

Path of Love:

A Call for Interfaith Harmony

by:

Fr. James Channan OP

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A Call for Interfaith Harmony
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To
my father Channan Masih
and
Fr Chrys McVey OP
who are great inspiration and models of
interfaith harmony and peace for me

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Preface

I know Fr James Channan OP personally since we were students at Christ the King Seminary in Karachi. From his student days I have observed that he is very much devoted in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue. Dialogue among people of different religions and especially Christian-Muslim Dialogue is an important mission of the Catholic Church. I am very impressed to see that he is promoting dialogue with great zeal and dedication. I know that after receiving higher studies from the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies in Rome, Italy and later on from the Harvard University, USA he has been fully involved in this field. I am proud of him that he is doing this work for more than 30 years. He has served the Catholic Bishops Christian-Muslim Dialogue Commission in Pakistan as well at the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims. He is well known and well recognized international personality and is in great demand to share about his expertise. He has participated in hundreds of national and international conferences. He has given public lectures in various universities such as in Finland, Germany, United States, Philippines, Netherlands and South Korea. His views and comments are very much respected by the people.

I congratulate Fr James Channan at the publication of his book "Path of Love: A Call for Interfaith Harmony". This book contains his lectures he gave in different universities, papers and interviews which have been published both in the national and international press. This book is very well done and it is the first of its kind in Pakistan.

Dialogue among people of different religions and especially Christians and Muslims is of prime importance. This is one of the most important tool through which we can promote harmony and reconciliation. Such an approach can bring healing, trust and good relations between Christians and Muslims in Pakistan. The Catholic Church in Pakistan has taken this apostolate very seriously and is very committed to this work. I see bright future of the Church in Pakistan through dialogue. It is already bringing

forth much positive results and we can see the efforts of Fr James Channan as an integral part of this mission.

He has received many national and international awards in recognition of his work to promote peace and harmony. He also received special award at the Jubilee celebration of the Archdiocese of Lahore. I admire his work and wish him all the best.

I am sure his book will serve as a great tool and inspiration to what is going on in Pakistan. In this book he has given a lot of references about the teaching of Second Vatican Council, addresses and encyclicals of Pope John XXIII, Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis. Moreover, he has presented the situation of Pakistan and the challenges which are faced by the Christians and also efforts which are being made to promote good will, respect and dialogue among people of all religions and especially Christians and Muslims. He is optimist and always sees a ray of hope of better days to come in spite of many challenges and difficulties we are facing in Pakistan. This book will serve as a great source of knowledge to the readers.

I wish him all the best for such a marvelous work of putting his articles, interviews and tributes together in a book form. I am sure the readers will enjoy reading his book and learn a lot about this work in Pakistan and around the globe. God bless Fr James Channan OP and may his work bring forth much positive results in Pakistan and around the world!

Archbishop Sebastian F. Shaw, OFM
Archbishop of Lahore
March 28, 2014

Foreword

Fr James Channan is known as man of dialogue and a man of peace. He has vast experience of interfaith and Christian-Muslim dialogue in the entire world. He is a progressive thinker and revolutionary teacher of promoting respect of religion among the believers. As a son of St Dominic he devoted his life to spread the Word of Love and create harmony among the believers. He knows that the world can not survive without love. The book has an urgent and practical purpose and purpose of the writer is to find out what can be done to promote peace in the world. He is playing an important role in building bridges among people of different religions and cultures. He is very assertive, crystal clear in his mission to promote peace. He has influenced the world more than anybody else in this field. He is a great and very influential friend who knows his call as preacher of Truth.

Path of Love: A Call for Interfaith Harmony is a powerful personal development process providing lasting results that expand over time and integrate gracefully into our life. While you will also experience incredible insights and deep understandings, Path of Love offers the potential for real enduring change in the world in which God is believed to exist. The love is so much needed in our world today. When two people or two nations are in a conflict there is a sense of anger, distrust, and hate but when we are willing to open our hearts to see the similarities and the needs of the other side, we can create compassion for one another, the gap can collapse and a bridge can be built. In this book the basic teaching of Islam and Christianity on the love of God and love of neighbor are presented so that the people start appreciating the values, ideals and dignity of human being to live in peace.

The focus of this book *Path of Love* is to create atmosphere of harmony and peace. This is a path with an open invitation to all people and all religions to be friendly with each other. This path helps people get in touch with the deeper teaching of the religion. It gives the readers an experience of deep love, peace, mercy, compassion, freedom, safety and great beauty. We need to have freedom of mind and heart, and if we want to have peace with

our neighbour or other country, we first need to have peace within our own hearts.

I consider this work to be of great importance in the field of dialogue in general and in particular for the students of religion and interfaith dialogue. It is superbly conceived and guides the reader through the theory, practice, and spiritual thinking of Fr James Channan OP. I congratulate Fr James Channan OP for producing thought provoking book. I am proud of my brother and happy to recommend this book to all who are interested in promoting dialogue between Christians and Muslims.

I am very pleased with the hard work and the publication of the book of Fr James Channan. May Fr James's life spur all of us to be fervent in prayer, courageous in living the faith, profoundly in love with God and neighbour through this book, we ask God to enrich the world always with genuine preachers of the *Word of Love*.

May God bless him and may his efforts bring forth much fruit!

Fr Pascal Paulus OP
Prior Vice Provincial
Ibn-e-Mariam Vice Province, Pakistan
March 25, 2014

Introduction

Fr James Channan, the well-known advocate and pioneer of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Pakistan and beyond, presents in the book “Path of Love: A Call for Interfaith Harmony” a collection of the many contributions he has made in this field. The book is divided into three parts, of which the first contains journal articles and speeches which he delivered at conferences in Pakistan and in many countries of the world. In the second part, Fr Channan presents a selection of interviews which he has given over many years on the topic of interreligious dialogue and understanding. The third part is a collection of commentaries and tributes by various individuals on the person and the work of Fr James Channan in the field of dialogue. These are presented in the original languages of French, Finnish, German, Italian and Spanish, followed by translations of the texts into English.

The first contribution in chapter 1 sets the tone of what is to follow in the various other contributions. The article “Christianity in the Islamic Context of Pakistan: Mutual Influences and Challenges” deals with the central issues with which Fr James Channan has been struggling throughout his life in dialogue. For him it is very important to go back to the origins of Christianity in this part of the world, which is now Pakistan. That Christianity in today’s Pakistan has its roots in apostolic times, going back to the missionary work of the Apostle Thomas, is of great importance for the Christian Churches today. Against accusations by Muslims that Christianity is a by-product of the colonial era, Fr Channan rightly points out that Christians have home right in the area. For him the ideas of the founding father of today’s Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, remain the guiding principles for the peaceful coexistence of members of the different religions in the country. Jinnah did not want an Islamic state, but a state in which all religions have their rightful place.

Fr James Channan is a Dominican priest and Catholic theologian who makes use of the directives and guidelines he finds in the teachings of the Catholic Church. This becomes apparent when he analyses the lasting significance of the encyclical letter “Pacem in Terris” on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of its publication, in a talk originally delivered at Notre Dame

University in the USA. A key point for him is that the basic ideas of this encyclical letter are very helpful in the present situation in Pakistan.

Again using the occasion of a 50th anniversary, this time that of the end of Vatican II, Fr James Channan published an article as a special contribution to the celebrations held in Pakistan in 2012, entitled “Golden Jubilee of the Second Vatican Council: Inter-religious Dialogue and Pakistani Perspective”. This article, as well as his interviews, show that the guiding force in Fr James Channan’s work and efforts in interreligious dialogue are the documents of Vatican II. Here he refers to the “Nostra Aetate”, a document describing the relationship of the Catholic Church to other religions, which opened the way for interreligious dialogue in the Catholic Church. Besides “Nostra Aetate”, there are other Council documents, like the “Dignitatis Humanae”, a declaration dealing with religious freedom, and “Ad Gentes”, a document on the missionary activity of the Church as a lasting obligation, which also affirms the need for entering into dialogue with other religious traditions. For Fr James Channan, it is of utmost importance to show how these general guiding principles of the Catholic Church’s attitude towards other religions can be applied to the special situation in Pakistan, where the Christian minority is struggling against the forces of Islamist radicals threatening its very existence. In doing this, he is not one-sidedly focussed on describing the difficulties and the plight of the Christians. In spite of the many challenges which make interreligious dialogue difficult and at times impossible, he insists that only in remaining firm in the resolve to continue and persist in the attitude of dialogue can a way for the peaceful coexistence of different religious groups be found. After all, the anti-blasphemy laws and other regulations are hurting not only the members of minority religions, but are affecting the majority Muslim community as well, and are obstacles to peace and harmony in the country. In another contribution in Part One, “Teachings of the Vatican on Christian Muslim Dialogue and Christian Muslim Dialogue in Pakistan”, we again find that Fr James Channan is intent on grounding his efforts and work in interreligious dialogue on the basis of the Church’s teachings on the subject. This basic orientation is underlined also in the contribution on the

Encyclical Letter ‘Ut Unum Sint’, on Commitment to Ecumenism” by Pope John Paul II.

Fr James Channan is internationally known as an expert on interreligious dialogue and religious freedom in Pakistan. In September 2000, he was invited as a resource person by the Commission on International Religious Freedom, held in Washington. James Channan used this occasion to present the state of religious freedom in Pakistan by giving an overview of the historical developments, citing examples of the violation of religious freedom in present-day Pakistan and concluding by making recommendations for change and improvement.

Fr James Channan is primarily concentrating his efforts in interreligious dialogue on his native Pakistan. But, at the same time, he is following developments in Christian-Muslim dialogue worldwide. The fourth contribution of Part One deals with the topic of the letter “A Common Word: Love of God and Love of Neighbour”, which was written by 138 Muslim scholars in response to a lecture Pope Benedict XVI had delivered in Regensburg University in September 2006. The derogatory quotations of the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II used by the Pope on this occasion had resulted in many negative reactions in the Muslim world. The letter by 138 Muslim scholars published several months later, however, showed that in the Islamic world there are strong elements which value interreligious dialogue highly and are ready to continue in this line.

Of great relevance and importance is the contribution in Part One, “Religious Freedom in Pakistan”, which was written on the prompting of the then president of the Papal Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Cardinal Francis Arinze. Here, Fr James Channan gives a well-reasoned and balanced evaluation of the situation of religious freedom in Pakistan with special emphasis on the Christian community. Here too, he does not only describe the deficiencies of the present state of religious freedom in Pakistan, but positively tries to present alternatives and concrete proposals to improve the situation. It is in this positive attitude and focus on looking into the future by envisioning alternatives that his lasting commitment to the cause of interreligious dialogue becomes visible and gains credibility.

The last contribution in Part One, “Concept of *Puja* in Hinduism”, is a reproduction of a research paper written for a graduate course during his study at Harvard University in 1996.

Whereas the other contributions of the book remain in the field of dialogue with Islam, this paper shows that Fr James Channan is familiar with another great Asian religious tradition, namely that of Hinduism. In the context of this volume, it opens another view on the author.

The second part contains some examples of the many interviews Fr James Channan has given in different situations and locations. For Fr James Channan, these interviews were opportunities to articulate basic ideas, problems and proposals to various audiences in always-changing circumstances. Compared with the more basic contributions in his articles, they throw some light on aspects not covered in the articles while at the same time showing the consistency and continuity of his understanding of the principles and practice of dialogue.

The concluding part is a testimony to the recognition that the life and work of James Channan have found, not only in his native Pakistan but also worldwide.

Given that the volume is a collection of articles, interviews, and talks written and presented at different times to different audiences, it is inevitable that there are repetitions. This holds true when James Channan speaks about the differences between Christians and Muslims in living together peacefully in Pakistan, which he can only do by repeatedly describing the present situation and locating it in the past history of Pakistan.

The volume is a substantial contribution towards Christian-Muslim dialogue in Pakistan and to interreligious dialogue in general. It helps us to understand the present situation of religious freedom in Pakistan by recounting the history, describing the difficulties, and opening ways for the future.

Dr Georg Evers
Aachen, Germany
July 28, 2013

Appreciation

It has been said that in reading about the lives and work of people of superlative character, we can uplift our own personalities. This, I think, is very true, and it is one reason why inspiring books such as *Path of Love: A Call for Interfaith Harmony* are so needed in this world. When we read about the pure-minded thoughts and actions of its author, Fr. James Channan, our hearts are refreshed and we feel a desire to emulate his example. This desire turns into a spark that illuminates our own highest hopes and wishes, and it urges us to draw out our own limitless potential for being of service to the world.

The goal of furthering Christian-Muslim dialogue is a noble one indeed. Much of the violence that disrupts the harmony of our planet is intertwined with feelings of religious hostility, and persuading people who hold such feelings just to sit together at the same table—much less talk with one another—can be a difficult task indeed. Therefore, even when its aim is simply to encourage such parties to acknowledge one another's existence, the importance of interreligious dialogue cannot be overlooked.

In this book, the author calls attention to a comment from His Holiness Pope John Paul II: "Prayer and dialogue go together. Dialogue depends on prayer and prayer becomes the mature fruits of dialogue." I share in this view entirely, and was overjoyed when Fr. James Channan, a respected colleague and a well known authority in interreligious dialogue, accepted my invitation to come to Japan in 2007 with his esteemed associate Maulana Abdul Kabir Azad, to deliver the keynote address at the landmark Symphony of Peace Prayers ceremony held in May of that year.

During their address, the two leaders stated: "Prayer is something which is common to every religion and spiritual tradition. It makes us realize that there is some supreme power, which we may call by many names, but whatever the name, this supreme power is present and living. We may call it Allah, we may call it God, Aum, or whatever name we may have.... There is much disturbance, hatred, violence, terrorism, and discrimination going on in the world, but we can make a difference. We must change the negative face of the earth and give it a bath of peace."

Nowadays Pakistan is much in the news, but many of us still harbor misconceptions about the country's culture and history, especially with regard to its multi-religious traditions. *Path of Love* opens our eyes to these precious traditions, and it renews our hope that they may return to the forefront someday.

