

Islam and Mission

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SEDOS

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It encourages research and disseminates information
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Editorial



Dear Readers,

On 12th of March this year, SEDOS organized a “Spring Session” on the topic of *ISLAM and MISSION*. Due to the ongoing pandemic it was organized as an on-line Seminar, a webinar, this meant that we were not able to see and hear the Speakers live. However, it gave many more people the opportunity to join in the event, also from outside Rome, even from far away countries, such as Asia and Africa; places where the dialogue with Islam is an especially “hot” topic.

In this Bulletin we have gathered the talks of the Seminar, and printed them in the order they were given. The flow of the Seminar was prepared with the help of Fr. Markus Solo, SVD, and Fr. John Mallare, CICM, both well qualified to deal with this difficult topic. The lead idea was to have two Speakers in the morning: a Christian about mission in Islam, and a Muslim about mission in Christianity. The result was that Fr. John Mallare, who has just graduated in Arabic and Islamic Studies at PISAI, Rome, spoke about the concept of *da‘wah*, and Dr. Aan Rukmana, professor at the Paramadina University in Jakarta, Indonesia, about his experience of Christians. The first talk was very scientific, the second very friendly. These two talks were introduced by Fr. Markus Solo, SVD, who is in charge of organizing the dialogue with our Muslim Brothers and Sisters, in the Vatican structures.

The afternoon session was devoted to our missionaries working in the field. Fr. Victor Edwin, SJ, gave the opening lecture. He spoke on how he tries to encourage the dialogue with Islam through teaching and other activities in India. Since both religions experience a similar situation in India today, this helps the two to co-operate. This talk was followed by three testimonies.

Sr. Jeanne Lokalola, ICM, who lives and works among Muslims in Podor, Senegal, gave the first one. She spoke in a very lively and happy way about her work there, and had even prepared a short video of a dialogue with one of her Muslim friends. The video can be viewed on the SEDOS website.

Fr. Thomas Hendrikus, CICM, gave the second talk. Fr. Hendrikus works in Antwerp, Belgium, to help the Diocese and its Christians to dialogue with Islam. He has many contacts with Muslims in Belgium and these encounters enable him to transmit in an honest and dialogical way their faith and religious practice.

The third Speaker was from Pakistan, a Lasalle Brother, Zafar Daud, FSC. His work is the formation of catechists. One of the main aspects of this formation program is to ensure the correct understanding of Islam because the catechists are the “front-liners” in the dialogue. If the catechists can show the parishioners the importance of dialogue, peace can be maintained in a country in which the Catholic population is a real minority.

The last Speaker we had invited was White Father Diego Cucarella, M. Afr, Director of PISAI. He knows what it takes to train missionaries to become “heralds” of dialogue with Islam. Dialogue has to be paired to Christian witness. This balance is a fragile one, but when dialogue is carried out with love and wisdom, the partner in dialogue will readily forgive some “imbalances” in the encounter.

We have added one more article, concerning the obstacles that arise in dialogue with Islam, namely an online talk Fr. Christoph Roucou gave a few weeks ago at an Interreligious Dialogue event organized by the IRD Committee of the USG-UISG in Rome. The article summarizes well the different aspects that come into play when we talk about mission and Islam.

Markus Solo Kewuta, SVD

Islam and Catholicism

Towards a Dialogical Mission



Fr. Markus Solo, SVD works at the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Vatican City

Prologue

At the beginning of my reflection on “Mission in Islam and Catholicism” which is the common topic of today’s seminar, allow me to raise a few difficult questions as a point of departure: Are Islam and Catholicism missionary religions? What does mission mean? Is it imposing one’s own faith on others? Can there be dialogue between missionary religions? How can Catholics and Muslims understand their missions in the contemporary world to serve peace and unity?

No doubt that both Christianity, including Catholicism, and Islam are missionary religions. Both can look back on the history of their expansions to various parts of the world, which commenced more than 2,000 years ago for Christianity and more than 1,400 years for Islam. Various historical sources and contemporary witnesses hold diverse experiences in their personal and collective memories.

If Christianity were not a missionary religion, it would never have left Israel, where it was born, to be present in the entire world. If Islam were not a missionary religion, it would not have been possible to expand beyond the Arabian Peninsula; it would never have taken the way through the Balkans and into Europe, from Africa to Spain and France, from the silk road that started in Asia Minor to China and finally to the rest of Asia.

Without going into the details about the spreading of these two great world religions, it is important to acknowledge that both religions have always had a strong missionary nature which perdures to this day. Yet, our path into the future depends on grasping how each of them understands the nature and purpose of mission. It is also crucial to know how Muslims and Christians seek to present this understanding of mission to others. In fact, Islam and Christianity use different methods and terms, but also have some commonalities.

The Burden of History

Generally speaking, the Christian term “mission” faces much skepticism among Muslims, in part because mission is associated with past colonialism. It is a historical fact that in some parts of the world, the rise of nationalism and religious radicalism during the colonial era went hand-in-hand. Today, anti-colonialism propaganda is still used and instrumentalized to trigger hatred, discrimination and intolerance towards minority Christians in various parts of the world.

This is based on the argument that Christians are colonial minions, and Christianity is the religion of western colonialists. This attitude is due, among other things, to the history of missions in the period of colonialism, tragically marred by the linking of “the 3G” (gold, glory and gospel), as the saying goes. Also, some Muslims mistakenly claim that Western is, automatically, Christian, and Christians outside Western environments are, therefore, foreigners with no right to exist.

In some other parts of the world, Christian mission is considered with suspicion as a strategy for converting people who do not believe in Jesus Christ. This misunderstanding happens along with lack of knowledge about various denominations within the Christianity, leading to a short-sighted generalization that all people who believe in Jesus and wear the cross are one and the same. It is imperative that this be corrected, because various denominations have different understandings and practices of mission based on different interpretation of the sending commissions initiated by Jesus and recounted in the Holy Bible.

In Islam, *da‘wah* is the rough equivalent of mission in Christianity. *Da‘wah* activities are aimed, in some parts of the world, to counter and neutralize Christian missionary efforts. In Indonesia there is, for example, the Muslim Muhammadiyah mass organization that claims around 50 million followers in the country and preaches an orthodox Sunni Islam. It was established on 12 November 1912 in conscious resistance to Christian influences at the same time, and it imitated methods of social assistance used by Christian missionaries. Theologically, *da‘wah*, however, does not play nearly as important a role in Islam as mission does in Christianity, where it is one of the basic theological principles. I will return to this key difference momentarily.

Catholic Mission: Post Conciliar Paradigm Shift

The reality of mission in the Church is based on Jesus’ commandment in the last chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. Its practice has evolved over time, up to the present moment, which is imprinted by the paradigm shift of the Second Vatican Council.

Jesus ended His three years of proclamation by instituting the universal mission that He Himself gave to the disciples, and thus to Christians in all generations. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time” (Matt. 28:18-20).

The Second Vatican Council’s Document on Mission Activity, “*Ad Gentes*,” states the very nature and goal of the Catholic Missions, saying: “*Divinely sent to the nations of the world to be unto them “a universal sacrament of salvation,” the Church, driven by the inner necessity of her own catholicity, and obeying the mandate of her Founder (cf. Mark 16:16), strives ever to proclaim the Gospel to all men*” (AG 1).

Furthermore, quoting from article 6 of the Document “*Ad Gentes*:” “*Missions is the term usually given to those particular undertakings by which the heralds of the Gospel, sent out by the Church and going forth into the whole world, carry out the task of preaching the Gospel and planting the Church among peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ... The proper purpose of this missionary activity is evangelization*” (AG 6).

The Document also emphasizes clearly the missionary character of the Church, explaining “*The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father*” (AG 2).

Therefore, from the beginning, Christians have tried to fulfill this mission of Jesus in various ways, and they continue these efforts today. If they did not, they would be unfaithful to the mission of Jesus. The Church firmly believes that Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh and Son of the Father, has an absolutely unique role in the salvation of the world. Christians are continually being called by God Himself to continue Christ's saving mission.

Two things stand out here: First, the mission of the Church is strictly based on theological grounds and derived from the inner-trinitarian sending process. Secondly, mission is not an additional task of the church that can be assigned arbitrarily among its members; rather, mission is an essential characteristic of the community of followers of Jesus and is included in the comprehensive task of the church, a salvation-mediating sign of relationship with God and the unity of the entire human family. It finds its concrete form in the proclamation of the Gospel everywhere on earth. Christian mission is the evangelization of peoples. Accordingly, "evangelization" is the new name of the Christian mission today. Developing the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI elaborates on this theme in his Apostolic Letter *Evangelii nuntiandi* of December 8, 1975.

According to this ground-breaking Letter, missionary activity and preaching consist initially of a "testimony without words." (cf. EN 21) Evangelization takes place through the lives of Christians, inspired and based solely on love and truth. Through testimony without words, the Christians awaken in the hearts of those who see their lives irresistible questions: "Why are they like this? What - or who - is it that inspires them? Why are you with us?" Indeed, such a testimony is a silent but powerful and effective preaching of the Good News.

This new paradigm is, in fact, different from the way the Church had usually understood and practiced missionary activity before the Second Vatican Council. However, this way of the evangelization is rooted in the Gospel,

as we see in the parables of the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5,13-16), and of the leaven (Matt. 13,33). Because it is based on love and fraternity, it is truly effective. It is, in a nutshell, about the efforts of the disciples of Jesus to be, as expressed in "*Ad Gentes*," "*one with men of every condition, but especially with the poor and the afflicted. For them, the Church gladly spends and is spent (cf. 2 Cor. 12:15), sharing in their joys and sorrows, knowing of their longings and problems, suffering with them in death's anxieties. To those in quest of peace, she wishes to answer in fraternal dialogue, bearing them the peace and the light of the Gospel*" (cfr. AG 12).

Following this paradigm, mission in the Catholic Church is neither forced conversion nor proselytism, neither imperialism nor hegemony, but a life testimony and acts of charity in the spirit of Gospel, carried out in respectful way, keeping the inviolable human dignity of every person, personal freedom and human rights.

In fact, mission in the Catholic church is inseparable from inculturation, which denotes the presentation and re-expression of the Gospel in forms and terms proper to a local culture. It results in the creative reinterpretation of both, without being unfaithful to either. Evangelization respects culture as part of the human phenomenon and as a human right. The Church is aware that the manipulation or oppression of culture is, therefore, an abuse. The Church is much more convinced, and it is its real experience, that the preaching of gospel is enriched by the adaptation of the values of Gospel with the local cultural elements. This helps people to recognize that the Good News of God has to do with their concrete life. Imposing foreign cultures and way of life incorporated in the religion into a local culture will create social segregation, alienation and lead, at the end of the day, to a new colonialization in the name of religion.

To conclude this section on a new paradigm of mission, one could say that the Catholic Church has a code of conduct concerning missions, based on at least the following

three documents of the Second Vatican Council:

First:

The Second Vatican Council's Decree on the Mission Activity of the Catholic Church, *Ad Gentes*, gives a sound explanation about the reason of its missionary activity emphasizing particularly on the principle of divine love, saying: "*Christian charity truly extends to all, without distinction of race, creed, or social condition... For as God loved us with an unselfish love, so the Church is also one with men of every condition, but especially with the poor and the afflicted... sharing in their joys and sorrows, knowing of their longings and problems, suffering with them in death's anxieties. To those in quest of peace, the Church wishes to answer in fraternal dialogue, bearing them the peace and the light of the Gospel*" (AG 12).

Secondly:

Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra aetate*, says: "*The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions.... "The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men*" (NA 2).

Thirdly:

Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae*, emphasizes that freedom of religion is to be granted to all equally (DH 6). By saying this, the Catholic Church renounces every kind of proselytism and forced conversion which are against human dignity and human rights.

Islam and Da'wah

The discourse on "mission" in Islam is linked to the term *da'wah*. The Arabic word *da'wah* (دعوة; plural *da'wāh*) expresses the sense of "call" or "invitation". It derives from the verb *du'ā'*, which means "to call" and leads to word "*dā'ī*, the active participle form which means "one who calls or invites".

The most quoted qur'anic verse to legally authorize *da'wah* is Surah al-Nahl (16,125) "Invite all to the Way of your Lord with wisdom and kind advice, and only debate with them in the best manner. Surely your Lord 'alone' knows best who has strayed from His Way and who is 'rightly' guided". *Da'wah* is, therefore, an invitation to goodness or to something good.

In conjunction with the meaning of Islam, which is surrender or submission to Allah, *da'wah* is understood to mean inviting someone to the way of submission and surrender to Allah.

As a matter of fact, there is no single meaning of *da'wah* in Islam. It can mean merely sharing information, inviting Muslims and non-Muslims, as well (centrifugal), towards a better understanding of the Islamic faith, leaving it up to the listeners to make their own choices. *Da'wah* can also indicate efforts of believers (centripetal) to help fellow Muslim better understand the Islamic teachings (as represented mostly by the contemporary Muslim scholar from Egypt Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) and his Syrian disciple, Rashid Rida (1865-1935). Lastly, there are the outward efforts through territorial expansions to convert others to Islam. The latter seems to be represented by traditional-conservatives who are a tiny minority within Islam.

Muslims, generally, do not like to talk about Islamic "mission" because God's messengers (missionaries) are understood to be the most important prophets, not every Muslim believer. With the sending of Muhammad, the "seal of the prophets" (*khatam an-nabiin*, Sura 33,40) and the revelation of the Koran

(*al-nuzūl al-Qur'ān*), the divine mission has come to an end.

Nevertheless, Islam is a “missionary” religion in the sense that it is designed to spread. It claims universal validity that “most people do not know”, as we read in the *qur'an*: “We have sent you 'O Prophet' only as a deliverer of good news and a warner to all of humanity, but most people do not know” (Surah Saba 34:28). Its goal is the establishment of the Islamic order all over the world and over all areas of life. This is accomplished through “*tabligh*” (preaching), “*khutbah*” (sermon), “*nasehat*” (advices), and “*fatwa*” (a formal ruling or interpretation on a point of Islamic law, given usually by a Mufti). Some scholars tend to categorize the ways of *da'wah* under two forms of “*jihad*”, which are the minor and major efforts for the cause of Allah (*fī as-sabīlillāh*).

“*Da'wah*” is a form of *jihad*; both major and minor *jihad*. In the context of Islamic law, “*Da'wah*” is the call or invitation to individuals or groups of people to accept Islam or to submit to Allah. According to the Islamic understanding, they are asked to return to Islam, since all people are actually born as Muslims. As mentioned above, Surah An-Nahl 6,125 speaks about a general invitation to all, but with wisdom and kind advice.



Being together and dialogue with a Jewish Rabbi and a Sikh Leader

Towards A Dialogical Mission

The future mission and *da'wah* activity of Christians and Muslims need to move from rivalry to dialogue in two ways: first, among the Christian and Muslim missionaries (*dā'ī*) in the mission areas; secondly, between the Christian and Muslim missionaries and the local people. The transformation from rivals to partners in the mission depends on the understanding of interreligious dialogue for both partners. Both Christians and Muslims define interreligious dialogue as an encounter in an atmosphere of freedom and openness, to promote, develop and enhance good relations and sincere friendship. It involves the attempt to listen to the other and to understand his/her religion in a respectful climate, hoping to find opportunities for constructive collaboration.

