

# Salaam

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Quarterly to Promote Understanding



*Religious to be Inter-Religious: The Incarnation as a Catalyst for Interfaith  
Dialogue and Cultural Empathy*

*How to be Religious being Interreligious*

*To Be Religious is to Be Inter-Religious*

*The Call to Brotherhood: Challenge and Opportunity for Lebanon*

*Trinitarian Theology Today: A Christian Engagement with Islamic Critique*

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**ISLAMIC STUDIES ASSOCIATION**

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

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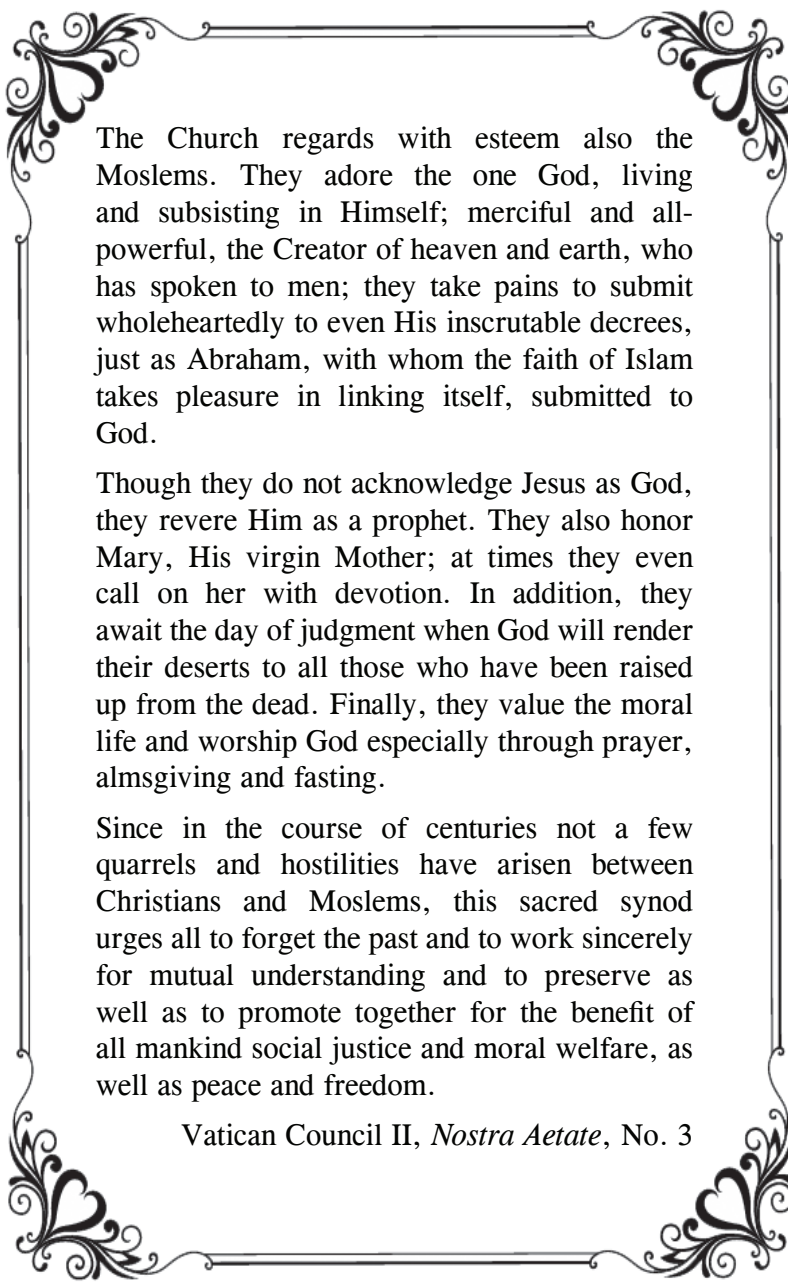
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The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable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

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

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

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

# Editorial

## SPIRITUAL AGE AS THE HUMAN SUMMIT

The world we inhabit is a truly remarkable creation, brimming with complexity and diversity that is both unique and interconnected. Despite its magnificence, we have only scratched the surface of understanding the intricate workings of our world, with countless complex actions occurring continually without pause for repair or maintenance. Yet, amidst this grandeur, the human being remains the most complex and wondrous miracle of creation, with over a trillion cells functioning in perfect harmony. However, when faced with the great mission of building a new world, some rose to the challenge while others did not. For centuries, human potential lay undiscovered and undeveloped, until the dawn of the Industrial Revolution brought about a breakthrough that would change the course of human history.

### *First Industrial Revolution 1765*

It came about with the discovery of steam power. With it, you could move very large and heavy materials long distances. You could also transport hundreds of people long distances. The next revolution came with the discovery of electricity.

### *Second Industrial Revolution 1870*

The second Industrial Revolution was known as the Technological Revolution. It resulted from the installation of extensive railroad and telegraph networks, which allowed for faster transfer of people and ideas. Electricity and increased electrification allowed factories to develop the modern production line. It also caused a surge in unemployment since many factory workers were replaced by machines.

### *Third Industrial Revolution 1969*

Then came the Third Industrial Revolution, also known as the Digital Revolution, which occurred in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century,

after the end of the two world wars. The significant development in communication technologies was the computer, with its extensive use in the production process. Machinery began to abrogate the need for human power.

#### *Fourth Industrial Revolution (current)*

In it, there is a greater use of automation and data exchange in manufacturing technologies and processes which include cyber-physical systems (CPS), cloud computing, cognitive computing, and Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI enables very many new applications making possible what was considered earlier clearly impossible. The fourth industrial revolution marks the beginning of the Imagination Age.

#### *The Spiritual Age*

Have we reached the human summit of development of impossibilities becoming possible? Certainly not. We have a mortal body and an immortal spirit. That enables us to enter into the final and most amazing Spiritual Age. The moment you mention spirituality, many think of linking it with one or more of the established religions. But in the new spiritual age, no such linkage is made, even though it may get much inspiration from them. The concept of spirituality needs much more exploration and explanation to make it become the final revolutionary stage. Many of the present restrictions that curtail freedom will then be removed and a very large and free open space made available. Many more miracles converting the impossible to possible will take place. Does this mean the abolition of religion? No.

The concept of spirituality requires much clarification and elucidation. I am giving only a few brief comments as keystone actions. Many good people in the world are also rich and are willing to invest their money in worthwhile projects. Peter Diamandis and Steven Kotler have a project called *Abundance* that would provide wellness of life to all the seven-plus billion people of the world – providing energy, education, healthcare, and freedom to all in a few decades. To give an example of a *secular* and *spiritual* project.

Another project: doing a good action for no other reason than that it is a good act. Example. A man walking home goes through a dark patch. A youngster puts a knife on him and asks for the purse. The purse is given. Then he takes his coat out, gives it to him saying, "It is cold. You will need the coat if you will spend the time here." He took the coat and wears it. "Are you hungry?" he asks. "Yes," he says. They go to the nearby restaurant. At the end of the meal, he says, "I'd love to pay for your meal, but you have my purse." The purse is slipped back to him. "Can I ask for one more thing? You give me your knife." He slips the knife also across to him.

For many, many years architects and engineers struggled to find a way to build an arch but failed. Finally, they found the keystone: a wedge-shaped stone at the center. Similarly, the Spiritual Age looks for a keystone action that will transform the present conditions. **Connect** is a keystone action that will bring such a transformation in the homes, in institutions like schools or religious communities, and public life.

*Through Secular-Spiritual practices, let us introduce the Spiritual Age, bringing wellness, peace, and joy of life to all.*

Fr. Thomas V. Kunnunkal SJ

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

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

# **“Religious to be Inter-Religious: The Incarnation as a Catalyst for Interfaith Dialogue and Cultural Empathy”**

*By Midhun J Francis, SJ*

In the tapestry of modern interfaith dialogue and cultural engagement, the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation stands out as a profound model for understanding and empathetic exchange. At the centre of this doctrine is the belief articulated in the Gospel of John that the divine was manifest in the human form of Jesus Christ. This symbolises an unprecedented commitment to fully immerse and participate in the human story. This essay explores how a religious person must be an interfaith person and how the Incarnation is more than just a theological cornerstone — it embodies a call for believers to engage deeply with the diverse experiences and traditions of others. Through the lens of Jesus’ transformative encounter with the Samaritan woman and his teaching in the Gospel of Matthew, we witness how social and religious barriers are broken down, and respectful dialogue and genuine curiosity about the “other” are foregrounded. The Incarnation thus provides an essential paradigm for those rooted in their faith to venture into the rich diversity of other cultures with empathy and integrity. This sets the stage for a discussion on the implications of this model for fostering respectful and meaningful interfaith communication in our world today.

## **The Incarnation as Model for Cultural Engagement**

A religious person should be other-oriented. To become other-oriented, one must enter into the perspective of the other in order to understand them better. The mystery of the Incarnation confers the capacity to excel as a competent interfaith individual. A Christian engaged in interfaith dialogue must embody the spirit of the Incarnation. The Incarnation, a central tenet of Christian theology affirmed in the New Testament, states that God entered the human world through Jesus Christ. This doctrine goes beyond a mere theological assertion and serves as a paradigm for dealing



with others in a religious context. The Incarnation exemplifies God's willingness to immerse himself in human culture. Similarly, religious people are encouraged to understand and respect cultural differences.

