

Salaam

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Quarterly to Promote Understanding



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

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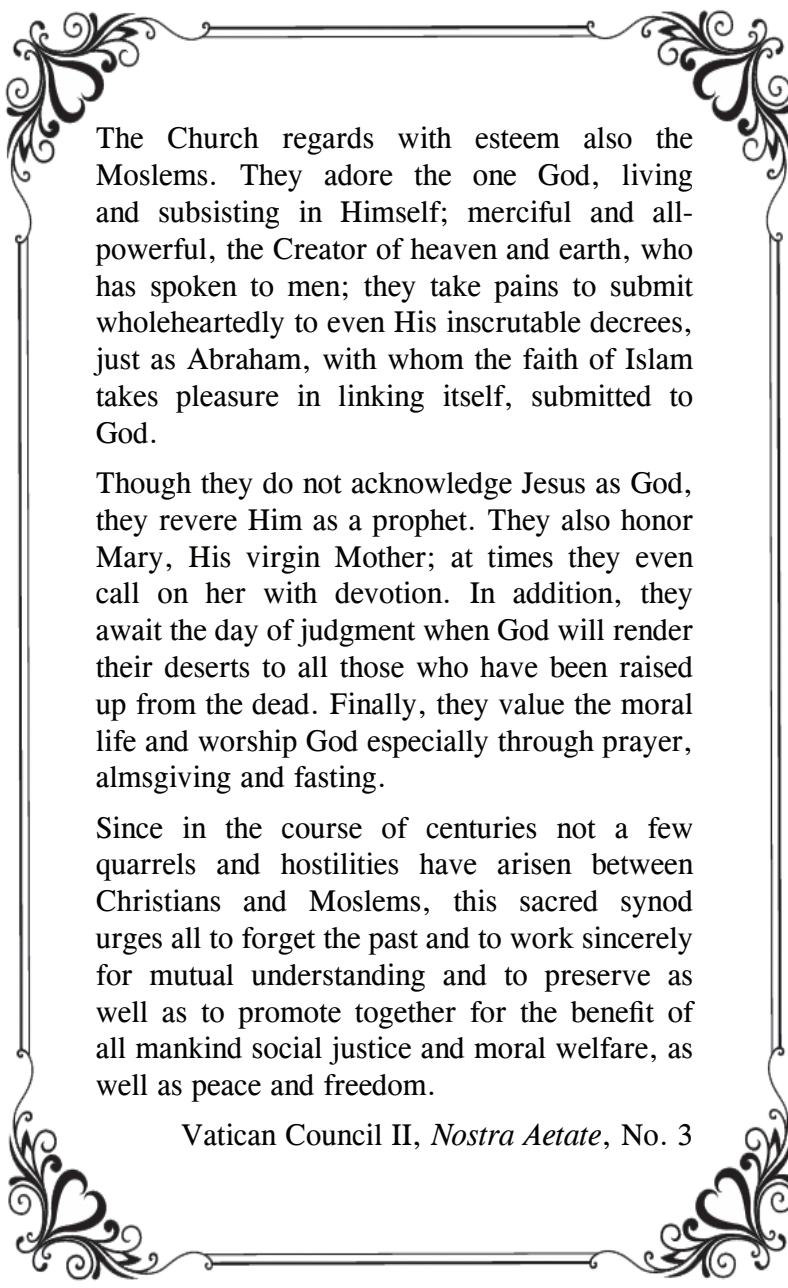
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The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable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

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

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

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

Editorial

Contextual theology takes the beliefs, practices and the sacred scriptures of other religions very seriously. The method of contextual theology adopted by students at the Vidyajyoti Institute of Religious Studies in Delhi draws inspiration and life from a felt connection with the social realities experienced by the people living around them. This means that students are encouraged to reflect on their Christian faith from the perspective of poor and marginalized communities and become familiar with their cultures and beliefs. In addition, these students seek to read and understand sacred texts in the light of their actual experience of visiting and interacting with members of these disadvantaged communities.

Furthermore, students from Vidyajyoti engage in various kinds of immersion experience, which are designed to bring them into contact with people of other faiths and acquaint students with their places of worship. For this reason, they travel to locations that have a special significance for other religions such as Lucknow and Varanasi. In addition to visiting these places and interacting with the people who consider these sites to be sacred, they study the writings of Catholic scholars who have focused on Islam and Christian-Muslim relations such as Fr. Christian W. Troll SJ, whose writings are a feature of the articles contained in this edition of *Salaam*.

In the light of the teachings of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (1962-1965), students at Vidyajyoti Institute of Religious Studies have become engaged in dialogue with the followers of various religions, which was an important theme at the Vatican Council. This is particularly evident in several of its key documents, including *Lumen Gentium* (see sections 1, 13, 16, 17, and 48), *Gaudium et Spes* (see sections 22, 42, 45, 57-58, 73, 76, and 92), *Ad Gentes* (see sections 3, 7-11, 13, 15-16, 18, 21-22, 34, 38, and 40-41), as well as *Nostra Aetate* and *Dignitatis Humanae* (see sections 2-4).

Moreover, the document *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG) emphasized the profound connection between Christian faith and the poor. More recently, Pope Leo XIV has emphasized the same point by saying that “in Scripture and in the history of the church, we encounter God in the poor” (*Dilexi Te*). Pope Francis, furthermore, had called us to renew our commitment to serving the poor and reminded us that the poor are not merely recipients of the Church’s evangelization but are also vital evangelizers themselves (EG, no. 19).

The Church has also directed us to translate these theological concerns into pastoral actions. For example, in 2014, the *Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue* (now the *Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue*) issued a statement on interreligious dialogue entitled *Dialogue in Truth and Charity*, which intended to provide pastoral guidelines for the engagement of Christians with people of diverse faiths. The document affirms that all believers are “pilgrims of truth and peace” who come to know and respect one another by listening to one another and working together “in projects of common concern.”

This document further emphasizes that, at the purely human level, dialogue is reciprocal communication, leading to a common goal in the context of religious harmony and goes on to say that dialogue is not only a question of discussion but that dialogue seeks to develop constructive relations with believers and religious communities that aim to foster mutual respect and understanding. In short, genuine dialogue can only take place in “an attitude of respect and friendship.”

The Fathers of the Church such as St. Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp, Justin, John Chrysostom and Augustine had already said that making contact with the poor was a sure way of encountering the divine. By reflecting on their words, we can become more aware that God is present among the poor and that, in turn, the poor have an intimate relationship with God. By our solidarity with the poor and by sharing their thirst for dignity and justice, therefore, we find our way into the Kingdom of God.

This issue of *Salaam* contains essays written by various students based on their study of the writings of Jesuit Father Christian W. Troll SJ, a renowned scholar of Islam in South Asia. The results of the research done by these students was originally presented at a seminar held at Vidyajyoti. After the essays were edited by Herman Roborgh, a former student and life-long friend of Fr. Troll, the editors felt that these essays would be beneficial for our readers.

Herman Roborgh & Joseph Victor Edwin SJ

The image shows the Arabic word 'Ar-Rahman' (الرحمن) in a bold, black, stylized calligraphic font. The letters are thick and rounded, with clear diacritics. The word is centered within a light gray rectangular background.

