

Jesuits in Dialogue

the interreligious dimension



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Albania, Guyana, Germany, India, Malaysia, Nigeria, U.S.A.

CATHOLICS MEET MUSLIMS IN PATNA

Paul Jackson, S.J.

Background

In March, 1979, a group of Catholics, together with a few Protestants, met in Agra at the invitation of Archbishop Dominic Athaide. It was a national consultation called by the Ecumenical Commission of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India to discuss the Relations of the Catholic Church to Muslims in India. As a result of this consultation the Islamic Studies Association (ISA) came into being. It was an exciting moment for those of us who were committed to reaching out to Muslims here in India. There was an expectation of great things to come.

It was clearly realized that the major obstacle to be overcome was the combination of ignorance and prejudice so widely found among Catholics in India. It was decided that the initial thrust of the Association would be to provide courses on Islam in seminaries and houses of formation. It was quickly discovered that no suitable book existed to serve as a text book for the courses in seminaries. It is true that there is no dearth of general books on Islam, but many of them do not even mention India, while the others pay scant attention to

India. Hence the Association planned and collaboratively produced *The Muslims of India: Beliefs and Practices*, edited by Paul Jackson, S.J. It was well received and a second edition is currently being prepared. Two seminars resulted in the production of another useful, though smaller work, *Questions Muslims Ask*. The Association's "Quarterly to Promote Understanding", *Salaam*, is currently in its twenty-second volume. Modest as it is, it nevertheless is a unique voice of the Catholic Church in the area of Christian-Muslim relations in India. Another work undertaken by the Association is to organize Conventions every two years on the occasion of the General Body Meeting of the Association.

Conventions have previously been held in Patna, Lucknow, Mumbai (Bombay), Kolkata (Calcutta), Chennai (Madras) and Delhi. These conventions have provided Catholics and Muslims with opportunities to get to know one another better. In this connection the following flier was produced:

ISLAMIC STUDIES
ASSOCIATION
10TH NATIONAL CONVENTION

THEME: AN EXPERIENCE OF
MUSLIM LIFE

What are the sources of your experience of Muslim life? Do you rely wholly on what is portrayed in the media? Do you know only about people like Osama bin Laden and

the Taliban, people far removed from your own experience?

Would you like to get an insight into Muslim life as it is actually lived and experienced by real Muslims in a wide variety of occupations and settings? Would you like to hear them tell their own stories, and then have an opportunity to mix with them and talk to them over morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea?

The Islamic Studies Association (ISA), a National Catholic Association founded in Agra in March, 1979, is providing you with such an opportunity on Saturday, 24th February, 2001, in Navjyoti Niketan, Patna. Do come and profit from this unique opportunity! The meeting will be from 9 a.m. till 5.30 p.m. The language will be English, with scope for Hindi where necessary. A contribution of Rs. 20 would be appreciated. Have you ever visited a madrasa, the Imarat-I Shari'a in Phulwari Sharif, a Dargah, a Khanqah, or the Khuda Bakhsh Library? Have you ever sat down with Muslims in such institutions, or in a largely Muslim mohalla, and talked to them in such settings? This is the programme organized for Sunday, 25th February, beginning from Navjyoti at 8.30 a.m. and ending there at 5.30 p.m. The language will be mainly Hindi, with English where necessary. A contribution of Rs. 20 would be appreciated.

In order to help the Muslim speakers focus on their own personal experience, rather than tell

us about Islam, the invitation letter to them was quite detailed. The key paragraph was as follows:

Everything hinges on the theme of the Convention: **An Experience of Muslim Life**. The key word is **experience**. The theme will come alive in so far as your paper is a real sharing of your own life. The Convention is **not** about theory, but about actual personal experience. This means that, through your sharing, you should come across to the participants as a **person**, a unique being. In simple language, you are being provided with an opportunity to tell your story.

Finally, the programme printed and distributed to Catholic Institutions as well as to the Muslim speakers a week before the Convention explained its focus thus:

In a Nutshell

The Islamic Studies Association (ISA), a Catholic Association in India, normally holds conventions in different parts of the country every two years. These conventions take up different themes. The present theme, **An Experience of Muslim Life**, is meant to provide an opportunity for the Catholic community in Patna to get to know something about how life is experienced by Muslims living here. As the recent example of Salim Ansari, the miner trapped in total darkness on a small ledge of coal and surrounded by brackish water for 138 hours, so graphically shows,

many Muslims have a deep, living faith in God.

This type of faith is manifested more by the way a person lives than by what he or she says.

We hope to catch a glimpse of this faith as we listen to the life experience of the Muslim friends who are with us today.

The Convention Itself

About 130 people gathered at Navjyoti Niketan, Patna, on 24th February for the first day of the Convention.

After an introductory prayer service Benedict J. Osta, S.J., Archbishop of Patna, welcomed the participants and situated the Convention in the present context of the contemporary scene in India.

Paul Jackson, President of ISA, gave a brief outline of the Association, mentioning "the difficulties involved in actually finding Catholics who are willing to commit themselves to some sustained effort to reach out to Muslims in collaboration with their fellow-Catholics." S. S. Mashhadi, our first Muslim speaker, gave us an insight into how a committed Muslim can play a significant role as a government administrator.

We then had a break for morning tea and interaction.