The doctrine of the Incarnation is illuminated in the Gospel of John (1:14), where it says: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us." This verse symbolically shows God's supreme dedication to engaging profoundly with the human condition, thus proposing a model for interreligious dialogue and the cultivation of cultural empathy. Through the Incarnation, Jesus Christ enters human history and navigates the intricacies of human cultures, traditions, and legal systems, consequently consecrating the human experience and supporting cultural diversity. In this act, Jesus retains his divine identity while fully embracing human culture; he becomes genuinely human and can thus fully empathise with and understand people.

### **Understanding Others from Within Their Culture**

In interfaith studies, the paradigmatic encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well, as described in John 4:1-42, is a profound case study. This exchange, which breaks down the prevailing social and religious barriers of the time, provides a stark demonstration of Jesus' approach to cultural empathy and his aversion to social taboos. Jesus does not impose his cultural framework upon the woman; instead, he engages with her within the nuances of her cultural paradigm. The interaction is characterised by genuine respect and an authentic willingness to understand and embody the essence of an interfaith person who not only recognises but embraces the perspective of the 'other'. This passage challenges followers of different religions to reconsider their prejudices and advocates a more sincere and respectful dialogue across cultural boundaries.

This biblical precedent emphasises the importance of interfaith communication to foster mutual understanding and respect. The

narrative urges a reorientation of perspective and motivates people to see the world through the eyes of those who differ culturally and religiously. Jesus' method of communication illustrates an ideal of interreligious dialogue: to empathise with the world of the other without losing one's own identity, as demonstrated by his self-revelation to the Samaritan woman as the promised Messiah. His example is a call to action for contemporary interfaith dynamics. He suggests that true empathy and understanding do not come from an abstract ideology but from a willingness to meet others where they are, both geographically and theologically. This approach significantly impacts developing a pluralistic yet cohesive social ethos in religiously diverse communities.

### **Jesus' Teachings and Cultural Inclusion**

In the sphere of interreligious dialogue, the principle of "love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22:39), as advocated in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), promotes a radical inclusivity that transcends religious and cultural boundaries. Interfaith initiatives demonstrate how this biblical principle, which is central to the teachings of Jesus, has been instrumental in nurturing empathetic frameworks within different religious communities. By interpreting the term 'neighbour' to encompass people from all walks of life and belief systems, this injunction paves the way for an interfaith person to truly appreciate 'the other' from their perspective. Such a person seeks to understand the beliefs, values and sacred experiences of members of other faith traditions, not as an outsider making preconceived judgements, but as an empathetic fellow traveller. This approach suggests that interfaith empathy can significantly reduce religious prejudice and create space for more harmonious and respectful relationships between communities.

Furthermore, an interfaith person who approaches the 'other' from an attitude of love and compassion, as taught by Jesus, often becomes both an ambassador and an interpreter, able to bridge divides between different groups. Love in this context is not just an emotion but a proactive commitment to the well-being of others that orients

interfaith discourse towards genuine mutual understanding. Such people are often at the forefront of grassroots movements against intolerance and embody an ethos that strengthens the fabric of society through reconciliatory initiatives. The influence of interfaith people in conflict zones, for example, shows that they have the potential to foster peace and healing by viewing the “other” not as an adversary but as a fellow human being to be understood and valued according to one’s own deepest truths. This particular perspective, rooted in the teachings of Jesus, has profound implications for the further development and success of interfaith dialogue around the world.

To summarise, the Incarnation of Jesus is a doctrinal cornerstone for Christianity and a robust framework for intercultural empathy and understanding that resonates well beyond theological boundaries. This divine example embodies the principle that God engages deeply with the human experience and, therefore, calls for a dynamic interfaith ethos that respects and embraces the richness of cultural diversity. In this sense, being truly religious, especially from a Christian perspective, transcends the boundaries of cultural isolation and creates connections characterised by love, service and a genuine willingness to understand. Followers of Christ are called to live in this spirit of incarnation and to enter other cultures not with the goal of conversion but with an open heart willing to listen, learn and help in love. The narrative of Christianity, when viewed through the interfaith lens, posits that a profound religiosity inherently tends towards interfaith engagement and underpins the conviction that to know God is to know and respect the breadth of his creation in its cultural weave. Therefore, I affirm that the true measure of faith lies not only in piety but also in the capacity to create an understanding of the myriad human expressions of faith and tradition.



# How to be Religious being Interreligious

*By Roberto Catalano*

## **1. India and my vocation for interreligious dialogue**

Experience, collaboration, confrontation and study in the field of encounter with brothers and sisters of other religions has characterized - and continues to do so - the last thirty years of my life. It is an experience born and developed, initially, during three decades of my living in India where all aspects of daily life were simultaneously a true school and a living experience of dialogue. In the context of the sub-continent, everything has been valuable, not only the specific moments of inter-religious meetings or study or even special courses. In the course of time, I realized that every moment of life is formative, because every situation in which we find ourselves teaches something of the other's culture, imagination, soul and religiosity. We must be careful not to let it slip away like water on a stone. Later, confirmations of what we have learnt also emerge, sometimes without us even realizing it. Personally speaking, years passed before I was able to connect a lived experience with a passage from the documents of the Catholic Magisterium or a text from the Church Fathers, or to other aspects of my being a Catholic Christian. In fact, in dialogue, especially inter-religious dialogue, 'life is teacher' and it is up to each of us to remain open and listening in order to learn and, later, to connect to our faith lived experiences.

## **2. The discovery of the possibility of the 'other'**

In my life, I had strong experiences of dialogue with Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, and Baha'is in India, and later with Jews, Buddhists, Confucians, Taoists, and followers of traditional and indigenous religions. Each of this triggered a process of reflection within me on the prejudices and exclusivist attitudes I carried in my heart and mind without even being aware of it. Looking back, I realize how my experiences of dialogue contributed

to a progressive process of purifying my faith and simplifying my mind. I found this, almost by chance, expressed very effectively by Luigi Sartori, a well-known Italian theologian, who in 1981, while I started living in the sub-continent, posed three inescapable questions that cannot leave any Catholic indifferent.

It seems that Christianity has arrived at a crucial turning point: similar to that in which Judaism found itself at the height of its religious maturity, when the prophets and priests asked themselves: “Has God limited himself only to us? Before us, did he remain silent and inactive? After us, i.e. outside us, does he have nothing to offer other peoples?”<sup>1</sup>

In this process, an aspect that I have come to appreciate in all its value is patience. In the encounter with the other, with someone different from us, with another culture and religion, one cannot be in a hurry. It is necessary to know how to wait and to mature reflections and personal experiences. Certain things can only be understood over time and almost without us realizing it. In this regard, I remember a feeling I had after several years - I think five or six - that I was living in India. I was walking down a street and reflecting on some aspects of my life at that time. I still remember exactly where I was. Suddenly, what I had struggled to understand for years about the Indian way of doing things, personal approach or social life, made sense. Within a second, I could see its meaning and logic. It was as if, by a magic touch, someone had set a myriad of hitherto disarranged and confused tiles in motion, and they had formed a mosaic whose design and figures I could clearly distinguish. After years of mental and spiritual struggle, I understood that culture and its expressions, including religion. They made real sense to me. I understood their own logic: that culture that sound mysterious could not and should not be different. They were not my categories - they would never be - but I understood them. In addition, this

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<sup>1</sup> L. Sartori, citato in M. Dal Corso e B. Salvarani, «Molte volte e in diversi modi». *Manuale di dialogo interreligioso*, Assisi, Cittadella Editrice, 2016, 7. (translation by the author of this article)

was accompanied by the conviction that this was an asset and, at the same time, carried limitations as my own Western culture does. What had happened? I had discovered the ‘possibility’ of the other and, on my part, the need to recognize him/her and allow him/her to be ‘other’. The discovery of the culturally or religiously ‘other’ is a fundamental experience in dialogue and brings a previously unsuspected richness. I found this masterfully expressed in the *Foreword* that Bishop Pietro Rossano - for many years Secretary of the then Secretariat for Non-Christians<sup>2</sup> - wrote in 1988 to his book *I perché dell’uomo e le risposte delle grandi religioni*<sup>3</sup>.

[...] the on-site contact with non-Christian religions and with hundreds of their followers and representatives [...] above all, the friendly and sincere acquaintance with so many people of high spiritual quality challenged me as a man and as a Christian. I have experienced how friendly acquaintance with other religions can benefit the self-understanding of the Christian faith. [...] I have also felt that frequenting non-Christian<sup>4</sup> religious men and women helps to expand the subjective and personal dimensions of faith, its inner substratum, the heart’s passion for the Infinite, the unstoppable impulse towards the heights [...].<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, one of the great riches I found was to see people living in their daily lives the ideals for which they had decided to spend their lives, a spirituality inspired by their respective sacred texts

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<sup>2</sup> The *Secretariat for Non-Christians* was established by Pope Paul VI in 1965. Later it became the *Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue* and, finally, more recently, in 2022, *Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue*.

<sup>3</sup> P. Rossano, *I perché dell’uomo e le risposte delle grandi religioni*, Milano, Edizioni Paoline, 1988.

