter- and cross-disciplinary approaches. In fact, there is a tendency to adopt the historical approach alone when studying the development of religious traditions, failing to reflect on inter-religiousness and inter-religious dialogue, which encompass all the categories of the human sciences. Interreligious studies are cradles of dialogue, whose concrete implementation requires the acquisition of tools, skills and knowledge. Dialogue cannot be only intellectual, for it is a living process, and it cannot be separated from life.”

**So, what is the specific trait of the Centre, which qualifies precisely as a ‘Centre for Interreligious Studies’?**

“I will give an example. The Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI), with which we collaborate, already offers courses in the area of Islamic studies or Arabic language; what we are offering is the study of Christian-Muslim relations and their contemporary perspective. These areas of knowledge are complementary, implying shared competences, yet with different roles and perspectives. I firmly believe in this line of work, precisely because my area of expertise has been dialogue formation, the pedagogy of dialogue, studying the categories involved in the dialogue process.”

**The Centre operates in close cooperation with the Faculty of Missiology, enhancing the “contextual perspective.”**

## **Can you tell us more about this?**

“Every religious experience develops within a specific context and interacts with its inherent cultural aspects, which possess a transformative power. Therefore, religious traditions, including Christian traditions, must be contextualised. In the Indian context, in which I have lived, Catholic communities follow three different Rites - the Latin, the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara rites - with as many distinct religious sensitivities.

We may assume that we can understand a single religion by categorisation, considering only its generic aspects, but if we delve into the different contexts then it becomes more difficult. It is necessary to study not only the relations between different religious traditions, but also the ways in which they are manifested in different contexts - whether historical, geographical or cultural. The relationship between Christianity and Islam in Europe is different from the relationship between Christianity and Islam in South Asia, or Iran. Therefore, it is important to understand and operate within this interweaving of the cultural - in the broadest sense of the term - and the religious dimensions.

Our effort is to examine contexts from the perspective of communion and universality, to develop an understanding of contexts as forms of richness that form part of the Church’s inculturation process, while simultaneously connecting each particular context to Church tradition and universality.”

**In addition to the Diploma, over the years the Centre developed other areas of study, which form an integral part of the academic path. These include two in particular: the Interfaith Forums and the Intensive Study Sessions. Will the Weekly Forums be given a new format in the 2022-2023 academic year?**



“The weekly Forums are open to the public. These encounters are of a more cultural and in-depth character, frequently with speakers from outside the Gregorian. They reflect the two lines of study of the Centre: Christianity-Islam and Christianity-Religions and Cultures of Asia. They have been quite successful and much appreciated, hence we decided that the time was ripe to promote them further. Starting next year, while remaining open to the public, the Forums will be incorporated into the Centre’s Program of Studies with a timetable adjustment to ensure the participation of enrolled students. This will facilitate students’ engagement with external perspectives and contexts. It will also provide them with an opportunity for open dialogue and ensuing systematic reflections.”

### **And as regards the Intensive Sessions...?**

“The Sessions are seminars focused on specific topics, in collaboration with other internal and external academic institutions, likewise open to both external participants and students of the Gregoriana. Two Sessions were held this year, in accordance with the Centre’s two areas of study. The session on *The Qur’an in Rome* was co-organised with the University of Naples “L’Orientale”, with *The European Qu’ran* (EuQu) research project, in conjunction with PISAI and several young researchers. The second Session has been taking place at the Camaldoli Monastery, in the days closest to Pentecost, focusing on dialogue with Hinduism and Hindu spirituality. *Towards Oneness. The Spirituality of Dialogue in Hinduism*, was the theme of this year’s event.