As is pointed out in the tribute by the Bishop William E. Swing, words like “peace,” “tolerance,” and “harmony” are by no means taken for granted in Pakistan today. Even so, he assures us that there are people all over the world who are doing their utmost to reaffirm the power of these essential words. For peace, tolerance, and harmony to become the reality, not only in Pakistan but all over the globe, I feel that all individuals, of all nationalities and cultures, need to take responsibility for nurturing them in their own consciousness. If each of us does not do so, there will be no alternative but for the world to be devoured within the abyss of ignorance and prejudice that appears when our essential path—the path of love—fades from our view.

This is why I feel that interreligious dialogue is a topic that holds interest not only to a special group of religious clerics, but to each human being on earth. With the advent of the 21st century, we have entered an age of individual responsibility, an age where each world citizen has to have at least a slight knowledge of important fields that used to be considered the province of experts—fields such as politics, economics, education, medicine, science, and religion. It is my view that *Path of Love: A Call for Interfaith Harmony* will play a decisive role in making this happen.

I would like to offer my deepest admiration and gratitude to Fr. James Channan for his unstinting devotion to the path of love that he has chosen, and for sharing with us with this precious account of his work.

Mrs. Masami Saionji

Chairperson

The Goi Peace Foundation, Byakko Shinko Kai, and The World Peace Prayer Society

Japan

September 3, 2013

Appreciation

The book “Path of Love: A Call for Interfaith Harmony”, by Rev. Dr. James Channan OP, is very relevant for people who are interested in the role of religions in today’s world, especially in conflicts. The author gives relevant observations and recommendations on a number of key issues in this collection of his articles and speeches given in different countries. The text provides answers to very general issues, but also offers concrete information about very practical problems. For example, the text illustrates the misuse of religion as a source of conflict: “This means the use of Islam by politicians/ governments for political ends, like the misinterpretation of concepts such as *jihad* – a concept that the Americans, Pakistanis and others invoked to launch the anti-Soviet *jihad* in Afghanistan.” In general, the book contributes to the efforts to understand Christianity in the context of Islam in Pakistan: mutual influences and challenges. It also shows that Christianity is often seen erroneously as part of Western influence only.

It is useful to reflect on Channan’s book in the frames of my work as a UNESCO Chair. In an intercultural world, communication necessarily mediates different values and cultural behaviours. Understanding religions helps us understand values and communication. Great civilizations and cultures have very different patterns of communication and use different senses in a different way. In global education and peace efforts, more attention should be given to the diversity of cultures and the co-existence of different religions, civilizations and cultures. The UN Alliance of Civilizations (AoC), in close cooperation with UNESCO and UNESCO Chairs, is promoting these goals in the spirit of a new humanism. Digital literacy as media literacy aims to develop both critical understanding of and active participation in the media. Using a computer requires diverse and complex previous knowledge. It also introduces the individual and humanity to new contexts, which demand mental, intellectual, profound and complex changes.

This book, “Path of Love”, helps to foster the spirit that our UNESCO Chairs have promoted in creating the Global University System (GUS), which hopes to play an active and

meaningful role in addressing the manifold difficulties facing humankind — war, pollution, disease, hunger — by fostering an attitude of trust, empathy and compassion, a sense of solidarity and global identity. It comes close to our secular search for a new humanism that, in comparison to the old humanism of the Renaissance, needs to be developed now in the 21st century. Just as the Renaissance humanists managed to place human beings at the centre of a world which had been organised by theology until then, we need a new dialogue now to revive the classical idea of the cosmopolitan, universal citizen, with very clear rights and responsibilities, which entail a planet-wide commitment. We must foster a kind of citizenship that stimulates the idea that individuals view themselves as the bearers of universal rights, as well as responsibilities which are also universal.

While the Aristotelian approach is common for the Western mind, particularly in communication and the search for truth, the mindsets of other civilizations are not only unknown in the global scholarly debate but may even have been forgotten. The need for higher humanity is obvious, and we must broaden our educational approaches to create a new Renaissance education, which will combine science, technology, art and spiritual values while respecting cultural diversities. The collected articles by Rev. Dr. James Channan OP help to broaden the Western mind to see the positive achievements of religious dialogue in the non-Western world.

Prof. Dr. Tapio Varis
Professor emeritus
UNESCO Chair in global e-learning,
University of Tampere, Finland
September 4, 2013

Appreciation

It is inspiring to read a book which reflects a whole life's work with its different aspects of interreligious dialogue. These writings show how difficult it is to establish mutual understanding and trust in a world of ethnic and religious prejudices.

In order to get a comprehensive picture about the landscape in which the author has sought his path of dialogue, we may imagine the process as a "learning curve", which shows how the promotion of dialogue has proceeded sometimes very quickly and sometimes through times of backlash and more controversial periods.

As an European, I am interested to see how the crisis over the Muhammad caricature in *Jyllenska Posten* 2005-2006 contributed to the Muslim-Christian Dialogue in Pakistan and especially to the work of Dr. Channan. Did it close doors and hinder mutual contacts, or did it conversely afford an opportunity to declare what is essential and necessary for mutual understanding? Both results of this crisis may have been possible. The reader has to seek the answer to this question.

The book shows how Dr. Channan has been challenged by various religious movements, institutes and political authorities. The role of the Vatican is emphasized, and the document "Nostra Aetate" in particular is held up as an important document for interreligious dialogue.

The role of religious politics in Pakistan and in the neighboring countries is described in an informative way, giving a realistic picture of the difficult position of Christians in Pakistan. This realism in regard to practical and current difficulties lays a good basis for an earnest approach to Muslim-Christian dialogue. At the same time, it also creates gratitude for every step forward in mutual understanding.

As the first recipient of the Golden Rule Award of URI 2009, I congratulate Dr. Channan for this important document, which will serve as a stepping stone for global ethics.

Professor Dr. Reijo E. Heinonen
Haapakatu 4, FI -21110 Naantali, Finland
September 6, 2013

Words of Congratulation

At a time when religions are more and more subject to fundamentalism and used to pursue political objectives, the book "Path of Love: A Call for Interfaith Harmony" is a joy to read. On behalf of Finland's Interfaith Dialogue Network, I thank James Channan OP for this great book that leaves the door of hope open.

James Channan OP is an interfaith pioneer who shows in praxis that dialogue can be effective if it aims not only at understanding but working together for the creation of social justice. It has been a blessing to have the opportunity to see the work of this interfaith leader, Christian priest James Channan, in pointing out that dialogue is certainly a positive force, but one that must also walk the path of compassionate service and beyond. This call to serve has taken Father Channan to many meaningful and high-level forums to speak for the importance of living in dialogue and cooperation.

In knowing the work of Fr Channan, I see there are many actions behind the words in this book. The sentences carry many practical elements that the author embodies as a bridge builder: solidarity with life, nonviolence and care, selfless service, ethical behavior, simplicity of lifestyle, daily practice, and serving as a prophetic witness in the causes of peace and justice and protecting the whole of creation. Dialogue with people of other religious traditions is one of the main challenges of our time, and in taking this challenge seriously, James Channan OP follows the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount: Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

This book tells how interfaith activities are not just intended to increase awareness of the need for interfaith cooperation and to encourage those involved to assess their progress, but also to increase mutual respect within communities and to take mutual responsibility and care for one another as human beings and citizens locally and globally. Dialogue discussions, festival celebrations and other activities provide opportunities to define the rights and the responsibilities of religions and their members and how they relate to the violation, promotion and implementation of human rights; how they can find common ethical

ground to work for common good. This book is a great example of how such work is in progress.

Finland's Interfaith Dialogue Network had the honour of giving the 2011 Golden Rule Award to two leaders in Christian-Muslim cooperation in Pakistan. One recipient was Dominican priest James Channan, and the other was Grand Imam Maulana Syed Muhammad Abdul Khabir Azad. The Golden Rule Award is a stone given as a sign of gratitude to people who try to implement The Golden Rule in practice. The stones challenge human responsibility and remind us of our mutual interdependence. That is exactly what this book and the work of father James Channan are about.

I congratulate James Channan OP for this important book that invites the reader to take steps toward the path of Love.

Ms.Heidi Rautionmaa,
Journalist,URI Global Council Trustee 2002-2008, Religions for Peace European Women of Faith Network Co Committee, the Ambassadors Advisory Council at The Parliament of the World's Religions, Helsinki, Finland.
September 10, 2013

About The Author

Fr. James Channan OP is respected throughout the world as a peace pioneer who has dedicated his life to fostering harmony among people of all religions, cultures, and walks of life.

Fr. Channan was born on October 15, 1952 to a Christian family in Okara, Pakistan. His father's name is Channan, and his mother's name is Khursheed. He grew up in a predominately Muslim community, where he studied under Muslim teachers and took part in local Muslim festivals along with his childhood friends. These experiences, he explains, naturally drew out his innate interest in the areas of interfaith harmony and Muslim-Christian dialogue.

A Dominican friar, Fr. Channan completed his priestly studies at Christ the King Seminary in Karachi and was ordained to the priesthood on April 9, 1980. After serving in Sahiwal parish for two years, he went to Rome, Italy for three years and studied at the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI), obtaining his Licentiate Degree in Islamic Studies and Arabic Language in 1985. After returning from Rome in 1985, he was appointed Executive Secretary of the National Commission for Christian-Muslim Relations (*Rabita Commission*), established by the Catholic Bishops Conference of Pakistan. He served in this capacity for 17 years. In 1985, he was appointed by His Holiness Pope John Paul II as Consultor to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and he served in that post for two terms of five years each. Later on, in 1999, he was appointed, again by Pope John Paul II, to serve for a five-year period as Consultor for the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims. From 1989 to 1992, he served as Regional Secretary of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences – Office for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (FABC-OEIA). In 1991, he was elected as the first Pakistani Prior Vice-Provincial of the Dominican Ibn-e-Mariam, Vice-Province Pakistan, for a period of four years. He was elected to that post for a second time from 1999-2003, and a third time from 2007-2011.

In 1995, Fr. Channan studied at Emmanuel College in Boston, Massachusetts, earning his Master of Arts and Pastoral Counseling degree. In 1996, he received his degree in the Graduate

Course in World Religions from Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA. In 2004, he successfully completed the Religion and Culture in Conflict Resolution Training program at American University, Washington, DC, USA. His academic career was crowned when, in recognition of his commitment to interreligious dialogue and peace, he was awarded an honorary doctorate in theology on December 11, 2012 from the Pakistan Theological Seminary of the Pakistani Protestants of the International Gospel Mission based in Norway.

Fr. Channan has had much international experience participating in meetings and conferences, and has presented reports on the themes of interreligious and Christian-Muslim dialogue, peace building, and related topics. He has delivered lectures and reports in Italy, Germany, Finland, Sweden, Spain, Malta, Jordan, Turkey, Nepal, India, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Philippines, Australia, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Bangladesh, USA, Estonia, Luxembourg, Belgium, Egypt, Brazil, Columbia, Mexico, and other countries. He has been invited to give lectures at Helsinki University, Finland, Turku University, Finland, Dongguk University, South Korea, Notre Dame University, South Bend, Indiana, USA, Yale University, USA, San Francisco State University, USA, and Santo Tomas University, Philippines. He continues to give lectures at forums and universities around the world. Several of his interviews have been published in both the national and international electronic and print media. TV channels and radio stations have broadcast his interviews in Pakistan, USA, Spain, Finland, Italy, Germany, and Japan.

Fr. Channan has written numerous articles on Christian-Muslim dialogue and the situation of the Christian minority in Pakistan, which have been published in both the national and international press. He takes pride in his heritage as a Pakistani Christian, and has done much to educate the world about interreligious conditions in Pakistan. He has authored one book in English “Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Pakistan” and two in Urdu (*Pakistan Main Masihi Muslim Mukalma* and *Muhabbat Ka Rasta*.) The work in hand is his fourth in English: “Path of Love: A Call for Interfaith Harmony.”

At present, Fr. Channan serves as Director of the Peace Center in Lahore, Pakistan, established by the Dominican Ibn-e-Mariam,

Vice-Province, Pakistan. The Peace Center was built to promote Christian-Muslim and interreligious dialogue through conferences, seminars, workshops, and the publication of books. Since 2005, Fr. Channan has served as Regional Coordinator for Pakistan of the United Religions Initiative (URI), an international organization at work in 84 countries to promote dialogue, peace and harmony, reconciliation, and justice among believers of different religions. He has established 45 URI Cooperation Circles (CCs) – groups working within the country for the promotion of interreligious dialogue.

In recognition of his remarkable services in the areas of Christian-Muslim dialogue, peace, and harmony, Fr. Channan has been honored with some 50 national and international peace awards and gold medals, including the Golden Rule Peace Award from Finland and the Peace Award from the Government of Pakistan.

Fr. Channan is a fearless proponent of dialogue among people of various religions – especially between Christians and Muslims – in the unshakable belief that peace and harmony will surely prevail on earth.

The inestimable contributions of this outstanding leader are expected to continue expanding during the years ahead.

Mary McQuaid
May 12, 2014
Fuji Sanctuary, Japan

Author's Note

It gives me immense joy to present my new book, entitled "Path of Love: A Call for Interfaith Harmony". It consists of three parts. Part one consists of articles, papers, and speeches which I have written and delivered at national and international forums and conferences. Part two consists of interviews given to national and international media. Part three consists of commentaries, tributes and essays which were written by several international personalities about my life and interreligious dialogue work. Almost all of them have already been published in various books, newspapers, magazines and websites. Most of them are available on the internet. Many of these articles and interviews are in English and Urdu, while others are in German, Italian, Spanish, Japanese, French, Polish and Finnish. They have been reproduced in their original languages along with translations into English. The interviews were given at different occasions on pressing issues affecting Pakistan, such as human rights, discrimination against Christians, and the burning of Christian houses, property and churches on false accusations of blasphemy. Others cover the present situation in Pakistan, including efforts to promote peace, harmony and Christian-Muslim and interreligious dialogue in Pakistan and elsewhere. The articles and position papers were written in response to invitations which I received on various occasions, as well as national and international conferences and symposia.