<sup>4</sup> As I quote this deep insight, I cannot but underline the definition of ‘non-Christian’. This was the typical way to define followers of other religions during and immediately after the Second Vatican Council. It still sound very Christian-centric and in course of time developed into calling everyone according to the religion, he/she belonged to: Hindus, Buddhist, Muslim etc.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, (translation by the author of this article)

and rooted in their different religious traditions. The last century has been rich in every corner of the world with men and women who, although from other religious traditions, can be a source of inspiration for us Christians. In addition, it is precisely by coming into contact with such figures that one realizes that in mutual respect one can find a common source of inspiration.

### **3. The Spirit blows where He wills.**

This allowed me to discover how the Spirit of God (whom we Christians call the Holy Spirit) is at work in each of us Christians and, in different but similar ways in Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, Baha'i and Buddhists. Years of friendship and deep spiritual and existential sharing have convinced me that 'the Spirit is present in all creation and in all history', as *Gaudium et Spes* repeatedly explains.

More and more in these relationships of spiritual and human friendship I have discovered and become aware and convinced that "interreligious and humanistic dialogue is founded [...] on the recognition of the active presence of the Spirit working in the Church and outside the visible boundaries of the Church"<sup>6</sup>. Over the years, I have touched with my own hands what Rossano, in an almost prophetic way - we were in 1972! - had intuited. The first act of the Christian mission and, therefore, also of the interreligious dialogue that is an expression of it, must be the discovery of what Christ has been working mysteriously for some time in those in front of us<sup>7</sup>.

### **4. The importance of silence and listening**

It was precisely from listening to each other that these friendly relations were born, which broadened my awareness of the very dimension of God, who has been at work in the heart of humanity

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, 89.

<sup>7</sup> See G. Osto, *La testimonianza del dialogo. Pietro Rossano tra Bibbia, religioni e cultura*, Pontificio Seminario Lombardo, Roma e Edizioni Glossa, Milano, 2019, 96-97.

for far longer than not only I, as a person, can imagine, but also than the Church itself has thought for centuries. On the other hand, in these encounters and in the sense of spiritual and existential sharing that has developed with these people I have touched upon the transforming power of the dialogical experience. As Joseph Ratzinger said back in 1987, “dialogue only arises where there is not only speaking, but also listening, and where in listening there is encounter, in encounter there is relationship, and in relationship there is understanding as the deepening and transformation of existence”<sup>8</sup>.

### **5. God can be experienced among people of different faiths**

Finally, the most unexpected and profound experience was that of feeling several times and in different ways the presence of God among us. It remains difficult to put into words this experience that can only be understood if one lives it. I leave it to John Paul II who expressed it in a masterly way during his visit to India in 1986.

The fruit of dialogue is union between people and union of people with God, who is the source and revealer of all truth and whose Spirit guides men in freedom only when they meet one another in all honesty and love. By dialogue, we let God be present in our midst; for as we open ourselves in dialogue to one another, we also open ourselves to God.<sup>9</sup>



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<sup>8</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Perché siamo ancora nella Chiesa*, Rizzoli, Milano 2008. (translation by the author of this article).

<sup>9</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Address to Representatives of different Religions*, Madras (Chennai), 5<sup>th</sup> February 1986.



## To Be Religious is to Be Inter-Religious

*By Joseph Victor Edwin SJ*

I would like to share with you some personal anecdotes that provide a setting for this conversation about being religious and inter-religious. Many years ago, during my school days, I was part of a group of Christian children who were teasing and mocking a picture of a Hindu deity. Little did I know that one of the Hindu teachers had witnessed our behavior and felt deeply hurt by our words. The teacher reported my misbehavior to my mother, who was also a teacher at the school. Upon hearing about my actions, my mother was filled with disappointment and anger. She refused to let me enter the house that evening and ordered me to wait outside until my father came home.

When my father returned, my mother explained what had happened, and my father was equally upset with me. He took me to the Hindu teacher's home and requested that I apologize for my actions. My father also apologized to the teacher on my behalf, explaining how religion is a precious and deeply personal aspect of one's life. He taught me that we must respect the faith of others, just as we expect others to respect our own beliefs.

That lesson has stayed with me for over 52 years. It serves as a beautiful reminder of the importance of empathy and understanding in our interactions with people of different faiths and cultures.

Upon completion of my college education, I decided to join the Society of Jesus, commonly known as the Jesuits. During the initial phase of our training, one of our Jesuit teachers taught us about Hinduism. As a part of the curriculum, he took us to a Hindu temple to provide us with hands-on experience. Despite being a non-Hindu, I had no qualms about entering the temple since I had learned the importance of respecting the beliefs of others. The Jesuit teacher further explained that we are all co-pilgrims, and our ultimate goal is to return to God. As children of God, we should respect all faiths and strive for unity among all human beings.

The bonds that we share with our loved ones can transcend religious and cultural differences. I am fortunate enough to have two wonderful 'sisters' in my life, one who is a Hindu and the other a Muslim. Every time I visit my Hindu 'sister', she takes me to a beautiful Hanuman temple, where I can witness her deep devotion to the deity. Through her eyes, I have come to recognize the benevolent nature of Hanuman, a beloved deity in Hindu mythology. On the other hand, when I spend time with my Muslim 'sister', she takes me on a spiritual journey to a dargah, a revered shrine of a Sufi saint. Her piety and reverence for God are truly inspiring, and I am grateful for the opportunity to learn from her. These experiences have taught me that love and respect for one another can transcend any differences we may have and that we can all learn from each other's unique perspectives and beliefs.

Through my experiences, I have learned a valuable lesson about the ability to perceive God through the unique perspectives of individuals from different faiths. This has led me to gain a deep appreciation and respect for the religious beliefs of others. It has also helped me understand that despite our varying religious affiliations or lack thereof, we are all traveling together on a shared journey. This realization has been the cornerstone of my interactions with people of other faiths, particularly my Muslim brothers and sisters.

In the year 1992, I was living in Patna, Bihar, where I was pursuing my degree in Humanities. This program included studying the Hindi language as well as the literature of the people in the region. On December 6, 1992, a tragic event occurred which shook me to my core - the destruction of the Babri Masjid. I heard the news on the radio and couldn't help but feel a sense of sadness. However, it was also around this time that I had the opportunity to attend classes on Sufism - the mystical aspect of Islam - taught by the late Jesuit Father Paul Jackson. He was a scholar deeply committed to promoting harmonious relationships between Christians and Muslims and introduced us to the faith and practices of the Muslim community in Bihar.

Through his teachings, I learned a valuable lesson - that understanding Islam meant knowing it through the lives of our Muslim friends.

Father Jackson even mentioned that sharing the Christian faith with Muslims was like swimming against the current or sailing against the wind. “If it is God’s will, you will enter into this ministry,” he told me. Over time, my interest in Islam grew, and I started meeting more Muslims. Soon, my ministry among Muslims became my personal calling, bringing me immense satisfaction and fulfillment.

The integral insight “to be religious is to be inter-religious” is found in the document of the General Congregation of Jesuits (GC 34/130). This insight served to widen the frontiers of Interreligious dialogue. I read the document with great interest and discussed it with Fr. Paul Jackson. In line with the document, I understood that we Jesuits, the servant of Christ in mission need to acknowledge, preserve, and promote the moral good found in other faiths. We should relate positively with people of different faiths. We should collaborate with others to achieve common goals. We should seek to develop ways in which people of different faiths can work together towards the common good. We live in a world that is exploitative, derisive, with conflicts born out of religious motives. In this context, we need to seek to develop a unifying and liberating understanding of Religion. These are some of the great insights I drew from the document.

The document and the conversations around it encouraged me to learn from Muslims and their cultures. When I began learning Urdu and went to Baramulla, Kashmir for my Regency, I really began to love Muslims. Then I began studying Islam in greater depth and reflected more deeply on the teachings of the Church, especially that is found in the document *Nostra Aetate*. It is worthwhile to quote the concerned paragraph from the document. It reads:

The Church also looks upon Muslims with respect. They worship the one God living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to humanity and to whose decrees, even the hidden ones, they seek to submit themselves whole heartedly, just as Abraham, to whom the Islamic faith readily relates itself, submitted to God. They venerate Jesus as a prophet, even though they do not acknowledge him as God, and they honor his virgin mother Mary and even sometimes devotedly call upon

her. Furthermore, they await the day of judgment when God will requite all people brought back to life. Hence, they have regard for moral life and worship God especially in prayer, almsgiving and fasting. Although considerable dissensions and enmities between Christians and Muslims may have arisen in the course of the centuries, this synod urges all parties that, forgetting past things, they train themselves towards sincere mutual understanding and together maintain and promote social justice and moral values as well as peace and freedom for all people.

The document points out the common related points as well as the essential differences between the two religions. This opens the possibility of collaboration between the two religions. The document emphasizes that the Faith in one God – adoration of One God is at the heart of both Christianity and Islam. This makes it clear that the God of Muslims is not a God invented by human reason but the transcendent God who spoke and entrusted his Word even if it is not the same Word. Muslim faith is essentially Islam, the active submission to God. Islam demands the believer to submit to the will of God whole heartedly reminding them the model of Abraham. Jesus and Mary are revered figures in the Islamic mysticism and spirituality. The document also highlights the common elements of the Muslim eschatology and Christian eschatology. The document recognizes ritual prayer, alms giving, and fasting as essential elements of spiritualities common to Christians and Muslims.