It is our common understanding that a genuine dialogue is not a one-way street, but a reciprocal communication on the basis of three principal elements: openness, listening and active participation. This understanding emphasizes a fundamental aspect: learning from each other. People who enter into encounter keep in mind that the partner of dialogue has something good to offer and something valuable to share.

Learning from the other is the result of listening with open mind and open heart, perception, and respect. Claiming truth and questioning the position of the other in an oppositional way will not be pre-eminent if mutual understanding is to flourish.

However, an honest questioning on the informative level can help to clarify the message and avoid misunderstandings. The questioning in dialogue neither leads to denying the truth claim of the other, nor to emphasizing or relativizing one's own claim to truth. Rather, the competition of the truth claims become the starting point for interreligious learning.

A clear reference for interreligious learning can be found in the Council document *Dignitatis humanae*: “Truth, however, is to be sought after in a manner proper to the dignity of the human person and his social nature. The inquiry is to be free, carried on with the aid of teaching or instruction, communication and dialogue, in the course of which men explain to one another the truth they have discovered, or think they have discovered, in order thus to assist one another in the quest for truth. Moreover, as the truth is discovered, it is by a personal assent that men are to adhere to it”.

(*Dignitatis Humanae* 3)

Learning from each other could raise the question of whether one’s own revelation or religious truth is basically incomplete. It is just a matter of learning through others and from other religions, what would have been learned in one’s own religion, but has not been learned. It must first be assumed that every revelation has its full claim to truth. God is perfect, but man is not. Human limitedness in understanding God’s revelation should make him or her more aware about the importance of mutual learning and enrichment on the path of life towards the absolute truth. All believers are Truth seekers, not finders of the Absolute Truth.

Here are some examples of *reciprocal learning*:

- Muslims help us better understand the importance of prayer, fasting and almsgiving in everyday life;
- Hindus urge us towards meditation and contemplation;
- Buddhists give us witness to detachment from material goods and of respect for life;
- the disciples of Confucius encourage us to respect elders and ancestors and to exercise filial piety;
- Taoists accompany us in the search for simplicity and humility;
- the followers of non-Christian religions also find aspects of Christianity that can help their own spiritual growth: the concept of a God who has human face, a God who calls us by

our name, a God who is interested in our lives and who became a man;

- the unity and universality of the Catholic family, spread throughout the world, holds open the door of hope and spreads love without exceptions.

Islam strives, as taught by *al-Qur’an*, to do good and to avoid evil (*amr bi al-ma’rūf wa al-nahī ‘an al-munkar*, Surah 4:110) or to compete in good things: “So compete with one another in doing good” (Surah 2:148). Based on mutual learning, Christian and Muslims are partners in the mission, sharing good with people by respecting their rights and inviolable dignity.

In this sense, mission and *da’wah* have to be dialogical which means that our faiths encounter the local or indigenous cultures, habits, customs and faiths in an atmosphere of openness, mutual respect, and understanding. We strive to communicate the Good News and the commandments of God to others without compulsion and any kind of violence, keeping in mind that dialogue cannot replace mission nor can mission replace dialogue. (cf. *Redemptoris Missio: On the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate*, Pope John Paul II, 7 December 1990).

The Catholic Church states clearly in the Document “Dialogue and Proclamation,” published by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in 1991, that dialogue and proclamation are very closely linked to one another: “Both “are authentic elements of the Church’s evangelizing mission... intimately related, but not interchangeable” (DP p. 208). The dialogical method of the mission will enhance the sincerity of the reasons of our missions, support reciprocity in giving and receiving for mutual knowledge and enrichment.

Some Concluding Remarks

As we pursue this challenging dialogic method, there are several bedrock principles to keep in mind that lead to best practices.

First, both the Bible and the Qur'an speak of God as the One calling and sending, and the believers as the ones responding actively and obediently. Having this in mind, both Christians and Muslims must allow God to be in the center of the missionary activities and deny all kinds of human interests. Neglecting God's supremacy in the mission will lead to the instrumentalization of mission for private agendas that will destroy relations with God and others.

Secondly, the future of Christian-Muslim relations requires a decolonization of the mind and the creation of a new mental map in which Islam and Christianity increasingly co-exist in shared geographical, cultural, social, economic and political spaces. The Document "*Human Fraternity for Peace and Living Together*," signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of al-Azhar, *Dr. Ahmad al-Tayyib*, pleads with us not to use the terms "majority" or "minority," because in front of the law each and every person is a full citizen of the same country with the same rights and duties. Moreover, labelling Muslims as Arabs and Christians as Westerners is incorrect and divisive.

Thirdly, Christian mission and Islamic *da'wah* should not utilize self-serving apologetics by addressing the weak points in other religions or quarrels and hostilities from the past, but, as emphasized by the Document *Nostra Aetate* "*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*" (NA 3).

Fourthly, Christians and Muslims are called to liberate people from various kinds of oppressions and miseries. Our mission becomes more authentic when we can give people back their freedom and their dignity as human beings, created and loved by God. This is an urgent need, as more than half of the believers of both religions live in the so-

called third world, shadowed by bitter poverty and illiteracy.

Fifthly, each religion is by nature exclusive, based primarily on truth claims about the way of salvation. Nevertheless, the mission and *da'wah* should never misunderstand the concept of pluralism. Pluralism does not mean that all religions are equal, that all religions have the same truth, or even that the truth of each religion is relative. Instead, it acknowledges two fundamental facts: *first*, there are various religions and each religion has its own truth; *secondly*, despite various paths towards God, the eternal Truth, each and every seeker of God has equal rights. Pluralism is, therefore, not another word for theological or practical syncretism.



Celebrating the Diversity in Mazara del Vallo, the first place of arrival of Muslim in Sicily

Epilogue

The various biblical and qur'anic sources I have quoted above underline that our religions are about beauty and salvific transcendence, and not about violent ideology against people's freedom and human dignity. On the contrary, our religions can transform the whole of human life in respectful and reasonable ways.

Both sides should learn from each other for mutual enrichment and for common efforts to serve people with all their vulnerability, but not the other way around, in order to make the other an enemy or a stumbling block. It is important, from time to time, to re-clarify and re-assert our goals and our

methodology in order to be loyal to our respective mission and *da'wah* activities entrusted by God.

The Catholic Church, through the Second Vatican Council's Document *Nostra Aetate* states: "*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...*" (NA 3). One of the salient commonalities between the Christianity and Islam is the belief in oneness of God (*at-tauhīd*). Various passages of the Holy Bible speak about the oneness of God and the salvific existence of the trinity (see *Isaiah 44:6, Isaiah 45:5–6, Galatians 3:20, 1 Timothy 2:5*). The Apostle Paul explains in the first letter to Timothy: "*Now there can be an intermediary only between two parties, yet God is one*" (1 Timothy 2:5). And the Qur'an mentions very clearly in Surah al-Ankabut 29,46 that we, Christians and Muslims believe in one God: "*Do not argue with the People of the Book unless gracefully, except with those of them who act wrongfully. And say, 'We believe in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to you. Our God and your God is 'only' One. And to Him we 'fully' submit.'*" (*Wa illāhuna wa illāhukum wāhid*: Our God and your God is 'only' one).

The Church is, however, aware that the theological differences among Christians and Muslims have contributed, in the course of history, to misunderstandings and destructive polemics. But for those dedicated to peace, there is no other way to deal with theological divergences than respectful acceptance, and understanding that differences are part of the exclusivity of religion. More than that, Christians and Muslims are requested to move from endless theological debates towards spiritual and moral improvements of the faith of each believer.

We all are aware that in various parts of the world, many Christians and Muslims are still not able to move on from suspicion about the religious teachings and practices of others, towards the discovery of spiritual commonalities that enrich and open the gate

for mutual respect and collaboration, to jointly give the testimony of love, hope and life to the world what the world really needs, particularly in this period of the health crises due to the pandemic of covid-19.

God the Almighty has given us all, through revelation and the voice of conscience, the sacred duty to stand up for justice and peace everywhere, to eradicate human misery, to combat poverty, to promote education, to foster the virtue of brotherhood, to cultivate the integrity of His creation, called by Pope Francis in his Encyclical Letter "*Laudato Si'*," our common home, and thus to contribute to a more human world according to God's will. It is God's call to each of us and it is our missionary duty to respond to Him in a free and conscious way (cf. *the Message of Pope Francis for World Mission Day, 31 May 2020*).

One day we will have to give an account before God as to whether we have fulfilled our mission together, as we are only divided by the way we believe, yet united in His Oneness. And we will have to give an account of whether we have given a credible witness about faith in Him to the many people who do not believe in God, or whether we have created walls, divisions, conflicts and wars. May God, the All-Loving and Almighty, God of mercy and reconciliation, purify our hearts and minds, keep us away from every temptation to instrumentalize or to abuse God's name in every mission and *da'wah* activity in the world, and help us be His channel of peace, justice, and truth for the good of the entire humanity.

I offer my sincere thanks to the Director of the SEDOS, Rev. Fr. Peter Baekelmans and his Team, and all the coordinators, for inviting me to address you. Thank you to all for your kind attention.

The Concept of Mission in Islam (*Da'wa*)



Fr. John Mallare, CICM (second from left), with professors of Dar Comboni Institute for Arabic Studies in Cairo, Egypt

Introduction

I would like to greet everyone participating in this Webinar. I thank SEDOS, through its executive director, Fr. Peter Baekelmans, for inviting me to talk on “**The Concept of Mission on Islam: *Da'wa*.**” This is a rather difficult theme to explore, since it is usually a Muslim who should explain this, but I took up the challenge and I hope to explain this, with the background knowledge I have.

I owe much of my explanation to David Kerr, Professor of Non-Western Christianity in the University of Edinburgh, who wrote an article entitled “Islamic *Da'wa* and Christian Mission: Towards a Comparative Analysis,” written “as part of an international research project of Christian theologians concerned with the future of Christian theological education in Muslim societies.”

Kerr highlights that “both Christianity and Islam are missionary religions; yet, little scholarly attention has been given to the comparative study of Christian mission and Islamic Mission (*da'wa*).” It can be recalled that in 1976, the *International Review of Mission* devoted an issue to “Christian Mission and Islamic *Da'wah*,” a product of a week-long dialogue conference by Muslims and Christians in Chambésy, Switzerland.

1. The Meaning of *Da'wa*

The Arabic word *da'wa* expresses the sense of “call” or “invitation”. It comes from the verb *da'a*, meaning “to call”. The active participle is *dā'i*, meaning, “the one who calls or invites”. It is here now where the question arises: Does *da'wa* correspond to “mission” and *dā'i* to “missionary”? While in Arabic, these concepts imply a centripetal movement (“calling into”), mission implies a centrifugal movement (“sending”). Here, we can call to mind what Pope Francis said in *Evangelii Gaudium*: “The Church which goes forth.” Catholic mission is one of being sent, especially to the peripheries.

2. *Da'wa* in the Qur'an

The verb *da'a* occurs frequently in the Qur'an:

- sometimes, **its subject is God**. For example, “God *calls* to the Home of Peace (*dār al-islām*), and He guides whom He pleases to a straight path.” (Q 10:25)
- sometimes, **the subject is the Prophet**. For example, “...the Messenger *invites* you to believe in your Lord.” (Q 57:8)
- frequently, **the subject is the people of Faith who call upon God**. For example, “They *cry* unto God, making sincere their religion unto Him.” (Q 10:22)

The noun *da'wa* occurs several times in the Qur'an, in the reciprocal senses of:

God's **call** to humankind and
the believer's **call** or **prayer** to God.

Kerr explains that the *locus classicus* of the verb *da'a* is found in *Sūra al-Imrān* (Q 3:104). He quotes two versions of the same verse:

“*And there may spring from you a nation (umma) who invite to goodness, and enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency. Such are they who are successful.*”

(Maramaduke Pickthall,
The Meaning of the Glorious Koran, 78)

“Let there arise out of you a band of people (umma) inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong: they are the ones to attain felicity.”

(Yusuf Ali,
The Meaning of the Holy Qur’an, 154)

These two varying translations reflect two different interpretations of the words preceding the phrase “inviting to all that is good.”

The **first** treats the whole community as the subject of “inviting,” i.e., *da’wa* is a collective responsibility.

The **second** interprets community in a restrictive sense of a “band of people”, or a “sub-group” that undertakes the responsibility of “inviting” on behalf of the rest of the community.

Kerr adds that the difference turns on the force of the Arabic preposition *min*: “from” or “out of.” It can either generalize “you” (as in “you all”) to mean the whole community, or particularize “you” (as in “some of you”) to mean a section within the community as a whole.

3. *Da’wa* in Classical Qur’an Commentary (*Tafsīr*)

Muslim commentators have been debating on the exegetical distinctions mentioned above. Roest Crollius, in an article entitled “Mission and Morality” in *Studia Missionalia* 27/1978 (257-83), reviewed ways in which Muslim commentators have interpreted the phrase “inviting to goodness,” in association with two other phrases which commonly occur: “enjoining what is right” (*amr bi’l mar’uf*) and “forbidding what is wrong” (*nahy ‘an al-munkar*).

There is a need to clarify the meaning of the phrases “enjoining what is right” and “forbidding what is wrong,” since these determine the content of *da’wa*. These two phrases frequently appear as counterparts in the Qur’an, denoting the norms of belief and ethics, which comprise the Islamic way of life: *belief in the unity of the one God*, and *obedience to God’s divinely revealed commands and prohibitions*.

These phrases constitute the core of the Qur’anic message of ethical monotheism, and indicate that “inviting to the good” involves the interrelated dimensions of “right faith and right conduct.” In Crollius’ words: They “describe an attitude and a way of acting that are characteristic of Islam both as a religion and as a social reality.”

The Qur’an applies these same phrases to other religious communities, notably the “People of the Book”, i.e., Jews and Christians who received divine books / scriptures before the revelation of the Qur’an. We quote:

“Of the People of the Scripture there is a staunch community who recite the revelations of God in the night season, falling prostrate. They believe in God and the Last Day, and enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency, and vie with one another in good works. They are of the righteous.” (Q 3:114)

Crollius suggests that this combined ethical injunction, *enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency*, represents the Golden Rule of Islam, which he compares to that of Christianity: “Do unto others as you would have them do to yourself.” (Mt 7:12; Lk 16:31)

Considering all these, **who has the responsibility** of “inviting to the good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong?” There are **two opinions**:

First: This responsibility **belongs to the entire Muslim community**, as seen in *Q 3:110*: “You are the best community that has been raised up for humankind. You enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency.” This interpretation is rather **idealist**.