Ar-Rahman

HUMAN DIGNITY AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN MODERN ISLAMIC THOUGHT: REFLECTIONS BY CHRISTIAN W. TROLL

Johnson P. Dominic

Introduction

In the present world, religious freedom has become a significant and urgent concern. Many societies today experience tensions, conflicts, and misunderstandings based on religious differences. At the same time, increasing pluralism invites people of different faiths to live together with mutual respect. In this context, the question of how to uphold human dignity while ensuring religious freedom becomes especially important. Fr C.W. Troll reflects on one of the most significant concerns of the modern world: human dignity and religious freedom. This issue is not merely social or political but deeply theological, as it touches the fundamental question of the situation of a human being before God. Every religion attempts to respond to this question and, in recent times, Islamic thought has engaged with it in a renewed and meaningful way.

According to Troll, modern Islamic scholarship is undergoing a process of self-examination and renewal. This process does not reject tradition but seeks to reinterpret it in the light of contemporary realities. Global developments, including reflections within Christianity on religious freedom, have contributed to this rethinking and encouraged deeper dialogue. Troll's reflections aim to understand how Islam can remain faithful to its core teachings while also affirming human dignity and freedom in the present world.

The Traditional View and the Challenge of Modernity

Troll observes that traditional Islamic teaching emphasizes two essential responsibilities: belief in God (*īmān*) and righteous action

(*'amal al-ṣāliḥāt*). These are inseparable, as true faith must be expressed through moral living. The Qur'an acknowledges human weakness, disobedience, and forgetfulness while continually calling believers to remain faithful to God's path. Islam also presents a historical vision of divine revelation through prophets such as Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, culminating in Muhammad as the final prophet. Acceptance of Islam involves entering into a covenant with God and becoming part of the *umma*, the global community of believers.

Within this framework, apostasy was historically viewed not merely as a personal decision but as the disruption of communal unity. With respect to apostasy, the Qur'an speaks only of consequences in the afterlife but later legal traditions introduced stricter punishments shaped by specific historical and political circumstances. Troll identifies here a tension between traditional interpretations and modern understandings of individual freedom. This tension calls for careful reflection, not in a spirit of criticism but with openness to the insights of contemporary Muslim thinkers.

Qur'anic Foundations for Human Dignity and Freedom

Modern Islamic thought seeks a return to the Qur'an to rediscover the foundations of human dignity and freedom. Troll highlights three key concepts: *karāmat al-insān*, *khalīfa*, and *amāna*. The concept of *karāmat al-insān* affirms that all human beings are honoured by God. This dignity is universal and inherent, not dependent on religion, status, or achievement. It provides a strong basis for recognizing the value and rights of every person. Moreover, the idea of *khalīfa* presents human beings as God's representatives on earth, which implies responsibility, moral agency, and freedom. Human beings are entrusted with the ability to choose and act justly, which suggests that faith must be a free response rather than a forced obligation. Finally, the notion of *amāna*, or trust, further deepens this understanding. The Qur'an describes how this trust, freedom and responsibility was accepted by humanity. This indicates that

human freedom is part of God's design and cannot be violated without contradicting the divine intention.

Troll reflects on the close relationship between human dignity and freedom, presenting them as deeply interconnected aspects of human existence. Human dignity, in this view, is not an abstract idea but is a lived reality that finds expression through freedom. Without freedom, dignity cannot be fully realized and without dignity, freedom loses its moral direction. Modern Muslim thinkers engage with this relationship in different ways. Some argue that freedom flows naturally from the dignity given by God to every human person while others maintain that freedom is an essential and inseparable element of that dignity. Furthermore, freedom is not understood as unlimited choice or mere personal autonomy. Rather, it is seen as moral freedom, which means the capacity to choose what is right and to act in accordance with God's will. This understanding brings a deeper meaning to human action in which freedom is not opposed to obedience but freedom is understood as coming to perfection through obedience.

These reflections have important implications for our understanding of the divine law (*Sharia*). For some scholars, obedience to God's law represents the highest form of freedom because it aligns human life with divine wisdom and purpose. Others, however, emphasize that such obedience must arise from inner conviction and sincere faith. If obedience is imposed externally without personal acceptance, it loses its moral value and cannot be considered true freedom. This discussion naturally raises questions about the role of the state in matters of religion. Increasingly, modern Islamic scholars argue that faith belongs primarily to the sphere of individual conscience. Since belief is a personal response to God, it cannot be forced or legislated. The role of the state, therefore, should not be to impose religious belief but to create conditions where individuals are free to seek, choose, and practice their faith. This shift reflects a growing awareness that genuine religion must be freely chosen and authentically lived rather than externally enforced.

At the same time, contemporary interpretations of the Qur'an show a significant development in understanding these issues. While earlier traditions did not always express their teachings in the language of human rights, modern scholars revisit the foundational texts to highlight values such as freedom, equality, justice, and responsibility. This process of reinterpretation is not a rejection of tradition but a faithful engagement with it in the light of present realities. In this sense, interpretation itself becomes an act of human freedom and responsibility, a dynamic response to divine revelation that seeks to remain true to its spirit while addressing the needs of the modern world. Moreover, this evolving understanding opens new possibilities for dialogue, both within Islam and between religions. It allows for a more profound appreciation of the human person as a moral agent, capable of making free and responsible choices before God. Such a vision not only strengthens the foundation of religious freedom but also contributes to building societies that respect diversity while remaining rooted in shared moral values.

The Significance of Religious Freedom

Troll provides several theological reasons for affirming the significance of religious freedom. Firstly, God respects human freedom and does not compel belief. This divine attitude sets a model for human relationships. Secondly, authentic faith must be free. Faith imposed by fear or pressure lacks sincerity and cannot be considered genuine. Thirdly, Christian mission must respect the dignity of others. True witness reflects the character of Christ, marked by compassion and humility. Finally, Islamic teachings themselves offer strong support for freedom of conscience. The Qur'an emphasizes human responsibility and moral choice, providing a basis for affirming religious freedom. Thus, human dignity and religious freedom are understood not merely as social values, but as truths grounded in the nature of God and humanity.

Troll's Vision for Christian–Muslim Dialogue

Troll emphasizes the importance of dialogue between Christians and Muslims by considering it a responsibility rather than a mere

option. Both traditions share a belief in the one God who is just and merciful. This common belief forms the foundation for mutual respect. At the same time, Troll asserts that dialogue need not disregard the value of mission. Christian witness must continue but it must be expressed with humility, respect, and love. Any form of coercion contradicts the message of Christ. Particular importance should be given to the “dialogue of life,” which takes place in everyday interactions. Through simple acts of kindness, cooperation, and mutual understanding, deeper relationships are formed.

Troll also highlights the shared responsibility of both religions to promote justice, peace, and the dignity of all people. Dialogue, therefore, extends beyond theological discussion and contributes to building a more just and harmonious society. Such dialogue requires patience, openness, and a willingness to listen sincerely to the other, even in the midst of differences. It is not about winning arguments but about growing in mutual understanding and truth. In this way, dialogue becomes a path of transformation where both Christians and Muslims are enriched and challenged to live their faith more authentically in service of humanity.