At this context what John Renard, a Catholic scholar on Islam writes become meaningful for me. He writes: “What then has Islam to say to us? I believe that Islam is itself one of God’s signs. Its implications for us as individuals, as Christians, and as members of the human community are enormous. Islam is a challenge, a risk, a source of encouragement, and a summons to take a bigger view of what life on our planet is about. The way we respond to Islam will have a great deal to do with what we consider true and holy.”

I spent several years studying Islam deeply, doing M.A, M.Phil. and Ph.D. in Islamic Studies and also master’s in theology deepening my knowledge of Islam and Muslim culture and practices—not simply as an academic or theoretical exercise, but also through

interacting with Muslims personally. It has been my way of life for the last thirty years.

In long conversations with Paul Jackson, I have deepened my understanding of Islam and Muslims in India. I learnt that the oneness of the transcendent God is at the heart of Islamic faith affirmation. For Muslims, the Qur'an in its entirety is the vehicle of a Word of God. Islam has enriched the lives and reflections of the Muslim believers over the centuries and enables them to reach the one God, to imbue their lives with God and thus to be way of salvation. I further learnt that 'God's majesty', 'our creatureliness', and 'our need to repent and be forgiven' could be themes for our conversations.

At times, I have not failed to notice certain expressions of political Islam in their conversation with me. I feel that such expressions should not immobilize our understanding of Islam. We Christians should not see Muslims solely as warriors of Allah. Patiently engaging with them we could discover the gems of authentic religious wealth behind the crust of certain legalism, and thus we can learn to appreciate the real, healthy, and constructive aspirations of Muslims towards a deeper spiritual life.

Further I realized that friendship and relationship are at the heart of dialogue. Dialogue partners need to recognize the goodness in others, and they need to be in constant and sustained contact with each other for their relations to unfold and for dialogue to be meaningful.

I have come to understand that every religion has its space in our immensely pluralistic world. In inter-religious dialogue, what we discover is not just religious beliefs and practices but also people—real, living fellow humans, who simply happen to follow a different religion—people as human as you and me. As a Jesuit among Muslims, my only prayer is that I always remain humble and open to the spirit of the Lord who leads Christians and Muslims in humble conversations.

# The Call to Brotherhood: Challenge and Opportunity for Lebanon

*Father Salah Aboujaoude, SJ*

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In his third encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*<sup>1</sup>, published in 2020, Pope Francis underlines the fact that brotherhood between all men is at the core of the Gospel and the dream of all humanity. In chapter VIII of the same Encyclical, the Pope emphasizes the role of religions in promoting and realizing this worldwide brotherhood. This is a theme very dear to Pope Francis' heart, and one for which he has taken several initiatives. But it's also particularly important for Lebanon, all the more so as this country comprises 18 religious communities (confessions). Let's look briefly at the richness of this chapter, which is the last in the encyclical, before reading the Lebanese situation in light of its demands.

## *Overview of Chapter VIII of Fratelli Tutti*

After underlining the potential of religions to contribute to the building of a brotherhood based on justice, the Pope emphasizes the aim of all dialogue, namely the establishment of “friendship, peace, and harmony, and to share spiritual and moral values and experiences in a spirit of truth and love” (No. 271).

The Pope goes on to clarify the foundation of all fraternity, which is divine filiation or the awareness of being “children”, which means that fraternity goes far beyond the simple equality that reason could establish (N° 272). It is this filiation which opens onto the transcendence of man (N° 273) and rightly demands, as historical experience attests, that “the effort to seek God with a sincere heart, provided it is never sullied by ideological or self-serving aims, helps us recognize one another as travelling companions, truly brothers

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html)

and sisters” (N°274). Hence the need to avoid anything that leads to “the denial of freedom of conscience and religious freedom” (Ibid). In the same sense, religious ideals must have their place in public debate, for the estrangement from these “religious values and the prevailing individualism accompanied by materialistic philosophies that deify the human person and introduce worldly and material values in place of supreme and transcendental principles” (N°275) are the most important causes of the crisis in the modern world. For this, moreover, the Church “has a public role over and above her charitable and educational activities. She works for the advancement of humanity and of universal fraternity” (N°276).

Then, recalling the Church’s attitude towards other religions as expressed by the Second Vatican Council, the Pope underlines the fact that if “If the music of the Gospel ceases to sound in our homes, our public squares, our workplaces, our political and financial life, then we will no longer hear the strains that challenge us to defend the dignity of every man and woman” (N°277). For this reason, the Church, like all Christians, is called to live universal love (N°278). And after once again recalling religious freedom as a “fundamental human right (that) must not be forgotten in the journey towards fraternity and peace” (N° 279), the Pope speaks of the unity of the Church, which is part of “the duty to offer common witness to the love of God for all people by working together in the service of humanity” (N° 280).

The Pope then goes on to stress that the true rooting of believers of all religions in their sources can only lead to “worship of God and love for our neighbour, lest some of our teachings, taken out of context, end up feeding forms of contempt, hatred, xenophobia or negation of others” (N°282). For this reason, all violence and terrorism in the name of religion are nothing more than a distortion of fundamental religious convictions. In fact, “terrorism must be condemned in all its forms and expressions. Religious convictions about the sacred meaning of human life permit us to recognize the fundamental values of our common humanity, values in the name of

which we can and must cooperate, build and dialogue, pardon and grow” (N°283). Religious leaders, for their part, have a decisive role to play in this regard; they are called “to be true people of dialogue, to cooperate in building peace not as intermediaries but as authentic mediators” (N°284).

### *Challenges of the Lebanese situation*

To promote friendship, peace, and common moral and spiritual principles for the benefit of everyone, the Pope properly emphasizes the significance of interreligious conversation in an atmosphere of love, honesty, and truth. These issues put everyone’s shared responsibility of creating a cohesive society before them, where people understand that they are called to work together for a brighter future and that they are all connected by a common destiny.

However, the so-called confessional situation in Lebanon’s context, which intertwines the temporal with the religious in its political and social dimensions, makes the practical application of these concepts murky and challenging. In other words, confessionalism produces an environment that is hostile to the application of the fundamental tenets of any significant and fruitful dialogue. If we are to genuinely seek the truth together and act in the interests of the common good, such discussion demands, in fact, the lack of bias and judgment as well as an openness to diverse points of view.

Because the struggle for power, which frequently hides the leaders’ personal and sectarian interests, fuels confessionalism, which has as its hard core the diversity of religions, it encourages prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination in interfaith relationships. All of this serves to reinforce a psychological bias against the other. Simply said, politicians in Lebanon do a terrible job of managing religious diversity and actively take advantage of it. And all of this is carried out within the confines of a conventional society. Traditional culture, in contrast to individualistic society, is founded on group values and traditions; this fosters a collective sense of belonging to the group that marginalizes individual self-esteem and



prioritizes a psycho-social aspect above group identity. Regarding religion, its rites, symbols, and festivals frequently serve as a platform for individuals to claim their uniqueness in the face of other communities. However, we notice the dynamism of an unconscious generalization of a negative image of the other, dread, suspicion, and a lack of mutual trust amid the crises that rapidly and easily take on a confessional tint in Lebanon.

Openness to others with the intention of joining them, according to Martin Buber, is not a natural process because it necessitates a significant personal transformation and a halt to the course of events<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, not seeing the particularities of others allows us to assimilate them to ourselves, to make them similar to ourselves by acting as if it were possible to understand them, to judge and evaluate them, to predict their reactions based on the same grid for reading reality that we apply to ourselves<sup>3</sup>.

Here, it's crucial to expand on what has been mentioned concerning religious rituals. In actuality, during conflicts, the socio-political part of rituals takes precedence without removing the religious component from people's consciences. Rites and religious symbols are transformed into political signs.

As a result, the socio-political and confessional dimensions of each of these local societies seem to their respective members to be inextricably linked. It basically means that civil society finds itself absorbed into the religious institution, which in turn seems to identify with civil society, because of the interaction between the two dimensions. The articulation of civil society with the religious community produces a homogeneous and highly cohesive socio-cultural formation. This statement conveys the idea that a person can only fully integrate into his or her community if he or she makes a

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Martin BUBER, 1959, *La vie en conversation*, Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, pp. 128 and 214-215.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Geneviève VINSONNEAU, 2002, *L'identité culturelle*, Paris: Armand Colin, p. 202.

commitment of loyalty to it that is both civil and religious, profane and theological, leaving aside his personal faith and religious life<sup>4</sup>.

On a broader relational level, denominational membership has become the main criterion for relations with members of other faiths. Awareness of the socio-cultural particularity and confessional identity of the local society is developed through the daily experience of its members in their relations with neighbors of other faiths. The collective consciousness of belonging to a particular confessional group correlates with antagonistic relations with other confessional groups. The consciences of the Lebanese thus remain essentially confused in the articulation between the civil and the confessional. At the same time, however, and paradoxically, a significant number of Lebanese, especially young people, are influenced by the principles of modernity and open to individualism and democracy. While this is far from influencing the course of political events, it does represent a base that could change the national landscape if the right conditions are in place.