In the second session, Muhammed

K. K., Superintending Archaeologist for Bihar, described his work of preserving Christian churches in Goa and how he uncovered the site of the Ibadat Khana, where the Jesuit fathers, on their arrival at Akbar's court in Fatehpur Sikri in 1580, joined in the religious discussions being held there. He also uncovered the site of their small chapel and residence.

Zakia Mashhadi gave us a lively insight into the life of an educated middle-class Muslim woman in North India. Her family was a blend of liberal and conservative ideas. She herself became a teacher, writer and translator.

Dr Razi Ahmad, Director of Gandhi Sangrahalaya, shared his experience and insights as a Gandhian activist and social scientist.

The last speaker was Dr Isri Arshad from Bihar Sharif. He began life in a poor, low-caste Hindu family, and had a painful experience of caste discrimination as a young boy in Bihar Sharif. He determined to shine through diligent application to his studies, and shine he did. Attracted by Islam's egalitarianism he became a Muslim. He has distinguished himself as a surgeon, community leader and friend of the poor.

The lunch break provided a valuable opportunity for interaction. When we gathered again our first speaker was Dr. A. A. Hai, eminent surgeon and community welfare

worker, who shared the inspiration he receives from his faith in God. Ishrat Hussain, a social worker in Holy Family Hospital, Patna, comes from a very liberal family belonging to the minority Bohra community. In her youth was a champion athlete, holding an all-India record. She was allowed to attend training camps where most of the athletes were male, but said she never had any problems. Sr. Manju, H.C., who lives with a Muslim family in a mixed village in Uttar Pradesh, described the lot of Muslim women in her village. Wife beating is common, but there is only one case of divorce and no case of polygamy in the hundred or so Muslim families. Dr. Akhtar Hussain Aftab gave a rousing call to foster the human face of all religions, and Imtiaz Ahmad, Patna's most eminent historian of Mediaeval India, explained what it is like for a Muslim to fast. He also made some comments on the present situation as a professional historian. We then had our afternoon-tea break.

The final session was thrown open to the participants to express their reaction to the day's programme. Prominent among those to speak were John Baptist Thakur, Bishop of Muzaffarpur; Fr. R. H. Lesser, the noted writer; various priests, sisters and young people in formation, as well as Jami Mashhadi, a young Muslim engineering student. Their comments were all positive. This was very heartening for the organizers.

The following day, 25th February, 36 people climbed on board a bus and went to Phulwari Sharif, a largely Muslim settlement near Patna. The oldest tomb there is dated 1385. The first place we visited was the Fiqh Academy. This is where young Muslims who have completed the full course of training in a madrasa, or seminary, come for two years to learn how to become lawyers and judges in the field of Muslim Personal Law, which is still being observed in India. Junaid Alam, the head of the Institution and chief teacher, gave a very lucid account of the studies undertaken there and answered questions to the satisfaction of our group. The sisters present, however, thought it was discriminatory that no women students were to be found there.

We then went to the Imarat-i Shari`a, the actual institute where legal opinions and judgements are given. The students go there for practical training. We were shown the various departments and also visited the young boys who are learning the Quran by heart. First of all they are taught how to read the Arabic alphabet, then they begin memorizing the whole Quran. This process normally takes about four years. What amazed the visitors was the fact that the boys do not understand what they have memorized. Most will then go on to study Arabic, but some will remain content with knowing the Quran by heart. This entitles them to be called a Hafiz Sahib, a title of respect in the Muslim community. We were offered tea before we paid

a quick visit to the small hospital being run on the premises. We did not have time to see the technical institute.

We then marched through the butchers' quarter where the initial attempt to sell us meat gave way to astonishment at seeing the group walking along the narrow lane.

Our next stop was the Sangi Masjid (Stone Mosque) built by Mir Ataullah Ja`fari, Governor of Bihar under the Mughal Emperor, Humayun, in 1549. A crowd of local people gathered as we went into the mosque. I explained the main features of the mosque and then the imam, the prayer leader, appeared on the scene. I requested him to show us where he stood and what he did when he was leading the prayer service. He very kindly obliged us with a cycle of prayer. We all watched and listened respectfully. It was a beautiful moment of communion in prayer.

Our next stop was to the tomb of Mujibullah Qadri, a Sufi saint who had died in 1777. We then had a brief look at the Khanqah, the buildings which constitute the living quarters of the descendants of the saint. We did not have time to meet Rizwan Ahmad Qadri, the current Shah Sahib, or head of the institution. We returned to Navjyoti Niketan for lunch.

After lunch we went to the Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library where Atiqur Rahman, the man in charge of the manuscripts,

explained the history of the library and showed us, with great devotion, some of the manuscripts kept in the library. The beautiful miniature paintings and border-work, as well as exquisite calligraphy, were greatly admired by all. We even saw a portrait of Mir Ataullah Ja`fari, the man who had built the Sangi Masjid we had seen in the morning.

Our final call was to the flat of the Mashhadi family where we were able to interact with the family members as well as with half a dozen young Muslim engineering students over an enjoyable afternoon-tea. It was a very relaxed and enjoyable affair where people felt free to ask questions. It was a fitting conclusion to a successful two-day Convention.

Comments

It might be instructive to share the experience of organizing a Convention along these lines on the Patna scene. The first point to notice is that the Archbishop of Patna, when requested to give the Opening Address, immediately consented to do so and wrote it in his diary. This was very heartening. So too was the response of William D'Souza, the Jesuit Provincial. He promised to spend the whole of Saturday at the Convention. He also agreed to conduct the Christian portion of the introductory prayer service.