For example, in the first chapter, there is a paper called "Christianity in the Islamic Context of Pakistan: Mutual Influences and Challenges". This paper was presented during a conference organized by the Christian Study Center in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, from 29th September to 2nd October, 2012. It relates very briefly the history of the birth of Christianity through St Thomas the Apostle, in the sub-continent and in this land of Pakistan. I have also given a brief analysis of political, religious, economic and social perspectives of the Church in general and of the Catholic Church in particular. The significant role of our political and religious leaders is highlighted, and the role of interreligious dialogue in general and Christian-Muslim dialogue in particular has also been touched upon. I described

how Catholic Church leaders such as Pope John XXIII, Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI and the present Pope Francis have played and continue to play leading roles as beacons of light in our country's important mission of Christian-Muslim dialogue. The sacrifices of our local political and religious leaders are also mentioned. A few suggestions are presented as to how government leaders can promote dialogue among religions and cultures and make such dialogue fruitful and rewarding by removing obstacles to understanding.

The second chapter contains the Keynote speech which I delivered during an international conference organized by the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana, USA at the Golden Jubilee celebration of the Encyclical Letter of Pope John XXIII, "Pacem in Terris" (Peace on Earth). The theme of this speech was "Pacem in Terris: Its Influences and Challenges to Catholics / Christians in Pakistan". I have analyzed the situation of Pakistan in light of the encyclical letter.

The third chapter consists of an article called "Golden Jubilee of the Vatican Council II: Interreligious Dialogue and the Pakistani Perspective." The Vatican Council started in 1962 and ended in 1965. The Golden Jubilee of the Vatican Council II was celebrated in 2012. There were special celebrations held in Pakistan on this blissful occasion. This Council promulgated 16 documents to address the mission of the (Catholic) Church in the modern world. These documents cover all main aspects of the Church and its mission. They provide guidelines for future occasions which may pose significant challenges to us as Christian believers and leaders. I have written this article with a focus on the Vatican Document *Nostra Aetate* (Relations with other religions) and its significance to the challenges of the Pakistani situation, as well as the ways in which we can promote, understand, and further strengthen interreligious dialogue and the mission of the Church over here; it contains challenges and strengthens areas of growth. This article was published in Urdu by the *Maktaba-e-Anaween*, in Pakistan in October, 2012.

In the fourth chapter, there is an article called "A Common Word: Love of God and Love of Neighbour", which was written at the invitation of a German organization called Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung in response to the famous letter by 138 Muslim scholars

from Jordan and the rest of the world. This open letter is addressed to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI and all other Christian leaders of different Christian denominations and Churches.

The basic teachings of Christianity and Islam on the love of God and love of neighbor are briefly presented with references from the Holy Quran and *Sunna*, as well as the Holy Bible and Church teachings. The aim is to foster unity, respect, and tolerance among the followers of the two largest world religions: Christianity and Islam. I wrote this paper keeping in mind the letter's relevance to the people of Pakistan. The paper was presented in Cadanabia, Italy on the 4th of October, 2009 at a gathering of 20 prominent Christian and Muslim scholars from Africa and Asia. I was invited along with two other prominent Pakistani Muslim scholars, Mr. Abid Hasan Manto and Kazy Javed. Our presentations were reproduced in the book "We have Justice in Common", published by Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung in Germany in 2010.

In the fifth chapter, you will find my paper on "Religious Freedom in Pakistan", which was written at the invitation of the "Vatican Commission for Religious Relations With Muslims". This was part of a 5-year work project carried out from 1999 to 2004, which was assigned to me by His Eminence Cardinal Francis Arinze, then President of the Commission. (Later on, His Grace Archbishop, Michael L. Fitzgerald, M. Afr. was appointed President.) This article was published in the book "Religious Liberty: A Theme For Christian-Muslim Dialogue", issued in Vatican City in 2006 by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. In this paper, I have critically analyzed the present status of religious freedom in Pakistan and the state of religious minorities in particular. I made reference to the Constitution of Pakistan, as well as the educational system and examples of how religious leaders, human rights activists and political leaders present their points of view on this important issue. I also proposed some suggestions to remedy the problems minorities are faced with.

In the sixth chapter, I have very briefly presented the attitude of the Vatican towards Muslims. I have quoted some of the most important documents of the Church, speeches by His Holiness

Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis. I have referenced documents published by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. You will also find a brief reflection on the situation in Pakistan, as well as challenges and successes in the important apostolate of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

The Catholic Church has placed great emphasis on ecumenism (dialogue among Christian Churches). Pope John Paul II once wrote an encyclical letter called *Ut Unum Sint* (May they be one). It is concerned with ecumenism. As part of my thesis while completing a Master's in Pastoral Counseling at Emmanuel College in Boston, MA, I wrote an article on ecumenism and how His Holiness Pope John Paul II has put such strong emphasis on ecumenical ties and dialogue among different Christian denominations. I focus on the urgent need for such dialogue among Christians, along with the challenges and difficulties in this noble cause. You will find this article in the seventh chapter.

I was invited by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom in September 2000 to give testimony on the situation of the Christian minority in Pakistan. Some important excerpts from this will be found in the eighth chapter.

The 9th chapter is on the canonization of St. John XXIII and St. John Paul II and their influence on Asia. The 10th chapter is on the concept of *Puja* in Hinduism. It is a research paper which I presented in a Graduate Course program at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts USA. Its subject is *Puja* (Offering), a very strong concept and practice in Hindu worship. I am sure you will find this chapter interesting as well. The last chapter is entitled as "We are the people of hope" this chapter is written by Sr. Josephine Michael OP and me which reflects the contribution of the Dominicans for education in Pakistan.

In the second part of my book, there are some selected interviews which I gave at international venues such as Japan, the United States of America, Italy, Hong Kong, the Vatican, India, Finland, Sweden, Poland, Spain, Germany and Pakistan.

I have had hundreds of opportunities to travel all around the world to participate in international meetings, conferences, seminars and symposia. I have also participated in a few

conferences at the United Nations (UN) in New York, USA, Geneva, Switzerland and Bonn, Germany. I have been invited to participate, to present papers and reports, and to give lectures. I have been interviewed both by the electronic and press media. This I have been doing in my capacity as Executive Secretary of the Pakistan Catholic Bishops, National Commission for Christian Muslim Dialogue, (*Rabita Commission*), Consultor to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Consultor to the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims, Prior Vice Provincial, Dominican Ibn-e-Mariam, Vice Province Pakistan, Regional Secretary of the Office for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA) of the Federation Bishops Conferences (FABC), Director of the Pastoral Institute, Multan Pakistan, Director of Dominican Center Lahore, Regent of Studies and as Regional Coordinator of the United Religions Initiative (URI) Pakistan and as URI Global Trustee.

I believe that I have an important role to play in building bridges among people of different religions and cultures, helping to bring positive understanding and peace between Muslims and Christians around the world by promoting dialogue. I have an important task to fulfill in bringing healing, reconciliation, justice and respect for all, along with messages of equality and love. This is my top priority and apostolate as a Dominican friar. I thank God for that!

I have vast experience travelling all around the world and presenting my views as a Christian, as a Dominican and as a Pakistani. I am proud to be Christian by birth, Dominican by vocation and Pakistani by nationality. Words cannot express my gratitude to my God. I express my heartfelt thanks to my family, the Dominican Order and to all my friends and benefactors who have made all of these significant milestones possible. May God bless them all!

Last but not least, I express my sincere gratitude to all those organizations, officials and persons from all over the world who invited me to present these papers and those who interviewed me and wrote articles on my life and apostolates.

I express my heartfelt gratitude to Archbishop Sebastian Shaw, OFM, Very Rev. Fr. Pascal Paulus OP, Mrs. Masami Saionji from Japan, Dr. Georg Evers from Germany, UNESCO Professor Dr.

Tapio Varis, Professor Dr. Reijo E. Heinonen, Ms. Heidi and Rautionmaa from Finland, for writing comments on my book. I am very grateful to Very Rev. Fr. Pascal Paulus OP, Prior Vice Provincial, Ibn-e-Mariam, Vice Province Pakistan and all the members of the Ibn-e-Mariam Vice Province and all my friends, well-wishers and benefactors who made the publication of this book possible. I express my sincere gratitude to Mr. Azhar Ghuari, Director, Multimedia Affairs, for undertaking the publication of this book and doing proof reading. I am very thankful to Fr Anthony Breen OP and Dr. Georg Evers, who did proof reading and made corrections and gave valuable suggestions. I also express my sincere and profound gratitude to Ms. Mary McQuaid and Ms. Kate Robinson who went through the entire text of my book, did the final proof reading and gave extremely valuable suggestions to give “Path of Love: A Call for Interfaith Harmony” a final shape. Last but not the least I owe my sincere thanks to Sr. Sabina Rifat, Coordinator URI Women wing, Pakistan, for her keen interest in the publication of “Path of Love”.

My humble efforts in writing these articles, papers, lectures and interviews are presented to you in this book. It has been a labor of love for me on the “Path of Love”. I invite you to read it and send in your comments and feedback. I will be most grateful and appreciative.

Fr. James Channan OP
On the Feast of the Annunciation of Lord Jesus Christ
March 25, 2014

PART ONE

ARTICLES AND SPEECHES

Chapter One

Christianity in the Context of Islam in Pakistan: Mutual Influences and Challenges*

Historically speaking, the planting of the seed of Christianity in this land goes back to the period from 45 A.D. to 52 A.D. when, according to the Parthian Tradition, St. Thomas the Apostle came three times to our land, which is Pakistan today. He followed the command and mission which was given to him and to all apostles by Jesus Christ, recorded in the Gospel of St Matthew 28:18-20: "Jesus came up and spoke to them. He said, 'All authority in heaven and 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 commandments I gave you. And look, I am with you always, yes, to the end of time.'" This is what St Thomas did for our land. In the 1st century, he travelled all the way from Jerusalem and arrived here after much hardship, but with great zeal and enthusiasm to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. That very site, Sir Koop, close to Texila, is about an hour's drive from Islamabad. This is where, according to the tradition, St Thomas preached and evangelized to the people before moving on to other parts of the sub-continent, such as South India. However, for several centuries, Christians have remained a minority, and that is true even today. We were a minority before, we are a minority now, and we most probably will remain a minority in the coming years. Until 1947, when Pakistan became an independent state, Christianity was a minority in a predominantly Hindu India, and after Independence in a predominantly Muslim Pakistan.

I acknowledge with thanks the untiring and dedicated evangelizing of different missionary groups, made up of both Protestants and Catholics who, following the mission of Christ and the good example of the Apostle St. Thomas, preached the good news of Jesus and evangelized to the people here. They bore the many hardships of living in this land and faced all kinds of challenges. They restored dignity to the down-trodden and marginalized, and by means of baptism made them part of the universal family of the Church - the body of Christ. The Church

has taken very deep root here, thanks to the Franciscans and Dominicans, as well as other Congregations and Societies who have made the followers of Christ the ‘salt of the earth and light of the world’.

Islam, which was born in 610 AD, was introduced here in 712 AD with the arrival of Muhammad Bin Qasim and others, including Mughal Emperors, and by the Muslim mystics, such as Khawja Muin ul-Din Chishti, Baba Farid, Baha ul-Din Zikria, Shah Rukn-e-Alam, Data Ganj Baksh, Shah Abdul Latif Bhetai, Madhu Lal Hussain and so on. All these mystics have played an important role in spreading the message of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, and converting people to embrace Islam. They spread the message of Islam, and now we see how huge this religion has become in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and other nations. Their preaching has brought forth much fruit for Islam, so that Muslims are the vast majority in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Even today, these mystics are very much revered by the Muslims in our country.

The fact remains that both Christianity and Islam spread here through the missionary work of evangelization - proclamation and *Da'wa*. Both Islam and Christianity are missionary religions, as they preach and invite others to conversion. Both are worldwide religions, with Christians accounting for 2.2 billion and forming 35% of the world population, and 1.5 billion Muslims forming 20% of the world population.

Pakistan became independent from the British on the 14th of August, 1947, under the able leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Our Christian political leadership took an active part in the Pakistan movement. It favored Muhammad Ali Jinnah and voted in favor of Pakistan, thus opting to remain in the land. We are the sons and daughters of this soil. We did not migrate to this land. We are neither a conquered people, nor a people who live here under the terms of a pact or agreement. Since the creation of Pakistan, Christians have remained a tiny minority of 3.5 million (2%), with Muslims forming an overwhelming majority of 180 million (96%).

Some of Muhammad Ali Jinnah’s speeches reveal that he wanted to see Pakistan become a secular state where religion had nothing to do with the affairs of the government. He was not in favor of a

theocratic state. This is what he said in his famous speech of the 11th of August, 1947, to the constituent assembly of Pakistan. We Pakistanis are very familiar with this speech.

Allow me to take you very briefly on a journey that will attempt to show how the impact of religion made Pakistan an Islamic state. The “Objectives Resolution” was formed and accepted in 1948 by the political leaders under the leadership of Liaqat Ali Khan, the first Prime Minister of Pakistan. The Objectives Resolution stated for the first time that Pakistan was to function according to the “teachings and requirements of Islam as set out in the Holy Quran and the *Sunna*”. Therefore, Pakistan *de juries* an Islamic state. (c.f. Charles Amjad Ali in his article, “Historical and Political Context of Christian-Muslim Relations in Pakistan: Challenges to Musicological and Theological Vocation” in *Current Dialogue* 25 July 2012). The Objectives Resolution was enshrined as the preamble of the first three constitutions of 1956, 1962 and 1973. This notion, however, has come to haunt the nation over and over again, especially during the dictatorship rule of General Zia-ul Haq, who made the Objective Resolution part of the main body of the Constitution in 1984. He then went on to ensure that all laws of the land were congruent with, and filtered through, his very conservative version of Islam. Between 1947 and 1971, there were many attempts both to Islamize Pakistan on the one hand and secularize it on the other. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto emerged as a charismatic leader at the critical time when East Pakistan separated and became Bangladesh in 1971. Bhutto governed from 1971 to 1977. He was under great pressure from the *ulama / mullah*. However, his government was the most secular government in Pakistan’s history and was deeply disliked by the Islamic forces, including Saudi Arabia. This was ably analyzed by Dr. Charles Amjad Ali. It was in 1973 that the 3rd Constitution of Pakistan was unanimously approved by the Parliament, and Pakistan was declared the “Islamic Republic of Pakistan.”