### *Chances for Lebanon*

Reverting to the tenets of *Fratelli Tutti*, the situation in Lebanon necessitates a fundamental and urgent transformation with the goal of defending religious freedom, freedom of conscience, the dignity of the individual, but also releasing religion from the grip of confessionalism, and fostering a dialogue aimed at achieving the common good. There is no question that religious authorities, whose function the Pope explicitly highlights in his message, can and must assume their significant responsibility in this desired and desirable transformation because it is consistent with the core teachings of every religion, namely the dignity of every human being and the idea of universal brotherhood.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Robert BENEDECTY, 2001, *Transfiguration sacrée de la société civile*, coll. « Hommes et Sociétés du Proche-Orient », Beyrouth : Université Saint-Joseph, Dar el-Machreq, pp. 202-209.

Concretely speaking, religious leaders can play a significant positive role through the various educational, cultural, religious, and social institutions they oversee for, first and foremost, the updating of a serious national pedagogy that transcends denominational affiliation; second, a clearer and more enlightened distinction between belief and unconsciously generalized prejudice and stereotyping; and, third, the need for a liberation of the “person”, given that a real encounter can only take place between “persons” who live according to their own convictions. Of course, all of this may be accomplished by open, serious, and courteous discussion between religious leaders.

**John Paul II, Message for the  
World Day of Peace, January 1, 2002**

“No peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness: this is what in this Message I wish to say to believers and unbelievers alike, to all men and women of good will who are concerned for the good of the human family and for its future.

“No peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness: this is what I wish to say to those responsible for the future of the human community, entreating them to be guided in their weighty and difficult decisions by the light of man’s true good, always with a view to the common good.

“No peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness: I shall not tire of repeating this warning to those who, for one reason or another, nourish feelings of hatred, a desire for revenge or the will to destroy.”

# Trinitarian Theology Today: A Christian Engagement with Islamic Critique

*James Kulvi SJ*

The online conference titled “Trinitarian Theology Today: A Christian Engagement with Islamic Critique,” was organised by Islamic Studies Association (ISA) on December 12, 2023, with Prof. Felix Körner SJ, a German Jesuit, as the speaker. Prof. Körner holds doctorates in Islamic Studies and Catholic Theology. Since October 2021, he holds the Nikolaus Cusanus Chair for Theology of Religions at the Institute of Catholic Theology at Berlin’s Humboldt University. Dr. Joseph Victor Edwin SJ, secretary for Islamic Studies Association, Delhi and Lecturer at Vidyajyoti Institute for Religious Studies, Delhi, welcomed all the participants and introduced the moderator Fr. James Kulvi SJ who was a student of prof. Körner at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome. Fr. James Kulvi introduced prof. Körner and moderated the session. The online event comprised of a session addressing specific aspects of Trinitarian theology and its intersection with Islamic perspectives. First, the speaker’s presentation and later, the interactive Q&A session was integrated to ensure a comprehensive exploration of the subject matter.

This virtual conference brought together scholars, theologians, students, and participants from diverse backgrounds. The event aimed to explore and facilitate discussions surrounding Trinitarian theology within Christianity, focusing specifically on engaging with critiques from Islamic perspectives. Trinitarian theology, a foundational and a germinal aspect of Christian belief, has been subject to study and analysis from various quarters, including Islamic scholars.

In his presentation prof. Körner began with three verses from the Qurān, Sura 4 (An-Nisā): 171, Sura 5 (Al-Māidah): 73 and Sura 5 (Al-Māidah): 116. He said that in engaging with the Qur’anic critique we need to be aware that the Qur’an’s fundamental concern is “monotheism”: acknowledge *the Origin, Ruler and End of all that is* as the one and only God. He further enhanced the argument by stating that for the Qur’an, both Trinitarian theology and Divine

Filiation are tampering with that concern: God as one of three, as Son of God as pulling God into creaturely structure. The Qur'an does not represent the mainline Church's Trinitarian belief but still the Qur'anic critique is a helpful challenge for Christians to clarify their own theology. Prof. Körner focused on three central aspects in his presentation. They are: **1. Three Traps** – i. Rowan Williams 2004, ii. Trimūrti, and iii. Dialogue. In these, the statement “the point of interreligious Dialogue is not ecumenism but “purification, enrichment,” and shaping the world together within the legal framework of equal rights for all”, caught the attention of some of our participants. **2. History** – historical research can purify the Christian faith – i. Jesus' Claim, ii. Easter, and iii. Fathers. **3. Clarifications** - i. Paradoxes, ii. Participating, and iii. Abba. We are reminded that we need to have Christ story in our confession and that the Spirit integrates us in having “Father” –Child communion. In conclusion, prof. Körner quoted, “*il coraggio dell'alterità*” (“the courage of otherness”) from Pope Francis' speech at the Founder's Memorial in Abu Dhabi in 2019, on the signing of the Document on “Human Brotherhood for World Peace and common coexistence”, which took place together with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahamad al-Tayyib. As brothers and sisters, we are all walking to the city of humanness, said prof. Körner.

In the end, the interactive Q&A session and virtual discussion allowed participants to actively engage with the speaker. This facilitated a dynamic exchange of ideas, enabling participants to seek clarification, share perspectives, and contribute to the ongoing conversation. The online meeting on “Trinitarian Theology Today: A Christian Engagement with Islamic Critique” offered a platform for scholars and students to engage in a thoughtful interchange of opinions, views, and thoughts. It positively contributed and enriched the ongoing efforts to foster interfaith understanding and harmony, leveraging digital technologies, and intending to transcend geographical barriers and foster meaningful dialogue on a topic of theological significance. The conference concluded with a call for continued dialogue and collaboration. Dr. Joseph Victor Edwin SJ, expressed his profound gratitude to prof. Körner and those who were present for the online conference. He reiterated the need to further explore theological commonalities, dispel misunderstandings, and promote lasting relationships between Christian and Islamic communities.

# **Pope Francis Speaks a Language that is Close to Us, Says Prof. Felix Wilfred**

*Joseph Victor Edwin SJ, Delhi*

Pope Francis speaks a language that is close to us, and resonates with our experiences, said Professor Felix Wilfred, a former Professor of the State University of Madras, India and the current Director of the Asian Centre for Cross-Cultural Studies, Chennai. He was gathering the fruits of the Symposium “Redefining the Mission Today: Pope Francis’ Vision and the Contemporary Landscape of India today”, held at St. Peter’s Pontifical Institute, Bangalore, India from November 14 -16, 2023. St. Peter’s Pontifical Institute and the Pontifical Mission Organizations, India, jointly organized the symposium. Many teachers of theology from the disciplines of Missiology and Ecclesiology from numerous formation centers across the county participated and presented papers at the symposium. The papers explored the diverse dimensions of Pope Francis’ vision for Mission in reference to South Asia.

## **Understanding Mission**

Pope Francis recaptures unassumingly the vision of Vatican II for our times by bringing people especially the poor as the focus of his reflections. The Synod on Synodality is a good example of such ‘recapturing the Spirit of Vatican II for our times’. Pope visualizes Christians as ‘pilgrims’ among people of diverse faiths on a mission to give witness to Christ, share his riches with others, and recognize the footprints of the Spirit of God within diverse traditions. He visualizes the Church as a ‘movement’ towards the Reign of God in solidarity with all people, truthful to their conscience. Christians as ‘pilgrims’ and the Church as a ‘movement’ are called to engage with all people of good will in constant encounter with the living God. All believers are ‘pilgrims of truth and peace’ (Pope Benedict XVI, “Address at the Meeting for Peace in Assisi,” 27 October 2011). God’s truth and revelation could never be objectified and

reduced to biblical words, doctrines, or symbols. It could never be identified anything finite, as it surpasses them all.

Further, Pope Francis' anthropology does not emphasize human person as the crown of creation. Rather, he sees the human person, created in the image and likeness of God, as forming part of the intricate web of relations and interdependent with the entire realities of creation and the whole cosmos. Thus, human person's connection with God, with fellow beings and with the cosmos is visualized holistically. Human beings, Pope Francis would insist, cannot attempt to encounter one another in peace by eliminating God and cosmos from the horizon.

Pope Francis views 'mission' as mission among nations. The word 'among' reveals something at the heart of Francis' understanding of the mission of the Church. The Church is the universal sacrament of salvation for all peoples (*Lumen Gentium*, 48). The Church has been endowed by Christ with the fullness of goods of salvation (*Redemptoris Missio*, 18 and 55). She sends her sons and daughters among all people including those who belong to diverse faiths. They are sent to seek fellowship with all and contribute to the Reign of God and transform the world like the leaven in the dough. They seek fellowship, in obedience to truth and respect for freedom of others, through constructive relations with individuals and communities of other religions (*Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Dialogue and Proclamation*, 9).