Second: This responsibility **could be delegated** to an individual or group that would act on behalf of the community as a whole. This is a more **pragmatic** interpretation.

During the medieval Caliphate, an officer known as the *muhtasib* was appointed by the Caliph “to see that the religious precepts of Islam are obeyed, to detect offenses and

punish offenders.” His duty was to act as a censor of morality in the public domain, ensuring that times of public prayers (*salāt*) were duly observed, or that the hours of fasting (*siyam*) were respected during the month of Ramadan. The modern equivalent of this today is the “religious police” in Saudi Arabia.

This institutionalization of the responsibility of “inviting to the good” shows that the classical commentators generally interpreted the duty of *da‘wa* as applying within the Muslim community. Among the earliest commentators it is only **al-Tabari** who specifically dealt with *da‘wa* outside the Muslim community, especially in relation to Jews and Christians.

It should be noted that classical exegetes generally distinguished *da‘wa*, in the sense we have discussed, from *jihad* that applies to the territorial expansion of the Caliphate. *Jihad* denotes “striving in the way of God”, with the purpose of bringing God’s cause to success through “opening” non-Muslim territories for Islam. These were to be administered as “territory of Islam” (*dar al-islam*), theoretically by the Muslim ruler consulting Islamic religious authorities in matters of policy.

A further distinction is drawn between extending this territorial and juridical concept of *dar al-islam* and converting non-Muslims within its domains. The former is a religious duty, and “enjoining what is right and forbidding the wrong” applied among Muslims within the *dar al-islam*.

As regards non-Muslims the qur’anic injunction that “there is no compulsion in religion” should apply, that is, the “people of scripture” administering themselves according to their own laws. As a result, non-Muslim conversion to Islam has tended to be by a gradual process that has been termed “social conversion.”

4. *Da‘wa* in Modern Qur’an Commentary

While classical Qur’an commentary favors an intra-Muslim understanding of *da‘wa*, **modern exegesis shows lines of both**

continuity and change. Among the most influential commentators of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were the Egyptian Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) and his Syrian disciple, Rashid Rida (1865-1935). Abduh was a professor at the al-Azhar University in Cairo where he lectured on qur’anic exegesis. Rida recorded and published these lectures in his periodical, *al-Manar*, and later produced them, which stands as a monument of the Salafiyya school of modern Islam, which seeks to rejuvenate Islam by returning to the authority of the “righteous forebear” (*salaf al-salih*) in the faith. As a modernizing movement, the Salafiyya movement has always encouraged *ijtihad* or reinterpretation of these historic precedents through rational and critical appraisal of the conditions and needs of modern society.

A good example of this is found in *al-Manar*’s interpretation of “*inviting to the good*.” Respecting the idealism of early Islam, it favors the inclusive interpretation of “inviting” as the duty of the whole Muslim community. It is a general duty that “each individual should keep before his eyes.” At the same time, *al-Manar* goes on to specify that *da‘wa* is also “the task of a group (*ta’ifa*) who are especially prepared for it.”

The two interpretations are reconciled as follows: “If, according to the first way of explaining the verse, each individual Muslim is under the obligation to call to what is good, to order equity and to forbid iniquity: according to this second interpretation, they are under the obligation to choose from their midst a society to fulfil this task, so that it can well take care of it and is capable of executing it, when this task is no longer fulfilled spontaneously, as it was in the line of the first Companions.”

In other words, the duty of *da‘wa* **used to be fulfilled by the entire community** in the time of the Prophet, when the righteous forebears “were living in perfect solidarity, and each one of them felt the same urgency to spread and defend Islam and to oppose everything that could detract from its

doctrine, morality, juridical regulations or the interest of the people.” **Under modern conditions, this duty should be undertaken by a specialist group**, although it is incumbent upon the rest of the community to support this group in fulfilling a duty that is binding on all.

Abduh and Rida stressed the duty of *da’wa* within the Muslim community. But they introduce a new emphasis, which sees the aim of *da’wa* being to renew the faith of the community. *Da’wa* thus becomes an important means of religious revival, and it is this sense that has been developed by several ideologically driven reform groups during the 20th century.

Another new direction emphasized in the Manar is for *da’wa* to non-Muslims, and especially Christians. This returns to the point made by the classical commentator, al-Tabari, who lived at the end of the period identified with the righteous forebears.

Abduh and Rida were much concerned with defending Islam against the challenge of Christian missionaries. They drew a direct link between evangelization (*tabshir*) and imperialism (*isti’mar*), both of which they saw as inimical to Islam. The

al-Manar repeatedly offers a rational defense of Islam against Western imperialism and secularism and the perceived irrationality of Christian faith - the latter being characterized by belief in miracles, the power of the church, the renunciation of the world, belief in the sufficiency of the Bible as source of all knowledge, and discord among Christians.

Rida devoted more energy than Abduh to answering Christian missionaries. In addition to his contributions to al-Manar, he wrote a small book on *“The obscurities of Christians and the Proofs of Islam.”* The book is interesting in that it articulates a significant principle that has been taken up in some later Muslim discussion of Christianity. Rida wrote: *“The*

Christian religion itself does not contradict the Islamic faith; it is rather the Christians themselves who seek to contradict it. The incontrovertible proofs and contentions against them (i.e., the Christians) are not the Muslims who themselves have become an argument against their own religion. Rather, these proofs belong to the Islamic religion itself.” This quotation makes clear the reasons why, for Rida, the duty of internal *da’wa* is the **purification of the Muslim community.**

5. Organized *Da’wa*

There are forms of organized *da’wa* that emerged during the 20th century of which we can identify three whose proponents are the following:

1. Rashid Rida (1865-1935): Early attempts to actualize *da’wa*
2. Maulana Ilyas (1885-1944): *Tablighi Jama’at*
3. Abu al-‘Ala Mawdudi (1903-1979): *Jama’at Islamī*

I do not intend to enter into the details of each form, but will just give the main ideas.



Fr. John Mallare, CICM (3rd from right, standing) and Fr. Jean-Marie Ntumba, CICM (5th from left, standing), on a courtesy visit to the Imams and Muslim religious leaders, in Sebikotane, Dakar, Senegal

Rashid Rida (1865-1935)

He rallied for the creation of a *da’wa* college in Istanbul, the seat of the Caliphate but he failed to convince the Ottoman authorities. Nevertheless, his efforts were not put to waste as the Al-Azhar University later

established department of *da'wa* and *irshad* (guidance).

It was fortuitous that his efforts coincided with the renewed efforts among Western Protestant Missionaries to organize Christian mission. Despite his seemingly small effort, Rida infused *da'wa* with a new dynamism that has inspired later generations.

He designed a curriculum that is inspired by *Salafiyya* principle that reflected that of the Qur'an and Sunna, but he also gave equal importance to inter-disciplinary studies on the social history of Islam, geography, psychology and political science, which were rather new for Islam.

He insisted that *da'wa* employ other languages other than Arabic, so that Muslims could match the skills of Christian missionaries "who learn the languages of all peoples."

He emphasized the moral education of the *dā'i* ("missionary"), as well as stressing *jihad*- not the military *jihad*, but the greater *jihad*, which is the *jihad* of inner spiritual and moral improvement.

For Rida, *da'wa* is the vocation of individuals who form themselves into a voluntary association on behalf of the whole community. It should be supported by the public authorities, but must be exercised as a spiritual commitment.

Maulana Ilyas (1885-1944)

He belonged to the Sufi tradition of Islam in India. Sufism emphasizes the interiority of Islam with attention to the internal purification of the soul (*nafs*) and mystical experience of God.

Founded the *Tablighi Jama'at*, which has grown to become one of the largest mass movements in modern Islam of *da'wa* in India and worldwide. Its name contains its basic commitment which is *tabligh* ("preaching"). Its more popular name is *Tahrīki Iman* ("Movement of Faith").

His preaching is based on **5 spiritual principles** which is the code of piety:

- ① Sincere repetition of the testimony of faith (*shahada*); i.e., affirmation of the sovereignty of God and the servanthood of Muhammad;
- ② Regularity of Prayer;
- ③ True knowledge of God's commandments;
- ④ Kindness and respect for all humankind;
- ⑤ Sincerity of Intention and constant vigilance against consternation.

He travelled and visited places to train preachers and develop skills of rural preaching. **For him, it is the duty of all Muslims to preach, and a few volunteers should always be ready to offer to leave their homes to travel to distant place for striving in the path of Allah.** He emphasizes on direct preaching by ordinary people to ordinary people. They would either visit mosques and preach in groups or do person-to-person preaching.

He believed in the **firm distinction of coercion vs. persuasion** and ruled out the former. He also prohibited his followers from engaging in politics as part of their *da'wa*.

Abu al-'Ala Mawdudi (1903-1979)

The *Salafiyya* movement has influenced the rise of other ideologically-orientated renewal movements in the 20th century, prominent among which are the Society of Muslim Brothers (*Jama 'at al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun*) in Egypt, and the Society of Islam (*Jama 'at -Islamī*) in Pakistan.

Though a scientific study of their understandings of *da'wa* is still much needed, a summary reading of their literary productions suggests that, during the middle decades of the century at least, they adjusted the al-Manar's balance between intra- and extra-Muslim *da'wa* in favor of the former.

This started in 1982 when an Institute for *da'wa* and *Qira'at* (Qur'anic recitation) was established in the recently founded Islamic University. When the University was re-chartered as the International Islamic

University in 1985, the Institute was given autonomous status as the Academy of *da'wa* and the Training of imams. The institute had a plan to develop an integrated approach to national and international *da'wa* although both dimensions relate primarily to intra-Muslim activities within Pakistan, and to international cooperation with like-minded *da'wa* groups in other Muslim countries. The government, itself committed to a policy of islamization, is called upon "to utilize their existing administrative machinery for the propagation of Islam."

These aim to cultivate a *Salafiyya* outlook among participants, and with it a sense of belonging to a transnational movement that is committed to renewing Islam worldwide.

It is in this context that the need for *da'wa* outside the Muslim community is recognized: the importance of strengthening effective *da'wa* in countries where Muslims experience religious pluralism, especially as Muslim minorities.

The plan seeks to professionalize *da'wa*, with a strong emphasis on *da'wa* training that combines *Salafiyya* teaching and interdisciplinary studies, and the creation of a popular *da'wa* literature using vernacular languages and English as the main international medium of communication. The plan envisages *da'wa* as a means of renewing the faith of the community as a whole, through the dissemination of *Salafiyya* ideology. This in turn envisages the re-unity of all Muslims in the spirit of nascent Islam.

6. *Da'wa* and Christianity

The Muslim debate about Islam and Christianity has produced a wider diversity of opinion in the late 20th century, as Muslims, like Christians, face old question of religious pluralism in new ways.

THREE MAIN APPROACHES OF ISLAM DA'WA TO NON-MUSLIMS:

The SUPERCESSIONIST approach

This extends the qur'anic principle of "abrogation" (*tansikh*), which allows a later verse to abrogate the authority of an earlier one, to the history of religion. Therefore, **the authority of revealed religion in one age is abrogated by a later revealed religion, and ultimately the qur'anic revelation of Islam abrogates the authority of all religions.** In this case, Christianity has been superseded, and insofar as it continues to exist after the revelation of Islam, it can only be regarded as a corruption of the original teaching of the Prophet Jesus. Muslims believe that Jesus foretold the coming of Muhammad. "*Good tidings of a messenger to come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad.*" (Q 6:61) With this approach, Christianity and Islamic *da'wa* have no relationship. One of its proponents, Sayyid Qutb, leading ideologue of the Muslim brothers, advised Muslims to keep no contacts with Christians.

The REVISIONIST approach

The revisionist position is theologically more accommodating. It is essentially the Salafi position, which we have already identified with Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida. It looks at all religions through the qur'anic perspective of *din al-fitra*, "natural religion." This recognizes a natural disposition in all creation, inanimate and animate, to exist in obedience to the Creator. **Revealed religion is therefore consistent with nature, and Islam - the final revealed religion - represents the complete harmonization of religion and reason in the life of the Islamic *umma*.**

True Christianity is likewise based in natural religion. It also was confirmed by revelation, **but the truth of the gospel (*Injil*) has been corrupted by the malpractice of generations of Christians whose superstitions have obscured the rationality of the gospel.** It is the duty of *da'wa*, therefore, to bring Christians back to their original truth. Once this revision has been achieved, they will need no persuasion to accept the truth of the Qur'an and convert to Islam.

Rida emphasized in his book that it is essential for intra-Muslim *da'wa* to reform Muslims themselves and return them to the proper practice of Islam.

The ECUMENICAL approach

The ecumenical position takes essentially the same approach as that of the revisionist, **with the difference that it does not require Christians who return to the pure faith of the gospel to convert to Islam.**

This is to take a twice-repeated verse of the Qur'an at face value: *"Those who have faith, and those who are Jews, Christians, and Sabeans - whosoever has faith in God and the last day and performs good deeds -these will have their reward with their Lord. No fear shall come upon them, nor will they grieve."*

Supercessionists interpret this verse as being historically contingent, referring to Jewish, Christian and Sabeian contemporaries of the Prophet Muhammad who accepted his prophethood. Revisionists interpret the verse to mean that religious pluralism is a phenomenon of history, but insist that it does not negate the duty of *da'wa* to "invite" all religions to confessional acceptance of Islam. Since other religions include people of good faith and conduct, they emphasize that Islamic *da'wa* should always observe the Qur'anic injunction to *"call unto the way of your Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and argue with them in the better way."*

The ecumenical interpretation, on the other hand, sees this verse as endorsing religious pluralism in principle. The late Palestinian American scholar, Professor Isma'il al-Faruqi, stated this position with clarity in his presentation on *da'wa* at the 1976 World Council of Churches' colloquium on "Christian Mission and Islamic *Da'wa*." *Da'wa*, he wrote, "is ecumenical par excellence."

For the first time it has become possible to hold adherents of all other religions as equal members of a universal religious brotherhood. All religious traditions are *de jure*, for they have all issued from and are

based upon a common source, the religion of God which He implanted equally in all men. This does not give license to lazy ecumenism (in al-Faruqi's words "kitchen cooperation"), however. Al-Faruqi opposes relativism among religions, and propounds a view of *da'wa* that draws Muslims and non-Muslims into a dialogue of mutual self-criticism in what he likens to "a domestic relationship between kin." Within this relationship, *da'wa* invites "an ecumenical cooperative critique of the other religion rather than its invasion by a new truth."

Conclusion

Our discussion of *da'wa* has focused on Qur'anic principles, varieties of Muslim exegesis, and varieties of approach to the re-thinking of *da'wa* and *da'wa* training in the 20th century. Important areas of concern have not been included: for example, the growth of *dakwa* activities in Malaysia and Indonesia, or the state-sponsored *da'wa* of countries such as the Libyan Arab Republic or Saudi Arabia. More research has to be done, particularly in the context of specific regions. But I hope to have given a representative account of *da'wa* discussion among Muslims, with attention to lines of continuity and areas of innovation.