Relevance for Today

Troll’s reflections remain highly relevant in the contemporary world, especially in pluralistic societies such as India where people of different religions, cultures, and traditions live together. While such diversity is a great strength, it can also become a source of tension when religion is misunderstood or misused. In many different social contexts today, unfortunately, religion is manipulated for political, social, or ideological purposes. This leads to division, suspicion, and even violence and makes Troll’s call for a renewed commitment to dialogue, respect and mutual understanding not only meaningful but urgently necessary.

In this regard, the idea of the “dialogue of life” becomes especially important. This form of dialogue does not require formal theological

preparation but takes place in everyday human interactions. It is expressed through simple acts such as helping a neighbour, showing kindness, listening with respect, and working together for the common good. These small but sincere actions create trust and gradually break down barriers between communities. Over time, such daily encounters can build strong relationships and contribute to lasting peace in society.

Furthermore, in ongoing discussions about religious freedom, conversion, and social coexistence, it is essential that the principles of human dignity and freedom remain at the centre. Everyone has the right to seek truth, to follow one's conscience, and to practice one's faith without fear or coercion. When these rights are respected, society becomes more just and harmonious. Both Christianity and Islam, when their authentic teachings are properly understood, strongly support these values. They affirm that human beings are created by God with dignity and are called to live responsibly and freely.

Ultimately, Troll's reflections invite all people to move beyond fear and misunderstanding and to recognize one another as brothers and sisters, each of whom is endowed with dignity and freedom. It calls for a shift from conflict to cooperation, from suspicion to trust, and from segregation to unity. The message is both clear and urgent: the future of peaceful coexistence depends on our willingness to choose dignity rather than discrimination, freedom rather than coercion and dialogue rather than argument. Only through commitment to such preferences can we build a society that reflects God's will for justice, peace and harmony among all people.

CLARITY IN CHRISTIAN – MUSLIM RELATIONS: REFLECTING WITH CHRISTIAN W. TROLL

Elson Lobo SJ

Many discussions about Islam often treat it as a single, uniform reality and emphasize the importance of interreligious dialogue for peace. However, Troll takes a different approach as he tries to explain the complex reality behind the words “*Muslims*” and “*Islam*.” He explores how Christians in Europe view Muslims and suggests how Christians and others could respond with greater understanding and fairness. The goal is to promote peaceful and respectful coexistence by recognizing human rights and allowing open, honest conversations about faith and personal experience. This is a kind of *political dialogue* that prepares the way for deeper discussions about religion and spirituality. To understand these different opinions clearly, we must first distinguish between the various levels or meanings of *Islam* according to its faith, culture, and political expressions. Without making these careful distinctions, views of Islam can easily become too simple and even misleading.

Understanding “Islam”

Troll explains that the word *Islam* has two main meanings. The first is the original Arabic sense of the word *islām*, which means “the act of surrender or submission to the will of the one God.” The Qur’an illustrates this with the story of Abraham, who “submitted himself (*aslamtu*) to God”. The second meaning, written with a capital “I”, refers to the religion founded historically on the Qur’an and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad. This understanding of Islam should not only be understood from its political or militant perspectives but also from its rich spiritual, moral and cultural traditions. The fact is that Islam is one of the great world religions that has given meaning to the lives of millions of people for more than 1,400 years. It has also made lasting contributions to art, science, and culture.

The foundation of Islam arose from the life and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad recorded in the *sīra* (biography) and in the Qur'an, which Muslims believe to be the Word of God. These sources have been interpreted in many different ways throughout history. The Prophet's life and the Qur'an are often divided into two periods: the Meccan period and the Medinan period, separated by the *Hijra* (the migration to Medina) in 622. In Mecca, the message centred on worshipping the one true God. In Medina, that same message was put into practice socially, politically, and sometimes also militarily to establish God's justice and order on earth. Islam has adjusted itself to many local cultures and customs, a fact that has created a great diversity in how Muslims express their faith in different regions. For instance, in some places, local traditions or royal laws have influenced public life more than religious law (*Sharia*). In this article I have chosen to examine Troll's comments on Islamist or fundamentalist Islam, which gives priority to the literal meaning of the texts.

Islamic Fundamentalism (Islamism)

Islamic fundamentalism, also called *Islamism*, is similar to Jewish and Christian fundamentalism because it treats the sacred scriptures as a complete and perfect guide for life. Yet, it also has its own unique features. Some Islamists reject the separation of religion and politics. They seek to rebuild an Islamic state governed by *Sharia* (Islamic law) and to recreate, in modern times, the kind of society that existed in Medina during the time of Prophet Muhammad. Since modern Muslim civilization grew mainly from Western and not from Islamic traditions, many Islamists strongly reject Western values, concepts and structures. Some groups, such as *Hizb ut-Tahrir*, even describe the West as *dār al-harb*: "the region of war." However, Islamism has taken many different forms some of which focus on peaceful reform while others justify the use of force. What unites them all is the shared conviction that political, social and personal life should be fully guided by the Qur'an and the *Hadith* (the sayings and actions of the Prophet). They view Islam as both

religion and state, the Qur'an as the *constitution*, and Sharia as the *ideal legal system*.

Troll explains that Islamists often look to the past for direction by seeing the early Islamic period as the perfect model for all times. Their popularity comes partly from their closeness to traditional, literal readings of Islam. But the rise of Islamism is also tied to modern social challenges such as rapid urbanization, poverty, unemployment, weak governments, and a deep sense of humiliation caused by the perceived unfairness of Western policies in places like Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Saudi Arabia.

For Islamists, the answer to all these problems lies in Islam itself, which they see as a complete and sovereign system that promises justice, moral clarity, and unity in a confusing and divided world. This belief strengthens a global sense of *umma*, a word referring to the worldwide Muslim community, and creates a clear contrast between the world of Islam and what they call the world of ignorance and evil (*jahiliyyah*).

Jihad: Violence and Terrorism

Though most Islamists today prefer to work within democratic systems, trying to bring about change gradually through political and social means, other more extremist groups use violence and often have a much greater influence than their size suggests. They make effective use of global networks and the modern media. These groups justify their violent actions as “defensive jihad,” claiming that their governments are corrupt and, therefore, not legitimate.

The goal of radical Islamists is to establish universal *Sharia* by means of military *jihad*. The term *jihad* itself is complex and often misunderstood. While it is not officially considered as a “sixth pillar” of Islam (except by some Shi'ite and Islamist movements), it plays an important role in the Qur'an and in the life of the Prophet Muhammad. Many Muslims today, however, understand Islam as a religion of peace. They often stress that the greater *jihad* is the inner

struggle against one's own selfishness and sin, while the lesser *jihad* refers to physical fighting. Though this teaching comes from a hadith whose authenticity is uncertain, this understanding of *jihad* appreciates the fact that most Muslims now emphasize a peaceful or defensive understanding of the term.

But what exactly counts as *legitimate defence*? Troll suggests that Muslims need a thoughtful and credible explanation of why they reject religious warfare even though some Qur'anic verses seem to support it. This calls for new methods of interpreting the Qur'an that fit the modern world. Violent Islamist groups see themselves as the only "true believers." Their anger and hatred arise from a mix of political, social, and religious causes such as poverty, oppression, and corrupt governments that are often supported by Western powers. The lasting effects of European colonialism also play a role.