The introductory flier quoted at the

beginning was produced in December and circulated in that month as well as in January. It was not sent by mail. It was personally handed over to a prominent person in a Catholic institution with an explanation about what was involved. On the average this took about an hour and included a cup of tea. It was interesting to notice the different reactions. On the whole, the more open the group, the greater the interest shown. Some schools, for example, made an immediate commitment to send some teachers, while others showed little interest. This is understandable. Catholic institutions in Patna are working at full stretch to meet the demands made on them. That is why their only real knowledge of Muslims is commonly what they derive from the media. They all know about the activities of the Taliban in Afghanistan, but possibly do not have a personal relationship with a single Muslim in Patna. The Convention was an opportunity to form a mental framework related to real Muslims in Patna. Sadly, many failed to avail themselves of this opportunity. On the other hand, it was greatly encouraging to see John Baptist Thakur, Bishop of Muzaffarpur, come for the whole of Saturday along with a number of his priests.

On the Muslim side, it was interesting to notice how, in spite of the clear instruction to give an experience-based presentation, reinforced by the short explanation in the programme, which all

received ahead of time, a number started off with one or the other aspect of Quranic teaching. This was, in itself, an experience of Muslim life!

Three of the Muslim speakers did not turn up. I learnt about one of them two days previously, but had no intimation about the other two. One was sick, and the other also claimed to be sick, but he had written out his presentation in Urdu and I think he found it difficult to give it in English. In the event all the participants – with one exception – would have followed what he had to say.

Nevertheless the programme was not adversely affected, but rather enhanced by their absence, for one gentleman had prepared a talk which he would not otherwise have been able to present, and we had enough time for each speaker to talk and then answer questions. If all had come we would have been rushed for time. We also had more time to allow people to give their reactions to the programme. This proved to be a boon, for their interventions clearly showed how successful the day had been in touching hearts and minds.

When the programme was ready, three days were spent distributing copies to both Catholics and Muslims. It was the final reminder.

The combination of a day of experience-based input from Muslims, followed by visits to a variety of Muslim institutions on the

second day, and the opportunities for interaction on both days, proved to be a successful formula.

**Assistancy Advisory Committee
on Interreligious Dialogue
Meets in St. Louis**

Francis X. Clooney, S.J.

In May, 1998, I accepted a request from the Jesuit Conference to coordinate the United States Assistancy's work in response to the directives of the 34th General Congregation on Mission and Interreligious Dialogue. Thereafter, in consultation with the provincials, I put together an Assistancy Advisory Committee on Interreligious Dialogue, to help me in this work: James T. Bretzke (JSTB; Wisconsin), Raymond A. Bucko (New York), Philip J. Chmielewski (Chicago), William J. Farge (New Orleans), Paul L. Heck (New England), Raymond G. Helmick (New England), Ignatius F. Ohno (Oregon), James D. Redington (Maryland), John A. Saliba (Detroit), Carl F. Starkloff (Missouri), Augustine H. Tsang (California). Joseph P. Horrigan from the Upper Canada Province is also going to be working with us, since many issues link the two assistancies.

This was the first such gathering of Jesuits for this purpose in the United States and hopefully a fruitful beginning to a larger initiative by US Jesuits. Key to the meeting was the opportunity for the committee members to get to know one another, sharing personal stories and apostolic experiences.

Since the committee includes Jesuits from all the provinces, we were also able to learn more about local initiatives directly related to dialogue, and also about organizing efforts in other areas that might serve as a model for our work.

Organizing Jesuits on an assistancy level is a daunting task, so we also examined the roles of the convener and the committee, and asked what kinds of planning is really feasible on an assistancy level.

On the second day, we were able to enter into more substantive discussions about mission and dialogue, realizing that we cannot make steady progress in the area of dialogue without a good understanding of the Church's positions on evangelization and dialogue, and a sense of what a fruitful Jesuit contribution might be to the Church's larger mission.

We agreed that dialogue is indicative of the providential situation in which we find ourselves today; as Pope John Paul II has said, "By dialogue we let God be present in our midst, for as we open ourselves to one another, we open ourselves to God".

Our conversations affirmed that dialogue is a positive value, a necessary response to the situation in which we find ourselves. We also saw that dialogue has to be integrated with other aspects of our work, ranging from a broad commitment to the evangelization of culture to our work in education, in the ministry of the Exercises, with the dispossessed and refugees, and on the whole must be linked with practical issues which concern Americans of all religious backgrounds particularly in situations of actual or potential violence where religions can either aggravate or alleviate tensions.

We did not have time to analyze any issue in depth, but at least gained a good sense of the balances required for fruitful dialogue with people of other faiths.

On Sunday we concluded with some brainstorming about what to do next.

We sketched various practical strategies: e.g., a website for dialogue-related news and documents (<http://web.lemoyne.edu/jesuit/dialogue>); the composition of a booklet containing brief sketches of different religions and a useful bibliography on religions, the Jesuit history of interreligious encounters, and Church documents.

Though no plans have yet been made, we envision one or more conferences over the next several

years: e.g., a conference for interested Jesuits and some of our lay colleagues, and especially with persons of other faith traditions.

I may also work together convening a small conference for scholars who are specialists in Jesuit mission history.