I also hope that by knowing all these, we can Christians can gauge our way of doing mission, and to see if we are really effective in the mission work entrusted to us by God.



Interreligious Dialogue forum organized by Fr. Markus Solo, SVD, and held at the PICD office, Vatican City.

How do Muslims view Catholics?

My Personal Experiences



Aan Rukmana sharing a meal with Fr. John Mallare

It was a very inspiring moment when I had the opportunity to talk with Pope Francis during my short visit to Rome in 2011. We were sharing the same vision about the future of relation between Islam and Catholics. We also talked about the inner part or religion. I still remember when he was saying “we are family under One God”. For me, that short talk was a very special moment, especially for my spiritual journey as a Muslim in understanding the Catholic’s faith.

In the middle of 2010, I got invitation from Sr. Gerardette Phillips to apply the *Nostra Aetate Fellowship* program. I was so glad when my application was accepted by the committee. This program was my first experience to visit Catholic Community and to live among them. During the program I studied comparisons between Islam and Christianity at Georgiana University and at PISAI. After the six months program, I understood Catholics not only from the eyes of Islamic teaching or Islamic Community, but phenomenologically speaking, I know them now better as they are, hearing from themselves.

Here are my first impressions during my encounter with the Catholic Community in Rome:

Firstly, when I was in Rome, I lived among Jesuit Community at Lay Center for Foyer Unitas under Dr. Donna Orsuto’s supervision. Almost every day I talked and shared the ideas and the feeling with the Catholic students. The most valued moment that I had was dinner’s time. At that moment we talked deeply from heart to heart about our daily activities. I felt so honored and respectful when all of my Catholic friends offered me the non-alcohol drinking like juice, mineral water etc. The way how they treat me was very touching and it was opening my eyes, my mind and also my heart.

Secondly, my first encounter with my respectful friend, Fr. Markus Solo Kewuta. I can see and feel the beauty of Catholic teaching from him. Fr. Markus showed me the true friendship and the true love among believers. His love to God represents his love to all human beings. We have been doing together the translation to the Indonesian language of the letters from the Pope to Islamic community at the occasion of the Ramadan since 1967 to 2002. I still remember when we had lunch together. At that time, I felt little bit sick, and I could see how worried he was. This is actually the true friendship that we have. Even though we came from very different background, in term of different faith and belief, but we can still work together and enjoy the differences as the blessing from God.

Thirdly is my meeting with Fr. John Mallare. When I studied at PISAI I met many friends from Catholics who were studying Islamic theology. One of my best friends is Fr. John Mallare. We discussed many things about the relation between Islam and Catholics and also the future of their relation in Indonesia and Philippines. The problem we had been facing in Indonesia and Philippines is mostly similar; it was regarding the issue of integration between Islamic Community and Catholic Community. After I finished the program at PISAI, our communication continued until now. My involvement at SEDOS Spring Session 2021 as speaker is

one of the results of our true friendship.

From Dr. Donna Orsuto, Fr. Markus and Fr. John Mallare I can see the beautiful face of Christianity. I see Christianity and Islam have similarity in term of the heart of religion. If we can go deeper into the heart of religion we can see Catholicism and Islam are religions with the same mission to tell the world about the Sacred in this life. The Sacred exist in love, friendship, tolerance and fraternity. "If we hate someone, we will not have time to love him or her" as Mother Teresa said. Thank you!

The following prayer authored by Christian, Jewish and Muslim clergy was used in many places in inter-religious worships around the time of the Gulf War in 1991:

***Eternal God, Creator of the universe, there is no God but You.
Great and wonderful are Your works, wondrous are your ways.
Thank You for the many splendored variety of Your creation.
Thank You for the many ways we affirm Your presence and purpose,
and the freedom to do so.
Forgive our violation of Your creation.
Forgive our violence toward each other.
We stand in awe and gratitude for Your persistent love
for each and all of Your children:
Christian, Jew, Muslim,
as well as those with other faiths.
Grant to all and our leaders attributes of the strong;
mutual respect in words and deed,
restraint in the exercise of power, and
the will for peace with justice, for all.
Eternal God, Creator of the universe, there is no God but You.
Amen.***

How Can Christians And Muslims Work For Peace in India?



Fr. Victor Edwin during a visit to a Shii Madrasa.

Introduction

The pulsating life of the Indian Union is preserved by sustenance drawn from the diverse religious, cultural and linguistic roots of the diverse peoples of India. This *togetherness-of-diversity* was sanctified when we, the people of this nation, resolved to adopt and enact the Constitution of India (adopted on 29 November 1946 and enacted on 26 January 1950) that framed India as a Sovereign Social Secular Democratic Republic with a parliamentary system of governance.

The idea of India is underpinned by the idea of 'one and the many'. A metaphor may serve us well to visualize the idea of India: India is like a *mosaic*, or like a *plate with several dishes*. Many colours and patterns in a harmonious blend make a mosaic beautiful. Many dishes, different in taste, together make a wholesome and sumptuous meal. Similarly, India, with its enduring differences of creeds and cultures, costumes and customs, languages and ways of life, remains one nation, celebrating diversity without losing the togetherness as one nation. India will flourish if remains faithful to its secular-democratic roots.

This idea of India is expressed in the form of equality of all citizens. All Indians are equal citizens: equal before the law. No one can be discriminated against on the basis of religion, culture or language. In the words of Shashi Tharoor: "India's democracy imposes no narrow conformities on its citizens. The whole point of Indian pluralism is you can be many things and one thing: you can be a good Muslim, a good Keralite and a good Indian all at once." In the same vein, we could say that one can be a good Christian and a good Indian at the same time. Likewise, one can be a good Muslim as well as a good Indian.

This idea of India enshrined in our Constitution is today threatened and breached by right-wing elements that hold the leavers of power now. They are fired by their imagination of a 'Hindu India' underlined by the Hindutva doctrine. Hindutva as a doctrine runs against the very design of the vision of India as a sovereign socialist secular democratic Republic. This truncated vision spreads the poison of communalism and denies equality to millions of Dalits and religious minorities. The Hindutva vision destroys the foundations of Indian democracy. Tharoor affirms: "Hindutva movement rhetoric echoes the bigotry that India was constructed to reject".

Muslims and Christians: Targets of hatred

Religious freedom is under attack, globally. India is no exception, but rather, where these issues have taken vicious forms dangerous proportions often resulting in rioting, lynching and looting. One must pay attention to the assessment done by a professional body like 'The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom'. Commenting upon India, It says: "religious freedom conditions in India experienced a

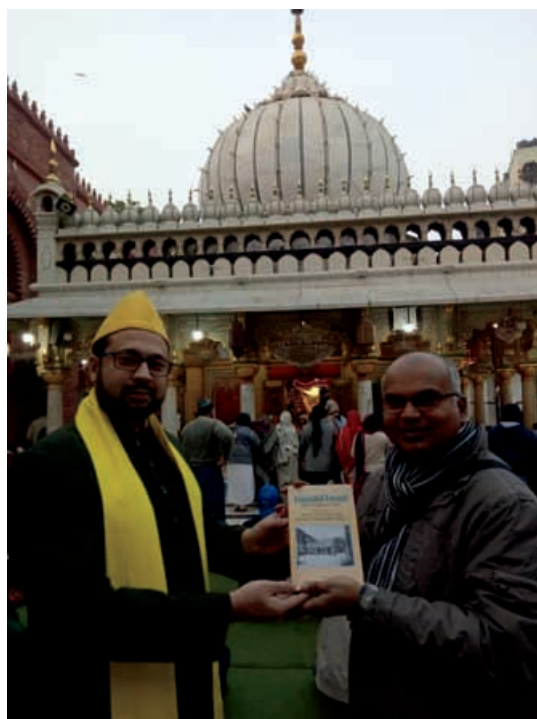
drastic turn downward; with religious minorities under increasing assault ... the national government used its strengthened parliamentary majority to institute national level policies violating religious freedom across India, especially for Muslims. The national government allowed violence against minorities and their houses of worship to continue with impunity, and also engaged in and tolerated hate speech and incitement to violence”.

In a well-researched essay, Asghar Ali Engineer argued that police together with law enforcement machinery, such as the local administration and judiciary, play a crucial role in communal riots. He wrote that riot victims and survivors generally complained that: (1) Police did not come to their rescue; (2) the police forces were themselves instrumental in killing; (3) they led the mob in looting and burning; (4) arrested innocent persons and tortured them inside the lock-up and put false charges against the arrested persons, and (5) encouraged the culprits to do whatever they liked by preventing the members of one community to come out during the curfew and allowing members of another community to do so with impunity (See: Asghar Ali Engineer, “Communal Violence and Role of Police”, *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 29, No. 15 (Apr. 9, 1994), pp. 835-840).

Crimes against Christians have been reported from at least 22 of the 28 Indian states. Besides rape and murder, they include social excommunication, threats, physical assault, setting houses and churches on fire and preventing Christians from using common water sources. “Essentially, to be Indian is to be Hindu. Those who are not Hindu are thus viewed as foreigners and with suspicion. The increase in violence can mostly be explained by the cycle of incitement and impunity often perpetrated by members of the BJP and other Hindu nationalist organizations operating in India,” explains William Stark, the Head of South

Asia at the International Christian Concern NGO.

It is in this context, we, Indian Christians and Indian Muslims need to ask ourselves, how can we work for peace in India? In the face of gradual erosion of democracy and several incidents of atrocities against minorities, especially Christians and Muslims, we must ask: What is the antidote to such corruption that poses a threat to the soul of India? For this, Muslims and Christians must work, drawing from their own resources, with all people trying to protect our secular space and defending the Constitution and our democratic institutions. The Indian Muslims (around 14%) and the Indian Christians (around 2%), two major minority communities, must wisely learn to recognise the need to work together for safeguarding our common future.



Fr. Edwin with Sufi brother Syed Muhammad Nizami

Antidote for Hatred: Commitment to Secular Space

The need of the hour is that both Christians and Muslims should work together with other secular individuals and civil society organizations to strengthen the secular-democratic roots of the country. In this enterprise, we should work with people of diverse faiths and also with people who have no faith affiliation. Our guiding star is the Constitution of India and the Constitutional values that are the connecting glue that binds diverse peoples in our shared respect for the dignity of all persons. There is a galaxy of men and women in the country who toil day and night for defending our Constitutional values. Establishing contacts and working with them is very necessary. The shrinking of the secular space must be stopped, and for that we must work with all who affirm their allegiance to the Constitution of India.

Commitment to Peace

On another level, both Christians and Muslims must recognise that we have another source to draw for this common shared responsibility. They can work together for inter-community peace by drawing from their religious faiths.

Pope Francis, in his recent encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (no. 81), teaches all people of goodwill that the dignity of a human person is preserved by *caring* for the vulnerable and by *overcoming* the many prejudices, personal interests, and historic and cultural barriers people may have for others. Thus, we need to build a society that includes, integrates and lifts up the fallen, marginalized and suffering peoples. In the same encyclical (no. 85), Pope Francis calls all Christians to recognise Christ in every excluded person. Further he calls them to leave the comfort zones and find one's fuller existence in the other (no. 88).

Pope Francis presents 'benevolence and solidarity' as tools to build up fraternal societies. Further, he points out the link between peace and forgiveness. Peace aims at forming a society founded on reconciliation (no.227 - 229). A society that

is founded on reconciliation is underpinned by love and forgiveness: love for all, loving even the oppressor (helping the oppressor to change and not allowing the oppressor to continue oppression); and forgiveness that renounces evil and revenge.

As-Salam ('The Source of Peace') is one of the ninety-nine Names of God in the Islamic tradition. Peace and justice are central to the message of Islam. Muslims understand that peace is not just the absence of war or conflict but a process in which human persons strive to establish a foundation for interacting with all in harmony and to institute just social, economic and political structures where they can fulfill their potential.

The Qur'an, the holy book of Muslims, recognizes diversity of religions as part of God's design for the world (Q 5:48 and 49: 13). Any discrimination among people on gender, ethnic, and religious grounds contributes to conflict. Recognition of pluralism (respect for different beliefs and identities) is essential for resolving conflicts and to establish peace. Muslims recognise that to exist in the world is to live in diversity. They explain that recognizing diversity in the light of the Oneness of God (the central affirmation of Islamic faith) is to live in an interconnected way with diverse peoples. Hence, Islam calls upon Muslims to collaborate with all people of goodwill and actively pursue unity and harmony. Further, Muslims point out that human beings are meant to God's representative on earth and that they are called to contribute work for harmony and to live in peace.

We recognise from this discussion that peace laced with justice is at the heart of both Christianity and Islam, even though both faiths present this aspect of religious conviction in different ways. The desire to contribute for peace in a secular arena is strengthened by inspiration from our sacred sources.

In the secular field, Muslims and Christians as Indian citizens, drawing from their spiritual sources, should engage with other citizens to protect the secular space in order

to ensure peace founded on justice. These two sets of believers must communicate with, and inspire, one another and remain open to inspiration from the other. Such open-ended communication would synergize both of them for commitment to build sustainable peace in India. In the following section I present briefly a model developed by some Jesuit pioneers in dialogue.



Fr. Edwin in the Iranian Cultural Center.

Christian-Muslim Dialogue in India

Before we present the model developed by some pioneering Jesuits, we must briefly state some difficulties that Christians and Muslims face in their interactions with one another. Many Indian Christians, especially after 9/11, look at Muslims indifferently. Some are ignorant of Muslims and Islam, and others often are belligerent in their attitudes towards Muslims. The source of their prejudice is often the media, and, sadly often, hearsay. Often, the present writer has wondered whether the Catholic Church adequately familiarized Catholics with the documents of Vatican II, especially those documents that explicitly talk about Christian-Muslim relations. Rarely one finds Christians who are aware of the Catholic Church's position on Muslims. One positive development must be noted here is that some Christian religious men and women personnel are exposed to Muslim-related issues during their formation years.

Muslim views on Christianity and Christians are restricted to the way in which the Holy Qur'an portrays Christians. In the Islamic

religious vision, Christians have failed to preserve the revelation given to Jesus. Consequently, Muslims believe that Christians have developed religious doctrines which are either irrational or incompatible with faith in the One God. Christian doctrines such as the Trinity, the divinity of Jesus Christ, crucifixion and redemption are dismissed as corruption.

As a result of these and several other factors, religious conversation between Muslims and Christians was often marked polemical debates. It is in this context a new dawn appeared as the 20th century unfolded. **Victor Courtois** broke new grounds in Christian-Muslim relations. He insisted that the study of Islam should lead to greater love for, and better appreciation of, Muslims. He dedicated much of his life to promoting mutual understanding and brotherly love between Christians and Muslims. He published a journal, *Notes on Islam*, to foster better understanding between Christians and Muslims. Following Courtois, **Christian W. Troll** and **Paul Jackson** strengthened and deepened the *Courtois Model* in Christian-Muslim relations in India. They distanced themselves from polemics, began studying Islamic texts with respect and reached out to Muslims with love.