Western Perspectives on Islam

Troll describes two common attitudes found among non-Muslims in Europe toward Muslims and Islam.

Islamophobia

This attitude combines ignorance, fear, and hatred. Many Europeans feel anxious about the rapid growth of the Muslim population and worry that Muslims living in Europe may still be holding on to the old idea of a political or military struggle against non-Muslims. People question whether Islam is truly a religion of peace and whether a real theology of peace has replaced the idea of "holy war."

These fears grow stronger when they hear reports of countries where non-Muslims have become second-class citizens under *Sharia* law or when some Muslim groups in Europe demand official recognition of *Sharia*. Stories about harsh punishments or terrorist attacks linked to Islam can deepen these fears, sometimes turning anxiety into disgust or hatred.

Multiculturalism

The second attitude is quite different. Many sociologists, theologians, and media professionals, especially in Germany, support a multicultural approach. They believe society should be open to people of all backgrounds and should even adapt its laws to accommodate diversity. Some supporters of this view argue that Muslims should have their own legal systems in certain areas, such as family or personal law. Interestingly, many of these same people also support a strong separation between religion and the state, similar to the French idea of *laïcité* (secularism).

In contrast to both these extremes, the main Christian churches in Germany promote integration within a secular, democratic system. They believe that peaceful coexistence depends on a shared legal and moral foundation. Former German President Johannes Rau described integration not as *assimilation*, which tries to make everyone the same, but as people of different backgrounds working together to build an open society based on common values.

The Catholic bishops of Germany clearly support the secular legal order, which guarantees equal rights to all citizens regardless of religion. They encourage Muslims to see secularism not as a Western invention, but as a universal principle that makes it possible to live together in a diverse society. Troll concludes that a secular-democratic order is essential for peaceful coexistence. Both Muslims and non-Muslims must find ways to live their faith sincerely while respecting this shared public framework. Dialogue on this issue is a responsibility for everyone including Christians and must make it clear that a modern, secular state does not mean a *godless* one but rather one that protects the freedom of everyone.

The Need for Dialogue and a Worldwide Alliance

Troll argues for the urgent need for intercultural and interreligious dialogue and for a global alliance against terrorism. Such an alliance, supported by the United Nations, would unite people of

all faiths and nations in rejecting terrorism, which destroys lives without distinction. He notes that most Islamic scholars firmly condemn terrorism as a violation of God's commandments. Troll invites Muslims to engage critically with their own traditions, just as Christians have done in rethinking the relationship between faith and warfare. This means developing new interpretations of the Qur'an that can respond to the modern, pluralistic world. The challenge for Muslims is to remain faithful to their beliefs while becoming active participants in the global community.

Troll also expects non-Muslims to support and share in this process and calls for a radical change among non-Muslims, especially in the West. Western nations must show greater honesty and fairness in their political and economic policies. To fight terrorism effectively, they must uphold human dignity and basic rights for all, avoiding double standards such as supporting unjust regimes while condemning violence elsewhere.

Islam has an important role to play in the worldwide conversation between religions and cultures. For this to happen, Muslims need to form strong institutions and adopt ethical positions that reject any claim to Islamic supremacy even in Muslim-majority countries. Christian-Muslim dialogue, especially on social and political issues, is essential to bring about a peaceful and creative future. Such dialogue is certainly possible and can be done with both conviction and mutual respect when both Christians and Muslims accept pluralism, practice tolerance, and work together for the common good.

A SHORT PERSONAL REFLECTION

As a Jesuit theology student, I understand Christian W. Troll's ideas as an invitation to look at Islam with respect and openness. He reminds us that Islam is not just a monolithic reality but has spiritual, cultural, and political aspects. This approach to Islam makes it possible for me to avoid stereotypes and to see Muslims as people of deep faith. Troll stresses that true dialogue between

Christians and Muslims is not just polite conversation but that it means working together for peace and justice. He also says that both sides must face their own problems honestly, especially with regard to the question of using religion with violence or in order to gain power. As a Jesuit, I am called to build bridges between religions, to listen with compassion and to look for God in every culture and in every individual. This way of thinking will bring healing, mutual respect, and unity to our divided world.

The image shows the Arabic word 'القدوس' (Al-Qudus) written in a highly stylized, bold black calligraphic font. The letters are thick and interconnected, with prominent curves and sharp points. The word is centered on the page.

AL QUDDUS

**WE DISCOVER OURSELVES BY UNDERSTANDING
OTHERS: CHRISTIAN W. TROLL AND CHRISTIAN-
MUSLIM DIALOGUE TODAY**

Edoardo Lilli Greg

Troll: Between Asia and Europe

Christian W. Troll was born in 1937 in Berlin. In 1971, he was ordained as a priest. He completed his studies in Bonn, Tübingen, Beirut, and India. He taught at various institutions across the world, including the Vidyajyoti Institute in New Delhi, the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, Birmingham, the Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome, and the İlahiyat Fakültesi of Ankara University. He was a professor at the St. Georgen Institute for Philosophical and Theological Studies in Frankfurt, Germany, and at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. He wrote prolifically on Christian-Islamic dialogue, an issue to which he devoted much of his life's work.

Christian W. Troll worked hard to establish a dialogue between Christians and Muslims, starting with the Indian subcontinent and then moving on to the European continent. His reflections and actions as a missionary theologian were framed by the challenges of a culturally and religiously pluralistic society in both India and Europe. The Indian subcontinent, where Troll began his mission in the early 1970s, is a testament to close coexistence between people from different religious traditions in their daily lives. In particular, the relationship between Christians and Muslims on Indian soil, where both are minority religions, could represent unprecedented points of interest, analysis, and action. It can be a very useful example for other contexts, such as Europe and the world at large, moving from the particular to the universal.

In Europe, and in Germany in particular, Troll's mission and theological reflection are extremely useful for those who engage

in interreligious dialogue in the contemporary context. In Europe, the contribution of cultures and religions from the rest of the world is crucial, also from a numerical point of view. Europe is a ground for meeting and dialogue between different cultures and religions, obviously with Christianity playing the role of the dominant religion. Here, Troll has concentrated his activity and commitment on interreligious dialogue in recent decades. His recent publications, such as *Muslims Ask, Christians Answer*¹, and *Dialogue and Difference: Clarity in Christian-Muslim Relations*², are very useful volumes for training those working on Christian-Islamic dialogue in contemporary European metropolises. Those who deal with encounter and dialogue today require in-depth preparation, both from a theological and methodological perspective, for a correct understanding of themselves and others. The initial assumption must always be a sincere desire for frank and transparent meeting and dialogue, with an attitude of sincere friendship.