The character of Pakistan underwent a radical change with the military coup of General Muhammad Zia al-Haq in July 1977. He led Pakistan to become an Islamic state in a strict sense. Through a change in the Constitution, minorities were removed from the mainstream through the system of ‘Separate

Electorates'. It was an apartheid system. Through the efforts of the minorities and constant criticism and condemnation, this system was finally abolished by General Pervez Musharraf in 2002. General Zia also made changes in the existing controversial blasphemy laws in the Pakistan Penal Code; 295-B and 295 C were approved and made part of the code. Under 295 C, there is a mandatory death penalty for those who desecrate the name of Muhammad - the Prophet of Islam.

The implementation of Separate Electorates made Christians second class citizens. Zia al-Haq unwittingly created hatred and violence in the name of religion. He fully supported extremists in the country and provided weapons to the militants. We are reaping the harvest he sowed. The constant misuse of blasphemy laws and the false accusations under these laws have made Christians and other minorities very unsafe and scarred. The present generation of Christians live in fear because when one Christian stands accused, the whole Christian community suffers. There is no need to mention that Hindu minorities and Ahmadis are faced with similar problems, and some of them have opted to leave their homeland and migrate to India and to other countries. The Church in Pakistan in our times is a suffering Church, as incidents of forced conversions, forced marriages, and kidnapping of Christian women sadly bear witness.

Some achievements

Our Christian community is very vocal and has raised its voice against the injustice and discrimination done to it. Most of the leadership, including bishops, major superiors and political leaders, are local. Thanks are due to our foreign missionaries, who have played a significant role in entrusting and transferring powers to the local clergy. Many foreign missionaries have returned to their homelands, in part because of difficulties in obtaining visas.

We have been playing and continue to play a large role in the field of education through schools and colleges. Christians are running two types of schools - English Medium and Urdu Medium. The English Medium schools are mainly for economically well off Muslims and Christians. They are a great service to and witness for the Christian community.

In the field of health care, Christian hospitals have been among the best in the country, such as those in Rawalpindi, Lahore, Multan, Sargodha, Hyderabad and Karachi, to mention a few.

The Christian community is a pioneer in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue. This includes the Christian Study Center in Rawalpindi, the Dominican Peace Center in Lahore and the Pastoral Institute Multan and Christ the King Seminary in Karachi.

Our service in the Armed Forces, such as in the Air Force, Navy and Army, has been well recognized and appreciated by the government. Also, our contributions to the fields of art, film, music, literature, and sports have been outstanding. The Government of Pakistan has recognized several Christians with civil awards in many of these fields.

The Christian community has also played an important role in politics - in the movement, creation, and development of Pakistan. Our political leaders, such as Diwan Bahadur, S.P. Singha, Fazal Ilahi and C. Gibbon, voted in favor of Pakistan. Throughout the years, from the independence of Pakistan until now, Christian political leaders have been playing a prominent role. Here I would like to mention with pride our hero Mr. Shahbaz Bhatti. He was an international personality, a well recognized and respected political leader, a human rights activist, and a promoter of justice and peace, interfaith dialogue and ecumenism. He was able to motivate the Government of Pakistan to approve 4 seats for minorities in the Senate, declare the 11th of August as Minorities Day, and establish a 5% Minorities quota in the federal services. He also played a leading role in abolishing the apartheid system of Separate Electorates and in restoring the Joint Electorate. He fought for the equal rights of all non-Muslims in Pakistan and his dream was to see Pakistan as the great leader and founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah had envisioned. He was an ardent champion of democracy, equality, religious freedom, and human dignity. He was vocal in criticizing the misuse of the controversial blasphemy laws and wanted to get them repealed, or at least bring safeguards so that minorities would not be made targets of personal revenge by those who would hide under the shelter of the law.

We have lost a great, dynamic visionary and charismatic leader in the form of Shahbaz Bhatti. He did not bow his head before the militant Taliban and fanatics. He never gave up speaking the truth, like our savior Lord Jesus Christ. I am sure his sacrifice will always be remembered with respect. The world condemned his assassination and mourned his death. I hope and pray that one day he will be declared a Saint and a martyr by the Catholic Church.

Now we have Mr. Akram Masih Gill, who is the State Minister and heads the Ministry of National Harmony of Pakistan, which was set up to promote harmony, peace and dialogue among people of different religions and especially among Christians and Muslims. Mr. Paul Bhatti is an Advisor to the Prime Minister for this National Harmony Ministry. He is also making efforts on behalf of peace and interfaith dialogue.

We live in an Islamic Republic. The teachings of Islam are dominant in every sphere of society. All laws are made in light of the Holy Quran and *Sunna*. At times, Christians are looked down upon. They are harassed, manipulated and falsely accused under blasphemy laws to settle personal scores. Our school curricula are filled with biases against our religion and the teaching of our faith. Discrimination against Christians is common, and at times the forced marriages and conversions of Christians have been reported. Christians in general are living in fear and are under continual threat from the militants.

These are the circumstances that we are living in. There are many challenges that we face. Such is the situation in which we must play our important role for the betterment of our society. Yes, we are a small minority - that itself is a beauty. We are called "to be the salt of the earth and light of the world." (Cf. Matt. 5:13-14). We must never lose our salt and light. We may have to present the face of the suffering Christ. Persecution is not something new for us. We have been facing it since the birth of Christianity. But suffering is not the end. Our model is Jesus Christ, who suffered, died and rose on the third day. So, our sufferings do not lead us to disappointment or defeat. They lead us to victory. What is required from us is to remain faithful and bear these hardships with courage, determination and commitment. Christ is our model.

In Pakistan, we are very much part of the society. There are many problems which are faced by both Muslims and Christians. To solve these problems, we need to stand up with the Muslim community and overcome the conflicts and issues we are confronted with. We need to work to build up peace, to come out of an age of polemics and enter into an age of dialogue.

Mutual challenges, conflicts and issues

I attended a conference which was organized in another country where Muslims are a great majority. In that country, religion has nothing to do with the affairs of the state. Religion and state are two separate matters. It was a Peace Conference held in March 2012, in which 15 prominent Pakistani Muslim and Christian scholars, religious leaders, educators and analysts participated. I was also invited to this high level conference. There were 10 foreign experts, as well as diplomats in attendance. In this conference, we thoroughly discussed the situation of Pakistan and how to promote peace and harmony.

The working group eventually synthesized the list of conflicts and crises into the following 4 key issues that can be called the genesis of conflict and crisis in Pakistan:

1. **Modernity versus Orthodoxy:** Conflicting views between the liberal and conservative versions of Islam, cultural values, social norms, and varying degrees of interpretation of some fundamental tenets of Islam that lead to conflicts and divisions among Muslims into liberal and orthodox followers. Orthodoxy was started by the Deobandi school of thought in Pakistan, according to Mr. Imtiaz Gul. Issues include the role of minorities in an Islamic state which has the right to implement Sharia and to declare *Jihad*, the role of women in society, and who has the right to settle conflicting views about pictures, photos, art and culture, and the question of whether to use an Islamic or global banking system. I feel that mainstream parties need to be secular and should not promote misuse of religion.

2. **Misuse of religion as conflict:** This means the misuse of Islam by politicians/governments for political ends, like the misinterpretation of concepts such as *jihad* – a concept that Americans, Pakistanis and others invoked to launch the anti-Soviet *jihad* in Afghanistan. The Pakistani army invoked the same concept for its political objectives in Indian Kashmir,

inviting and inciting the people into violence and the exclusion of others. This also lies at the roots of the Indo-Pakistan tensions.

3. Misplaced perceptions of non-Muslims: This includes rigid, clichéd views of people from the West and people of other religions, such as the stereotyping of Hindus, Jews and Christians. Another related dimension of this phenomenon is the sense of superiority felt among Muslims who, because of training and teachings, consider Christians, Hindus, and other non-Muslims to be 2nd class Pakistanis. I would also include the biased syllabus in our schools. It presents a very negative picture of Christians and Hindus to our students. There are misrepresentations of their religious beliefs. They are looked down upon, and Islam is presented as the superior religion.

4. Crisis of identity: This means people are not really sure how to prioritize their identity, i.e. whether they are Pakistanis first, Punjabis first, Baluchis first or Sindhi first. Essentially, the over-emphasis on religion has obscured the national identity of people living in Pakistan. They have failed to become one nation and are still divided along ethnic lines. The Islamist, Taliban and Al-Qaeda-inspired ideologies have added another dimension to this conflict, because Islamists believe that the entire world will soon belong to Muslims.

Possible strategies for solutions

- a) Bring conflicting views up for dialogue among various religions and stakeholders. Promote peace and harmony.
- b) Prevent misuse of religion for conflict by politicians and governments misusing the Scriptures to inspire violence, *jihad*, and the exclusion of others.
- c) Promote better understanding of religions and perceptions about other religions. Work on improving and correcting perceptions of other religions and their followers.
- d) Develop Pakistani nationhood, independent of religion and ethnicity.
- e) Exploit the common values and the historical and cultural heritage among all peoples in Pakistan.
- f) Make participation of women in all of these strategies a top priority, recognizing their equality and dignity in addressing the challenges we face.

- g) There is a great need to promote trust and mutual respect.

This is the context in which we are living as a minority Church. As Christians, we have to discern what role we can play in these challenging and difficult times. The best situation might be if we had a secular state, where religion and state remained separate. But this seems to be unfeasible, at least at this time. I appeared on a talk show to discuss the Rimsha Masih case (a Christian illiterate with Down Syndrome who was falsely accused of blasphemy for burning the pages of the Holy Quran) with Allama Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi, John Maqbool Auria and Rashid Rehman. During the program, I commented that Pakistan was envisioned by Quid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah as a secular state. Mr. Rashid Rehman responded by saying that that kind of Pakistan died with Muhammad Ali Jinnah. That vision of Pakistan is no more, and this is what we are now seeing. We have also strongly raised our voices against the attack of Taliban gunmen against a young Muslim girl, Malala Yousafzai, on October 9, 2012. Malala wants all girls to be educated in Pakistan, and she challenged the Taliban for not allowing girls to go to school. We condemned the attack on Malala and terrorism in all its forms.

Teachings of the Catholic Church

The Catholic Church is celebrating the Golden Jubilee of the Vatican Council II, which began in 1962 and ended in 1965. It has set out some guidelines on how we can reach out to people of other faiths, and how we might fulfill our role in overcoming some of the fundamental difficulties that humanity is confronted with.

We begin with the reality that Pakistan is a Muslim country, and we Christians must learn to live in harmony with the Muslim community and find ways to meet the challenges that we face living in an Islamic society. As a Catholic and a Dominican priest, I would like to share some of the teachings of the Church on how we should live with people of other religions. There is an important document called *Nostra Aetate* (Relations of the Church with Non-Christian Religions). But *Nostra Aetate* cannot be taken in isolation from other documents of the Vatican Council II. There are additional Church documents which speak

of the relationship of the Church towards people of other religions, such as *Dignitatis Humanae* (Religious Freedom) on the fundamental question of religious freedom, *Lumen Gentium* (on the Church), *Gaudium et Spes* (Church in the Modern World), *Ad Gentes Divinitus* (Church's Missionary Activity) and *Unitatis Redintegratio* (on Christian Unity) and Ecumenism.

The Church has taken many concrete steps toward interreligious dialogue in light of the principles laid down in the *Nostra Aetate*. As a result, it has learnt much from the dialogue and has undertaken needed reforms. In the words of Archbishop Michael L. Fitzgerald, "At first, because of its far-reaching character, *Nostra Aetate* took the Church by surprise. Thus it was necessary that the validity of this document be evidenced on theological foundations; as a result, in fact, it has produced theological advances. Developments related to interreligious dialogue, on matters of ecclesiology, Trinity, and especially pneumatology, are found in the teachings of various Sovereign Pontiffs and in certain other Church documents."

The documents mentioned above invite us to reflect upon the need to foster good relations with all religions in the world, and with Islam, Hinduism, Judaism and Buddhism in particular.

1. There is an important reason to foster dialogue among religions. All human beings belong to one community which was created by God, and all share a common destiny in God. Therefore, it is important that we reach out for dialogue with people of other religions. No one should be left out in our endeavor to promote good will, tolerance, peace and unity. We are all members of one human community. We read in *Nostra Aetate* No.1, "All men form but one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock created by God to people of the entire earth (cf. Acts 17:26), and because all share a common destiny, namely God. His providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all men. (cf. Wis. 8:1; Acts. 14:17; Rom 2:6-7; Tim 2:4) against the day when the elect are gathered together in the holy city, which is illuminated by the glory of God, and in whose splendor all peoples will walk (cf. Apoc. 21: 23ff)." So the spirit behind this document was that unity must be fostered because we are called to one destiny in God.

2. There is an openness on the part of the Church to appreciate what is true in other religions. That is another principle which leads us to reach out in dialogue with people of other religions. The *Nostra Aetate* No. 2 puts it in the following words: “The Church assures us that it rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of truth which enlightens all men.”

3. The Church also places great emphasis on its mission of proclaiming the Gospel. It is an integral and no less important mission of the Church, and exists side by side with the mission of dialogue. As it is important for Christians to witness their own faith and way of life, we must respect spiritual and moral truth among non-Christians. We read in *Nostra Aetate*, “Yet, she (the Church) proclaims and is duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way, the truth and the life (Jn:1:6). In him, in whom God reconciled all things to himself (2 Cor: 5:18-19), men find the fullness of their religious life.”

4. In *Nostra Aetate* there is special mention of relations with Muslims, who are the second largest religion in the world. We read in the *Nostra Aetate* No. 3., “The Church has also a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to men. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God. Just as Abraham submitted himself to God’s plan by faith, so also are Muslims eager to do the same. Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus as prophet, his virgin Mother they also honor, and even at times devoutly invoke her. Further, they await the Day of Judgment and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this reason they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms-deeds and fasting.

Over the centuries many quarrels and dissensions have arisen between Christians and Muslims. The sacred Council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding; for the benefit of men, let them

together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.”

There are many examples from the World Council of Churches as well, but I will leave those for another time. However, the World Council of Churches is strongly in favor of promoting dialogue, peace, and respectful coexistence with Muslims. They are very much aware of our situation and the persecution the Pakistani Church faces, and have raised their voice at the United Nations. The most recent example was the discussion on the blasphemy laws in September 2012 in the United Nations Office in Geneva, Switzerland. The World Council of Churches urged the Government of Pakistan to repeal these controversial laws.