While Courtois anticipated the open attitude of Vatican II, Troll and Jackson, in the light of *Nostra Aetate* and *Dignitatis Humane*, ventured to build bridges between Christians and Muslims without losing their identity as Christians. Their lives were challenged and shaped by both their own faith and that of Muslims. The significance of their life and work emerges from the high level of integration they attained in living as Christian friends among Muslims.

Troll and Jackson contributed to Christian-Muslim dialogue in the area of theology and spirituality respectively. Troll's work on the Muslim reformer Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan remains as a standard academic account. Jackson's translation and commentary on medieval Sufi texts highlighted the spiritual treasures of mystical Islam. While they wrote weighty theological essays in journals, they



Fr. Edwin in a Madrasa in Chennai, India

contributed articles for magazines for average Christian readers to learn to appreciate the Church's teaching on interreligious dialogue. The *Islamic Studies Association* that they had established along with their Christian friends in dialogue with Muslims continues to serve the Indian Church as a vanguard in encouraging dialogue between Christians and Muslims.

One must point out here that we have not found many Muslims studying Christian faith from Christian sources in a non-polemical manner. Indian Muslims must not ignore this dimension of Christian-Muslim relations.

Conclusion

Muslims and Christians as minorities increasingly experience marginalization in India, especially in the last few decades as right-wing forces gained ascendance on the Indian political map. While the Constitution remained a bulwark of secular Constitutional values, this foundation is increasingly being damaged today. In this context, this essay has pointed out that secular individuals and groups must work together for preserving the secular space. Christians and Muslims must fulfill their responsibility in defending the Constitution. Their respective religions have resources to work for peace. Christians and Muslims must draw from these resources to make their work for peace wholesome.

On a second level, Indian Christian and Indian Muslims must speak to one another and discover the beauty of one another's religious faith. Debates and polemics must end and dialogue must begin. Initiatives with regard to Christian-Muslims relations in South Asia may have some useful insights for the rest of the world.

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Always remember to consult Papers #100, #125, and #150 to avail of the comprehensive indexes.

The numbers given refer to the individually numbered papers (not page numbers).

Jim Kroeger, MM

« Que tes œuvres sont belles »

En ce jour où nous totalisons 11 ans de présence au Sénégal, je viens au nom de ma communauté à travers cet article remercier avant toute chose, Père Peter et toute l'équipe SEDOS qui nous ont fait confiance pour contribuer à votre bulletin d'information. Nous allons essayer de faire découvrir à tous les lecteurs et les lectrices, l'aventure missionnaire de Sœurs Missionnaires du Cœur Immaculé de Marie (ICM) avec l'Église locale et le peuple Sénégalais à Podor/Sénégal. Nous avons expérimenté et témoigné de l'amour et de la fidélité de Dieu, Maître de la Mission à travers différents événements quotidiens.

Pour la petite histoire, l'année 1968 marque le début officiel de l'existence de la Paroisse Saint Michel de Podor/Sénégal. En 2018, la Paroisse a célébré son Jubilé d'Or (50 ans) d'existence.

Nous, Sœurs Missionnaires du Cœur Immaculé de Marie (ICM), sommes arrivées au Sénégal (Podor) en date du **13 mars 2010**, c'est le début d'une nouvelle aventure missionnaire. En cette année 2021, aujourd'hui 13 mars où nous publions cet article, nous totalisons 11 ans de présence ICM à Podor au milieu des musulmans.

Que Dieu soit loué!



De gauche à droite: Sœur Nida (Philippines), Sœur Meena (Indienne), Père Roger Shono (Congolais, CICM), et Sœur Célestine (Congolaise).

Ci-dessous, la communauté actuelle en 2021, toujours trois sœurs:



De droite à gauche, Sœur Jeanne (Congolaise), Sœur Elucia (Haïtienne), Sœur (Célestine).

Chers lecteurs et lectrices, permettez-nous de vous partager notre modeste expérience au milieu de peuple Sénégalais à l'extrême Nord, précisément à Podor.

Notre mission est comme « une portion de levure qui fait monter la pâte » ; c'est une mission de présence où on n'y trouve aucun chrétien autochtone. Le Sénégal fait partie des pays islamiques exceptionnels ; on y trouve au sein d'une même famille les chrétiens, les musulmans et les animistes. Chaque jour, nous côtoyons non seulement les Sénégalais mais aussi mes les Mauritaniens qui traversent chaque jour le fleuve pour leurs activités commerciales. En ce moment nos frontières sont fermées à cause de mesures sanitaires.

La spécificité de la mission de Podor réside dans le fait qu'elle fait appel à la capacité d'inventivité ou de créativité missionnaire pour trouver où notre présence peut être utile. Nous sommes appelées, chaque jour, à imaginer des lieux où nous devons rayonner et être des témoins visibles de l'amour de Dieu au milieu de nos frères musulmans. Il y a dans cet effort de chaque jour, la volonté de renouveler la joie d'être frères de tous sans distinction des races, des sexes et des religions.

Dialogue Inter – Religieux: Encadrement Des Jeunes Catholiques Et Musulmans Dans Deux Collèges (Echange Entre Les Parents, Elèves Et Les Imans)

Le dialogue inter-religieux est incontournable dans notre mission. C'est dans tous les aspects de notre vie que nous partageons ce dialogue de vie. Le respect mutuel et l'authenticité de la foi de chacun, nous aide à vivre dans l'harmonie et la complémentarité. Nous exprimons cela dans toutes nos rencontres : Eucharistie, prière à la Mosquée, conférence dans les collèges, réunion avec les parents d'élèves, réunion avec les Imans, rencontre dans le panel, les musulmans qui donnent aux chrétiens les calendriers au début de l'année avec les images de Jésus, etc...La prière est exécutée par un musulman ou un chrétien selon les circonstances.

Le Sénégal est connu comme un pays de : **Paix**, (bien que fragile avec les événements vécus durant ce mois de mars où il y a eu mort d'hommes), d'**Harmonie** et de **Tolérance religieuse**.

Une autre réalité est que le mariage au Sénégal est complexe. Dans le Nord du Sénégal (Podor), nous rencontrons les problèmes ci-dessous :

Le mariage précoce : les jeunes filles de 11 à 13 ans sont forcées de se marier.

Le mariage familial entre cousins germains, résultat le problème de consanguinité.

Le divorce prématuré.

Excision : les filles qui ont été mutilées se sentent marginalisées

Divorce des parents très élevés, familles recomposées, enfants orphelins conséquence l'enfant est pris en charge par la grand-mère, l'oncle, tante...

La fille est privée de la formation, elle doit faire la cuisine, s'occuper des enfants et de la belle-mère surtout dans le village environnant.

Le phénomène des enfants aux villages qui ne vont pas à l'école.

Notre Réponse : Nos joies et défis

La mission du Sénégal répond à notre charisme ICM. Nous allons là où les autres ne veulent pas aller. **C'est la mission de présence.**

Après observation et écoute attentive de la population face à toutes ces réalités citées ci-haut, nous nous sommes organisées pour encadrer **les enfants handicapés, les femmes aux villages** et donner **la formation professionnelle en coupe-couture et Cuisine-Restauration aux jeunes filles marginalisées.**

La plupart des jeunes filles et femmes non scolarisées ou ayant abandonnées les études d'une façon prématuré à cause de mariage précoce.

Chaque année, le nombre des filles augmentent. Nous avons commencé en **2012** avec **3 filles**, en ce moment, c'est-à-dire en 2021, nous en sommes à 70 filles, toutes musulmanes et 1 garçon.

Notre joie est le fait d'être acceptées par la population et de partager dans le respect nos différences.

En plus de cela, la joie de mettre la Femme marginalisée debout lui en donnant un métier:

- Eduquer,
- Former,
- Promouvoir,
- Accompagner psychologiquement tous les cas de détresse et révolte causés par le divorce précoce et l'excision en les aidants pour l'insertion dans la société avec un métier.



Jardin de Sœurs ICM à Podor/Sénégal

LES DEFIS

- L'acceptation et la compréhension de l'autre dans sa religion qui est différente de la mienne.
- L'ouverture dans le dialogue (dialogue de vie).
- La différence dans la façon de concevoir et de faire les choses : exemple en train d'enseigner, un monsieur se met à la porte pour vérifier si nous parlons de Jésus aux élèves ou simplement demander le *saricha* (aumône). Ils viennent prier pour les filles pendant les cours.
- Le temps actuel où dans d'autres pays les jeunes se bousculent pour les études, nous observons certains jeunes à Podor qui abandonnent les études facilement à cause de mariage et la cuisine sans que les parents s'en soucient. Les garçons abandonnent aussi pour paître le troupeau parfois en complicité avec les parents.
- Le grand défi à prendre en considération pour une meilleure adaptation du milieu c'est: **Le climat rude:**

❖ **Grande chaleur**

❖ **Vent de sable/Poussière**

❖ **Harmattan**

A cause du désert, chaleur et climat rude, nous avons pris l'option de planter les fleurs, les arbres fruitiers pour lutter contre le réchauffement climatique. Nous avons fait des pépinières entre autres de papayer que nous avons distribué à la population.

Les images ci-dessous dans notre parcelle à Podor parlent d'elles-mêmes:



Pépinière de papayer



Le cinquième anniversaire de l'encyclique de Pape François survient à un moment décisif, une pandémie mondiale et le message de **Laudato Si'** est tout aussi prophétique aujourd'hui qu'il l'était en 2015. Cette pandémie nous a donné le temps de réfléchir sur notre façon de transformer notre monde là où nous vivons.

Le **COVID-19** une occasion unique de **transformer** les plaintes et le labeur actuels en contractions donnant naissance à une nouvelle façon de vivre ensemble, liés dans l'amour, la compassion et la solidarité, et à une relation plus **harmonieuse avec la nature, notre maison commune**. C'est ainsi que nous avons pris l'initiative au début de la pandémie de coudre les masques.

La remise des masques à la Mairie et à la Préfecture au début de la Pandémie du COVID 19.

Masques confectionnés dans notre atelier de couture. C'est notre contribution à la population pour la lutte contre la pandémie du Coronavirus au Sénégal.

Sœur Jeanne sur un âne conduit par un petit garçon. Cette image démontre combien Dieu seul est à l'œuvre dans toutes nos expériences que nous faisons au Sénégal. Nous comptons toujours sur la Divine Providence. «Allez et l'Esprit vous conduira sur les routes nouvelles.»



MERCI / DJEUREUF

(An English translation of this text can be found on the SEDOS Website)

Called to Human Fraternity



Visit of Fr. Thomas Hendrikus (second from left) to a Mosque in Antwerp, Belgium.

Contrary context

I thought that my desire to work in the field of interreligious dialogue came to an end when I accepted to begin a new missionary adventure in Belgium in 2015, a year after my Arabic and Islamic studies in Rome. A big question came to my mind whether my studies are still applicable here. The only thing that I could say through my limited point of view about Belgium is that it is a country with a long and illustrious history of

Catholicism, where many missionaries, including my CICM confreres, came from and were sent to missions all over the world. This first confrontation brought me to a contrary reality that I have experienced in Indonesia which is the country with the largest Muslim population in the world and where the Christians are a minority and sometimes have difficulties in certain issues in their dealing with Muslims. I always thought that it is probably more reasonable for me to work for interreligious dialogue in Indonesia than in Belgium.

However, after one and half years of preparation in the CICM House in Schilde, I

came to know that the city of Antwerp itself, which will later be our missionary base. Antwerp boasts a remarkable diversity which represents different nationalities, cultures, and religions. This multicultural society is also growing strongly along with its secular characteristics. Everyone is free to express himself or herself in public but not for issues related to religions or religious activities. The crisis brought about by the massive influx of migrants in Europe during the last decade and the concomitant problem of integration have eventually created a need to preserve a national identity in the so-called super-diversity. This multicultural entity becomes more and more divided and polarized. In front of these situations, I need to *see* and experience the challenges and later try to *judge* and *act* (Cardinal Cardijn's method: *see-judge-act*) through the responsibilities bestowed upon me in my pastoral work, especially in interreligious dialogue.

From “Dialogue of Community Life” to “Dialogue of Peace” in the City

Mother Theresa once said that “peace begins at home.” This saying reminds me that doing something valuable must always begin at home or in a community. In our community in Deurne (in the suburbs of Antwerp), we share our religious life amid cultural diversities. Everyone is free to express himself, but we have to respect each other even if we have different opinions about something. Everyone also takes his own initiatives to contribute according to his own capability or his passion to the community and to support one another out of a genuine attitude without pretension and domination. In the community we are actually learning from each other. For example, I learned to be friendly from Ghislain who likes greeting people and asking a simple thing like “How is your day?” I also learned to be more

flexible and available like Fabio who easily adapts to all new situations and conditions around him. Moreover, we are learning authentically to be ourselves in spite of our differences. This *modus vivendi* certainly makes our community more solid and dynamic. Strikingly, it is recognized by people around us who are very curious to know about our community.

This good reputation of our presence in Deurne is seen by Msgr Johan Bonny, Bishop of Antwerp, as another sign of hope for the birth of a new pastoral unity. However, the bishop has warned us that our pastoral work will not be easy for us, especially when we have to deal with local Flemish people. Nonetheless, he gave us his full trust as well as the freedom to find our own way in doing missionary work in Deurne by the witness of our community life among the people, animating them to work together with all basic communities and organizations, and with those adherents of different religions present in our pastoral area. I then focused on my missionary desire to work for interreligious dialogue.

On the one hand, the first reaction to my proposal was very positive. It came from Bart Paepen, the Episcopal Vicar, who was eager to have a project on promoting peace in the city with the Muslims on the level of his vicariate. He recommended me for this kind of work. The preference to work with Muslims has its reasons. The number of Muslim communities in Antwerp is steadily growing every year coupled with the problem of Islamophobia after the suicide bombings in Brussels in 2016. From the beginning, Bart said to me that we would restart this new initiative from zero because there has been no commitment to work for interreligious dialogue with Muslims in the diocese of Antwerp for quite a long time.

On the other hand, I knew that there are many obstacles to start with. First of all, my command of the Dutch language was not yet sufficient. Secondly, I did not know any person who had been long involved in interreligious dialogue. Thirdly, pluralism could create tensions and would make people

live in their respective cultural ghettos if integration did not succeed. To overcome these obstacles, I needed to be determined to do it out of love and believed that there would always be a way to solve every problem.

Think Globally, Act Locally

In the era globalization and the advent of social media, we should know a common principle: “think globally, act locally.” This principle has helped me to carry on my new missionary adventure in Antwerp. According to a survey made in 2019, Antwerp has at least seventy-five (75) Muslim communities, more than in any other city in the entire region of Flanders. We can also find all kinds of Muslims here in Antwerp. They belong to various traditions, namely Sunni, Shia, Ahmadiyyah, etc. They came from different countries, namely Morocco, Turkey, Pakistan, Senegal, Bosnia, Egypt, etc.