Beyond Controversy

It is important to note that Christian W. Troll began his mission in a historical period, the early 1970s, when the word ‘dialogue’ was uncommon. More common were polemics and attempts at oppression. Up until that point, in the places where Troll began his mission, the approach to encountering the other had been based on confrontation, rather than encounter. This is also why it is correct to speak of Christian W. Troll as one of the Jesuit pioneers of dialogue. This needs to be seen in the context of the renewal brought by the Second Vatican Council. The Church was emerging from a centuries-old exclusivist tradition, even more in contexts like India, where the colonial mentality was dominant. Other cultures, even those with an important literary and textual heritage, were studied with polemical intent to exploit problematic issues to assert the

¹ Christian W. Troll, *Muslims Ask, Christians Answer*, London, 2006 (Orig. Ted. 2004)

² Christian W. Troll, *Dialogue and Difference: Clarity in Christian-Muslim Relations*, New York, 2009 (Orig. Ted. 2008)

claim of one's own religious and cultural superiority. Christian W. Troll's rigorous commitment to the study of Islamic language and culture stemmed from an opposite desire. Not from the desire to overwhelm the other but from the desire for reconciliation. Troll devoted energy and years of work to the knowledge of languages, Urdu, Persian and Arabic, with a sincere and transparent desire for encounter and mutual understanding.

Speaking to our contemporary world, the pioneering mission witnessed by Troll teaches us today that encounters with others must take place in a sincere and honest climate and through a process of acquiring knowledge and skills that enable correct understanding. We can have dialogue only if we have deep and accurate knowledge about each other based on transparent intentions. With this in mind, Troll took the initiative to build both academic and friendly relationships with key Indian Islamic thinkers, such as Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (1925–2021), who sought to define the Islamic religion in relation to the challenges of a modern, multiethnic and multi-religious society and the need for promoting the common good of all. Troll's decades-long commitment to focusing attention on those crucial questions for theological dialogue between Christians and Muslims shows that he was able to overcome polemical motives and draw on the benefit of mutual understanding.

Discernment and Witness to Faith

For Troll, dialogue is a mission, the fruit of deep discernment. Troll devoted himself to dialogue in both religious and theological terms because, for him, it was answering a call. A call to be God's servant and so, a call to do God's will. He was able to understand the meaning of this call very clearly thanks to his profound discernment, which he began as an adolescent and matured later as an adult in his commitment to the Jesuit Order. For him, 'discernment' is the fruit of a spiritual discipline that is focused on understanding the signs of the divine will in one's life and in the contexts in which one acts.

Discernment first led Troll to see in his personal interest for other cultures and religions a call towards missionary life. And then, as a missionary, this same discernment guided him to discover that elements of Islamic religion and theology could trigger a sincere and profound mutual exchange with the Christian religion. Through careful discernment, Troll understood that the foundations of dialogue had to be based on the secular foundation of human values and universal human rights as expressed by the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration. Another basis for discernment was the Magisterium of the Church expressed by means of the Second Vatican Council and specifically the Document: *Dignitatis Humanae* in 1965. In this light, we must also see Troll's commitment to knowing and appreciating those thinkers who, in the context of Indian Islam, looked for a positive response to the challenges of modernity.

We could safely say that the gifts of discernment are evident in all aspects of Troll's theological thought and more generally in his vocation to a mission among Muslims. Discernment characterizes Troll's entire method of dialogue. For example, Troll discovered the signs of the Spirit of God in the Muslims with whom he came in contact. On the other hand, he recognized that in several areas it was problematic to find signs of the divine presence (for instance, that political version of Islam in which freedom of faith, plurality and diversity were not recognized). On the other hand, Troll noticed the absence of the Spirit of God in prejudicial attitudes present among Christians and in the political expression of such prejudices. And so, in the particular style of dialogue advocated by Troll, we see the fruit of discernment: Troll is a witness of faith, a missionary theologian and an intellectual missionary. In his case, knowledge of Islamic culture and religion was not a secular pursuit but a response to the Divine will that sent him to establish bridges on the foundations of sincere friendship and mutual understanding. Being sent on a mission among Muslims for Troll meant showing respect for Muslims' testimony to faith. He was firmly convinced that Christians and Muslims could live together in harmony, peace

and friendship only if they remained faithful to moral principles in an incessant effort at mutual understanding.

Common Elements and Differences

Troll's collection of essays *Dialogue and Difference: Clarity in Christian-Muslim Relations*³ expresses well the point that highlighting common elements and differences is the *conditio sine qua non* for a true and honest knowledge of the other. Dialogue must therefore take place on the basis of this awareness and find a way to meet in which the elements of difference or even the specificities of different professions of faith were not be hidden or unknown but were recognized and compared. In some cases, it would be possible to find unity but the mutual differences that structure two different religious identities should always be accepted. For Troll, dialogue meant thinking and talking together with a transparent attitude. People who have knowledge about important theological issues can learn from each other. In this mutual testimony of faith to which dialogue is ultimately traced, both interlocutors experience their own religious affiliation and observe aspects that are highlighted by the presence of the other. By remaining faithful to their religious principles and moral obligations, both commit themselves to building a common ground in which dialogue can take place. In modern pluralistic society, the principles of mutual respect and the recognition of human rights and human dignity demand such an approach to interfaith harmony.

Praying Together

In my view, within Troll's theological thought, praying together is an important element to be explored further in future studies and concrete dialogues while remaining aware of differences. As a Christian, every time I visit a mosque in the city of Rome where I live, I sense a great sense of responsibility towards my Muslim brothers whom the Lord has put in my way. I sense God's call to visit these other children of His who experience a deep bond

³ op. cit.

with God through their religious faith. I feel responsible that the message I bring them will always be a message of friendship and encounter in the very important and complex area of spirituality and religious beliefs. I ask God to make it possible for me to bring to these brothers and sisters the deep love of God for them. I ask God for the grace to be able to give of my best through showing respect and understanding for these brothers and sisters who welcome me, especially at the time of prayer.

Through his reflections, Troll teaches us how to move in such an important area as praying together. The danger of syncretism or relativism is always present if one does not have the right theological foundations. Discernment, as Troll teaches us, allows us to affirm that the Spirit of God is present in both Christians and Muslims and becomes evident when we pray together. It is in prayer together that the spiritual element in common, the Divine Spirit, makes us one at heart. Our prayer does not need to be expressed in words. But a verbally formulated prayer would be suitable provided that it takes into account the common theological ground on which we meet.

An important example was provided by the prayer of the children of Abraham recited at a joint prayer between the three Abrahamic religions on 6th March 2021 during Pope Francis's apostolic trip to Iraq. This happened in an interreligious meeting that was held in the plains of Ur of the Chaldees. At the end, an oration inspired by the figure of Patriarch Abraham was sung as the common ancestor of Christians, Jews and Muslims. Here is a short quote: "Almighty God, our Creator who loves the human family and all that Your hands have accomplished, we, the sons and daughters of Abraham belonging to Judaism, Christianity and Islam, together with other believers and all people of goodwill, thank You for giving us as a common father in the faith Abraham..."

The teaching of Christian W. Troll, a pioneer of dialogue, is increasingly relevant today. Personally, I have realized that the moments when I could stand by my Muslim brothers and sisters were important opportunities for me to grow personally and spiritually,

to understand God's will for me on a daily basis. In those moments of encounter, dialogue or prayer, I discover more about myself. God is calling me to a deep responsibility to these brothers of mine of another faith. I bring them the testimony of how much God loves them and how significant they are in God's eyes. By asking them questions about faith and culture and by answering their questions, I had a deeper awareness of my being a Christian and of doing God's will in the world.