I hope that readers of this report will share with me and the Advisory Committee their insights as to how we should implement dialogue in the American context, how it is to be balanced and integrated with other Christian values and commitments, and what initiatives, local or national, should be highlighted in the near future.

Making dialogue a dimension of all our Jesuit ministries is a project still in its infancy, and your ideas and suggestions are vitally important to our work in this area.

OUR BULLETIN ON THE WEB

We are happy to report that the first seven issues of the English edition of our Bulletin *Jesuits in Dialogue: the Interreligious Dimension* is now on internet. You can find us at the following address:

<http://puffin.creighton.edu/jesuit/dialogue/>

In this way you can consult the earlier issues in case you missed or mislaid one, and also have the articles already scanned for recopying or sending to others.

So far, only the English version is available, but we hope to eventually have all language versions on the worldwide web.

We hope eventually to include notices of past and future activities in interreligious dialogue, relevant articles, and documentary features. Jesuit Secretariat for Interreligious Dialogue.

EJIF Summer Program 2000 in Albania

Darko Perkovic, S.J.

This summer EJIF (*European Jesuits in Formation*) has once again gathered scholastics from all around the Europe organizing its traditional Summer Meeting. In order to create the proper atmosphere for the meeting, we held it in Albania. Why Albania?

Since this year's theme was Interreligious Dialogue, the EJIF Coordinating Commission thought it would be important to find a European country which could give us the taste of mixing with believers of another religion. Albania today is still recovering from 40 years of officially imposed atheism and has a population composed of Muslims, Orthodox and Catholic Christians, and non-believers. Albania was certainly the right place for our deliberations.

The Summer Meeting was held from 27th July to 17th August. We were situated in the valley of Pezë, some 20 km west of Tirana, at the Habib Conference Center belonging to the Bahai community. We were very well received and the accommodation had all facilities we needed.

Our activities, as in previous years, were divided into three parts: the EJIF Forum, an eight-day retreat and the EJIF Symposium. Let me present a summary of each of these events.

The EJIF Forum:

We were 19 participants coming from two German and two Polish provinces, the Spanish Baetica, Tarraconense and Loyola provinces, Italy, Malta, Flanders, Croatia, France, Ireland, Rumania, Portugal, Austria, Britain and Switzerland. The theme focused on interreligious dialogue and presentations were given over 5

days by Fr. Tom Michel S.J. We had lectures on Islam and were also given some short insights into the other main world religions. We had a lot of opportunities to ask questions in order to deepen our knowledge and approach of other faiths. For this we are most grateful to Fr. Tom, who spoke with such great respect about other faiths. We were also very glad to welcome Father Mark Rotsaert S.J., the acting president of the C.E.P., with whom we had a meeting during one of the evenings, mainly about the topic of formation and the meaning of the C.E.P and its task.

Most of his religious life he spent in Egypt working and living with Muslims. Frs. José Maria Orozco Morales S.J. and Tom Michel S.J. assisted as spiritual directors. We all sensed it was a very privileged experience to do the retreat together as a particular way to foster strong ties with each other, rooted in our common desire to follow Christ as his companions.

The EJIF Symposium:

The main issue of this year's EJIF Symposium was the election of the new Coordinating Commission.

The EJIF Retreat:

The retreat was situated in the line of the interreligious theme. The retreat director was Fr. Christiaan van Nispen S.J., from Cairo. Fr. Christiaan has a very rich experience and wide knowledge both in spiritual matters and in Islam, as we could see from his daily inputs for our meditations.

The election took place in the presence of Father Chris Dyckhoff S.J., Socius to the President of the C.E.P. The three new members of the Coordinating Commission are Ludger Michael Joos from the Upper German Province, Georges Henry Ruysen from the North Belgium Province, and myself, Darko Perkovic from the Croatian Province. After the election we

discussed the positive and less positive aspects of the Summer Meeting 2000 and also the possible topics that could be included in the 2001 Summer Meeting. The major interests were directed at themes like Formation in the Society of Jesus, Community Life, and issues related to Refugees and Migrants in Europe.

During these three weeks we lived in great harmony and brotherhood, tasting fully Ignatius' words of our being companions of Jesus and friends in the Lord. We all had a great sense of our great cultural, linguistic and spiritual variety and riches as members of one and the same international, European body or *communitas ad dispersionem*. We were well received by the Italian Jesuit community in Tirana which organised on three occasions a social evening for us: the first evening we arrived in Tirana, the Feast of St. Ignatius, and the last evening of our stay in Albania. We visited the Emmanuel Community for former drug-addicts, which is in the process of being built and located halfway from Tirana to Pezë and run by Italian Jesuits. We also had a chance to pay a visit to the Jesuit Major Seminary in Sköder in northern Albania, a poor city mainly inhabited by Catholics. As leisure activities, we went twice to the wonderful sand beaches of Durrës on the Adriatic Sea, spending the afternoons playing water polo and football.

Looking back on the Meeting, I could say that it once again

succeeded in achieving its primary goal, that of building friendship and a stronger feeling of oneness among young European Jesuits. I hope that this short report will be an encouragement for your brotherly prayers for the next EJIF Meeting which is to be held in Portugal.