To visit and meet them in their respective communities is quite easier than to bring them together; it is a similar problem that I have with our basic communities in our Catholic pastoral unit. But for me it has been the only way as the first step of dialogue: making friends and visiting them as much as possible. And I started this task with my neighbors who belong to our pastoral unit. As a delegate of Belgian Bishops’ conference for the relationship between Muslims and Christians in Flanders (the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium), I did not need to handle these activities all alone around Flanders, because there are many experienced persons or other confreres who



Visit of Fr. Thomas to the Turkish Imam

have been already inspiring and animating people and communities in their place to build a good relationship with Muslims. Fortunately, they are present in almost every province and diocese in Flanders and I take every opportunity to visit them, share with them my own experiences, and learn from them on how they work and deal with similar problems. I am enriched by my regular contact with these people. I have come to know also that every place has its own unique context and the way of working is different from place to place. Despite the differences we are yet strongly connected by a common purpose to promote peace between the two religions (Islam and Christianity) in Belgium. At the same time, we are trying to give positive images of religion in general and avoid all the prejudices against any religion in the society at large. We also strengthen our networking in all Flanders by being in contact with non-governmental organizations or NGO's in the country which share the same spirit, purpose and direction to work for interreligious dialogue, justice and peace; and also to promote cultural diversities. Some of these NGO's are Orbit, Pax Christi, Tau Franciscan, VOEM, ROMC, and Welzijnszorg.

With the same vision and mission, we also started to inspire and animate people in our Pastoral Unity of Saint Christopher (PUSC) in Deurne and Borgerhout *extra muros*, which consists of 14 parishes. There are four Muslim communities around the PUSC: three Moroccan and one Bosnian. In the beginning, it was very challenging and difficult to get in contact with them. I still remember that once I went to a Moroccan Muslim community with one of the colleagues from PUSC. He was shocked because at that time we were rejected and sent out of their mosque in an unfriendly way. This bad experience made me and my colleague a little bit discouraged. After trying all things, we have become aware that it would take time to win their trust. There was perhaps another serious issue which created a big problem for them and for us as

well, like the problem of language we used to communicate. Sometimes it was very difficult to start a good conversation and we just ended up in misunderstanding. My colleague later decided not to take another risk because of the previous experience of being rejected. I respect his decision but also remain hopeful that one day he can be ready enough to face all the risks in our missionary commitment for interreligious dialogue with the Muslims in our PUSC. As for myself, I accept all difficulties as a learning process not because I have to do that as a person in-charge of interreligious dialogue in the vicariate of Antwerp, but first of all, as a missionary called to love our neighbors, especially those who are recognized as strangers and foreigners in our society. The experiences of being refused or rejected are something unwanted. However, as Christians we have faith in Jesus who had also a lot of experiences of rejection, even by his own people. He was not discouraged in such situation. He accepted and faced it consistently with his never-ending love for people and for those who hated him, even until death on the cross.

Interreligious Dialogue as a Call to Human Fraternity

We mentioned previously some anthropological, social and political challenges; and its opportunities in order to reach the Muslim communities and to build a genuine strong relationship of friendship with them in Antwerp. Working in interreligious dialogue brings me to another perspective to understand a biblical passage in the New Testament. In Rom 1:18-32, Paul describes the consequences of unbelief as manifested in the lifestyle of the Gentiles and his negative verdict against those who have failed to recognize God in his creation and fallen into idolatry and depravity. However, in Acts 17:22-34, Paul shows his positive attitude towards the Gentiles by praising their religious spirit and acknowledging the "unknown God" whom they revered.

As a missionary Paul knew how to deal with others. He learned their culture and spoke their language. By his adequate understanding of others, he could get rid of any misunderstandings, problems, difficulties and troubles among the people with whom he lived. He did not isolate himself in a comfort zone. He preferred to go outside of himself and the community, proclaiming and sharing the Good News with others, full of respect and openness. This Christian attitude of Paul also resonates in the philosophical thoughts of Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas emphasized the importance of reaching out to 'Thou' with empathy and sensibility as a positive experience of otherness, foreignness or exteriority. Only through this way we can be fully and truly 'I' in the dynamic dialogue with 'Thou'.

In the context of interreligious dialogue, we gradually practice this value in order to break all prejudices and fear about the other (*Thou*) and minimize all skepticism and pessimism in our divided and polarized society without losing our own identity (*I*). Moreover, opting for interreligious dialogue becomes indeed a missionary work and also a Christian call to human fraternity because our world, more than ever, is now on the brink of losing peace, love, hope, and joy (cfr. *Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi*).

Long time ago, Francis of Assisi met the Sultan of Egypt al-Malik al-Kamil on his way to the Holy Land. The 800th anniversary of the meeting of these two great persons was celebrated in 2019 with the new document entitled *Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, which was signed in Abu Dhabi by Pope Francis and Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar. This fraternal declaration underlines a common concern of Christians and Muslims to work together with dignity and

determination to “see in the other as a brother or sister to be supported and loved.” We, the believers, “are called to express this human fraternity by safeguarding creation and the entire universe and supporting all persons, especially the poorest and those most in need.” To end this short article, I quote Al-Muhasibi who said: “Your best friend is the one who -- seeing him or her reminds you of *Allah*, speaking to him or her increases your knowledge, and his or her actions remind you of the hereafter.”

Wassalam!



Attending the feast at the end of the Ramadan with Bosnian Muslims and Bishop Msgr Johan Bony from Antwerp

The Role of Catechists in the Dialogue with Muslims in Pakistan



(Lasalle Brother Zafar Daud to the left.)

Historical Background of Christians in Pakistan and need for dialogue

Traces of Christianity are found historically from St. Thomas the apostle's presence in the court of Gondopharnes the famous king of Taxila near Rawalpindi between 19 and 45 A.D. When a few Christian communities exited in the northern areas of Pakistan. Since then Christian travelers have crossed this land from time to time without making any significant impact. Later in the 16th Century some Jesuit priests' presence in Moghul Emperor Akbar's court (1583) and their missionary activities is also part of the Christian history. Which by less support and favor of Emperor Shahjehan in (1650) did not bear much fruit.

The Real beginning of Christian evangelization started when the British rulers granted religious freedom to all its inhabitants in the whole British empire. It mainly started in the service of British Army and their Christian employees.

The missionary work in Punjab and other provinces of Pakistan started with the arrival of Capuchin and Jesuit priests (1855) from (Agra and Bombay) now India.

With the arrival of missionaries to cater the needs of the British army and religious freedom evangelization took place in large

scale. Most of the missionary work was done in the areas of Sialkot among the low caste Hindus in the beginning.

The missionaries learnt the local language to preach the gospel among the common people. A large number of people embraced the Christian faith among whom many were from the poorest of the poor. Most of them working for Hindu, Sikh, or Muslim landlords. The Christian missionaries acquired lands from the British empire and established Christian villages for the identity and Christian formation of the converts. Many of the Christian converts moved to cities for ordinary jobs and livelihood, sweepers job was an easily available opportunity for unskilled and uneducated people. This provided an opportunity for them to settle in city and earn their living.

The missionary work was expanding and the missionary needed to reach the people so they needed help of the local people who could accompany the missionaries in their work. Some of the young boys with little education were chosen and were called "Babu" Adha, Sialkot.



The Role of Catechists' in Evangelization and Dialogue

Since then the Catechists have been involved in the Christian community. A Catechist is assigned from the parish for a particular community, he does the spade work for the parish priest, most of the time the Christian families are scattered in a vast geographical area or villages. In some villages there are five or ten Christian families, in others fifty or hundred families. Catechist reaches to all these families for their spiritual needs, teaching catechism, guiding and helping them in other matters of life. Sometimes even settling the petty disputes and dealing with government officials under the guidance of the parish priest.



Catechist is the person who visits each family and helps them grow in faith and in social and economic matters. Since he lives with faithful he gets involved with the people of that area both Christians and Muslims. As a local religious leader of the community he initiates dialogue with Muslims not necessarily on religious matters but on socio political matters, that helps both the communities to understand and accept each other.

In a country like Pakistan one must be open to Inter Faith dialogue. You have to dialogue or else you can stop all your work. It is absolutely necessary to survive.

Catechists in St. Albert's Catechists' Training Centre are formed to be open to other faiths. Catechists must be fully aware of the Islamic studies, which can help them

in their field work, especially in the areas where both Islam and Christianity agree. Both being Abrahamite religions share a lot in common and that can be the beginning of a dialogue.

At our Catechists' Training Centre, we not only prepare the gentlemen to be a good Catechists we also train the wives of the trainees to be fully involved in the apostolate. Many women folk when they come do not know to read and write. For this purpose, we have adult Education classes for the wives of Catechists, thus the whole family gets involved in the mission.

One such couple when they passed out here they took deep interest in reaching out to Muslims. During the Muslim Holy month of Ramadhan, they fasted from Sehri (before sunrise) to Iftari (to sunset). They broke fast with different Muslim families. They got many invitations for breaking of the fast. Slowly people started sending meals for Sehri as well.

Slowly this couple invited Muslims couples to fast with them in the season of Lent. This was more difficult because their Christian fast was not as strict as the Muslim fast. Explaining this Christian notion of fasting was very difficult.

There are occasions when Muslims have helped Christians to build chapels, or have helped them to acquire land for church or contributed in the form of labour for the building.

Catechist works at the very grassroot level, in a country where 97% population is Muslim. As mentioned earlier due to the poverty, social discrimination, and religious prejudice there are so many problems that the Christians face in an Islamic country and the only way to bring them closer is a peaceful dialogue every level.

Social services, such as Schools and hospitals can be very helpful in dialogue. Many of the Muslim students come to our schools for education, discipline, and learning values. And we should be more effective in these areas through our humility and service.

Islam and Mission

People of dialogue, not builders of new walls



PISAI, 18 October 2019, opening of the Academic Year with the participation of Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and former President of PISAI (Fr. Cucarella at the right of the Cardinal)

Dear brothers and sisters, greetings to all of you from Rome.

Last Monday, most of Italy including the capital was declared a “red zone”. Although the restrictions are less strict than a year ago, they remind us that the pandemic is not yet over and because of this I would like to begin my intervention today with a thought for those who have suffered, and continue to suffer, the effects of the worldwide coronavirus pandemic.

I also would like to express my gratitude to the leadership of SEDOS for having chosen the topic of “Islam and Mission” for this webinar and for having put together this wonderful group of speakers, who shared their knowledge and experience with us today. I feel honored to have the opportunity to offer the closing remarks.

I will proceed as follows. **Firstly**, I would like to share with you something about myself and the institution where I work at present. Then I will say why I think that learning about another religious tradition, (in this case, Islam, also applicable to other

religions), is primarily beneficial for our own Christian identity and commitment. **Finally**, I will reflect on why a serious attention to the religious tradition of the people among whom we live should be an essential element of our missionary vocations. I acknowledge with joy the presence of some Muslim brothers and sisters among us today, but my remarks will mainly be addressed to the Christian participants.

As you have seen in the program, my name is Diego Sarrió Cucarella and I am a member of the Missionaries of Africa, also known as the White Fathers. Because of our origins in North Africa, the Missionaries of Africa have kept until now a particular interest in Islam and Christian-Muslim relations. There is much that could be said about it, but today I will briefly focus on an institution which exemplifies this unique vocation of the Missionaries of Africa for the world of Islam. I am referring to the PISAI, which is the Italian abbreviation for Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies, an institution with which I have been associated for more than seventeen years now, first as a student, then as a visiting professor, then as permanent member of the faculty and Director of Studies, and now as President. One could say that the PISAI is unique in that it is the world’s only Pontifical Institution of Higher Education entirely devoted to the study of Islam.¹ The PISAI

¹ For a longer presentation of the history and mission of the PISAI, see Diego Sarrió Cucarella, “The Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI). Mission, Heritage and Influence on Christian-Muslim Dialogue”, in *Christians in the World of Islam. Dialogue - Mission - Witness*, edited by Eugeniusz Sakowicz and Bogusław Żero, Misjonarze Afryki (Ojcowie Biali), Natalin k/Lublina 2021, 77-86.

seeks to prepare its students for active engagement in the field of Christian-Muslim dialogue, either in the academic milieu, in the pastoral field, or in civil society at large. The Institute offers a specialized education in Arabic and Islam, as well as in the history and the main issues of Christian-Muslim relations. The conviction that motivates the PISAI is that Christian involvement with Islam must be grounded not only on good will but also on objective knowledge of the other religious tradition.

The PISAI began modestly, and nobody could have imagined at the time its future development and transfer to Rome. It was founded under a different name at Tunis in 1926 by the Missionaries of Africa to train some of their members for apostolic work among Muslims. The purpose originally envisaged for this training period was to provide not so much a scientific study of either Arabic or Islam, but rather a practical study, suitable for enabling the missionaries to forge relationships with the local people in a climate of respect for their cultural and religious background. The Institute very soon began to attract others who were also interested in the apostolate among Muslims. The first non-White Fathers who came to study at the Institute were Father René Voillaume and one of his first companions in 1932. The next year, Father Voillaume founded the community of the Little Brothers of Jesus inspired by the life and writings of Blessed Charles de Foucauld.

As it grew in size and importance, the Institute felt the need to offer academic diplomas to its students and to be recognized by the ecclesiastical authorities. Steps were taken to this end, and by a decree of the Sacred Congregation for Seminaries and Universities, it was established as a Pontifical Institute in March 1960.

Four years later, in 1964, this Institute was transferred to Rome. The Second Vatican Council was then in progress. On Pentecost Sunday of that year, Pope Paul VI had instituted a special department of the Roman Curia for relations with peoples of other religions, known at first as the *Secretariat*

for Non-Christians, later renamed *Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue*. Pope Paul VI also promulgated his first Encyclical Letter, *Ecclesiam Suam*, in August 1964, which set out a whole programme for future dialogue between religions. Then there came the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*; the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*; and the Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes...* all these Council documents suggested to the Institute new reasons for continuing along the path of its first inspiration, as it saw itself more clearly as being at the service of the Universal Church. Today, almost 60 years after its transfer to Rome, the PISAI has become fundamentally a centre of study and research, which is also frequented by lay students and, in this sense, very different from its origins as a training house for missionaries. You may say that it has become more of an academic institution. Nevertheless, Christian reflection and prayer are still an important part of the Institute's life. A special moment of prayer is the midday Friday Eucharist, celebrated in the chapel of the PISAI at the end of the week's work and at the time when practising Muslims are praying in their mosques.

The aim of the Institute is not simply producing experts in Islam, but forming



Chapel of PISAI, 14 June 2019, solemn Mass for the closing of the Academic Year 2018-2019, presided by Cardinal Angelo De Donatis, Vicar of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Diocese of Rome

witnesses to Christ among Muslims. The PISAI provides those who are called to this particular vocation with a knowledge and appreciation of the religious heritage of Islam that will help them, without in any way diluting the Gospel, to announce it in a way that will find an echo in the religious culture of Muslims. It was with great emotion and a profound sense of reverence that we celebrated the beatification of seven former students of PISAI among the 19 Martyrs of Algeria, on 8 December 2018.