Al-Malik

FR. TROLL'S MISSION: UNDERSTANDING THROUGH DIALOGUE

Antony Thomas

Fr. Christian W. Troll, a Jesuit priest, whose mission involves engaging with Muslims and Muslim communities around the world. His work is rooted in a profound understanding of interfaith dialogue and cultural exchange. His approach remains firmly grounded in the teachings and doctrines of the Catholic Church. This ensures that his outreach is not only respectful and empathetic but also aligned with the core principles of his faith. By fostering meaningful relationships with Muslims, Fr. Troll seeks to promote mutual understanding between Christians and Muslims, all the while remaining true to the foundational beliefs of Christianity.

Already in the early church, Justin Martyr, who was schooled in Greek philosophy, came up with the idea that there are rays of truth in non-Christian teaching such as in Greek philosophy, for instance, which he believed originated in God's truth, the Logos (*logos spermatikos*). He understood philosophers who followed reason as "Christians before Christ". He believed that their partial understanding of truth was a reflection of the complete truth found in Jesus Christ. And today, the church officially teaches much the same.

The Second Vatican Council states that the Catholic church "regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life" which "often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men". So, "The Church ... exhorts her sons that through dialogue and collaboration with followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men". (*Nostra Aetatis*, 2)

Even before the documents of the Second Vatican Council were published, Pope Paul VI advocated dialogue: “it seems to us that the sort of relationship with which the Church could establish with the world could be more in the nature of dialogue” (*Ecclesiam Suam*, 78). And “speaking generally of the dialogue which the Church of today must take up with a great renewal of fervour, we would say that it must be readily conducted with all men of good will both inside and outside the Church.” (*ES*, 93)

Pope John Paul II carried forward the ideas of Paul VI regarding dialogue. In fact, Pope John Paul II devoted more attention to Christian–Muslim relations than any of his predecessors. The decisive feature of his approach was respect for the authenticity of Muslim religious experience. In his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, published in 1979, John Paul II reiterated very firmly the teaching of Vatican II that “by his Incarnation, the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every man” and argued that the Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of non-Christians not in spite of their adherence to another religion, but rather as a foundation of any genuine religious faith.

John Paul II’s teaching on Islam clarifies certain questions that in *Nostra Aetate* and *Lumen Gentium* had remained unclear. These council documents had stated carefully that the Islamic faith is pleased to associate itself with Abraham and describes Muslims as “professing to hold the faith of Abraham”. John Paul II repeatedly drew a parallel between the self-understanding of Muslims and that of the Christians as Abraham’s descendants or children. So, if Muslims are descendants or children of Abraham, one might ask whether Muslims are not saved in a manner analogous to the Jews and Christians as children of faith in Abraham, who are inheritors of the promises made to the patriarch.

In this context, John Paul II’s address in 1979 to the Catholic community in Ankara is relevant. “Faith in God”, he said, “professed by the spiritual descendants of Abraham – Christians, Muslims and

Jews – when it is lived sincerely and promotes life, is a certain foundation of the dignity, brotherhood and freedom of men, and a principle of uprightness for moral conduct in the life of society.” The Pope urges Catholics to, “consider every day the deep roots of faith in God in whom all your Muslim fellow citizens believe in order to draw from this the principle of a collaboration with a view to the progress of man, emulation in good to the extension of peace and brotherhood in the profession of faith.”

In his 1984 address to the plenary session of the Secretariat for Non-Christians (renamed in 2022 as the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue) he said: “Dialogue is fundamental for the Church, which is called to collaborate in God’s plan with its methods of presence, respect, and love towards all persons.” However, for the Church, interfaith dialogue must be rooted in faith in the Triune God. The Pope presents the Trinity as a guiding model for dialogue. “In the mystery of the Trinity, revelation helps us perceive a life of communion and exchange” (*Dialogue and Mission* 22). The church has the duty to discover and bring to light the love of the father “hidden in creation and history”. Every man without exception has been redeemed by Christ and is united with Christ “even when man is unaware of it”. Moreover, the “Holy Spirit acts in the depth of people’s consciences and accompanies them on the secret path of hearts towards the truth” even “outside the visible confines of the Mystical Body” (DM, 23–24)

In this address, the Pope quoted the documents of the Second Vatican Council and reminded Christians of the genuine invitation to dialogue “not only in those things which unite us, but also in our differences” and thus give witness to Christ. He said that we Christians were called to live dialogue in our daily lives. Christians “ought to bring the spirit of the Gospel into any environment in which they live and work, that of family, social, educational, artistic, economic, or political life.” There should be a dialogue of deeds and cooperation, for instance, in the fields of promoting “social justice, moral values, peace and liberty”.

Beyond this, there can be a dialogue between experts, particularly in a pluralistic society, which would lead to a better understanding of and mutual respect for the religious faith and cultural specificities of the dialogue partners leading to “communion and fellowship among people”. At a deeper level, the Pope writes:

Persons rooted in their own religious traditions can share their experiences of prayer, contemplation, faith, and duty, as well as their expressions and ways of searching for the Absolute. This type of dialogue can be a mutual enrichment and fruitful cooperation for promoting and preserving the highest values and spiritual ideals of man. It leads naturally to each partner communicating to the other the reasons for his own faith. (DM, 35)

Nostra Aetate, no 3 urges all Christians, in their interaction with Muslims, “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.” Furthermore, the Church regards the Muslims with esteem. Paragraph 16 of *Lumen Gentium* places Islam first among non-Christian religions because the Muslims profess to hold “the faith of Abraham [and] along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind.”

This is the mandate that Fr, Christian W. Troll SJ received from the church and the Society of Jesus. It required him to discern the will of God while witnessing to his faith among Muslims. To my understanding, Fr Troll took an intellectual approach to his mission among Muslims: he remained firmly committed to his Christian and priestly vocation even as he spent years studying Islam and respecting the faith convictions of Muslims with whom he interacted.

Troll established academic as well as personal relationships with many Muslim scholars in Delhi. For example, Fr Troll acknowledged his intellectual debt to Prof. Vahiduddin for “an understanding of

Islam as unconditional surrender to the God of creation and the Qur'an." Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, Dr Sayyid Abid Hussain, Prof Mushirul Haq and Prof Ziaul Hasan Farukhi were other outstanding Muslim scholars with whom Fr Troll interacted and who became his personal friends. His interactions with Muslim scholars were informed by his theological convictions, his commitment to freedom of conscience and religious freedom and by his familiarity with the scholarship of Muslim intelligentsia in the Indian subcontinent.

In this context, the writings of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan are of seminal importance. Sir Sayyid's attitude towards the Bible shaped Troll's understanding of the importance of scriptures in inter-religious dialogue. Sir Sayyid stressed the point that Muslims should study and comment upon the Bible because it proclaimed the oneness of God (*tawhid*, a fundamental tenet of Islam). His view was quite different from the general Islamic understanding that Bible was a corrupted scripture.