## **BOOK REVIEW ARTICLE:**

**THE LANGUAGE OF THE TAJ MAHAL: ISLAM, PRAYER AND THE RELIGION OF SHAH JAHAN. Michael D Calabria OFM. I. B. Tauris, 2022. ISBN 978-0-7556-3785-0. Pp. 288. Price - U.S. \$ 39.95.**

By Khurshid Khan

Love assumes a central and primary role in most discussions of the Taj Mahal, academic or otherwise. However, the object of love that the Taj Mahal represents shifts. In popular memory, the Funerary structure is celebrated as a monument of romantic love, which focuses on the romantic impulses of the emperor, who conceived and built the Taj as a deep expression of his love for his wife Arjumand Banu Begum / Mumtaz Mahal (“the Chosen one of the Palace”). Scholarly writings see the commissioning of Taj Mahal stemming from Shah Jahan’s love for architecture. These studies emphasize the study of its architectural features. Michael D. Calabria in his book, *The Language of the Taj Mahal: Islam, Prayer and the Religion of Shah Jahan*, published by I.B. Tauris, London (2022), studies the monument through a different object of love i.e., as “an eloquent testimony” to the emperor’s love for his faith. In the authors’ words “a faith he (Shah Jahan) approached sincerely but lived imperfectly”.

The work draws attention to the study of the Qur’ānic verses calligraphed on various parts-from the gateways to the graves in the basement- of the Taj. The calligraphic engravings on the Taj are generally seen as merely decorative- used for beautification. The art form itself is barely given the scholarly attention that architecture and painting have received even though it is a vital part of both. Generally, calligraphy on

artefacts is ignored even though it is a key to comprehending meanings assigned to objects on which it is rendered. However, Calabria is sensitive to the fact that Calligraphy was a vital artistic achievement of the Mughals and most Mughal Sovereigns were adept in the art. Through a detailed study of the inscriptional programme of the Taj, the author surveys the reasons and purpose with which the 241 Qur'ānic verses were chosen to be inscribed on the monument. Calabria accomplishes this by identifying, translating and commenting upon the Qur'ānic verses along with a discussion of the significance behind their placement on certain parts of the monument. While the Architect Ustad Isa and the Emperor have been discussed at length elsewhere, Calabria finds another author for this famous monument in the shape of Amanat Khan- the calligrapher whose name is also inscribed on the tomb. Calabria combs through sources to demonstrate the calligrapher's role in selecting Qur'ānic verses with Shah Jahan.

Calabria ably demonstrates that the Taj is more than a mute tomb complex and presents it as an embodiment of the way Shah Jahan interpreted Islam for himself, and the obligations it entailed on him as a ruler towards humanity. The inscriptions denote that Shah Jahan believed that faith should be expressed in one's actions and not in prayer alone. For him 'caring for the poor, the orphaned, the hungry and the imprisoned is a vital aspect of religion. And so is "compassionate and consistent" dispensation of justice. (p.216)

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<sup>1</sup> The author has indicated that it is true that the Qur'ānic verses inscribed on the Taj are so stylized that it is difficult to read. However, a person familiar with the sacred text on reading of a few initial lines can identify the verse and read them from the Qur'an.

The work indicates that the façade through which one enters the Taj Mahal, that is the south gate, the chapter “The Daybreak” (*sūrah al-Fajr*) from the Qur’ān is inscribed to remind humanity of how it has abandoned its concern for the orphan and the needy. Further it mentions the day of judgement and the fate that would befall the greedy on that day. When one leaves the structure through the same gate on its rare side is inscribed the Qur’ānic chapter “Morning Light” (*sūrah al-Duhā*). The verses in this chapter similarly exhort humanity to care for the poor and the orphans. Calabria argues that the two chapters on the front and rear side of the entrance gate carry the “ultimate message of the Taj” i.e., to care for the marginalized.

Calabria further argues that the chapter, *Yā Sīn* (the heart of the Quran) is inscribed on the surface of each of the four *pishtaqs* (tall gateways) of the main mausoleum. He puts forth that *Yā Sīn* is engraved on the tomb not solely because of its associations with the dying and the dead but because it embodies the most essential teachings of the Qur’ān. The author examines the eschatological connection between the chapter *al-Fajr* inscribed on the main entrance gate and *Yā Sīn* on the mausoleum’s four gates. He then posits that both chapters remind the faithful “to return” to God. For Calabria, the other chapters inscribed on the doorways to the tomb, address the fundamental question, “where is humanity headed to?” and he perceives the Qur’ānic verses as an architectural instrument to persuade humankind to heed God’s (and his Prophet’s) message while journeying towards the divine. The Taj, when viewed through this significant calligraphic frame, allows Calabria to hail the structure as “a monumental Qur’ān”.