As President of PISAI, it is for me a source of pride to see that many individuals deeply involved in promoting better understanding between Christians and Muslims in recent decades have passed through a period of training at our Institute, including three of our speakers today: Fr. Markus Solo, Fr. John Mallare and Fr. Thomas Hendrikus. Also Dr. Rukmana followed some courses at PISAI during his studies at Rome in 2010.

There is an essential point which I would like to share with you, and which is not just theory, but something that most students at PISAI and in other institutes where Christians study other religions have verified over the years, namely, that learning about another religious tradition in a spirit of openness and understanding is highly beneficial because it leads, first of all, to the purification and intensification of one's own religious commitment.² Let me explain what I mean. Learning about others – and this is particularly true for both Christians and Muslims – clears up misconceptions and false ideas inherited from centuries of conflict and polemics and, in doing so, it changes our self-image, it purifies the truth about ourselves, because this truth is always connected with the way we think about others. Secondly, when we learn about others, we find that our own religious tradition is not the only one that is reasonable, committed, or open to God. After this discovery, if we choose to remain in our own original

tradition, this now becomes a real choice in the face of real alternatives, and not only of distorted representations of the other.

I move now to the last part of my remarks, which is a reflection on why a serious attention to the religious tradition of the people among whom we live and work should be an essential element of our missionary vocation, as essential, I dare to say, as our commitment to Justice and Peace. I am sure that many of you must have heard of Raimon Panikkar (1918-2010), one of the greatest scholars of the 20th century in the areas of comparative religion, theology, and interreligious dialogue, born the son of an Indian Hindu father and a Spanish Catholic mother. I like what he once said when asked why Christians should be interested in meeting believers of other traditions and trying to know them. Panikkar said quite simply that knowing the other is an essential requirement for the Christian who wants to live Jesus' commandment of universal love, since, as he put it, "we do not love what we do not know".

Missionaries are those who, by vocation, under the impulse of divine Love, leave their home, their familiar surroundings, to venture into another place, another country, another culture, to meet the other, with the mission of loving them, on behalf of a God whom Christians confess to be a loving Trinity. Each time we arrive in the country of another as missionaries, we discover that in fact there were several 'others', some more fragile and vulnerable, others stronger and better off. This loving Trinity that has set us in motion in the first place calls us to give preferential attention to the most vulnerable other, the one whose life and dignity are threatened. In my own missionary experience, one of the greatest difficulties has been to accept that even that most fragile 'other' also needs to love, to give, to share. However, to learn to receive is much more difficult for most of us missionaries than giving! Those who have worked in development and assistance projects know very well how what should be a free expression of human solidarity and

² Here I draw from the insights of Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders*, Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester 2010, 155-157.

Christian charity can easily become a top-down paternalistic action, where the roles of “benefactor” and “beneficiary” are mutually exclusive: either you are the one giving or the one receiving, but you cannot be both!

In recent times, Pope Francis has warned Catholics against proselytism, that is, against using any type of pressure to convert someone, reminding us of the need always to consider the other, even the most destitute, as my equal in dignity and as the host who welcomes me and not the passive subject of my missionary zeal. This is, I believe, the great challenge, at least on the spiritual level, of our missionary vocations: to care for the wounded other, yes, not to walk past them insensitive to their suffering, but without losing the deep desire to know them, to listen to them, to discover their true face, which is often disfigured by the wounds in their bodies. We are called to love them because of who they are in the deepest part of their identity and not simply because of what has happened to them. This is why, I would like to believe, the Samaritan in the parable intends to come back to the inn where he leaves the man who had fallen into the hands of robbers. He returns to listen to him and to know him better, not just to repay the innkeeper for the extra expenses!

When approaching the religious other, missionaries should seek to establish a relationship of equals where all can be givers and receivers. Each of us is immersed in a culture, a tradition, a religious heritage in which we have been formed and to which we have contributed. Our Christian conviction is that God, the Father of Jesus Christ, is not a stranger to these cultures, to these traditions. On the contrary, it is God who is at the origin of all that is true, just and beautiful in them. Moreover, the Church invites us, “through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life”, to “recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values” found among people (*Nostra Aetate*, 2).

I would like to conclude by quoting some inspiring words of Pope Francis in his recent Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*:

As religious leaders, we are called to be true ‘people of dialogue’, to cooperate in building peace not as intermediaries but as authentic mediators. Intermediaries seek to give everyone a discount, ultimately in order to gain something for themselves. The mediator, on the other hand, is one who retains nothing for himself, but rather spends himself generously until he is consumed, knowing that the only gain is peace. Each one of us is called to be an artisan of peace, by uniting and not dividing, by extinguishing hatred and not holding on to it, by opening paths of dialogue and not by constructing new walls (FT 284).

Let us welcome with joy this call to be authentic mediators, not intermediaries, to be artisans of peace and not of division, to be people of dialogue and not builders of new walls.

I thank you all for your kind attention.



Library of PISAI, 21 March 2019,
“Georgetown Lecture on Contemporary Islam” by
Patrick J. Ryan, S.J., entitled: *The Call to Jihad and
the Lure of Prosperity: Contemporaries Polarities in
African Islam and Christianity*

Dialogue à une époque de violence

Une lecture de la *Fraternité humaine* depuis le sol

Introduction

La demande qui m'est faite: «Pouvez-vous centrer votre présentation sur les relations avec les Musulmans à l'époque du terrorisme global? Quelle est la situation actuelle en France et quel peut être le rôle des responsables religieux pour faire face à ces défis?

Il m'est demandé de parler du contexte français, d'où les remarques que je souhaite faire en introduction:

- Des actes de violence, des meurtres ont été perpétrés ces derniers mois ou années: une attaque à Nice le 14 juillet 2016, 87 morts et 434 blessés, l'assassinat du Père Jacques Hamel, prêtre en train de célébrer la messe, le 26 juillet 2016; l'assassinat d'un professeur à la sortie de son collège, le 16 octobre 2020, puis celui de deux femmes dans une église à Nice, le 29 octobre 2020. Ils ont été commis par des individus qui se réclament de l'islam.
- Mais si le terrorisme et la violence se manifestent en France régulièrement, nous ne pouvons pas dire que nous vivons au quotidien dans un contexte de violence ou de peur du terrorisme.

Je souhaite inscrire dès cette introduction, le témoignage d'un ami, né en France de parents nés en Algérie, marié à une catholique pratiquante, 3 enfants, j'ai célébré leur mariage. Ils appartiennent au Groupe des Foyers Islamo-Chrétiens (le GEFIC). Il occupe des responsabilités importantes dans une structure publique, le Musée du Louvre à Paris et est 1^{er} adjoint au maire d'une commune de la banlieue nord de Paris.

Dans les années 80, à l'école et au collège, en banlieue nord de Paris, nous étions dans des classes avec des élèves, et pour certains des amis, venant de partout: Pologne,

Sénégal, France depuis plusieurs générations, moi né ici de parents nés en Algérie. Les différences n'étaient pas du tout mises en avant; cela relevait de l'appartenance familiale. C'était de l'ordre de la découverte et c'était plutôt pour nous une richesse. Il n'y avait rien de problématique. La perspective était celle de l'intégration dans la société française. L'événement de l'équipe de France remportant la Coupe du Monde de football en 1998 a été un symbole très fort du modèle français d'intégration: la France «Black, Blanc, Beur». Cela disait un fonctionnement et un idéal.

Et puis deux événements ont bousculé et mis en question tout cela: d'abord les attentats du 11 septembre 2001 à New-York, puis en France les émeutes de Clichy-sous-Bois. Ces événements ont été révélateurs d'un malaise profond dans la société française.

J'aborderai donc le contexte spécifique français du point de vue de la situation des musulmans dans notre société, puis j'évoquerai des lieux de rencontres, d'échanges et de dialogue pour évoquer ensuite ce qui fait obstacle au dialogue et conclure sur notre rôle comme responsables religieux dans ce contexte.

1. Dans quel contexte sommes-nous appelés, en France, à vivre la fraternité?

Liberté, égalité, fraternité

Peut-être faut-il commencer par vous rappeler la devise de la République française à laquelle tiennent tous les citoyens français quelles que soient leur religion, leurs origines, leur milieu social: Liberté, égalité, fraternité. Et nous le savons pour instaurer et faire respecter la liberté et l'égalité, on rédige et vote des lois mais la fraternité ne se

décète pas. C'est un idéal qui dépend de la responsabilité de chaque citoyen. J'aime à dire que cela relève de notre double responsabilité de citoyen et de chrétien puisque nous croyons que tous les êtres humains sont créés à l'image et à la ressemblance de Dieu et que Jésus le Christ nous a révélés.

Il est bon de citer dès maintenant la première phrase de la Déclaration signée par le Pape François et le cheikh Ahmed el-Tayyeb à Abou Dhabi, le 4 février 2019: «*La foi amène le croyant à voir dans l'autre un frère à soutenir et à aimer.*»¹

Une longue et complexe histoire de la France avec ses musulmans

La France a eu un empire colonial dans des pays où la quasi-totalité de la population était musulmane, les pays du Maghreb ont été colonisés par elle, sous la forme d'un protectorat en Tunisie et au Maroc, d'une assimilation en Algérie qui était territoire français où les habitants de confession musulmane n'étaient pas considérés comme des citoyens sauf pour servir dans l'armée.

La guerre d'indépendance de l'Algérie de 1954 à 1962 a laissé des blessures de part et d'autre jusqu'à aujourd'hui. Les mémoires restent vives et blessées, près de 60 ans après l'indépendance.

Aujourd'hui, dans un pays de 68 millions d'habitants les personnes de tradition musulmane représentent environ 5 millions de personnes, soit près de 8% de la population, (en notant que les statistiques religieuses sont interdites en France). Plus des 2/3 d'entre elles ont la nationalité française alors que pour beaucoup de nos compatriotes encore, musulman = immigré = arabe, parfois = extrémiste voire terroriste. Un certain racisme vis-à-vis des arabes et des personnes noires de peau existe en France.

Des personnes de tradition musulmane sont présentes dans toutes les catégories socio-professionnelles mais en proportion

beaucoup plus fortes parmi les ouvriers ou les métiers peu qualifiés.

A cause de cette situation «au bas de l'échelle sociale», beaucoup de familles musulmanes habitent dans des quartiers populaires aux périphéries de nos villes, lieux de beaucoup de difficultés et de problèmes d'abord pour des raisons sociales et politiques.

Religions et laïcité dans la France du XXI^e siècle

La laïcité est une spécificité française difficile à expliquer à l'extérieur de nos frontières, le mot lui-même étant souvent intraduisible en anglais, en allemand ou en arabe ! Il faut distinguer la sécularisation qui touche beaucoup de sociétés contemporaines, souvent liée à la modernité. La sécularisation désigne un processus où des pans entiers de la vie sociale ne dépendent plus de l'Eglise, (écoles, hôpitaux...), où également des dimensions très importantes de la vie des individus ne sont plus rapportées à la religion. Dans ce processus, la religion risque de perdre toute place dans la vie sociale et être cantonnée à la sphère privée.

La laïcité est un cadre juridique qui définit la non-ingérence réciproque de l'Etat et des religions: l'Etat n'intervient pas dans les affaires de l'Eglise (en 1905) ou des autres religions et réciproquement.

Mais de nombreux musulmans, y compris des imams, confondent sécularisation et laïcité et attribuent à la laïcité la chute de la pratique religieuse en France.

De plus, à côté du cadre juridique de la laïcité s'est développée en France, durant un siècle, une «mentalité laïque» et une idéologie «laïciste» qui se veut en opposition avec la dimension visible et sociale des religions, à commencer par l'islam.

¹ Document sur *La fraternité humaine, pour la paix mondiale et la coexistence commune*, Pape François et Cheikh Ahmed al-Tayyeb, Abou Dhabi, 4 février 2019.

L'islam et les musulmans en France: une mosaïque

La communauté musulmane en France n'est pas unifiée mais traversée par de multiples courants, certains sont liés aux pays d'origine et aux pouvoirs en place : l'Algérie (qui nomme le recteur de la Mosquée de Paris), le Maroc, la Turquie ; ces pays essaient de contrôler les populations et les mosquées.

Les pouvoirs publics cherchent depuis 35 ans à avoir un organe représentatif des musulmans avec qui discuter des questions liées au culte. Mais ils n'y parviennent pas. Le CFCM (Conseil Français du Culte Musulman) n'est pas légitime aux yeux de 80 %, au moins, des musulmans vivant en France!

D'où vient la violence?

En France, la violence, en particulier dans les quartiers populaires n'est pas d'abord religieuse ou commise au nom de la religion. La violence la plus visible est celle qui est liée aux trafics en particulier au commerce de la drogue qui rapporte des sommes considérables et est considérée par certains responsables politiques comme ce qui assure «la paix sociale» dans des quartiers où le chômage et la précarité conduiraient à des explosions sociales.

Elle est aussi une sorte de cri ou de réponse de personnes qui sont déstabilisées par la mondialisation et ne voient pas d'avenir pour eux dans ce nouvel univers.

En France, la violence surgit ainsi de la part de personnes qui se sentent oubliées par la République, mises hors des circuits de réussite scolaire et sociale. La violence surgit dans des quartiers qui deviennent des zones de « non-droit » dont se sont progressivement retirés les services publics. De ce fait, ce sont des « mafias » qui y font la loi et, par exemple, contrôlent les entrées et sorties du quartier, à tel point que la police ne s'y rend plus.

Les actes de violence à motivation religieuse sont très peu nombreux comparés à cette violence quotidienne subie par des populations pauvres qui se trouvent être,

pour des raisons sociales, souvent de tradition musulmane.

2. Quels sont les lieux ou les moments où se rencontrent spécifiquement chrétiens et musulmans, en France, et particulièrement à Marseille?

Marseille : 2^o ville de France par le nombre d'habitants, près de 850 000 dont près de 300 000 personnes de traditions musulmane, 80 000 arméniens, 60 000 juifs. Où chrétiens et musulmans se rencontrent-ils?

Dans la vie des quartiers populaires de Marseille : mais la mixité sociale, culturelle et religieuse tend à disparaître. Certains de ces quartiers sont devenus quasiment musulmans, sauf quelques familles chrétiennes ou l'une ou l'autre communauté de religieuses ou de religieux, souvent âgées.

Dans les établissements catholiques d'enseignement: à Marseille l'Eglise fait le choix de soutenir des écoles dans ces quartiers populaires. En conséquence certaines écoles catholiques, primaires ou collèges, accueillent de 60 à 90 % d'enfants ou d'élèves de confession musulmane. Maintenir ces écoles et les faire vivre, dans la perspective de servir la vie ensemble, la connaissance réciproque, le dialogue interculturel et interreligieux en actes.