Religious Dimensions in the Dialogue Amongst Civilisations

Chandra Muzaffar

Dialogue among people of different religious communities is more widespread today than ever before. For many of those involved in this process, dialogue is an avenue to explain one's own faith to the other and to learn a little about the religion one's dialogue partner. There are some who would like to see this dialogue go beyond 'Knowing one another'. They hope that through active intellectual interaction and engagement a shared universal spiritual-moral world view will emerge which will serve as the basis of a new truly just and compassionate global civilization. What they are seeking is not just inter-religious understanding but the nurturing of a deep human bond of love and empathy transcending religious affiliations. It is of course true that there are some groups and individuals engaged in inter-religious dialogue

whose real aim is to convert die other to one's religion or at least 'to prove that ones religion is superior to the others.

While inter-religious dialogue is gaining momentum, the relationship between civilizations is being shaped — as has been the ease for most of human history— by the forces of power and wealth. The centres of power and wealth located largely in die West and the North are creating a global civilisation driven by money market, machine, and media. Since at the root of this drive is an obsession with the first M, we have described the ideological foundation of contemporary civilisation as moneytheism. Multi -National Corporations (MNCs) and, increasingly, currency traders, dominate the global economy. Coca-Cola and McDonald's are in every nook and cranny of the planet. CNN reaches most middle-class livingrooms around the globe. Films and videos, comics and cartoons, music and dances from the United States have become part and parcel of a global culture of sorts. Heroes and heroines promoted by sporting activities associated with the centres of power and wealth in the West have become global idols with millions of raving fans. And, parties and competitive elections are regarded as the essence of politics while adherence to individual civil and political rights is the ultimate measure of political maturity.

The global economy, global culture

and global politics may be dominated by the centres of power and wealth in the West but there is no denying that elements from non-western civilisations also sometimes seep into the planetary architecture. Foods and music and even figures from the non-western world of sports. entretainment and politics do every now and then acquire global fame. Rut more often than not, it is because thcy are able to fit into the milieu shaped by the dominant West. They may add variety to but in no way are they allowed to threaten Western hegemony.

In many respects, Western hegemony has had an adverse Impact upon the rest of humankind. It has thwarted the growth or values, cultures and social systems which may have been able to contribute to human civilisation as a whole. At the same time, it has led to the imposition of systems or thought and patterns of living which are antithetical to the principles of social justice and the tenets of social harmony and equilibrium. Conspicuous consumption by an elite and widening economic disparities have eroded the notion of social obligation that the rich had towards the poor in many traditional non-western societies. Similarly the decline of the family and the disintegration of the community have not only weakened social cohesion but also undermined the dissemination of positive moral values within the populace.

This does not mean that Western

influence which is ubiquitous has not produced any positive results for non-Western societies. Democratic institutions, the empowerment of women, the mechanisms for attaining economic prosperity and the utilisation of science and technology for the public good would be some of the accomplishments of the West which have been harnessed by non-western societies for their own benefit.

Nonetheless, the emasculation of non-western cultures and the perpetuation of vast iniquities of wealth, power and knowledge in many non-western societies have helped to spawn mass religious movements which are often opposed to Western cultural and political hegemony. These movements seek to re-assert a 'pure and pristine' religious identity — an identity which invariably is interpreted in rigid, dogmatic terms. Their leaders and interpreters who are often from the educated middle-class have begun to discover that the deprived and disadvantaged masses yearning for a modicum of justice are always a ready and receptive constituency for their skill, simplistic political rhetoric.

Whenever these groups obtain political power, they reinforce religious division and dichotomies in society. Sometimes they display a degree of religious chauvinism which betrays the universalism embodied within their own philosophies. This is true to some extent of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in

India today with its slogan of 'Hinduvta'. The Islamic clerics at the core of the Islamic State in Iran have exhibited yet another face of religious resurgence. Authoritarianism which concentrates power in the hands of the religious elite and delegitimises competing perspectives on religious doctrine is one of the defining characteristics of the religious state. Meanwhile, in India and Iran fundamental economic challenges confronting the people remain unresolved.

The failure of the authoritarian religious elite in Iran to address issues of justice, freedom and equality has given birth to a popular reform movement in which women and youths play prominent roles. The Islamic reformers, in contrast to the authoritarian elite, are value oriented rather than law-based; inclusive rather than exclusive; universal rather than sectarian. Hence, their commitment to the dialogue of civilisations. However, for the religious reformers to carry forward their struggle they should be seen as authentic articulators of change espousing an alternative from within rather than without the tradition.

Equally important, they have to prove to the people that they have the knowledge, the ability and the skills to overcome problems related to economic justice, political freedom and social cohesion.

The time has come for religious reformers to produce concrete,

tangible policies and programmes which are not only directed at their own people but also seek to address larger civilisational crises — crises which are connected, in a sense, to the perennial question of the human being's place in the universe and her ultimate destiny.

Are the reformers capable of coming to grips with critical civilisational challenges? Whatever their strengths and weaknesses, the prevailing situation appears to favour the reformers. As we have hinted, flaws in the authoritarian, dogmatic approach to religion are becoming more and more obvious to all and sundry. Besides, some of the major problems facing human society both at the national and international levels, call for solutions which are value based — which is the perspective from which the reformers view contemporary challenges. To check the decline of the family and environmental degradation, for instance, one has to inculcate respect for intra-family ties and for relations with nature.