There are many examples of encounters where Catholics have met Muslims for better understanding as we address common issues. Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have played a heroic role in promoting dialogue with Islam. There is the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (I was appointed by Pope John Paul II, and I served as Consultor to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue for 10 years), and there is also the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims. (I was appointed by Pope John Paul II to this commission and served as Consultor for 5 years).

There is also the example of Mr. Sohail Ahmed Raza, Director, Interfaith Relations of Minhaj ul-Quran International. He received a scholarship from the *Nostra Aetate Foundation* of the Vatican to study Christianity in Rome for 6 months. He attended courses and seminars at Gregorian University, the University of St Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum), and the Pontifical Institute for Islamic Studies and Arabic Language (PISAI). He stayed at the Generalate of the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers) in Rome. He observed ceremonies of the Holy Week and celebration of the Holy Mass in different Basilicas and Churches in Rome. He also met Pope Benedict XVI and presented to His Holiness a book by Dr. Tahir al-Qadri, “Fatwa on terrorism and suicide bombings”. Now another Muslim Professor, Muhammad Zaman Nazi of Forman Christian College (Chartered University) in Lahore, has applied for and obtained a scholarship from the *Nostra Aetate Foundation* to study in Rome for six months. It is

truly wonderful that Pakistani Muslim scholars are studying in Rome.

A Common Word: Love of God and Love of Neighbour in Islam and Christianity

“A Common Word: Love of God and Love of Neighbour” is a famous letter which was written by 138 Muslim scholars from all over the world to Pope Benedict XVI and all other Christian leaders of different denominations. The aim of this letter is to promote positive understanding and respect among Christians and Muslims around the world. Several texts from the Holy Bible, Holy Quran, *Sunna* and Christian teachings are cited to support this endeavour. It was a great initiative taken by the Muslim religious leaders. Several conferences were organized in response to this letter. One of these conferences was organized in Rome in November 2008 by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. In his message to the participants of this conference, Pope Benedict XVI emphasised the need for respect in working for the common good. When he addressed the participants of the Catholic-Muslim Forum in Rome, His Holiness said, “I am well aware that Muslims and Christians have different approaches in matters regarding God. Yet we can and must be worshippers of the one God who created us and is concerned about each person in every corner of the world. Together we must show, by our mutual respect and solidarity, that we consider ourselves members of one family: the family that God has loved and gathered together from the creation of the world to the end of human history.”

The same declaration also mentions several other points which are relevant to the situation of Muslims and Christians in Asia, such as when it says, “Human life is a most precious gift of God to each person. It should be preserved and honoured.” Yes, it is important to preserve and honour human life. These words challenge us to work with greater zeal in trying to apply this concept to our situation in Pakistan. If it enters into the minds and hearts of the people, there will be no more killing of innocents. There will be no more suicide attacks and bomb explosions. There will be no more public lashing of women by the Taliban. Men will not be forced to grow beards, and women will be respected as free and equal human beings and will be free

to play their essential role for the betterment of society. These teachings of the Holy Bible and Holy Quran need to be known by the fanatics and militants: to love God and love your neighbour. If these teachings are understood and accepted by all Muslims and Christians, then there will be great respect for one's own life and the life of the other as well. So it is important to get these ideas across to those who have a narrow understanding and interpretation of their religion.

Yet another point in the declaration is relevant when we speak of the love of God and love of our neighbour: that we must respect every person around us, and that there should not be any discrimination in the name of religion. It is a fact that in some countries, such discrimination exists. The Rome Declaration says, "Religious minorities are entitled to be respected in their own religious convictions and practices. They are also entitled to their own places of worship, and their founding figures and symbols they consider sacred. Both Catholics and Muslims are called to be the instruments of love and harmony among religions, and for humanity as a whole."

This will help to overcome violence and terrorism, with which we are faced in some countries of Asia, such as Pakistan.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference Pakistan and Major Superiors Leadership Conference Pakistan issued a Joint Statement on the 12th of November, 2008. It was issued in response to the strong wave of terrorism and extremism our country is confronted with during these days. The statement says; "Realizing that this has created complex difficulties in all walks of life, it was also realized that we are called to be signs of hope for all. In order to be so, we have decided to take the following concrete steps:

- i. Promote faith formation in our communities through catechesis, Bible studies, prayer by means of media, and training of our lay-leaders.
- ii. Organize awareness programs in Parishes, Institutions, families etc in order to bring about peace, harmony and better understanding among diverse faith communities.
- iii. Work for interreligious dialogue on life and ecumenism."

In light of this statement, we see the Catholic Church is committed in Pakistan to promoting peace, harmony and interreligious dialogue.

The Church of Pakistan Bishops (Protestant) is also on the front line in promoting peace and harmony among religions. The Rt. Rev. Dr. Alexander John Malik, Bishop of Lahore diocese, and The Rt. Rev. Samuel Robert Azariah, Bishop of Raiwind diocese and Moderator of the Church of Pakistan, have established interreligious dialogue committees. They are ardent promoters of Christian-Muslim, interreligious and ecumenical dialogue.

Some points of reflection for us as Christians

1. We are from this soil, and Pakistan is our home. We have to make this place an abode of Jesus Christ. Let him be born in us in our lives; what we say and what we do and the way we live.
2. Christians in Pakistan in general belong to the poorer economic class. We rejoice that Christ was also born in a poor family. We are called to serve others and Christ gave us the example.
3. We need to be firm in our faith and never lose heart. Look at Christ crucified. He helps us in our sufferings. We believe in Christ who was crucified, but that was not the end of his mission. There was also the resurrection of Christ. That is our goal. Our attitude must be Christ-like, to forgive those who attack us, to love those who hate us, not to take revenge, to be with the poor, marginalized and suffering; to raise our voices against the injustice done to us, to pray for those who persecute us. We should also have the attitude of Jesus Christ who served others, who came to serve and not to be served.
4. We need to give a very solid and profound catechism to our children and students that they remain very firm in their faith. How nice it would be if a special basic catechism book were made for the children and made available in every home. We are terribly lacking in this area of catechism.
5. There is also a need to educate our youth in Christian formation, for they will be the heads of families tomorrow.
6. We need to promote dialogue at all levels: a dialogue of life, a dialogue of words, a dialogue of deed and a theological dialogue. The proclamation of the Gospel is also of prime importance.
7. We need to confront the challenges which are faced by both the Christian and Muslim communities, such as: modernity and orthodoxy, misuse of religion, misleading concepts and ideas

about minorities, identity crises, violence against women, poverty and illiteracy.

8. We need to appreciate what is good in Muslims and have a positive approach towards them. There are many problems which we face in common, such as poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, fanaticism, terrorism, violence, ethnic discrimination and gender inequality. On a geographical and religious basis, we need to work jointly to meet and overcome these challenges.

9. We need to accept the reality that we as Christians are a minority. It does not seem that we will ever be a majority, at least in the next few decades. Accepting this reality, as Dr. Charles Amjad Ali has reflected in his article quoted above, the Church must be a cross-carrying minority (c.f. Mark 8:27-38); it must assume the metaphor of leaven (Matt. 13:33, Galatians 5:9) and not of dough; it must assume the metaphor of salt (Matt. 15:13) and not presume to be the main dish; it must become light (Matt. 15:13-15) and not darkness. Thus God, who has reconciled the world to Himself in Christ, must be proclaimed by his ambassadors who know this truth. We thank God for being Christians in Pakistan.

* This lecture was given during a conference at the Christian Study Center, Rawalpindi, Pakistan on 30th of October, 2012.

Chapter Two

A Common Word in a Pakistani Context Love of God and Love of Neighbour *

First, I would like to express my gratitude to the organisers for putting emphasis on Sub-Saharan Africa and South and South-East Asia, areas where the number and influence of Christian and Muslim communities has increased significantly. Their evaluation of the “Open Letter and Call of Muslim Religious Leaders,” the so-called Letter of 138, written on 13 October 2007 and published by the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute of Islamic Thought in Amman, Jordan, is very important. The Muslims and Christians of these areas have a vital role to play in bringing peace and harmony to the world. Their work will help to improve mutual relations between local Christians and Muslims, and it will also have a positive impact on the entire world. Christians and Muslims have a lot in common and a lot to offer one another for the betterment of humanity. There are differences, as Prof. Syed Hossein Nasr said in Rome, which have providentially kept Christianity and Islam distinct and separate. However, when the common elements are recognised, appreciated, and brought together to collaborate with one another, they can play a significant role in promoting peace and interfaith harmony in the world. I am sure that by coming together in Cadenabbia from Asia and Africa, our meeting will bear many positive results for building good will and good relations among the followers of these religions.

When we look at the numerical and political situation of Muslims and Christians in South and South-East Asian countries, we find that there is a great diversity. In some countries, such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei, Muslims are in the majority and Christians are a small minority. In other countries, such as the Philippines and East Timor, Christians are in the majority and Muslims are a minority. In several other countries, both Muslims and Christians are in the minority, such as in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Vietnam, Singapore, Thailand, China, Japan and Taiwan. Christians and Muslims are present throughout the Asian continent. On the whole, Christianity remains a minority in Asia with around 3% of

the total population, and Muslims vastly outnumber Christians. However, positive encounters, understanding, interfaith dialogue and respect for differences are very important for peace in Asia and in fact in the world.

Evaluation and remarks about the Open Letter

A letter entitled “*A Common Word Between Us and You*”, (ACW) signed by 138 prominent Muslim scholars and religious leaders, was sent to Pope Benedict XVI and several other Christian religious leaders around the world. This letter was sent at a crucial time when some misunderstandings between Christians and Muslims developed after the lecture of Pope Benedict in Regensburg, Germany, delivered on 12 September 2006. The quotation used by the Pope in his lecture in Regensburg resulted in unrest among some Muslims in the world. Some Muslims felt offended, while others perceived it to be a step backward in Christian-Muslim dialogue, which had been developing for the past several decades, especially since the Second Vatican Council.

ACW brought a timely message of healing and reconciliation. It was written so as to build a strong bridge of understanding between Christians and Muslims. It offers a big step forward, arguing that we must get out of the age of polemics and enter an age of mutual understanding and dialogue. It sets a tone of tolerance and respect for the religious beliefs and practices of the other, stating that differences should also be respected. It carries an initiative and positive approach based on the love of God and love of neighbour; such an emphasis had never been placed so strongly in the past 1400 years. These concepts are based on the sacred scriptures and traditions of Christianity and Islam. The letter provides guidelines on the common words between the two religions.

ACW is a concrete response from Muslims to the initiative taken by the Catholic Church, particularly by the Second Vatican Council and by the Secretariat for Non-Christians in Rome, which later became the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue. It is also a step forward from what Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II had been doing and what Pope Benedict XVI is currently doing to bring about harmony, respect, and dialogue among brothers and sisters of various religions. We are aware

that there has been ongoing dialogue between Christians and Muslims since the 7th century. There have been clashes as well. It is a fact that in our time Muslims and Christians cannot afford to ignore one another. Christians are 2.3 billion and form 35% of the world population, and Muslims are 1.5 billion and comprise 20% thereof. Together they are over half of the world population, at 55%. The urgent need for dialogue at all levels of life has been rightly emphasized by both Christians and Muslims, especially by religious leaders, scholars, human rights activists and promoters of peace and interfaith dialogue. The United Nations is also playing an important role and making a lot of effort in creating harmony and positive understanding, collaboration and mutual respect among religions for the betterment of humanity. The UN has declared 2009 the Year of Reconciliation. This positive understanding of one another's religions will play an integral role in solving the issues and challenges which are faced by humanity, especially during the 21st century. There are the issues of hunger, poverty, illiteracy, refugees and internally displaced people. There is the issue of the violation of human rights and the dignity of the human person. There is religiously-motivated violence in some South Asian countries. There is the issue of discrimination on the basis of caste, colour, sex and religion. In some countries there is a strong wave of fanaticism, extremism and militancy. In Pakistan, the rise of terrorism, the Taliban and militancy have put the stability of the country at risk and these things have brought a lot of misery, uncertainty and fear among the people. The Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Baha'i and Zoroastrian religious minorities in Pakistan are especially affected by this fear and uncertainty. Some of them have opted to leave their homeland to safeguard their lives and have sought asylum in Europe, Australia, Canada and USA. Suicide bombings and terrorist attacks are common, and have resulted in the killing of thousands of innocent people and caused grave pain and concern, not only for Pakistan but for the entire world. In such a situation, our liberal, secular-minded and moderate citizens, and particularly religious minorities, feel very insecure and look to the government to provide protection for their lives, property, religious freedom and dignity.

There is a danger of the spread of such types of extremism in some other countries as well. There is a lack of religious freedom in some countries in Asia. I believe that if Christians and Muslims will join together, they can start to resolve these issues. They will be able to create a more human world. There will be peace in the world, and the love of God and love of neighbour will be put into practice.

This Open Letter and Call from Muslim religious leaders and scholars to Christian religious leaders on the topic of “*A Common Word between Us and You*” appeared at an appropriate time to create more positive understanding among Christians and Muslims. The theme of the love of God and love of neighbour in Islam and Christianity is well chosen. Love of God and love of neighbour are fundamental teachings and beliefs both for Christians and Muslims. It is the first time in history that such a theme has been brought up so strongly to provide a firm foundation for Christian-Muslim dialogue.

This Open Letter starts on a positive note with the basic teachings of Islam and Christianity, focusing on love of God and love of neighbour. For example, on the love of God, the letter gives the following quotations from the Holy Quran:

He hath no associate

reminds Muslims that they must love God uniquely, without rivals within their souls, since God says in the Holy Quran:

Yet there are men who take rivals unto God: they love them as they should love God. But those of faith are more intense in their love for God (Al-Baqarah, 2:165). Indeed, [T]heir flesh and their hearts soften unto the remembrance of God.... (Al-Zumar, 39:23).

Another quotation says that Muslims should be truly grateful to him in loving God is the forgiveness of sins:

Say, (O Muhammad, to mankind): If ye love God, follow me; God will love you and forgive you your sins. God is Forgiving, Merciful. (Aal 'Imran, 3:31)

This Open Letter also gives quotations from the Holy Bible attesting that the love of God is the first and greatest commandment. The *Shema* in the Book of Deuteronomy (6:4-5), a centrepiece of the Old Testament and of Jewish liturgy, says:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! / You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.