Dans le service des aumôneries de prisons et d'hôpitaux: pour garantir la liberté de conscience et de culte, la loi de 1905 a prévu des aumôneries dans tous les lieux fermés qui empêchent donc un croyant de sortir pour pratiquer son culte. Les aumôniers catholiques et protestants étaient les premiers dans ces lieux, rendant souvent visite à des malades ou des détenus musulmans, dans le respect de leur foi. Souvent, ce sont eux qui ont fait découvrir à leurs collègues musulmans l'importance d'être à l'écoute des malades ou des détenus, et l'importance d'être auprès d'eux porteurs de la Miséricorde de Dieu.

A l'occasion de mariages islamo-chrétiens: ce sont souvent des situations délicates mais, en France, de plus en plus de couples se forment avec cette différence d'appartenances religieuses et, souvent, culturelles. Cela pose moins de question quand il s'agit d'un homme musulman qui épouse une femme catholique ; mais cela devient parfois très tendu voire impossible quand il s'agit d'un homme chrétien qui désire se marier avec une femme musulmane. Les pressions familiales sont parfois très fortes pour contraindre l'homme chrétien à devenir musulman. Pourtant, de tels couples existent.

Sans attendre, l'Eglise mais avec son soutien, existe depuis plus de 30 ans en France le GFIC, Groupe de Foyers islamo-chrétiens, lieu de partage d'expériences, d'accompagnement de jeunes couples, de réflexions par rapport à l'éducation religieuse des enfants.

Un groupe imams/prêtres auquel participent une femme musulmane et une femme chrétienne se réunit depuis 10 ans à Marseille. La raison de ce groupe ? apprendre à se connaître, à échanger. Ainsi, au fur et à mesure des rencontres (5 fois /an) des liens de confiance se sont établis. Ce groupe aborde des réflexions communes, à chaque fois introduites par un imam et par un prêtre. Ces rencontres tissent de la confiance, font bouger les positions intellectuelles voire théologiques des uns et des autres. A cause de la confiance et de l'amitié qui est née

entre les membres, il est possible d'aborder des « sujets qui fâchent », sans esprit de polémique ou de concurrence.

Des «rassemblements» communs et fraternels entre chrétiens et musulmans:

Au plan national, je peux citer deux initiatives qui existent depuis des années : la SERIC, Semaine islamo-chrétienne, portée par une association d'amitié islamo-chrétienne (le GAIC, groupe d'amitié islamo-chrétienne) organisant des événements dans de nombreuses villes en France et dans d'autres villes européennes.

«Ensemble avec Marie», proposant depuis 7 ans, des échanges, rencontres, moments de célébration grâce à la figure de Marie, initiative partie du Liban et relayée en France par l'association Efesia.

A Marseille, un groupe d'échanges entre femmes chrétiennes et femmes musulmanes a lancé une initiative de journée conviviale et spirituelle, ouverte à tous les chrétiens et musulmans qui le souhaitent. Depuis quatre cette journée, au printemps, rassemble des familles, avec enfants et adolescents pour un temps de partage autour du repas, des moments de prière et des échanges sur une thématique d'actualité. Relayé par le bouche à oreille, cette initiative rassemble plus de 300 personnes. Elle est préparée bien des semaines avant par un groupe qui rassemble des chrétiens et des musulmans.

Dans des actions de solidarité menées ensemble:

Depuis plusieurs années des organisations caritatives musulmanes et chrétiennes se sont associées pour des opérations communes en direction de personnes en situation de précarité, localement, par exemple en banlieue sud-est de Paris à Créteil, paroisse catholique et mosquée font des distributions alimentaires alors que les autres organismes sont en congé. La Crise du Covid avec les mesures de confinement ont conduit beaucoup de familles dans des situations de précarité voire de pauvreté. A Marseille, dans un quartier, organisme social, chrétiens et



Forum Islamo-Chrétien Paris, 2016

collectif des musulmans ont mis ensemble leurs forces pour venir en aide chaque semaine à plus de 300 familles qui n'avaient plus de quoi nourrir leurs enfants, après le 15 du mois. Ce sont les instituteurs de l'école publique qui avaient alerté les uns et les autres.

Lors d'initiatives d'hospitalité réciproque: comment dépasser la peur de l'autre, sinon en se rencontrant?

Visites réciproques des lieux de cultes : C'est ce qui conduit dans de nombreux lieux à des visites réciproques dans les différents lieux de culte où les rites sont expliqués.

Intervenants musulmans dans le cadre de formations dans des lieux universitaires catholiques. Ainsi à l'Institut Catholique de la Méditerranée, nous proposons une formation spécifique pour la rencontre islamo-chrétienne sur une année, des intervenants musulmans sont invités, des cours à deux voix chrétienne et musulmane, sont proposés sur un même thème.

3. Quels sont aujourd'hui les obstacles au dialogue?

Le choc des ignorances

Ce n'est pas le choc des civilisations auquel nous faisons face mais le choc des ignorances. Nous constatons en France, que, particulièrement dans les jeunes générations, les uns et les autres sont ignorants de la religion des autres et de leur propre religion. Au nom de la laïcité, il n'y a pas de place pour les religions dans les matières enseignées, si ce n'est à travers les cours d'histoire ou de littérature française. La peur du prosélytisme à l'école conduit à ignorer la dimension religieuse. Et les enseignants, dans l'enseignement public, ne savent pas comment réagir vis-à-vis d'élèves musulmans qui interviennent en cours. Ils sont tenus à la neutralité qui glisse vers le silence.

L'absence de savants musulmans

On parle souvent des imams, mais, en fait ce qui fait cruellement défaut aux communautés musulmanes en France c'est le manque de

formation de leurs cadres religieux. La laïcité ne permet pas des formations de type théologique dans le cadre de l'université comme en Allemagne. Chaque courant développe son lieu de formation, mais le plus souvent, ce sont des imams ayant étudié à l'étranger voire venant pour quelques années officier en France depuis l'Algérie, le Maroc ou la Turquie.

L'influence des courants extrémistes

Il faut appeler les choses par leur nom.

Il existe une très petite minorité tentée par ce que les Médias appellent le « djihadisme », ce sont quelques centaines d'individus sur les 5 millions de personnes musulmanes. Avec eux, pas de dialogue possible puisqu'il traite tous les autres de « *Kouffars* », c'est-à-dire mécréants, non seulement les juifs ou les chrétiens mais les autres musulmans !

Au-delà d'eux, ce qui est plus inquiétant c'est le développement de courants inspirés par le wahhabisme saoudien, c'est-à-dire une conception très rigoriste de l'islam, une lecture littéraliste du Coran, un rejet de toute lecture critique et de l'usage de la raison en matière religieuse. Ce wahhabisme s'est répandu en Afrique sub-saharienne et au Maghreb et de ce fait aussi en Europe. Cette idéologie religieuse passe par les réseaux Internet, par les vidéos venant de religieux vivant dans les Pays du Golfe, ignorant tout du contexte de vie en Europe.

Dans les quartiers populaires, les mêmes jeunes peuvent être tentés de suivre cette idéologie rigoriste tout en participant aux nombreux trafics, dont celui de la drogue, qui font vivre une économie parallèle, et n'hésitent pas à utiliser la violence.

Les théologies et/ou philosophies disponibles

Parmi les obstacles au dialogue chez les musulmans comme chez les chrétiens, il peut y avoir le regard sur l'autre proposé ou, parfois, imposé sur l'autre différent de moi par la culture, les origines ou la religion. L'adage « hors de l'Eglise point de salut » a conduit à ignorer l'autre voire à le convertir à tout prix pour qu'il puisse être sauvé.

Quelles théologies du salut et de l'Eglise sont aujourd'hui proposées, enseignées, diffusées? chez les chrétiens et chez les musulmans.

Quelle conception de la mission aussi? ce n'est pas un hasard si le Pape François répète à longueur de discours (à Rabat par deux fois par exemple): «Non au prosélytisme».

Théologie et philosophie: ce qui est en jeu c'est la conception de la vérité. Trop de gens fonctionnent en disant «j'ai la vérité», la conséquence en est que l'autre est dans l'erreur, oubliant la conception chrétienne de la vérité, rappelée par Benoît XVI: «*Certes, ce n'est pas nous qui possédons la vérité, mais c'est elle qui nous possède : le Christ qui est la Vérité nous a pris par la main, et sur le chemin de notre recherche passionnée de connaissance, nous savons que sa main nous tient fermement. Le fait d'être intérieurement soutenus par la main du Christ nous rend libres et en même temps assurés.*»²

Il est clair que, actuellement, pour une grande majorité de musulmans seule la foi en Dieu pratiquée sur le chemin de l'islam conduit au salut. D'où leur désir que nous devenions tous musulmans, pour, dans le meilleur des cas, être sauvé.

4. Quel rôle pour les responsables religieux, dans ce contexte?

Au sein des communautés chrétiennes

- Pour sensibiliser la communauté chrétienne: Travailler à une théologie du dialogue et ses fondements dans la révélation biblique ;
- Faire connaître aux chrétiens l'enseignement du magistère sur le dialogue et la rencontre;

Pour tous les responsables religieux

- S'engager eux-mêmes, sur le terrain, dans la rencontre et le dialogue; il n'y a pas de dialogue sans rencontre préalable; Les deux sont à conjuguer ensemble;

- Mettre en priorité le domaine de l'éducation sous toute ses formes et développer initiatives et pédagogies dans ce domaine (depuis l'école jusqu'à la faculté et la formation des ministres du culte et des agents pastoraux);
- Chacun dans sa communauté, dans sa tradition, mettre en œuvre cette affirmation signée par le pape François et le cheikh Al-Tayyeb: «*La foi amène le croyant à voir en l'autre un frère à soutenir et à aimer.*»

Ensemble

- Mener ensemble, par ex. des imams et des prêtres, un travail de relecture de nos Ecritures et de nos Traditions.

Pour conclure,

Une attitude spirituelle indiquée par Christian de Chergé, prieur du monastère Notre-Dame de l'Atlas à Tibhirine, pris dans la violence terroriste, après le face à face avec le chef terroriste, la veille de Noël 1995:

- «*Je ne peux demander au Bon Dieu : tue-le. Mais je peux demander : désarme-le. Après je me suis dit : ai-je le droit de demander : désarme-le, si je ne commence pas par demander : désarme-moi et désarme-nous en communauté. C'est ma prière quotidienne, je vous la confie tout simplement.*»³
- «*Le Verbe s'est fait FRÈRE, frère d'Abel et aussi de Caïn, frère d'Isaac et d'Ismaël à la fois, frère de Joseph et des onze autres qui le vendirent, frère de la plaine et frère de la montagne, frère de Pierre, de Judas et de l'un et l'autre en moi.*»⁴

(We are thankful for the author to have shared with us this article)

(An English translation of this text provided by UISG can be found on the SEDOS Website)

² Benoît XVI, Discours à la curie romaine, 21 décembre 2012.

³ Christian de Chergé, *Invincible Espérance*, Paris, Bayard, 1997.

⁴ Christian de Chergé, *Homélie du Jeudi Saint*, 1995.

SEDOS “RESIDENTIAL” SEMINAR
ONLINE (from Rome)
3 May - 7 May 2021

TIME	MONDAY, 3/5/2021 Opening Session
15:00 - 15:15	Opening Prayer
15:15 - 15:30	Opening Address: Fr. Tesfaye T. Gebresilasie, MCCJ, SEDOS President (EN)
15:30 - 16:15	OPENING SPEECH: Fr. Joshtram Kureethadam, SDB <i>The Ten Green Commandments of Laudato Si’</i> (EN) <i>Dicastery for Integral Human Development, Rome</i>
16:15 - 16:30	<i>Coffee / Tea Break (video)</i>
16:30 - 17:15	Special Talk: Jane Mellett <i>The Call to Ecological Conversion</i> (EN) <i>Laudato Si’ Officer, Trocaire, Maynooth, Ireland</i>
TIME	TUESDAY, 4/5/2021 Education Aspect
09:00 - 09:15	Prayer in Portuguese / Orientation – Moderator: Kathleen Storms
09:15 - 10:45	Fr. Petero Matairatu, SM <i>Practices and Principles of Tutu Rural Training Project</i> (EN) <i>Director of Marist Rural Training Centre, Taveuni Island, Fiji</i>
10:45 - 11:15	<i>Coffee / Tea Break</i>
11:15 - 12:45	Sr. Helen Grealy, RC, and Fr. Brian Grogan, SJ <i>Loving Sister Earth</i> (EN) <i>Loving Sister Earth Movement, Ireland</i>
14:00 - 15:00	Discussion in small groups (optional)

TIME	WEDNESDAY, 5/5/2021 Sustainability Aspect
09:00 - 09:15	Prayer in Spanish / Orientation – Moderator: Peter Baekelmans
09:15 - 10:45	Prof. Yvan Brakel <i>Take the lead in the carbon accountability and sustainability (FR)</i> Catholic University Louvain, Engineering Faculty, Belgium
10:45 - 11:15	Coffee / Tea Break
11:15 - 12:30	Fr. Richie Gomez, MSC <i>Sustainable living and agriculture for indigenous peoples (EN)</i> Ecological Education Center in Butuan, Mindanao, the Philippines
14:00 - 15:00	Discussion in small groups (optional)
TIME	THURSDAY, 6/5/2021 Spirituality Aspect
09:00 - 09:15	Prayer in English / Orientation – Moderator: Chris Chaplin
09:15 - 10:45	Fr. Brian Grogan, SJ <i>What hope for a Small Blue Planet? (EN)</i> Loving Sister Earth Movement, Ireland
10:45 - 11:15	Coffee / Tea Break
11:15 - 12:45	Fr. Amado L. Picardal, CSsR <i>Deep Relationality: Living in Communion (EN)</i> JPIC desk of USG/UISG, Rome, Italy
14:00 - 15:00	Discussion in small groups (optional)
TIME	FRIDAY, 7/5/2021 Closing Session
09:00 - 09:15	Prayer in French / Orientation – Moderator: Peter Baekelmans
09:15 - 10:00	Special Talk: Sr. Sheila Kinsey, FCJM <i>Sowing Seeds for the Future (EN)</i> JPIC desk of USG/UISG, Rome, Italy
10:00 - 10:30	Coffee / Tea Break
10:30 - 11:15	CLOSING SPEECH: Fr. Augusto Zampini Davies <i>In the aftermath of the Synod on Panamazonia (SP)</i> Dicastery of Integral Human Development, Rome
11:15 - 11:30	CLOSING ADDRESS (EN) Fr. Tesfaye T. Gebresilasie, MCCJ, SEDOS President

SEDOS Residential Seminar 2021

Living Green Mission
Online webinar

3 May – 7 May 2021



SEDOS envisions to engage all Religious organizations and focus on the practices of sustainable developments. This Seminar thus creates a platform for a like-minded community of individuals, Congregations and organizations to provide a living example that *Living Green Mission* would be a powerful tool for sustaining the world and preserving resources for future generations.

Simultaneous Translations: English/Italian/Spanish/French

Participation Fee: 50 Euro

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For further information see the SEDOS website.

<https://sedosmission.org/sedos-residential-seminar-2021/>