At the international level, it is not possible to tame the havoc wreaked by currency speculators without a fundamental reorientation in our approach to money which has now been transformed from a medium of exchange into a commodity for profit. The battle against casino capitalism is, in the ultimate analysis, a moral struggle that demands a new value-system. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction can only be brought under control if civilisation as a

whole views human security and human relations, expressed at different levels of interaction, from a non-violent non-aggressive standpoint. This requires a value transformation. The reformers are also helped by the fact that societies everywhere are becoming heterogeneous today. The spread of multi-religious societies means that human beings have no choice but to live with the other. When the presence of 'the religious other' is no longer a theoretical construct but a living reality, one's attitudes and values, willy-nilly, will undergo a change. It is not inconceivable that over time people will become more tolerant and accommodative of one another — though in the interregnum there are bound to be inter-religious tensions and even conflicts. The accommodative, inclusive approach of the reformers, needless to say, will become more relevant in multi-religious societies seeking to establish a *modus vivendi*. Globalisation, and the borderless world that is emerging in its wake, enhances the relevance of the reformers. As humankind as a collectivity becomes more and more conscious of its shared existence and common fate, it will realise how imperative it is to strengthen the sinews within the human family through shared interest and shared values. The reformers' universal spiritual-moral ethic will provide a basis for tomorrow's global unity. In spite of the present confusion and crisis, there is no doubt that it is the hands of the reformers that will shape the future.

The above essay was presented The House of World Cultures, Berlin, Germany on 18 November 2000 by Chandra Muzaffar, a Malaysian Muslim political scientist.

**Address of Father General
to the consultation
“Jesuits among Muslims
in Europe”**

Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J.

I welcome you to the consultation “Jesuits among Muslims in Europe,” sponsored by the Conference of European Provincials and organized by the Secretariat for Interreligious Dialogue. You are here, in most cases, because you have been named by your Provincials, based on your experience, expertise, or interest in this field of apostolate, to represent the Province at this consultation and to communicate its results and findings to the members of your Province.

The presence of Muslims in Europe is varied and raises for Jesuits a broad range of issues. For those of you coming from Provinces of Eastern Europe, the presence of Muslims is not something new, dating back centuries to the Ottoman and Mongol conquests,

but challenged once again in the post-communist period by the responsibility of building peaceful and pluralist societies. Those coming from Western Europe are facing new and complicated situations brought on by the migration of Muslims in recent decades. In a number of European countries, there is the relatively recent phenomenon of conversions of Europeans to Islam, and there is also the new phenomenon of the children of Muslim migrants, born and educated in Europe, living between two cultures with divergent value systems.

Your reflections at this consultation will cover a wide range of topics and situations. You will have to review the fears and concerns of Europeans faced with unforeseen cultural changes in their home societies, with the ever-present danger of extreme nativist reactions. You will have to look at the reactions of Muslims to the highly secular modern European societies in which they live, reactions which can be judgmental and work to the detriment of national unity. You must also look at the possibilities of an emerging “European Islam” which seeks to integrate what is best in European traditions of personal dignity and human rights into the teachings of Islam, thus offering the possibility of making a positive contribution both to European societies and to the worldwide Islamic community.

As Jesuits, you will seek to apply to your own national and regional

situations the directives of the documents of the 34th General Congregation, specifically those of “Our Mission and Interreligious Dialogue” and “Our Mission and Culture.” You must ask yourselves and one another what can and should dialogue with Muslims mean for Jesuits living in contemporary Europe.

What impact does the presence of Muslims have on our mission today as we seek to offer our world a service of faith that does justice in dialogue with cultures and people of other religions? How do we relate to Muslims, and teach our fellow Christians to live among Muslims, as deeply committed believers in God who strive to make our societies more humane, just, peaceful and respectful of legitimate differences? Can we find ways to share our faith with Muslims that take into account the deeply religious path that they are already following?

This is the first such consultation of European Jesuits to study the question of Christian-Muslim relations, but it is not intended to be the last. It will not be possible to treat at much depth all the varied issues which will arise. It is realistic to hope, however, that from your consultation will grow a nucleus of European Jesuits who will be able to animate the Provinces to address these issues in coming years. It will be your task to find the most effective ways to promote this sharing at the European level.

To encourage you in your deliberations on these days, I cite the words of “Our Mission and Culture” from the last General Congregation: “It is part of our Jesuit tradition to be involved in the transformation of every human culture, as human beings begin to reshape their patterns of social relations, their cultural inheritance, their intellectual projects, their critical perspectives on religion, truth and morality, their whole scientific and technological understanding of themselves and the world in which they live. We commit ourselves to accompany people, in different contexts, as they and their culture make difficult transitions” (4:25.) I will pray for you these days so that your efforts in Ludwigshafen might bear fruit in helping the Society to carry out this aspect of our mission in Europe.

Dialogue in Guyana for Justice and Peace

Joshi Praadep A., S.J.

When I asked a Muslim if we could meet together regularly to share one another’s religious experiences, he was suspicious: “Why do you want, meet and share religious experiences?” He felt there must be some hidden agenda, that it was only a means to the final goal of conversion. ‘You know’, he said to me “we Muslims are missionary minded, and you Christians are also missionary minded. So there is bound to be a

collision in meeting and discussing religion.” I replied. “No. I don’t want to discuss. All I want is to know more about and appreciate Islam and Muslims better.

I would also like to pray with you”. His suspicion is not uncommon among Muslims and, to a lesser extent, among Hindus.