Moreover, humility is the hallmark of the ministry that Pope Francis exercises. From this perspective mission is understood not as a triumphalistic enterprise counting on victories but a 'process that would encourage 'the culture of encounter'. The culture of encounter cultivates frankness, courage and parrhesia (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 259). It nurtures humility to discover oneself in the light of the other and honestly revealing about oneself to the other. It guides each partner to illuminate one another through social friendships. Fr. Felix Wilfred presented two questions for ongoing reflection with regard to the personal call to missions: In mission,

are we to die *for* Christ? (This could represent a triumphalistic attitude and sound even dangerously fundamentalist) or are we to die *like* Jesus? (This highlights that the Church as the sacrament of unity and believers as disciples of the historical Jesus).

### **Mission as praxis**

According to a classical definition, humans are rational beings. Without dismissing reason, the Pope highlights human person as relational being. For relational beings, love is the path to knowledge. Pope Francis emphasizes primacy of compassion and he wants this to be at the heart of mission of his disciples. On 28 August 2019 at a general audience, he reflected on how Jesus strengthened the early Christian community to serve those in need. He said the early Church was depicted as ‘a field hospital that takes in the weakest people: the infirm’. ‘The sick hold a privileged role in the Church and in the priestly heart of all the faithful,’ said Pope Francis. “They aren’t be cast aside. On the contrary, they are to be cared for, to be looked after. They are the objects of Christian concern.”

### **Mission and its political dimension**

All baptized Christians are sent on Mission. St. Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (no. 21) affirms that the Mission is a single but complex and articulated reality and it is expressed in many forms (Dialogue and Mission, 13). The Church carries out the mission by making herself fully present to all peoples and all persons (Ad Gentes, 5). Thus Mission has public dimension and in that sense Mission is political.

### **Mission - speaking Truth to the power**

We live in a post-truth era where doctored facts replace actual facts. In the post-truth era feeling is weightier than evidence. George Orwell captured this era in the following words: ‘the very concept of objective truth is fading out of the world. Lies will pass into history’.



It is said that every lie has an audience. The political leaders, especially of the present dispensation, manipulate the masses into believing something that they know as untrue. They lie, obfuscate facts by abandoning evidences. In this context, to speak truth to power means to confront those who hold important positions, whether in government, business or religious institutions. To speak truth to power means to demand a moral response to a problem, rather than an expedient, easy or selfish response. The phrase ‘speak truth to power’ carries a connotation of bravery, of risking either the status quo, one’s reputation or livelihood, or the wrath of the person one is confronting. Pope Francis invites Christians and all people of good will to speak truth on behalf of the impoverished poor.

### **Mission – Fostering social friendship**

Fraternity requires an explicit option, a deliberate choice. As W. Carey Mc Williams puts it: ‘becoming brothers (sisters) amounts rather to a revolution’ (1973, p. 23). For Pope Francis ‘fraternity’ is a social practice rather than an abstract metaphor. In his vision ‘love’ connects social friendship and universal fraternity. He writes: “a love capable of transcending borders is the basis of what in every city and country can be called ‘social friendship’. Genuine social friendship within a society makes true universal openness possible” (Fratelli Tutti, 99). Pope Francis affirms that ‘universal fraternity’ and ‘social friendship’ are inseparable components of every healthy society. He stressed: “to separate them would be to disfigure each and to create a dangerous polarization” (Fratelli Tutti 142). How do we practice this ‘social friendship – universal fraternity’ continuum in our diverse contexts? Pope presents the parable of the Good Samaritan. Pope stresses the Samaritan’s decision to ‘make-the-one-who-is-in-need’ as his neighbour as a true form of social friendship that is open to universal fraternity (Pasquale Ferrara, p. 87-101). It is like ‘sowing seeds of trust’ in a violent world, says Prof. Wilfred.

## Conclusion

Pope Francis through joining his voice with all who thirst for justice, invites all Christians and all people of good will to act with confidence in building social friendships that sows the seeds of peace. We must make every effort to end the vicious cycle of violence. He invites all to build a future together for all especially for those who are marginalized on the foundations of Peace and Justice.

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

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

# Dialogue is Understanding Myself and Others

*By Joseph Victor Edwin SJ*

Fatima Sarah and a team of Muslim brothers and sisters from the Bangalore chapter of the Centre for Peace and Spirituality (CPS), visited the Jesuit Formation Centre for Theology (JFCT), Bangalore, for a theological conversation with the Jesuit students at the Centre on, 4th January 2024.

Joseph Victor Edwin SJ, the course instructor, introduced Sarah and her team as Muslim missionaries. He said, “They are here to bear witness to their faith and engage with us Christians.” Their mission (*dawa*) is to call people to submit to God by surrendering their will to the will of God.

Victor Edwin further pointed out that for Muslims God is the subject of *dawa* and the content of *dawais* the call to submission and surrender to God. Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, was given this mission, ‘to call people to submit to God’, and ‘to establish a community (*umma*) of those who submitted as an effective bearer of *dawa* for all time to come’.

Sarah pointed out that after the finality of prophethood, Muslims are to carry out the same mission on behalf of the Prophet, namely, what he did directly in his life. Sarah also said that, “to carry out this task correctly, it is imperative to awaken the missionary consciousness within Muslims. They must be informed that the relationship between Muslims and other nations is that of a caller and the called, not of one nation against another.”

Edwin pointed out that historically the *umma* went beyond this ‘mission understanding’. He recalled a conversation he had had with Professor Christian W. Troll SJ, who told him clearly that the *umma* went beyond the prophetic mission and became politically active. Those groups of Muslims who became politically active began giving an ultimatum to others. Their call was, “Accept Islam,

if not submit to Muslims by paying Jazia or be ready for a battle.” It is not uncommon to find the traces of such insolence present in some Muslims and groups of Muslims in our own times.

Sarah pointed out that it is in this context that the members of the CPS earnestly pray to God Almighty that they fulfil their missionary responsibility as mandated to them by the prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him.

It is wonderful to meet missionaries of other religious traditions, as we Christians know the centrality of mission in our lives, ‘bearing witness to the Risen Lord and to the coming of the Holy Spirit’. One may recall what the renowned Zen Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh said about dialogue: “In dialogue, we allow what is beautiful, peaceful and meaningful in the other to transform us.” Paul McKenna, who is engaged in interfaith dialogue for many years adds his comment: “Through dialogue, the best in you has the capacity to bring out the best in me”.

Sarah pointed out the rationale for submitting to God by presenting the creation plan of God as understood by Muslims. Firstly, God created the whole universe. Human persons must meditate upon the beauty of creation, recognize that creation declares the glory of God, and grow in gratitude. Then the Qur’an declares that humans, upon recognizing these blessings, should ‘submit to God’. The Arabic word for ‘submit’ is *tuslimun*, a term that can also mean ‘become Muslim’. Secondly, she noted that God created human persons with an innate desire for eternal bliss. Human beings would find bliss in paradise where they would be free from all limitations and disadvantages, free from fear, pain and all imperfections. As imperfect human persons we cannot enter the garden of eternal life. We must perfect ourselves by undergoing many a trial.

The world is a testing place. God has placed all of us in the world to bear witness to God, follow his commands and go through a period of trial on this present and imperfect world, thus preparing ourselves for the Judgement, explained Sarah. Human persons

must remain steadfast in testing times, trusting God and obeying God's will in their lives, she continued. Thus human beings will be ready to stand before God, expecting the reward of a life of eternal bliss, trusting God's mercy, for God decreed mercy upon himself (Q. 6. 54).

As we Christians reflect upon this sharing of Sarah, we recognise that there is a profound difference in the Christian understanding of 'eternal bliss'. The Church teaches that God in his goodness and wisdom revealed himself, and made known his will, that through Christ, the Word made flesh, human beings may in the Holy Spirit have access to God the Father, and come to share in the divine nature (cf. D.V., no. 2). Edwin pointed out that clarity on profound differences is integral to any sincere dialogue.

In conclusion, it was felt that differences need not become sources for conflict but rather enrich us mutually, and shape our lives towards bending our will to the will of God in all circumstances.

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

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

# Isa Webinar Responds to the Question: How Do Muslims Interpret the Qur'an?

*Joseph Victor Edwin SJ*

In my classes on *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, I am often asked “Do Muslims interpret their Scripture? Recently, I asked the questioner, what was at the back of his mind while asking this question. He was candid. He said: “I think that Muslims do not interpret the Qur'an. They want to follow their scripture, a medieval text, without interpreting it in accordance with the times in which we live. I think this is the root cause of the backwardness of Muslims”. I reflected upon his comment and found two concerns raised by him. One is about interpretation of the Quran and second the backwardness of Muslims of India. He connected both as cause and effect. I suggested that he goes through the Sachar Committee Report

(<https://www.minorityaffairs.gov.in/WriteReadData/RTF1984/7830578798.pdf>) which would give a clear picture of the status of Muslims in India. Regarding interpretation of the Qur'an, I suggested that we have a conversation about how Muslims understand and interpret their Scripture.

Our conversation began by noting some of the profound differences in Muslims' understanding of the Qur'an from the way Christians understand the Bible. Christians often think about the Qur'an as they think about the Bible. As Chapman writes: “While Christians see all the books of the Bible as inspired Scripture, they do not believe that the process of inspiration was such that every single word was dictated to the writers. They believe that these writers were thinking about what they wrote, each with their own style of writing, but that the Holy Spirit of God was at work in their minds.