Calabria arrives at such conclusions, among others, through fastidious scrutiny of Qur’ānic chapters and verses engraved

on the Taj, he cross references those inscriptions from other literary texts and the sayings of the prophet (*hadīs*). For instance, Calabria demonstrates, that as the sky splits open to reveal the light of the morning sun, the Taj too appears in all its whiteness before the visitors as the light of the dawn. He invites attention to the fact that *sūrah al-Fajr* (on the entrance) and *sūrah al-Duhā* (on the exit), both refer to dawn. The calligraphic reference to daybreak, for Calabria, emphasises that just as the sky splits open at sunrise to gradually reveal the light of the day after “the darkness of light” as does death leads to a new life.

Calabria also submits that the entire monument invokes the movement of the sun in the sky, and when viewed in that light, the inscriptions reveal that the figure eight in funerary architecture is not just an invocation of paradise but a reference to the day of resurrection as well. Calabria places such semiotic insights from the architecture of the Taj Mahal not as an immemorial and invariant Qur’ānic truth, but rather he contextualises the chosen Qur’ānic verses in their significance for Shah Jahan as a 17<sup>th</sup> Century South Asian monarch. For instance, demonstrating the contextual relevance of the chapters of “The Daybreak” (*sūrah al-Fajr*) and *al-Duhā* in the seventeenth century, Calabria writes:

*“In these verses Shah Jahan saw tragic relevance to his own time for early in his reign-even as he grieved Mumtaz’s death-the subcontinent suffered ...the great famine of 1630-32.”*

On account of the above three million perished in Gujarat and one million in Ahmednagar. There were famines in Punjab in 1636-37 and in Kashmir in 1642 leading to huge loss of lives” (p.70). Hence, he suggests that such suffering moved

Shah Jahan to turn to the scripture to remind the wealthy to care for the needy.

The contextual analysis of these Qur'ānic verses relating to the funerary structure could not have been possible without the author's serious engagement with the **language and syntax of the Qur'ān and the hadīs**. Here Calabria's previous scholarship on religion and spirituality aids his detailed analysis of the emperor's faith displayed on the funerary structure. He complements his argument for a "monumental Qur'ān" by referring to the literary texts of that period and other architectural monuments like mosques and other tombs complexes of the Sultanate and the Mughal era. Such comparisons facilitated the author to mention the contributions of Mumtaz Mahal in administrative and judicial matters. This is a welcome change from the fare that relgates her to the position of a mute muse for the monument.

Scholars engaging with religious orientations of Mughal rulers perceive administrative policy as a barometer for their faith. Because of such a perspective, they categorize the rulers as either liberal or orthodox political entities. This view conceives religion from without where conformity to ritualistic elements of faith is considered as orthodox and their non-observance as liberalism. For the Mughals, such discussions place Akbar and Aurangzeb as the polar ends of the barometer. Calabria takes a more circumspect decision here, instead of placing the emperors on a sliding scale of adherence to faith, he places them on a continuum where the actions of one influence and direct the other.

Calabria draws attention to the nature of impact Akbar had on Shah Jahan's religion and spirituality. He examines literary texts, albums of paintings and calligraphy, the poetry inscribed on some of the paintings and the emperor's inscriptions on his books from his library. He provides an account of Shah Jahan's affiliations with Sufis and the spiritual discussions he had with Sufi Shaykhs like Miyan Mir (c.1550-1635), Mullah Shah Badakhshi, Mir Sayyid Muhammad Qannauji and Chishtī Shaykh Muhibbullah of Allahabad (1587-1648). Calabria uses such associations to argue that the tradition of positioning oneself as the temporal and spiritual head of the state initiated by Akbar was carried forth by Jahangir and Shah Jahan as well. This is a marked departure from writings which project Shah Jahan as an orthodox ruler. The work ends poignantly, with a detailed account of Aurangzeb deposing his father and Shah Jahan's burial next to Mumtaz in the Taj Mahal. Calabria has presented a text that is archivally rigorous and semiotically creative, which exhorts other scholars to peer through into the Calligraphic and contextual elements that secure meanings for the Taj. Calabria's text provides a new dimension to the historical study of the era.