But I did not give up. After speaking with several Hindus and Muslims, about ten of us met every month. To one Muslim member I said “Your father has some posters in his big shop which says Christ did not die on the cross and other statements which embarrass me as a Christian.” “I’ll speak to my father,” he replied. Those posters were removed. His father became a very good friend of mine, and even asked me to be on the Corentyne Peace Council which had two Muslims, two Hindus and me. Persons brought their problems to us. We visited them in their homes every Wednesday, or they came to our office. Our purpose was to solve their problems and save them from going to the courts. We solved about 50% of their problems. At the same time we got the good will of all. As a Catholic priest I was able to foster plenty of good will for the Church.

I was also invited by the Pentecostal Pastors, over ten of them, to a meeting to organise a March for Jesus. I felt the way they were doing it would offend the sensitivities of the Hindus and Muslims. I explained the Catholic

point of view that we believe that there are many beliefs and practices in non Christians religions which are true and holy, and that we have a high regard for their manner of life, many of whom would put to shame Christians. Their religions reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all people. I expressed my view that the way the march would be conducted is like pointing a finger at them. I also spoke of how Christ praised the faith of a pagan Roman officer who said to Jesus, “I’m not worthy that you should come to my house but only say the word and my servant shall be healed.” Jesus was surprised at his great faith and said to the crowd that followed him, “I have never found faith like this not even in Israel” (Lk 7:9). My remarks were recorded in the minutes and we continued to be good friends.

In dialogue we don’t gloss over our differences but we don’t emphasise them either. But we emphasise the points we have in common like faith in Jesus prayer, fasting and doing good to the poor and sick. We would often meet and pray together. In the Sacred Heart parish we have three other Christian churches. We are planning to meet, pastors and lay leaders. I do not know what will emerge, but we can pray and plan a small project together. We can celebrate some feasts together. On the more serious side we can read and discuss some of the joint-statements issued in Europe and North America. The most recent Roman-Catholic-Anglican

statement in May 1999 on "*The Gift of Authority*" can be regarded as an ecumenical break-through. Such a statement can be studied in the parishes to understand and appreciate more deeply God's gift of authority given us by God through his Son Jesus and his Vicar on earth, the Pope, the Bishops, priests and lay leaders in different ways.

All human beings are made by God, and our hearts are restless until they come to rest in God. All human beings are in ceaseless quest for complete happiness. The quest is inspired by the Holy Spirit. All religions arose from this primordial openness to God. At their origins we often find founders who, with the help of God's Spirit, achieved a deeper religious experience. Handed on to others this experience took form in doctrines, rites and precepts of the various religions. Every authentic religious experience finds its expression in prayer. We can always join in prayer with members of different churches and faiths. In this way we help one another to transcend ourselves. I have often joined alcoholics and drug addicts in praying the serenity prayer. Their members are of different religions or of none. What a sense of fellowship we all experience in prayer. This fellowship is essential to overcome weaknesses and come closer to God. Jesus himself longed for fellowship. He showed it on so many occasions, especially in his agony: "Stay here with me and pray." You must have heard or read

how Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and Christians of several Churches joined with Pope John Paul II for the World Day of Peace at Assisi on 27 October 1986. He has had similar meetings on other occasions. Hindus, Muslims and Christians have reflected at a meeting and written down what they thought was good and what they thought was bad about the other two. I shared these reflections and we agreed to emphasise what we thought was good about the others. In this way we broke down barriers and stereotyped images of one another. We became less judgmental and more appreciative. Instead, respect, trust and love grew. All of us experienced an inter-conversion in some way or other. We became more open to each other and to God. This was a great experience not only for me but for the other with whom I met. Our desire to live in peace and harmony with others was not just a desire but an action. I have prayed with Muslims and Hindus in their mosques and mandirs and they with me. I have attended their readings of the Holy Qu'ran and the Bhagavad Gita and even dared to explain verses from them. They liked my explanations - they thought they were unique. And they surprised me with their appreciation of passages from the Bible. Truly justice and peace can be consolidated through ecumenical and inter-faith dialogue. We all have to learn something and not seek ourselves but only God alone who has revealed himself to Christians and others through his Son, Jesus.

VIEW FROM NIGERIA

PRAYER THAT UNITES

Peter Schineller, S.J.

We have all had the experience. A school, a public gathering, or a celebration such as a wedding or a funeral. It is time for a prayer to opener to conclude the occasion. The Reverend Father, the Reverend Sister, or one of the elders is called upon to lead the prayer. It is a mixed group, that is, many are Christians but non-Catholics, and a large number are Moslems. In such a setting, how does one pray? What prayer? Does one begin with the sign of the cross? Does ore mention Jesus Christ, and pray through him to the Father? Does one recite the Our Father?

Of course. if the gathering is composed of 90% Catholics, it is fitting and proper to utilize prayers that Catholics are familiar with and feel at home with. The Hail Mary, the hail Holy Queen or Angelus could be prayed. But if there are many Muslims there, what does ore say? How does ore pray in a way that the Muslims can join our prayer?

My suggestion is that in a mixed

group, with a considerable percentage of Muslims, we go the extra mile, and pray in a way that they feel at home with. I see such occasions of prayer with Muslims as opportunities to show our respect and admiration for their faith. Instead of making them feel uncomfortable by emphasizing what is distinctive to Roman Catholics. we Christians might better emphasize what we believe in common with our Muslim brothers and sisters.