The letter of 2 Timothy, traditionally attributed to the Apostle Paul, describes the Old Testament in these words: ‘... the holy Scriptures ... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ

Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed (theopneustos) and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness...’ (2 Timothy 3. 15-16). The second letter of Peter describes the process of inspiration in the books of the prophets in these words: ‘...prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along (pheromenoi) by the Holy Spirit’ (2 Peter 1.21; ‘men they were, but, impelled by the Holy Spirit, they spoke the words of God’ NEB).

Christians therefore think of Scripture as both the Word of God and the words of human beings at the same time. They believe that the minds of the writers were fully active as they received the message that God communicated to them. God was at work in their minds as they wrote. The Word of God has come to us in and through the words of the human writer. Although the human element in the process of revelation means that people wrote within their normal limitations, it does not mean that what they wrote is not true and reliable” See: C. Chapman, *The Bible Through Muslim Eyes and a Christian Response*, Grove Biblical Series [Cambridge: Grove Books Limited, 2008].

The Qur’an, in contrast is a relatively short book revealed by God to Prophet Muhammad through the agency of Gabriel. The holy book refers to the method of revelation in Surah ‘Destiny’ (Q. 97). “We sent it down on the night of the destiny”. For many Muslims the Arabic text evokes the heavenly origin of the book. God did not inspire Prophet Muhammad. He sent down the glorious Qur’an that existed eternally in a guarded tablet (Q. 85: 14–15). It is, therefore, clear that the Bible and the Qur’an are understood differently by each of the communities that revere them as holy books.

Recognizing the differences between the Bible and the Qur’an helps one to answer the question: How is the Qur’an interpreted by Muslims? The Islamic Studies Association organized a webinar to discuss this question. Dr. Herman Roborgh, the head of the School of Philosophy and Religion at Minhaj University Lahore in Pakistan

addressed this question during the webinar “Interpretation of the Qur’an – New Approaches”.

Dr. Herman pointed out that the Holy Qur’an consists of three different types of texts: texts about the Unseen (*al-ghayb*), historically oriented texts and the texts using symbolic language (parables, *mathal*). Furthermore, he pointed out two different types of interpretation: the textualist (literal) interpretation and the contextualist interpretation. Textualists rely on three principles to interpret the Qur’an namely, the text as the fixed foundation for *tafsir* (interpretation and the belief that Islam is the complete religion and thus there is no need for further elaboration, justification or clarification based on reason. He further said that the textualist-literalist approach to *tafsir* based on philology was dominant in Sunni Islam in the pre-modern period. A more flexible approach today considers the socio-historical context of revelation.

Dr. Herman pointed out that Muslims agree that there are three levels of meaning in the Qur’an, namely: the linguistic meaning (based on the Arabic language, the use of dictionaries etc.), the historical meaning (the use of words in their historical setting), and the contextual meaning (understood from the micro and the macro context of the verses). The meaning of the Qur’an according to modern interpretation is the combination of these three levels of meaning. Since meaning emerges from the relationship between author, text, recipient (or listener) and context, the meaning of the Qur’an will change as these elements change.

Another important aspect connected with the interpretation of the Qur’an is ‘abrogation’. We read in Qur’an (2. 106): “Any revelation We cause to be superseded or forgotten, We replace by something better or similar” (Q. 2.106). In the past, many scholars thought that this verse referred to the replacement of certain verses of the Torah and Bible by those of the Qur’an. In contrast, Fazlur Rahman and other modern interpreters of the Qur’an hold that the former scriptures were revealed by God and, therefore, could not have been abrogated.



Dr. Herman also highlighted the contribution of Indian scholars like Shah Waliullah (India, d. 1762) who rejected *taqlid* (blind following of the ancestors) and advocated *ijtihad* (independent judgement); Sayyid Ahmad Khan (Aligarh, India, d. 1898) who welcomed Western scientific and rational ways of thinking and rejected the possibility of miracles; Muhammad Wahiduddin Khan (India, d. 2021) who stated that the findings of modern science confirm the meaning of the Qur'an.

Further, Dr. Herman pointed out the some of the outstanding contribution of scholars like Taha Husayn (Egypt, d. 1973) who argued that the Qur'an was not an objective source of history; Amin al-Khuli (Egypt, d. 1967), who called for a literary approach to the Qur'an without any other considerations; Hamiduddin Farahi (India, d. 1930), who recognized the existence of coherence (*nazm*) in the shorter Surahs of the Qur'an; Amin Ahsan Islahi (Pakistan, d. 1997), who developed the ideas of Farahi into a complete commentary on the Qur'an (*Tadabbur-e-Qur'an*) in which he found coherence (*nazm*) in every Surah of the Qur'an; Amina Wadud, b. 1952 and Fatima Mernissi, d. 2015, who both brought feminist concerns to bear upon the interpretation of the Qur'an and argued that the ethico-legal content of the Qur'an about women must be interpreted in the light of the socio-historical context of the time of revelation and of the contemporary period of history. According to these authors, the Qur'an's message about women had been lost in the subsequent patriarchal society that developed after Prophet Muhammad.

The webinar was informative and enabled the participants to know and appreciate the approach of modern Muslim scholars who stress the importance of the context in order to understand the Qur'an. In this way, the webinar attempted to provide an answer to the question posed at the beginning: "How do Muslims interpret the Qur'an?"



## **Taj Mahal: A Spiritual Text that Awakens Human Conscience**

**(A reflective report on a webinar on the “*The Spirituality of Taj Mahal*” by Professor Michael Calabria OFM)**

*By Joseph Victor Edwin SJ*

Prof. Michael Calabria OFM unveiled the spiritual dimension of the Taj Mahal by reading the monument as a ‘holy text’ in a webinar organized by Islamic Studies Association on 8 January 2024. He told the listeners that Taj Mahal is not only a monument of love but also a spiritual testament of Emperor Shah Jahan, an elegant expression of his Islamic faith that he approached sincerely but lived out imperfectly. Taj Mahal, he emphasized, is a spiritual text that awakens human conscience, and teaches that obedience of God cannot exclude care for the poor.

Fr. Michael is a Franciscan, serving the Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies as its director at St. Bonaventure University, NY, USA. He holds a Ph. D in Islamic Studies from the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter, UK. He speaks widely on various aspects of Islam and Islamic culture including the Qur’an, Islamic spirituality, art and architecture, and Christian-Muslim relations.

Calabria studied the Qur’anic inscriptions carefully and closely and published his findings in a book titled: *The Language of the Taj Mahal – Islam, Prayer and the Religion of Shah Jahan* ( I.B. Tauris, 2021). He shared the fruits of his research as presented in the book at the webinar. He informed the listeners that Shah Jahan chose 14 complete chapters from the Holy Qur’an (249 verses) for calligraphic inscription on the monument. His aide Amanat Khan decorated the monument with those verses selected by the emperor in exquisite calligraphy and made the Taj one of the most beautiful Muslim monuments.

The *Davwaza-i-rauza*, the gateway to the Garden where the Taj stands majestically, invites the visitor to pause and prepare to enter garden complex. On the gateway the verses from the chapter of al-Fajr (“the Daybreak”) is inscribed. The verses of Al-Fajr are intriguing, multivalent, and rich in theological and spiritual meaning. The name of the chapter reminds the visitor of the start of a new day (a new life symbolically) following the long dark night of fear and struggles. The entire Taj Complex is marked by this ‘rising and setting’ of human lives that come from God and return to God. While being pilgrims in this world, God speaks to the hearers (through the verses of al-Fajr) and reminds them ‘care for the poor and needy’ make their spirituality authentic. Within the Taj Mahal, the context for this reminder from the Almighty is the time of Emperor Shah Jahan whose reign faced terrible famine in which millions perished. Shah Jahan fed the hungry people with great generosity. This reminder continue to be relevant even today. It is said 16.3% of Indians are undernourished and India ranks 107 out of 121 nations in the global hunger index. Though India has registered impressive economic growth in recent decades but it fares poorly on UN human development indices (cf. Global Hunger Index). One is reminded of what the Bible says with regard to the care for the poor: What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead (James 2:14-17). The ‘gate’ appeals to us ‘not to forget the poor’. Recently Pope Francis in a letter to a major archbishop in India wrote: “I urge you especially to remember the poor, and those in most need”.

Those who obey God have nothing to fear as God assures that he brings the dead back to life. (Q. 36. 12) and welcomes the worthy

ones to ‘enter paradise’ (Q. 36. 26). Who are the ‘worthy ones’? Those who cared for the poor are worthy people who would enter the garden of eternal life. The Qur’an accuses those who turned their face away from the poor as ungrateful people and they are unworthy of entering into the paradise. Ingratitude is giving devotion to someone else not to God and to his commands. Similarly, in the Bible we read about the final judgment.

### **The King tells:**

“‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me’””

Then, Calabria drew the attention of the listeners to the inscriptions on the central dome of the mausoleum. Shah Jahan chose three chapters (nos. 67, 48 and 36) that proclaim the sovereignty of God. God has power over everything. The Qur’anic verse on the cenotaph reminds the visitor that God forgives our sins. We must be humble and seek his forgiveness. The cenotaph indicates that the bodies of the queen and the emperor were interred in the floor below. The queen’s cenotaph reminds the visitor all must one day rest in the great silence of the grave where we wait in patience for God’s mercy who forgives our sins and gives us everlasting life.