Likewise, in the New Testament, when Jesus Christ, the Messiah, is asked about the greatest commandment, he answers:

But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. / Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, / "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" / Jesus said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." / This is the first and greatest commandment. / And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' / On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:34-40)

On the love of neighbour, the Open Letter gives several references from Islam, saying, for example, "There are numerous injunctions in Islam about the necessity and paramount importance of love for – and mercy towards– the neighbour. Love of the neighbour is an essential and integral part of faith in God and love of God, because in Islam without love of neighbour there is no true faith in God and no righteousness. The Prophet Muhammad [May God bless him and grant him peace] said:

None of you has faith until you love for your brother what you love for yourself" and: "None of you has faith until you love for your neighbour what you love for yourself."

While writing on the love of neighbour in the Bible, the Open Letter says, "We have already cited the words of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, about the paramount importance, second only to the love of God, of the love of the neighbour:

This is the first and greatest commandment. / And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' / On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 22:38-40).

"And the second, like it, is:

'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these (Mark 12:31).

“So, the common word between us is that there is one God and we should love God with all our heart, soul and mind. To love God is the first and greatest of commandments. Freedom of religion is also mentioned in the Holy Quran: “Let there be no compulsion in religion”. (Q. 2:256)”

In this letter, there is a recognition that Muslims are not against Christians. The letter says,

“As Muslims, we say to Christians that we are not against them and that Islam is not against them – so long as they do not wage war against Muslims on account of their religion, oppress them and drive them out of their homes (in accordance with the verse of the Holy Quran). (*Al-Mumtahinah*, 60:8)”

This letter also proposes that Christians can interpret the Holy Gospels as saying that Muslims are not against them. The letter gives the following quotations from the Holy Gospels:

“In the Gospel Jesus Christ [Peace be with him] says: *He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters abroad* (Matthew 12:30). *For he who is not against us is on our side* (Mark 9:40). ... *for he who is not against us is on our side* (Luke 9:50).”

The Open Letter invites Christians, in light of the above verses, to consider Muslims not against them. There is an invitation to come together on common essentials of the two great religions: Christianity and Islam. The common ground is very strong, making the relationship between these two religious communities the most important factor in contributing to meaningful peace around the world. The letter rightly concludes, “If Muslims and Christians are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace.” It is very true that Muslims and Christians have an important role to play for world peace. If they are not at peace with one another, there cannot be peace in the world. There are 57 Muslim countries and, as mentioned earlier, Muslims and Christians together make up 55% of the world’s population.

This Open Letter, as the Final Statement from Yale University puts it, “began with a desire by Muslim leaders to follow the Quranic commandment to speak to Christians and Jews:

O People of the Scripture! Come to A Common Word between us and you: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him (3:64).

The intention behind *A Common Word* is not to foist the theology of one religion upon another or to attempt conversion. Neither does it seek to reduce both our religions to an artificial union based upon the Two Commandments.”

This is a very important point; to discern that it is not for the conversion of the other, nor does it reduce our religions to an artificial union. Christianity and Islam are missionary religions; in favour of evangelisation and *daw'a*. These are an integral part of their mission to invite other people to join their religion. This should also carry on. However, such conversions are not the aim of this type of dialogue. Conversion of the heart is needed to reach out to the other for mutual respect and understanding. In the approach of ACW, differences are respected and a positive understanding and appreciation is sought from each other. Both Christians and Muslims share a common ground, which is the love of God and love of neighbour, described in the two greatest commandments of the Gospel and rooted in the Torah: ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind’, and, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ The Yale Statement, being a response of 500 Christian leaders, says that this common ground is real and is a basis for dialogue between our two religions. It is a part of our common Abrahamic heritage.

Such an understanding, when studied in the South and South-East Asian context, can bear a lot of positive results. There is a grave need to bring Muslim and Christian scholars of this area to a joint conference to study these concepts. There is a need for open-mindedness and honesty in discussing a range of theological issues. The theological issues to discuss, as the Yale Statement puts it, include different understandings of the Unity of God, of Jesus Christ and his passion, and of the love of God. It is also important to discuss the practical issues with which we are confronted, such as poverty, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the situation in Palestine and Israel, the dangers of further wars, and freedom of religion.

In the existing situation of South Asia, it will be important to include the war in Afghanistan, the war against terrorism, and the problem of radical Islamists and the Taliban in Pakistan. The issue, of 60 years' duration, of Kashmir, in which over 85,000 people have been killed, cannot be ignored. We can also address the issues of poverty, hunger, illiteracy, internally displaced people and refugees. The sufferings of religious minorities and violence carried out against the Christian minority in Pakistan and both Muslim and Christian minorities in India, for instance, can be discussed in the search for possible remedies. The violation of human rights and human dignity can also be discussed. The Yale Statement has agreed: "We recognise that all human beings have the right to the preservation of life, religion, property, intellect, and dignity. No Muslim or Christian should deny the other these rights, nor should they tolerate the denigration or desecration of one another's sacred symbols, founding figures, or places of worship."

Although Christianity and Islam are different religions, the two commandments are an area of common ground and a link between the Quran, Torah and the New Testament. In the Quran, God Most High tells Muslims to issue a call of *A Common Word* to Christians (and Jews – the People of the Scripture). Both believe in the unity of God and worship him. There is no intention to make one religion out of the two. There is an element of respect for the identity of the other's religion and the fact that they worship the same God. As the Yale Statement puts it, "The intention behind *A Common Word* is not to foist the theology of one religion upon another or to attempt conversion. Neither does it seek to reduce both our religions to an artificial union based upon the Two Commandments." The letter also emphasises this strongly when it states, "As Muslims, we say to Christians that we are not against them and that Islam is not against them – so long as they do not wage war against Muslims on account of their religion, oppress them and drive them out of their homes, in accordance with the verse of the Holy Qur'an (Al-Mumtahinah, 60:8)."

This letter brings up the point of religious freedom: "Let there be no compulsion in religion..." (Q. 2:256). The love of God and love of neighbour are made a common ground of all future

interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslims – this is common ground on which hangs *all the Law and the Prophets* (Matthew 22:40). This dialogue between Muslims and Christians is not, as the letter states, “a matter for polite ecumenical dialogue between selected religious leaders. Christianity and Islam are the largest and second largest religions in the world and in history. Christians and Muslims reportedly make up over a third and over a fifth of humanity respectively. If Christians and Muslims are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace.”

The letter stresses that we must have respect for differences and not look down upon one other because of them: “So, let our differences not cause hatred and strife between us. Let us vie with each other only in righteousness and good works. Let us respect each other, be fair, just and kind to one another and live in sincere peace, harmony and mutual goodwill.”

This Open Letter is taken positively and seriously both by Christians and Muslims. It calls for and invites a renewal and intensification of Christian-Muslim dialogue. The fact that this letter has been discussed by various universities and groups demonstrates how important and significant it is to study it and move forward with positive thinking for promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue. The theological faculty of Yale University organised a workshop and conference on *A Common Word* from 24-31 July 2008, followed by “*A Common Word Conference*” at the University of Cambridge from 12-15 October 2008, with an Opening Address by the Archbishop of Canterbury; a colloquium organised by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in Rome from 4-6 November 2008, in which Pope Benedict XVI addressed the participants; and now this International Conference on Muslim-Christian Dialogue in Cadenabbia, Italy from 1-4 October 2009. I anticipate that many more conferences will be organised on the theme of *A Common Word*.

This understanding of the love of God and love of neighbour in Christianity and Islam is well summarised and presented in the final declaration of the first seminar of the Catholic-Muslim Forum, in Rome from 4-6 November 2008. In this declaration we read, “For Christians the source and example of love of God and neighbour is the love of Christ for his Father, for humanity and for each person. ‘God is Love’ (1 Jn. 4:16) and ‘God so loved the

world that He gave his only Son so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life' (Jn. 3:16). God's love is placed in the human heart through the Holy Spirit. It is God who first loves us, thereby enabling us to love Him in return. Love does not harm one's neighbour but rather seeks to do to the other what one would want done to oneself (Cf. 1 Cor. 13: 4-7). Love is the foundation and sum of all the commandments (Cf. Gal. 5: 14). Love of neighbour cannot be separated from love of God, because it is an expression of our love for God. This is the new commandment, 'Love one another as I have loved you.' (Jn. 15: 12) Grounded in Christ's sacrificial love, Christian love is forgiving and excludes no one; it therefore also includes one's enemies. It should be not just words, but deeds (Cf. 1 Jn. 4:18). This is the sign of its genuineness.

"For Muslims, as set out in *A Common Word*, love is a timeless transcendent power which guides and transforms human mutual regard. This love, as indicated by the Holy and Beloved Prophet Muhammad, is prior to the human love for the One True God. A Hadith indicates that God's loving compassion for humanity is even greater than that of a mother for her child (Muslim, Bab al-Tawba: 21); it therefore exists before and independently of the human response to the One who is 'The Loving'. So immense is this love and compassion that God has intervened to guide and save humanity in a perfect way many times and in many places, by sending prophets and scriptures. The last of these books, the Qur'an, portrays a world of signs, a marvelous cosmos of Divine artistry, which calls forth our utter love and devotion, so that 'those who have faith, have most love of God' (2:165), and 'those that believe, and do good works, the Merciful shall engender love among them.' (19:96) In a Hadith we read that 'Not one of you has faith until he loves for his neighbour what he loves for himself' (Bukhari, Bab al-Iman: 13). (§ 1)"

In these paragraphs, we note how the love of God and love of neighbour are understood by Christians and Muslims. Their understandings of the love of God and how He manifests it are different. The differences in understanding and interpretation must be respected. This respect is important to manifest and declare in our Christian-Muslim relations in Asia. This is also so in light of what Pope Benedict XVI emphasised when he

addressed the participants of the Catholic-Muslim Forum in Rome on 6 November 2008. His Holiness said, "I am well aware that Muslims and Christians have different approaches in matters regarding God. Yet we can and must be worshippers of the one God who created us and is concerned about each person in every corner of the world. Together we must show, by our mutual respect and solidarity, that we consider ourselves members of one family: the family that God has loved and gathered together from the creation of the world to the end of human history."

The same declaration also brings up several other points which are relevant to the situation of Muslims and Christians in Asia, for example when it says, "Human life is a most precious gift of God to each person. It should be preserved and honored." Yes, it is important to preserve and honour human life. The declaration challenges us to work with much more zeal to bring this concept into our lives, for example in Pakistan. If the preciousness of life enters into the minds of the people, there will be no more killing of innocents. There will be no more suicide attacks and bomb explosions. There will no more public lashing of women by the Taliban. Men will not be forced to grow beards, and women will be respected and will be free to play their full role for the betterment of society. Such teaching of the Holy Qur'an and Holy Bible needs to get into the minds of the fanatics and militants: to love God and love your neighbour. If these teachings get across to all Muslims and Christians, then there will be a great respect for one's own life and the life of the other as well. So, it is important to get these ideas across to those people who have a narrow understanding and interpretation of their religion.

This type of approach is connected with the next point of the Rome Declaration: "Human dignity is derived from the fact that every human person is created by God and has been endowed with the gifts of reason and free will, and therefore, enabled to love God and others. Respect the human dignity of all, both male and female." This is another important factor; that all human persons are respected and equal opportunities are provided to them, to make use of their talents which are given by God. Pope Benedict XVI in his address said, "I was pleased to learn that you were able at this meeting to adopt a common position on the need to worship God totally and to love our fellow men and

women disinterestedly, especially those in distress and need. God calls us to work together on behalf of the victims of disease, hunger, injustice and violence.”

Yet another point in the declaration is relevant when we speak of the love of God and love of our neighbour: that we should respect every person around us and, that there should not be any discrimination in the name of religion. It is a fact that in some countries there is discrimination in the name of religion. The Rome Declaration says, “Religious minorities are entitled to be respected in their own religious convictions and practices. They are also entitled to their own places of worship, and their founding figures and symbols they consider sacred. Both Catholics and Muslims are called to be the instruments of love and harmony among religions, and for humanity as a whole.”

This will help to overcome the violence and terrorism with which we are faced in some countries. It is a fact that in some countries of Asia, such as Pakistan and India, the places of worship of minorities have been desecrated, houses burnt, believers killed and schools destroyed by the militants. There is a need to work together against such aggression and religiously motivated violence.

In the Rome Declaration we read, “We profess that Catholics and Muslims are called to be instruments of love and harmony among believers, and for humanity as a whole, renouncing any oppression, aggressive violence and terrorism, especially that committed in the name of religion, and upholding the principle of justice for all (§ 11).

There is another important point which can help us join hands to overcome poverty and promote the just distribution of food, thus overcoming hunger. The Declaration continues,

“We call upon believers to work for an ethical financial system in which the regulatory mechanisms consider the situation of the poor and disadvantaged, both as individuals, and as indebted nations. We call upon the privileged of the world to consider the plight of those afflicted most severely by the current crisis in food production and distribution, and ask religious believers of all denominations and all people of good will to work together to alleviate the suffering of the hungry, and to eliminate its causes (§ 12).”

Some suggestions, recommendations, and future plans

There is a need to prepare young people and educate them in such a way that they know about their own religion and other religions as well; we emphasize this point a lot in Pakistan. The future of the world rests in the hands of young people. They must be formed in such a way that there is respect for all and room for the religious freedom of each human person. We have been stressing a lot in this regard that in Pakistan our curricula should promote interfaith harmony, peace and respect. In the Rome Declaration we read, “Young people are the future of religious communities and of societies as a whole. Increasingly, they will be living in multicultural and multi-religious societies. It is essential that they be well formed in their own religious traditions and well informed about other cultures and religions (§ 13).”

In the Open Letter, there is a strong mention of justice for all: “God says in the Holy Quran:

Lo! God enjoineth justice and kindness, and giving to kinsfolk, and forbiddeth lewdness and abomination and wickedness. He exhorteth you in order that ye may take heed (Al Nahl, 16:90).

Jesus Christ [Peace be with him] said:

Blessed are the peacemakers(Matthew 5:9),

and also:

For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul? (Matthew 16:26).”

In Pakistan it is imperative to work for the safeguarding of human rights and the human dignity of all. There are Muslim and Christian groups which are already working for human rights, peace and justice. There are some groups which work jointly, such as the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. There are groups working for the rights of women, such as the Women Action Forum. There are organisations which are active for the rights of workers and labourers, and to eliminate child labour. There are other organisations that are vocal against discriminatory laws in the country, e.g. the Joint Action Committee (JAC).