Troll argued that "genuine religious and spiritual dialogue in the context of our modern societies seems to...be meaningful only with [those] who share our fundamental secular, democratic values and logically, therefore, ultimately recognise the separation of politics and religion". This contention is relevant apropos of Maulana Maududi's argument supporting the need for a Muslim state. Maududi's position was in stark contrast with the views of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad who argued that Muslims had to share political power with people of other religious traditions and live as equal citizens of India. Based on the Qur'an and Islamic thought, Azad justified political participation with non-Muslims in forming a common statehood.

Following Azad's views, Wahiduddin Khan argued that "Islam should not be identified with its historical manifestations at any particular point of time." Wahiduddin Khan's major contribution probably was his efforts to interpret the Qur'an for his fellow-believers in a pluralistic world. For Maulana Wahiduddin Khan,

Islam conveyed a proper understanding of the link between God and humanity. He emphasized the need to reinterpret Islam for the modern world. Troll agreed with Wahiduddin Khan that the reinterpretation of Islam could hold the key to the future because of its flexible response to the challenges of modernity such as freedom of thought.

Finally, Troll proposed the concept of Qur'anic humanism as a basis for the mutual interaction between Christians and Muslims. This concept is founded on the understanding that man is the vice-regent of God who should, therefore, carry out the will of God even though he possesses the freedom to deviate from divine injunctions.

Troll's approach to Christian-Muslim relations is marked by commitment to his faith and his call to give witness to that faith. That was his mission. However, Muslims are also commissioned to invite others to become members of the Islamic community. For Troll, "any attempt to improve relations between the two religions must take into account the missionary task of each of them as well as the content of their faith". And this missionary task must be rooted in the freedom of the human person.

In the third part of the book *Dialogue and Difference*, Christian W. Troll SJ makes a theological assessment of the whole project of dialogue between Christians and Muslims. Right at the outset, he pointed out that "while certain conceptual similarities suggest that there is extensive shared ground between the two faiths, at a deeper level there are often profound differences." No real dialogue is possible without acknowledging and respecting these differences.

There is also another difficulty for Christians in theologically interacting with Muslims, namely, the fact that Islam is not practised as a monolithic religion. Any dialogue with Islam would mean dialogue with one or more understandings of Islam. However, all Muslims believe in the Qur'an as the revealed word of God and

see Mohammed as the “seal of the prophets.” While all Muslims accept certain basic religious practices as prescribed by God, there is nothing like a ‘magisterium’ in Islam, which would provide the authentic or sole interpretation of the Qur’an or the Sunnah.

Against this backdrop, Troll addresses four specific areas of interest and relevance to Christian–Muslim dialogue. First, the Word of God in Christian and Muslim understanding. Second, Muslim beliefs concerning Qur’an and the Bible and their relevance to Muslim–Christian encounter. Third, the spiritual significance of Bible and Qur’an for Christians and Muslims. And fourth, studying Qur’an and Bible together.

Christians and Muslims share the conviction that the Creator has taken the initiative to speak to the human race, to reveal Himself to humans. For Muslims, the supreme revelation of the Word of God is the Qur’an, “the final unique and fully authentic manifestation of the word of God.” For Christians, however, the history of revelation is quite different. “Long ago, God spoke through the prophets. But in these days, he spoke to us through the Son, through whom all things were created” (Hebrews 1:1–2). So, there is a basic difference in the understanding of the Word of God in Islam and Christianity. For Muslims, the perfect revelation of the Word is the Qur’an itself - in Arabic. The word of God became the book in which there is no doubt. For Christians, however, the Word of God came into the world “in the fullness of time”, not in the form of scripture, but in the person of Jesus Christ—the word become flesh.

For Christians, scripture and tradition form one sacred deposit of the Word of God (*Dei Verbum*). Christians believe that God chose individuals and groups as his instruments to convey the word of God. The biblical text is simultaneously and entirely the word of the writer and the word of God. The style and the genre of the biblical writings vary, revealing the hand of those who wrote them. In contrast, the word of God came to Mohammed by way of dictation through the Angel Gabriel. God tells Mohammed, word for word,

what he has to say. Muslims, in fact, insist that Mohammed was an illiterate person who could not have written the Qur'an himself.

Christians believe that God revealed himself in the course of history of salvation, and more particularly in the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is the focus of all history and who saved the world through his death and resurrection. Islam, by contrast, does not recognize any such history of salvation but understands the history of the relationship of God to humankind quite differently. Muslims believe that God sends prophets periodically to remind the people of the one immutable religion. These prophets are sent at different times to different places and different peoples. Finally, Mohammed was sent by God as the last, definitive prophet to preach the one and the same message brought before him by earlier prophets. Moreover, the message was addressed to the whole humankind—not to any chosen people like the Israelites.

It is also important to understand how Muslims view the Bible. Initially, they view the Bible with a certain amount of confusion: there is a plethora of books and authors in the Bible with differing styles and subject matter. But they do believe that before Muhammad, God revealed other scriptures like the Torah, the Psalms to earlier prophets, and the Gospel to Jesus. They, however, feel that the Bible has been falsified, corrupted by Jews and Christians as is clear from the internal inconsistencies and contradictions. Moreover, the Qur'an clearly states that Jesus never claimed to be anything more than a prophet and that he did not die on the cross. Also, that he explicitly announced the coming of Muhammad. The promise of sending the Paraclete in John 14: 26 was interpreted by them as a promise to send the *periklytos*, the praiseworthy one—Muhammad whose name means “praised.” But Christians understand this as referring to the promise to send the Holy Spirit.

Some Muslim scholars, while accepting the text of the Bible as genuine, suggest that the falsification about which the Qur'an speaks refers to misguided interpretations of the text by the Jews

and Christians. But as many Muslims and Christians live alongside each other in many parts of the world, there is growing awareness of the need to get to know one another better and to act together to promote what is good and avoid what is evil. In this context, many educated Muslims feel a certain curiosity about the scriptures of Jews and Christians. Some of them are becoming aware of the need to learn something from Christians themselves about their own understanding of the Bible. In this process, they will encounter a critical approach to the Bible among Christian scholars. Though this might reinforce their belief that Bible has been corrupted, they would have to accept that the historical–critical exegesis of the Bible has not resulted in the end of Christian faith. Rather, it has contributed positively to the meaningful interpretation of faith and to a recognition of the spiritual and theological relevance of the Bible.

Among the Christians, too, there seems to be a new interest in sympathetically engaging with the Qur’an, which continues to nourish the faith of more than a billion Muslims. Is it possible to bring the Bible and Qur’an into a spiritual dialogue with each other? It would certainly help both Christians and Muslims if they could become more aware of how the scriptures of each tradition shapes the lives of those who read it in faith, both individually and as a community.

There have been attempts at shared reading of the Bible and Qur’an since the 1980s. The fact that such shared spiritual reading will probably engage only a small number of people does not detract from its intrinsic value. In this context, mention must be made of the unique long-term project of the Muslim-Christian Research Group, which has brought together Muslims and Christian scholars from Europe and North Africa on a regular basis for research and discussion as independent and individual representatives of their respective faith traditions and as friends with neither political or religious agenda.