When the visitor comes gets out of the monument in the gate way through the verses from chapters 93 and 95 the visitor is once again reminded of the dawn of his/her life with a warning do not turn your face away from the poor (Tobit 4. 8).

Michael Calabria's presentation on Taj Mahal beautifully highlighted spiritual and religious significance of the monument for the emperor Shah Jahan but also for a devout visitor who has time to dwell deep into the meaning of the life and to develop sincere solidarity with the poor. Taj Mahal while as a monument of love enraptures the heart as a holy text it invites the visitor for a personal examination of conscience reminding them 'not to forget the poor' while being a pilgrim in this world preparing oneself to stand before God. With awareness for greater solidarity with the poor one enters into the garden where the Taj Mahal stands.

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

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

# Sharing Interfaith Experiences In India

*By Joseph Victor Edwin SJ*

## **Fostering respect between cultures**

In January 2024, I had the privilege of teaching two courses in Bangalore, India. The first course was on Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations at the Jesuit Formation Centre in Theology (JFCT), and the second course was on Muslim Faith and Practices for the Missiology students at St. Peter's Pontifical Institute. In keeping with the teachings of my late mentor, Paul Jackson SJ, I organized meetings between Christian students and local Muslims to promote interfaith understanding. These meetings were facilitated by Dr. Zakaria Abbas and included visits to the Shia place of worship Babul Hawaej and Shia Centre Aza Khana, where we met with local Shia Muslims.

The main objective of this gathering was to create a platform where Christian students could obtain an accurate understanding of the Muslim faith and practices, straight from the source. Our Muslim friends were kind enough to share their knowledge and experiences with us. In addition to that, the meeting was intended to highlight the current struggles faced by Muslims in India today. On the other hand, it was also an opportunity for Muslims to learn about the Christian faith and way of life by attentively listening to their Christian friends.

As Christian students, we follow the teachings of *Nostra Aetate*, which stresses that the Church does not ignore any truth or holiness present in other religions. We hold in high regard and appreciate the ways of life, principles, conduct, and teachings of other religions, even if they differ from our own. These teachings usually reflect a glimpse of the Truth that enlightens all people. If you happen to visit a Muslim institution, mosque, or dargah, you will be astounded by their warm hospitality and kindness towards Christian visitors. Hospitality is a crucial aspect of Islamic culture, and those who have Muslim acquaintances can confirm this fact.

## **Prophet Muhammad, and his family, belong to the posterity of Abraham**

Shia Muslims believe that Prophet Muhammad and his family are descendants of Abraham. They consider that the family of Muhammad was the chosen one of God and superior to all other people. According to a devout elderly Shia Muslim friend, after Abraham, the succession was divided into two lines: one through Ishmael and another through Isaac (whom Muslims call al Imran). The line of Isaac ends with Jesus, whose birth and disappearance (not death, as Muslims believe that God lifted Jesus to heaven before he could be crucified) are miraculous. The line of Ishmael continues through Abd al-Muttalib (the grandfather of Muhammad) and then bifurcates again through Abd Allah (father of Muhammad) to Muhammad and through Abu Talib (uncle of Muhammad) to Ali ibn Talib. These two lines are reunited through Lady Fatima (daughter of Muhammad) by her marriage to Ali ibn Talib (Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law). The lineage of Ishmael continues with the eleven holy Imams and concludes with the twelfth Imam Muhammad al Mehdi, whose birth and disappearance are also miraculous like that of Jesus. According to Shia belief, both Jesus and al Mehdi will return at the end of the world before the Day of Resurrection. Shia Muslims believe that Jesus will follow the 12th Imam, and both will lead the people.

### **Babul Hawaej: Replica of the tomb of Hazrat Abbas**

We arrived at Babul Hawaej to a warm welcome. Inside, we found a replica of the tomb of Hazrat Abbas, one of the martyrs of Karbala. Dr. Zakaria Abbas gave us a brief overview of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn and his companions. They sacrificed their lives for the sake of truth, following the guidance of Prophet Muhammad. Dr. Zakaria told us the story of Hazrat Abbas, one of Imam Husayn's cousins, who risked his life to bring water to the children in Imam Husayn's camp. The enemies had cut off the water supply, leaving the children thirsty and crying. Shia Muslims commemorate the sufferings and martyrdom of Imam Husayn and his companions

during the month of Muharram each year. What is the significance of the Karbala martyrs' suffering and how does it relate to the present day?

### **The Significance of Karbala Martyrs' Suffering**

In his article "The Karbala Tragedy and Suffering in Shia" in the volume titled *Making Sense of Suffering: Theory, Practice, Representation* (edited by Bev Hogue and Anna Sugiyama) Mehmet Celenk explains that within the Muslim world, the concepts of Shia and redemptive suffering are closely linked. This connection has been established since the martyrdom of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Husayn, on the battlefield in 680.

Muhammad al-Baqir (d. 732) and his son Jafar al-Sadiq (d. 765) were the fifth and sixth imams of Shia Islam. They developed a proper Shia theology based on the pre-existence of Husayn and his sacrifice. Husayn sacrificed his life for the sake of humanity. After this sacrifice, the Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fatima, and the twelve imams became the intercessors and intermediaries for all who showed them love.

The followers of the Ahl al-Bayt, or "people of the house of the Prophet," have been weeping and lamenting for centuries, turning this practice into an established religious system. The timeless suffering of Husayn and the Karbala martyrs still hold great significance today. Every tear shed brings Shi'ites closer to Husayn and God, connecting them to the past and present. The Shia's infliction of suffering is seen as both a proof of love for the intercessors and a participation in al-Husayn's eternal martyrdom, thus making these sufferings redemptive.

Classical Sunni Islam does not believe in the idea of a savior who acts as a mediator between God and humankind, nor does it support the concept of intercession that could influence the salvation of humanity. However, the martyrdom of Husayn during the battle of Karbala, the political isolation of his followers, and their close association with other minority groups, particularly Christians, led to the development of a Shia theology that explores the meaning of



suffering and its impact on the afterlife. The exploration of finding meaning in suffering provides an opportunity for deeper theological conversation between Shia and Christians.

### **A Christian Reflection: God suffers in Christ**

Abraham Joshua Heschel, a Jewish theologian, presented the idea of the Divine Pathos. This concept raises the question of whether the divine is capable of suffering. Michael A. Chester reflected on Heschel's ideas and drew attention to the distinction that Heschel makes between the biblical "God of Pathos" and the Hellenistic "Absolute". Heschel contrasts the religious responses to these divine concepts in terms of the "religion of sympathy" and the "religion of apathy", which are found in Hebrew and Greek thought, respectively. According to Heschel, the biblical view of God has been distorted in both Jewish and Christian traditional theology by interpreting God in the categories of Greek philosophy. This has resulted in a separation of God from humankind and the world. Heschel's concept of the Divine Pathos is based on the contrast between "Hebrew" and "Greek" thought.

Heschel writes:

The idea of divine pathos has also anthropological significance. It is man's being relevant to God. To the biblical mind, the denial of man's relevance to God is as inconceivable as the denial of God's relevance to man. This principle leads to the basic affirmation of God's participation in human history, to the certainty that the events of the world concern Him and arouse his reaction. It finds its deepest expression in the fact that God can suffer (The Prophets, vol. 2., Harper and Row, New York, 1962, p.269).

### **The Passion of Christ is celebrated in the Eucharist**

Christians believe that Jesus Christ was crucified. According to the Qur'an, Jews claimed to have killed and crucified Christ, but the verse denies that they did so. Instead, it suggests that it was made to appear to them as if they did (Q. 4:157-58). However, all four gospels affirm that Jesus was crucified, stating the central truth that 'They crucified him' (Mark 15:24, Luke 23:33, John 19:18, and

Matthew 27:35). Jesus died on the cross, and God raised him from the dead (1 Corinthians 6:14).

The Passion of Christ is presented to us through word and sacrament in the Eucharist. Through this celebration, Christians are reminded of Christ's suffering and death on the Cross. Through his passion, death, and resurrection, Christ has reconciled us to one another and God. Our faith is renewed as we acknowledge that God was involved in this historical event. If God was not involved, then there would be no redemptive activity emanating from Christ's death. Therefore, Christ's suffering is seen as the passionate suffering of God, who suffers from the overflowing love of his being. Without God's involvement, Christ's passion would only be a human tragedy, and God would remain a distant, cold, uninvolved, and silent heavenly power.

The Christian faith teaches us that the Tripersonal God works together to deal with the extreme sinfulness of the world through Christ's passion. The paschal mystery of Christ delivers human beings from the slavery of sin. Additionally, Jesus' reception of a new and indestructible life from God reveals the infinite mercy of God the Father. The Cross is the most mysterious way that God has communicated with us in human history to offer salvation.

## **Conclusion**

The martyrdom of Imam Husayn in Karbala and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ are significant events in the history of Shia Muslims and Christians respectively. During our meeting with our Shia friends in Bangalore, we realized the importance of listening to each other's faith convictions with compassion. It's not about changing the other person's beliefs but loving them unconditionally. When we love someone, we feel free to respond to the truth and conviction of the other. Dialogue teaches us that compassionate listening is integral to reconciliation and building communities across borders.



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