In this conference, we have two well-known Muslim scholars, human rights activists and promoters of peace, inter-faith and

Christian-Muslim dialogue from Pakistan: Mr Abid Hasan Minto and Mr Kazy Javed Hussain. They are contributing immensely to promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue in Pakistan and in the rest of the world. They can also play a great role in using ACW to reach out to others, especially Muslim scholars and intellectuals. There is a need to make the ACW Open Letter and the various responses to it better known to the general public; so far they are not. They should be known by university faculties focused on world religions and interfaith dialogue. The Vatican documents, such as *Nostra Aetate*, speeches of the recent and current Popes and the documents published by the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue and the World Council of Churches on Inter-religious Dialogue, should also be made available and translated into different languages so that they can reach the general public. There could also be talk-shows and public forums of various newspapers dedicated to this topic. The youth can be encouraged to study these documents and write articles on them.

The government of Pakistan has established the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. There is also a Ministry of Minorities Affairs. Last year a Christian, Mr Shahbaz Bhatti, was appointed as Federal Minister for Minorities Affairs. He is working to bring about equality among all citizens. Recently a 5% quota was reserved for minorities in all spheres of life. Addressing a convention for solidarity with minorities on 28 May 2009 in Islamabad, Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gillani said, "A Minorities Commission has been set up to protect the rights of minorities and to ensure implementation of the five percent quota for minorities in the government services." Mr Gillani also said that interreligious harmony needs to be promoted as, with greater understanding, the country would be strengthened and be able to face the challenges that present themselves. In the same convention, Mr Gillani announced that an interfaith complex would soon be set up in Islamabad to serve as a centre to work for interfaith harmony.

There are several organizations that are working to promote interfaith harmony and peace. The National Commission for Interfaith Dialogue and Ecumenism (NCIDE) of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Pakistan has been active for the last 25 years to promote interfaith and Christian-Muslim Dialogue. The

Minhaj al-Qur'an of Dr Tahir al-Qadri has established the Muslim-Christian Dialogue Forum. The Pakistan Association of Inter-religious Dialogue (PAIRD) has been active for the past 25 years. The United Religions Initiative (URI) is another organization that has been working since 1998 to promote dialogue, reconciliation and peace among religions and cultures at all levels of life; particularly at grassroots levels. The URI has established over 37 groups in the country for youth, children, men and women, to educate them on Christian-Muslim and interreligious dialogue. It has arranged programmes on the International Day of Peace for people of various religions and from various walks of life. The electronic and print media are also playing an active role.

It is also true that at this moment my country, Pakistan, is going through a time of crisis, with more than three million people being internally displaced. They were forced to leave their homes due to the military operation against the Taliban and militants in the Swat Valley. The Taliban have a radical and narrow interpretation of the Islamic *Shari'a*. They want to impose the strictest form of Islam. They are not in favour of the education of women. They are against any social, political or media role for women in public life. Towards that end, they have destroyed over 150 girls' schools with bombs and over 100 boys' schools as well. They are against the shrines of saints and mystics and thus have destroyed shrines of famous sufi mystics and poets, such as that of Rehman Baba. One reason that they gave was that women go to these shrines and seek the intercession of saints; therefore, they say, the shrines should be destroyed. They levied the *jizya* tax on minorities. They do not accept parliament and are totally against democracy. These militants disregard the high courts and the Supreme Court and want to bring in their own *qadis* (judges). The Pakistani nation as a whole, and in particular civil society and liberal minded people, have strongly reacted against this form of Islamisation and the Taliban. They have staged rallies and addressed press conferences to condemn the Taliban's form of interpretation of the Quran and Islamic *Shari'a*. The minorities have joined them. In such a situation, it is important that Muslim religious leaders play a role to bring about positive change in society based on the love of God and love of

neighbour to save this nation from the grip of the Taliban and extremists. In my opinion, these extremists need to be educated in schools and colleges and be opened up towards modern sciences and the world.

The government of Pakistan has started a military operation, *Rah-e-Rast*, against these militants and has succeeded to a great extent. A large number of internally displaced people have started returning to their homes in Swat and other places. The girls' and boys' schools are being re-opened and the Taliban chased away (about 2,000 of them killed and many arrested). The bold steps of the government and army action against these militants have brought relief to the public in general. There is no need and there is no room for such radicalism in our country.

There is a strong wave of promoting interfaith dialogue in the country. Several students from Islamabad University, Quaid-e-Azam University, Karachi University and Forman College University, Lahore, are doing research on interfaith and Christian-Muslim dialogue. The faculties of religion have taken interfaith dialogue as an integral part of their studies. The professors of these universities have invited Christian scholars and advocates of interfaith and Christian-Muslim dialogue into the universities to give lectures to the staff and students. They have realised that dialogue is a dire necessity at the stage of history through which we are passing. It is a good step towards creating harmony and understanding among Christians and Muslims, accurately knowing the beliefs of the other, and thus respecting differences and working together on the issues with which our countries are faced. Dialogue at all levels, such as the dialogue of life, the dialogue of development works, the dialogue of religious experience and the dialogue of words between scholars, is of prime importance.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference Pakistan and Major Superiors' Leadership Conference Pakistan issued a Joint Statement on 12 November 2008. It was issued in response to the strong wave of terrorism and extremism with which our country is confronted. The statement says: "Realizing that this has created complex difficulties in all walks of life, it was also realized that we are called to be signs of hope for all. In order to be so, we have decided to take the following concrete steps: i) Promote faith

formation in our communities through catechesis, Bible studies, prayer by means of media, and training of our lay-leaders; ii) Organise awareness programs in Parishes, Institutions and families in order to bring about peace, harmony and better understanding among diverse faith communities; iii) Work for inter-religious dialogue of life and ecumenism.”

In light of this statement, we see that the Catholic Church in Pakistan is committed to promoting peace, harmony and inter-religious dialogue.

The Church of Pakistan Bishops (Protestant) are also on the front lines in promoting peace and harmony among religions. The Rt Revd Dr Alexander John Malik, Bishop of Lahore, and the Rt Revd Samuel Robert Azriah, Bishop of Raiwind and Moderator of the Church of Pakistan, have established inter-religious dialogue committees. They are ardent promoters of Christian-Muslim, inter-religious and ecumenical dialogue.

In September 2009, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Pakistan and Bishops of the Church of Pakistan, along with the Major Superiors' Leadership Conference of Pakistan and several other small churches, established the Pakistan Christian Action Forum to address the present wave of violence against Christians in various cities such as Gojra, Korian Wala, Bamni Wala and Sambarial. In several, there was religiously motivated violence against Christians from June to September 2009. Seven Christians were burnt alive, including women and children, and over 300 Christian houses and churches were destroyed in mob hysteria following the false accusation of blasphemy and desecration of the Holy Quran. The Pakistan Action Forum is determined to bring healing between Christians and Muslims and make our society a more humane one, where every person is respected.

The Pakistani nation on the whole is in favour of democracy and being a democratic state. Significant numbers of the citizens of Pakistan have always voted in favour of liberal or secular parties and rejected religious political parties. These religious political parties have managed to get only a few seats in the parliament. The public of Pakistan in general is fearful of the hardliners and militants. The general public wants to breathe in a free, liberal and secular Pakistan. The so-called religious parties have been

creating hurdles in the progress and prosperity of the country. This is what has happened to Pakistan since the 9/11 incident. The radicals have carried out many terrorist attacks on public places, institutes, police and military academies and headquarters.

It would be splendid if this Open Letter could be translated into various languages in Pakistan, such as Urdu, Sindhi, Balochi, Pushto and Punjabi. There is an attempt to translate it into Urdu, but it is necessary to do it properly. There is a need to make this letter available to the general public. It would be wonderful if it could also be published in our newspapers and made known in the electronic media. As there are several interfaith groups working in the country, this letter can guide us to get to know each other better and promote interfaith harmony between Christians and Muslims.

This Open Letter is not known to the public in general. Therefore I strongly recommend that it should be made known to a wide range of readers. It would be good if we could take the initiative and organize seminars and workshops on this theme. It would also be a great help to Muslims and Christians to collaborate with one another, to bring these themes to conferences. The content of this letter could become part of the curriculum of schools, *madrasas*, colleges and universities. It would be good to form groups of religious leaders, scholars, students, intellectuals, and promoters of peace and interfaith harmony to study this document and make it known to the general public. The Open Letter could also be discussed during television shows and in newspaper forums.

Muslims and Christians together can fight against the issues they are faced with in our region, such as poverty, illiteracy, religious freedom and human dignity. Pope Benedict XVI said in his speech to the delegates of the Common Word Conference in Rome on 6 November 2008,

“My hope, once again, is that these fundamental human rights will be protected for all people everywhere. Political and religious leaders have the duty of ensuring the free exercise of these rights in full respect for each individual’s freedom of conscience and freedom of religion.”

The Holy Father Pope Benedict further said, “The discrimination and violence which even today religious people experience throughout the world, and the often violent persecutions to which they are subject, represent unacceptable and unjustified acts, all the more grave and deplorable when they are carried out in the name of God. God’s name can only be a name of peace and fraternity, justice and love.”

The Holy Father has challenged us to spread the message of harmony and mutual understanding by saying, “We are challenged to demonstrate, by our words and above all by our deeds, that the message of our religions is unfailingly a message of harmony and mutual understanding.”

It would be an excellent step to form a network of scholars from the South and South-East Asia region and have conferences, seminars and workshops on this topic. It would be good to identify funds for this purpose so that harmony, Christian-Muslim dialogue and peace are promoted.

Let the outcome and statements of the conferences in Yale, Cambridge, Rome and Cadenabbia be made available to the general public. It will certainly remove a lot of misconceptions, and trust will be built.

It would be helpful to establish Christian-Muslim dialogue groups at continental, national and provincial levels in Asia, to work jointly on social, economic, religious and political problems.

There is a grave need to establish Christian-Muslim dialogue and peace centers in our countries. These will offer research facilities and organize programmes to promote dialogue among Muslims and Christians at all levels of life.

The Dominican friars in Pakistan have started the construction of a Peace Centre in Lahore. It will be completed by mid-2010. It will be the first Peace Centre in the Archdiocese of Lahore and most probably in Pakistan as well. This centre is being built to hold seminars, conferences and workshops on interreligious dialogue and peace. It will also be a place to publish articles and brochures on creating good will, tolerance and positive understanding among people of various religions, especially Christians and Muslims. The International Day of Peace celebrations will be held in it as well. There will be programmes

and seminars for youth, women and children, as well as with media personnel, religious scholars and human rights activities. This Peace Centre will be interlinked with other organizations and groups at national and international levels which are working for similar aims and objectives. I am planning to organise and host an international conference on ACW next year in this Peace Centre.

In conclusion, I would like to state that I am sure that in the light of the Open Letter and positive responses from various parts of the world, from religious leaders and scholars alike, there will be a change in society. There will be a positive change in the attitude of Muslims and Christians, and if they had negative attitudes towards one another, this letter and its responses will help us to concentrate more on what unites us rather than what divides us.

* This paper was presented during the Cadenabbia Conference in Italy, on 4th of October, 2009 and published in the book “We Have Justice in Common” by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Foundation, Germany, 2010.

Chapter Three

Teachings of the Roman Catholic Church on Christian-Muslim Dialogue and Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Pakistan

Introduction

First of all, I am grateful to Professor Tuula Sakaranaho and the administration of Helsinki University, Finland for inviting me to give this lecture on the “Teachings of the Vatican on Christian-Muslim Dialogue and Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Pakistan”. It is the very first time that I have come to Helsinki and this part of the world. I am very thrilled about it, and I am also very grateful to Ms. Heidi Rautionmaa for making all the arrangements for me to come to this beautiful land.

The topic given to me is very relevant and timely as well. We find Christians and Muslims living side by side around the globe. There is hardly any part of the world where Christians and Muslims are not meeting one another. This is not a new phenomenon. In fact, Muslims have been in dialogue with Christians right from the dawn of Islam in the 7th century. The Prophet of Islam had dialogue and direct communication with Christians in the area where Islam was born. These were the Christians who offered refuge to Muslims when they fled from Mecca to the Abyssinian Negus in 615 A.D. and asked the king for political asylum. This group of Muslims was received with open hearts and respect by the Christians. But soon after that, some differences arose between them on the denial of the prophethood of Muhammad by the Christians.

There are several verses in the Holy Quran about Christians. These verses have two attitudes towards Christians. One is of respect and friendship, such as “...And nearest in love to the believers are those who say we are Christians - because among these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant” (*al-Ma’ida*. 85), “Christians are the People of the Book” (*al-Ma’ida*.62), and again, “Gospel is revealed to Jesus” (*al-Ma’ida*.49). We read in the Holy Quran yet another verse which says, “And dispute not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those among them who inflict wrong (and

injury); but say, ‘We believe in the Revelation which has been come down to us and in that which came down to you. Our Allah and your Allah is One; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam)’ (*al-Ankabut*. 46).

But there are other verses in the Holy Quran which are not positive towards Christians, and that is of “*Shirk*’ association of others with God. For example, “In blasphemy indeed are those that say that Allah is Christ the Son of Mary.”

(*al-Ma’ida* .19)

There is a famous encounter of an official meeting of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad, with Christians when representatives of the Christian tribe of Najran came to Mecca in 632 AD, which ended with the “Pact of Najran”. The Prophet of Islam also offered Christians an opportunity to say their prayers in the Mosque of the Prophet of Islam in Medina. There has been a long list of “encounters and clashes” between Christians and Muslims since the dawn of Islam in the 7th century of the Christian era.

Neither Christians nor Muslims can afford to ignore the presence of one another. Together they form 55 % of the world population. Christians are 2.1 billion and form 35%, and Muslims are about 1.5 billion and encompass 20%. There is a great need for the followers of these two religions to think seriously and profoundly about how they might better understand and collaborate with one another. They need to respect the differences between each other’s beliefs. With this approach of friendship and understanding, we can make this world more peaceful and worth living in. The need for mutual respect and collaboration is even greater as we journey together in the 21st century. There is no need to impose one’s thinking upon the other.