For many Christians, reading and studying of the Qur'an – and doing so at least sometimes in dialogue with Muslims – is part of the theologically demanding task of discerning the fruits of the Spirit in the foundational texts and practice of the religions, as well as in the actual lives of the faithful. However, Christians are often asked by the Muslims as to why they have not become Muslims after studying the Qur'an. This and other associated questions deserve to be considered carefully and answered thoroughly—above all out of respect for the truth claims made by Christianity and Islam. It is important to give an account of the faith that one has freely chosen. In fact, Muslims have the right to expect from believing Christians a clear theological statement of their faith, despite the possible misunderstandings that may ensue.

Basing himself on the writings of two well-known Jesuit theologians – Edmund Farahian and Christiaan van Nispen – Troll goes on to discuss the specific character of Islam from a Christian perspective. Of course, Islam presents itself as the final word of God, which was meant to correct what had been corrupted by the Jews and Christians either in the actual text or in their interpretation. The Qur'an, in other words, rewrites the sacred history presented in the Bible even as it adapts to its own vision and logic the stories and personages of the Bible. Some of the biblical prophets mentioned in the Qur'an serve as forerunners of Muhammad.

However, for these Jesuit theologians, the figure of Abraham represented a solid basis for Christian reflection on the theological significance of Islam and the specific character of Muslim–Christian dialogue. Abraham proclaimed and lived out an exemplary monotheism. Especially significant was Abraham's unconditional acceptance of the absolute mystery of the divine will, even when God demanded of Abraham the sacrifice of his son. As far as Muslims are concerned, Abraham is the model worshiper of the one God.

If the Qur'an present the purity of Abraham's obedient monotheistic faith and establishes him as a permanent part of the Islamic inheritance, does it follow that Christians should consider the Qur'an as a divine revelation and Mohammed as a prophet? The two theologians mentioned above do not consider the Qur'an even as a partial revelation. For the church, revelation came to an end with the death of the last apostle since it is through the witness of the group of apostles, whom Jesus gathered around himself, that he manifested himself to the world. And, if the Qur'an does not lead people to a direct discovery of Jesus, there is little scope for considering it as revelation. Neither is it meaningful to speak of Mohammed as a prophet. All we can say is that he is *Rasool Allah*, the messenger of God.

This does not deny the fact that the Qur'an has succeeded in expressing something fundamental in the experience of Abraham and in conveying most powerfully its sense of the mystery of God, the only Lord, the only One who has a right to every human heart. But it does not mean that Jews and Christians should accept the Qur'anic revelation and mission of Mohammed. However, Christians can affirm, in accordance with *Lumen Gentium*, that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are all concerned with worship of the same God, the God of Abraham, the one transcendent Creator. However, within this faith in the same God, there are serious differences. These differences arise from each person's sense of faithfulness to his conscience and hence faithfulness to God himself. Both Christians and Muslims believe that God's call brings with it a responsibility for humankind and for the world. The barriers between Muslims and Christians are bound up with differences and contradictions between them at the level of faith and practice.

There are both positive and negative elements in Islam from a Christian theological perspective. Positive elements include the sense of God as transcendent and absolute, hidden and mysterious, as well as the radical distinction between the Creator and the creation. Another positive element in Islam is its invitation to its

followers to open their hearts to God, allowing the Spirit to act in the heart of a believing Muslim. Christians also value the Islamic teaching about the worship and service of God and the associated ritual practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Also attractive, from the Christian perspective, are the Islamic view of humankind as God's representatives or viceroys on earth and the attempt to live according to the divine attributes, especially God's mercy.

While the Abrahamic faith and worship of one God provides much secure common ground, the Christian faith in the Trinitarian God and the Incarnation of the second person of the Trinity pose a great hurdle in interfaith dialogue between Muslims and Christians. The God of the Qur'an does not seek to cross the divide between Creator and humankind by becoming incarnate, or by becoming one with humanity. Indeed, in Qur'anic terms, God would be denying himself if he did that. In other words, the incarnation of God and the divinization of human beings are, for the Qur'an, simply inconceivable. Therefore, the Qur'an maintains that Jesus was nothing more than a servant of God, a prophet in line with the other prophets. Also important is the Islamic denial of the death of Jesus on the cross, which is a denial of the mystery of redemption, a central theme for Christian faith.

However, from the perspective of Christian faith, Muslims seeking God with an open heart are, without knowing it, oriented towards Jesus Christ who enables all people, in ways known only to him, to participate in the Pascal Mystery. For, as *Gaudium et Spes*, par. 22 says, the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of coming into contact with the Pascal Mystery in a way known to God alone. Given this theological possibility, Muhammad deserves to be respected by Christians. For Muhammad introduced and lived out in an exemplary and impressive way the teachings and practices of Islam on which *Nostra Aetate* commented so positively. According to Pope John Paul II, Muhammad deserves to be respected as the founder of one of the great world religions who had a deep religious experience with the help of God's Spirit. Therefore, Christian

theology should approach Muhammad and the Qur'an with the greatest care and respect but not forgetting, at the same time, the church's duty to proclaim the fullness of truth entrusted to it in and by Christ. This includes the prophetic responsibility to raise critical questions about some of the ways in which Islam is taught and practised.

The teachings of the Second Vatican Council, particularly *Lumen Gentium*, par. 16 and *Nostra Aetate*, par. 3, must be seen as marking a new beginning. And while accepting that there have been conflicts between Muslims and Christians in past centuries, these Documents open up the possibility of cooperation between these two religions in the face of the pressing needs of the world today. The years following the Second Vatican Council saw a new custom on the part of Popes to meet with representatives of Muslim communities during their pastoral visits to countries. Following the example of these Popes, many local churches began to reach out to Muslims in discreet and fraternal ways (as "brothers in Abraham" to use the phraseology of Pope Gregory VII).

In this context, Troll also examined the approach of regional churches to this question of Islam and Christian–Muslim relations, especially the attitude of the Regional Bishops Conference of North Africa regarding Christian–Muslim relations. He also examined the pastoral letters of the Catholic Patriarchs of the East. The letter of the Bishops Conference in North Africa expressed a highly localized perspective on coexistence and cooperation with Muslims. But there was hardly any reference either to the Islamic allegiance of virtually the whole populace of North Africa or to the fact that the religious and cultural life of the peoples of North Africa was permeated by the Islamic tradition. Neither was there mention of the Council Documents.

However, one has to take a realistic view regarding Christian–Muslim dialogue and recognize that not everyone is optimistic about it. In 1989, the then archbishop of Algiers, Henri Teissier, suggested

that formal dialogue between Christians and Muslims was in a state of paralysis. The comments of Archbishop Teissier remind us that dialogue involves an unconditional demand for the creation of relationships of reciprocal respect as a lived social reality. Even if the dialogue is between just two people, it requires on both sides the readiness to enter into such a reciprocal relationship. It was beyond the scope of Troll's current work but it would have been instructive if he had examined the situation in India where both Christians and Muslims live as minorities in a multi-religious country and where the relationship between Christians and Muslims is influenced by much inter-community rivalry and political competition.

The image shows the Arabic word 'المؤمن' (Al Mu'min) written in a bold, black, stylized calligraphic font. The letters are connected, with the 'Alif' (ا) at the top right, followed by 'Lam' (ل), 'Meem' (م), 'Sin' (س), and 'Noon' (ن) at the bottom left. The word is centered on a light gray background.

Al Mu'min

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