## Book Review

**Finding Jesus among Muslims: How Loving Islam Makes Me a Better Catholic.** Jordan Denari Duffner. Liturgical Press, 2017. ISBN 978-0-8146-4592-5. Pp. 147. Price – U.S. \$ 19.95.

The various paragraphs of the Conciliar texts such as *Lumen Gentium*, no. 16 and *Nostra Aetate*, no. 3 present the basic attitude and vision of the Church vis-à-vis Muslims. While *Lumen Gentium* affirmed that "... the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place among whom are the Muslims: these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day", *Nostra Aetate* on its part affirmed respect for Muslims in the following words: "upon the Moslems, too, the Church looks with esteem. They adore one God, living and enduring, merciful, and all-powerful, Maker of heaven and earth and Speaker to men. They strive to submit wholeheartedly even to His inscrutable decrees, just as did Abraham, with whom the Islamic faith is pleased to associate itself". Both texts emphasize the character of the basic approach which underlines and puts first what is positive and what unites these two sets of believers. The papal magisterium, the teachings of the episcopal conferences of different nations and several bishops in their exhortations continue encourage Catholics to know and converse with Muslims among whom they live through sincere and patient dialogue.



Ten years ago, a volume titled: *Christian Lives Given to the Study of Islam*, edited by Christian W. Troll SJ and C. T. R. Hewer (Fordham University Press, New York: 2012) captured the autobiographical reflection of several Christians who in the wake of the Second Vatican Council committed their lives to the study of Islam and Christian-Muslim relations in peaceful ways. It was a unique and insightful volume that inspired many students to discern their ways in Christian-Muslim Relations.

This slim book *Finding Jesus among Muslims: How Loving Islam Makes Me a Better Catholic* is a significant contribution in this genre. In a fascinating personal narrative, the author J. D. Duffner relates her experiences of meeting Muslims in diverse contexts and draws many lessons for interfaith dialogue in general, especially to Christian-Muslim relations.

In the context of many prejudices and biases against Muslims, Duffner tells the readers that there is no alternative to 'personal meeting of Muslims'. In such meetings, where she reaches out to Muslims, she learns about their religious traditions. This learning brings new knowledge about others and thus wipes away ignorance, she maintains. She tells the readers that knowing the other from close quarters intellectually and experientially will also challenge prejudices born of obstinate and fixed mind-sets. Thus, men and women who were enlightened by such journeys can help his/her fellow religionists to learn to appreciate the good and beautiful in the other religious traditions.

Further, Duffer, demonstrates that, friendships are born in such personal meetings. Mutual collaboration and dialogue teach each partner the importance of listening to one another

and the need to interpret the other in the light of personal experience. Duffer indicates the best possible way to contribute to the wellbeing of all is to enter into sincere collaboration with people who are open and interested in such alliances. The art of listening to one another is the key to such liberating relationships. The reader learns that personal contacts are the most efficacious way to grow in mutual understanding.

She does not ignore the profound theological differences between Christian and Muslim traditions. She underlines that the differences at the normative/doctrinal level should be carefully recognized and affirmed. She stressed that failure to recognize differences may end up in some form of eclecticism or syncretism. Differences may enrich both believers if they are open to God and to Truth since Truth embraces all.

The author helpfully gives several appendixes: Discussion Questions, Guidelines for Dialogue with Muslims, a joint Prayer for Christians and Muslims (written by the author herself), Resources for further studies, Glossary of words (and phrases that may be helpful in conversation with Muslims), and pronunciations and definitions of select given names (that facilitate conversations with Muslims).

I recommend this book for students of theology and pastoral workers, and I am sure they shall find in this book an excellent guide for interfaith relations in the Muslim contexts.

Joseph Victor Edwin SJ, Lecturer, Vidyajyoti Institute of Religious Studies, Delhi.



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