This is not being unfair to our tradition, not watering down what we believe. Do we rot regularly pray the Psalms - and the Psalms make no explicit mention of the Trinity, or Jesus or May? They are powerful prayers, and in fact, Muslims would feel very much at home with many of the Psalms.

For an example of prayer with Muslims, we have the words of Pope John Paul II. At various occasions he has met with and prayed with Muslim leaders and Muslim faithful. I will give one key example of bow he prayed with and for Muslims and Christians, and then comment on and show bow we might adapt and use that prayer. Note above all that it is prayer that emphasizes the faith that we share with Muslims. not the faith that divides The place was Dakar, Senegal, the year 1992. Pope John Paul II at the conclusion of his major address, invited the Muslims

to pray with him, and prayed as follows:

O God, you are our Creator, You are good and Your mercy knows no bounds. To you arises the praise of every creature.

O God, You have given us an inner law by which we must live. To do Your will is our task.

To follow Your ways is to know peace of heart. To You we offer our homage.

Guide us on all the paths we travel upon this earth.

Free us from all the evil tendencies which lead our hearts away from Your will. Never allow us to stray from You.

O God, Judge of all humankind, help us to be included among your chosen ones on the Last Day.

O God. Author of justice and peace, give us true Joy and authentic love, and a lasting solidarity among peoples. Give us your everlasting gifts. Amen.

May the God of Mercy, the God of Love, the God of Peace, bless each of you and the members of your families. Amen.

Introduction to the Prayer. Note that the Holy Father does not begin with

the sign of the cross. My suggestion is that we begin by asking for a moment of silence in words such as these: "Let us now pause in silence for a moment." Then, after a brief pause, we begin the prayer.

Names of God. The Pope prays to God with several names or attributes. He is Creator, judge, the one who gives the law, the author of justice and peace, the one who gives joy. He is called the God of Mercy, Love, and Peace. We see that the Pope does not refer to Jesus the Son of God, nor even to God as Father because for Muslims this might be taken as a way to emphasize that Jesus (as we believe and they do not) is the only-begotten Son of the Father.

Additional names of God from Islamic literature that are also very Christian, names that could be used would be to invoke God as the exalted One,"~ 'the One who loves beauty," and "the glorious One." Especially favored by Muslims are the attributes of God as "The Merciful, the Compassionate."

Themes for Prayer with Muslims.

The Pope prays that we do God's will, and follow God's ways. We ask God to guide us, keep us from evil, and to include us among those chosen on the Last Day. We pray that God bless us and our families, that God give us joy, love, and solidarity among peoples.

Input from the Second Vatican Council can provide additional guidance. The Council Fathers gave a clear summary of how we have much in common, but also serious differences with adherents of Islam. There we read that Muslims are among those who acknowledge the Creator,” and, “professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind” The Church, No.16). An oft-quoted passage, the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (No. 3) states:

Upon the Moslems too, the Church looks with esteem. They adore one God, living and enduring, merciful and all-powerful, Maker of heaven and earth and Speaker to men.

They strive to submit wholeheartedly even to His inscrutable decrees, just as did Abraham, with whom the Islamic faith is pleased to associate itself. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin mother at times they call on her too, with devotion. In addition they await the day of judgment when God will give each man his due after raising him up. Consequently, they prize the moral life, and give worship to God especially through prayer, almsgiving, and fasting.

This official statement of the Church on Islam gives much wisdom that should guide us in praying with Muslims.

Conclusion of the Prayer. The Pope concludes the prayer with “Amen”. He does not conclude as Christians often do, by praying to the Father, in the Spirit, through the Son, Jesus Christ. For example, we often end our prayers, “We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen” But in the situation where many Muslims are present and praying with us, it is perfectly proper to conclude as the Pope does. “Give us your everlasting gifts. Amen.” We might also conclude with words like these: “We pray in Your name. Amen.” Or, May You be blessed and praised, forever and ever. Amen.” Or again, “To You belong splendor, might, and mastery, now and forever. Amen.”

Prayers that Lead to Unity.

The Church urges every Catholic to work and pray for unity among all of God’s people. Occasions where Christians and Muslims meet and pray are one opportunity to foster unity. These are opportunities where Christians can show good will by praying in a way that unites rather than stresses differences and divisions. Seeing this as the path to unity, Pope John Paul II spoke to Muslims in Italy in 1980: “May the spirit of unity and of reciprocal respect show itself more powerful

than that which divides and sets at odds.”

Let me conclude with words that the Holy Father in Belgium in 1985

addressed to Christians and Muslims.

These words emphasize what we have in common with our Muslim brothers and sisters, and indicate the spirit in which we might fruitfully pray with those of the Islamic tradition: As Christians and Muslims, we encounter one another in faith in the one God, our Creator and Guide, our just and merciful Judge. In our daily lives we strive to put into practice God’s will according to the teaching of our respective Scriptures. We believe that God transcends our thoughts and our universe and that His loving presence accompanies us throughout each day. In prayer, we place ourselves in the presence of God to offer Him our worship and thanksgiving, to ask forgiveness for our faults, and to seek His help and blessing.”

Even in small ways, Catholics can promote the cause of religious peace and unity. The way we indicate here is sensitivity to and respect for the faith of Muslims when we are called upon to pray at a gathering where there is a large number of Christians and Muslims present.