It is a fact that both of these religions have many similarities, but there are many major differences in our interpretation and understanding of revealed truth. Both Christians and Muslims believe in the oneness of God, in the prophets and their role in the world. Both believe in the Day of Judgment, almsgiving, angels, life after death, reward and punishment. Both Christians and Muslims believe that they are the children of Abraham. Both believe in the revelation and second coming of Christ.

There are also differences: for Christians, Jesus is the Word of God; for Muslims the Holy Quran is the Word of God. Christians believe Jesus is the Son of God, fully divine and fully human. He was crucified, died and rose on the third day. Muslims believe that he did not die on the cross. He was raised alive. Muslims do not believe in the divinity of Christ. There are also differences with regard to the personality of Muhammad and his prophetic mission. Christians do recognize Islam as a religion which professes belief in one God.

Nevertheless, it is a fact that both of these religions are spread all around the globe. There are 57 Muslim countries. There is a Christian West. When something happens to Muslims in the Christian world, it has an impact on Muslims around the world, and if something happens to Christians in Muslim countries, that too has an impact upon the Christian world.

There are some countries where Muslims are a majority and Christians a minority, such as Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Jordan, Libya, Malaysia, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Egypt, while in other countries, Christians are the majority and Muslims a minority, such as Finland, Germany, France, UK, Italy, Germany, USA, Canada, Philippines, Switzerland, Spain, Belgium, Ireland, Austria, Argentina and Brazil. There is a long list of countries where Christians are in the majority and Muslims are a minority. And there are some countries where both Christians and Muslims are a minority, such as in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Singapore, Japan and Taiwan.

The Holy Quran itself contains references to Christians and indicates how dialogue should be conducted. At different periods and in different places, as Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald wrote in his article, "Christian Muslim Dialogue – a Survey of Recent Developments" (10 April 2000), the relationship has been one of cooperation and conflict. There has been much cultural interaction between Christians and Muslims. According to the Archbishop, "Christians did not really have an adequate theological basis for an open relationship with Muslims. Islam tended to be looked upon as a sort of Christian heresy. On the other hand, while Islamic society allowed a place for Christians in its system, as *ahl al-dhimma*, it has little sympathy for the specific beliefs of Christians."

Vatican Documents

For Catholics, the Second Vatican Council, the great gathering of bishops from all over the world which took place from 1962 to 1965, marked a new beginning in Christian-Muslim relations. It brought about a new attitude towards the followers of other religions in general, and towards Muslims in particular. The Declaration of the Vatican Council on the relationship of the Church towards other religions, *Nostra Aetate*, states that the Church has a 'high regard' for Muslims. (n.3) This is really a change in the attitude of the Church towards Muslims. The same document continues: "Over the centuries many quarrels and dissensions have arisen between Christians and Muslims. The sacred Council pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding for the benefit of all men. Let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values" (ibid).

The theological bases for the attitude of esteem are found dispersed throughout the various documents of the Council. God wills the salvation of all. The whole human race is united in its origin and its destiny. God is active in the hearts of all human beings, drawing them to Him, as He is active in the different religious rites which give corporate expression to the human response to God. Yet human beings have been created with free will. Therefore, they must respond freely to God, according to the dictates of their conscience. This is the foundation for *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Declaration on Religious Freedom. It is also the basis of interreligious dialogue as encouraged by *Nostra Aetate*. Several other Church documents, such as *Lumen Gentium*, *Redemptoris Missio*, *Dialogue and Proclamation* and *Evangelii Nunciandi*, provide a profound theology of dialogue and a foundation on how to reach out to the people of other religions, especially Muslims. Dialogue, then, is an integral part of the mission of the Church.

Speaking specifically about Muslims, *Nostra Aetate* says: "They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to men. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan, and whose faith Muslims eagerly claim for their

own. Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus as a prophet; his Virgin Mother they honor, and even at times devoutly invoke. Further, they await the day of judgment and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this reason they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms-deed and fasting” (NA. 3)

The Church takes developing good relations with Muslims very seriously, and explores the ways in which we can collaborate with each other through dialogue. Dialogue means respecting one another, understanding one another, appreciating one another and working for peace, justice, human rights, human dignity, religious freedom and its expression, moral values and ethical values. The question we need to ask ourselves is - how can we join hands to fight against poverty and illiteracy? How can we work together to protect the environment and the rights of minorities?

After the Second Vatican Council, it fell to the Popes, and in particular to Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II, to oversee the practical application of the Second Vatican Council. Popes Paul VI and John Paul II played very significant roles in promoting good relations between Christians and Muslims, and now Pope Benedict XVI is carrying on this task so that this world can be a more peaceful place to live in.

These Popes, during their apostolic journeys to different countries, always set aside a time to meet believers of different religions, including Muslims. They have also received Muslim leaders in the Vatican and have taken the opportunity of discussing matters of common concern. For example, during the visits of Pope John Paul II to Morocco in 1985, he addressed a large gathering of Muslim youth, and in Tunis in 1996 he laid special emphasis on dialogue within the Mediterranean area. Also at the initiative of Pope John Paul II, a large number of religious leaders were invited to come to Assisi, Italy in 1986 to pray for peace in the world. A number of Muslims accepted the invitation and came for this event.

Pope Paul VI set up a Secretariat for Non Christians during the second Vatican Council in May 1964. Later on in 1988, it became the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. In the papal encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, August 6, 1964, Pope Paul VI

said, “[we refer] to the adorers of God according to the conception of monotheism, the Muslim religion especially, deserving of our admiration for all that is true and good in their worship of God.”

As part of establishing good relations and dialogue with Muslims, the book on “Guidelines for dialogue between Christians and Muslims” was published in 1969, and its second edition was brought out in 1981. This book has been translated into many different languages, including Arabic.

There was a great desire to establish direct contacts with Muslims. Pope Paul VI received many Muslim religious leaders in Rome. The Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs in Cairo paid an official visit in December 1970. In 1974, Cardinal Pignedoli visited Saudi Arabia and had a meeting with King Faisal. Later in the same year, a Saudi delegation of experts in Islamic law arrived in Europe for discussions on human rights. They also held working sessions with the Vatican officials and were received by Pope Paul VI.

Since 1968, the Secretariat has been in the habit of addressing and sending a message to Muslims at the end of Ramadan, for the celebration of *Eid-al Fitr*. This letter is signed by the President of the Council, but in 1991, because of the suffering caused by the Gulf War, the message was signed by His Holiness Pope John Paul II.

Pope John Paul II

Pope John Paul II met more than 50 times with Muslims. He had a great respect for them and has had many encounters with the followers of Islam. He always gave a message of encouragement to encourage good relations, understanding, and joint efforts to promote justice, peace, human dignity and religious freedom and bring healing to the world. He challenged us to forget the bitter past and forge a new beginning to make significant changes in the world. He was deeply respected by the Muslim community. At the death of Pope John Paul II, Muslims mourned his death, and they remembered him with great respect and admiration.

Here are some quotations from the address of Pope John Paul II to the Catholic Community of Ankara, Turkey 29, 1979: “My brothers, when I think of his spiritual heritage (Islam) and the value it has for man and for society, its capacity of offering,

particularly in the young, guidance for life, filling the gap left by materialism, and giving a reliable foundation to social and juridical organization, I wonder if it is not urgent, precisely today when Christians and Muslims have entered a new period of history, to recognize and develop the spiritual bonds that unite us, in order to preserve and promote together, for benefit of all men, ‘peace, liberty, social justice and moral values’, as the Council calls upon us to do (*Nostra Aetate* 3).”

Pope John Paul II’s address to the representatives of the Muslims of the Philippines, February, 1981, he said: “I deliberately address you as brothers. That is certainly what we are, because we are members of the same human family, whose efforts, whether people realize it or not, tend toward God and the truth that comes from Him. But we are especially brothers in God, who created us and whom we are trying to reach, in our own ways, through faith, prayer and worship, through the keeping of his law and through submission to his designs....”

In his address to the representatives of the Muslims of Belgium, May 19, 1985, he said: “It is a good thing to come to understand each other by learning to accept differences, by overcoming prejudices with mutual respect, and by working together for reconciliation and service to the lowliest. This is a fundamental dialogue which must be practiced in neighborhoods, in places of work, in schools. This is the dialogue which is proper to believers who live together in a modern and pluralistic society.”

In his address to the delegation of the World Islamic Call Society, Rome, January 1990, he said: “...Both Christians and Muslims are called to defend the inviolable right of each individual to freedom of religious belief and practice. There have been in the past, and there continue to be at present, unfortunate instances of misunderstanding, intolerance and conflict between Christians and Muslims, especially in circumstances where either Muslims or Christians are a minority or are guest workers in a given country. It is our challenge as religious leaders to find ways to overcome such difficulties in a spirit of justice, brotherhood and mutual respect.

To the Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt, September 7, 2000, he said: “In a world deeply marked by violence, it is bitterly ironic that even now some of the worst conflicts are

between believers who worship one God, who look to Abraham as a holy patriarch and who seek to follow the Law of Sinai. Each act of violence makes it more urgent for Muslims and Christians everywhere to recognize the things we have in common, to bear witness that we are all creatures of the one merciful God, and to agree once and for all that recourse to violence in the name of religion is completely unacceptable.... .

Religion is the enemy of exclusion and discrimination; it seeks the good of everyone and therefore ought to be a stimulus for solidarity and harmony between individuals and among peoples."

Christian-Muslim dialogue conferences and meetings

There is a very long list of conferences and meetings between Christians and Muslims on an official level, from the Vatican to various country levels.

To mention a few: in Broumana, Lebanon in July 1972, in Accra, Ghana in 1974, in Hong Kong 1975, in Tripoli, Libya in 1976, in Malta in 1990, in Rome in 1990 and again in Rome, 1997.

On the Muslim side, the Royal Academy for Islamic Civilization Research and branches of the Al Albait Foundation in Amman, Jordan, have established relations with Christians, and in some cases they have also invited Jews. The themes of their meetings have centered on common values regarding family life, business and the ethics of banking. In one of these meetings, concerning peace and justice, one of speakers on the Christian side was Cardinal Ratzinger, our present Pope Benedict XVI. There have been further talks in collaboration with the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. In the planning for these conferences, there has always been collaboration with His Beatitude Michel Sabbah, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem.

Six consultations had taken place before 1997: "Religious Freedom" in Rome, 1989, "The Rights of Children" in Amman, 1990, "Women in Society" in Rome, 1992, "Religion and Nationalism today, Problems and Challenges" in Amman, 1994, "The Use of the Earth's Resources" in Rome, 1996 and "Human Dignity" in Amman, 1997.

Most of these meetings have been with Sunni Muslims. However, it is worth mentioning a colloquium which was held in Tehran, Iran in 1994. It was organized by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue with the Secretariat of Interreligious

Dialogue of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance in Iran.

Christian-Muslim dialogue groups exist in a number of countries. For example: Al-Liqa with its headquarters in Bethlehem, the Pakistan Association of Interreligious Dialogue in Pakistan, the Warm Hearts Association in Bangladesh, the *Silsilah* Movement in the Philippines and the Association for Religious Fraternity (*al-ikha al-dini*) in Cairo.

The World Muslim Congress, the World Muslim League and the International Social and Cultural Organization are also active in promoting dialogue with Christians at an official level with the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue at the Vatican. In 1998, a special agreement was signed setting up a joint committee with Al-azhar. The Vatican has also established a Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims. I have been appointed Consultor of this Commission by Pope John Paul II for 5 years from 1999 to 2004, and also Consultor to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue for 10 years, from 1985 to 1995. The government of Qatar has also been very actively involved and has organized Muslim-Christian Dialogue. The King of Saudi Arabia, Abdul Aziz, has also organized interreligious dialogue meetings in Mecca, Madrid and New York.

Usually there are formal discussions. It is very important to get engaged in social issues along with the dialogue of life, dialogue of deeds, theological dialogue and dialogue of religious experience. This will help to bring about positive understanding and unity. Christians and Muslims will continue to differ on essential matters of faith. However, dialogue on the theological level does not mean proving that one is right and other is wrong. Its purpose is mutual enrichment. Dialogue should ultimately strive for peace in the world.

Challenges to Christian Muslim dialogue

(Cf. Cardinal Francis Arinze, Christian-Muslim Relations in the 21st Century, Gregorian University, Washington, D.C., 5 June, 1997)

1. The weight of the past - lack of peaceful and serene relations due to past wars and suspicion.

2. Lack of self criticism needed by both Christians and Muslims; failure to reflect on the past and look for a better future.
3. Religious fanaticism and extremism.

Ways to meet the challenges

1. Healing of historical challenges.
2. Learning to exercise self criticism.
3. Liberate religion from political manipulation.
Government should be impartial towards all religions.
4. Promote development of justice and peace.
5. Joint concerns over the use of the Earth's resources.

Christian Muslim dialogue in Pakistan

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan, with a population of approximately 180 million, is the 6th most populated country in the world. It is 97 percent Muslim, and home to about 3.5 million Christians, the largest minority in the country. At the time of the Pakistan movement (including its independence and growth), our Christian political leaders played an important role for the country, voting in favor of the creation of Pakistan. They have also played an impressive role in the development of the country. Their services in the field of education and civil and armed services have been highly regarded and appreciated by the government. However, with the passage of time and intensive emphasis on implementing Islamic law - '*Sharia*' - Christians and other minorities have been made to feel like second-class citizens. Very often, Christians face discrimination on account of their religion. Several Christian churches and houses have been burned to ashes by militant Muslims on false accusations of blasphemy against the Prophet of Islam or desecration of the Holy Quran. The entire Christian colonies in Shanti Nagar, Babni Wala, Korean Wala, Gojra and Sangla Hill, to mention a few, were totally destroyed by angry Muslim mobs. Not only that, more than 30 Christians have been killed on false accusations of blasphemy.

The Catholic Church at present, in terms of its clergy and organization, is almost totally Pakistani in character. That is truly an amazing accomplishment, writes one historian, John O'Brian, in his book.

The vast majority of Christians have, by and large, been oppressed, discriminated against, and not treated as equal

citizens by the Muslim majority, writes a Catholic priest, Fr. Liam O’Callaghan SSc, in his doctoral thesis on ‘Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Pakistan: Responding Together for Liberation of the Poor’, April, 2010. “A further complicating issue I notice,” says Fr. Liam, “on this vexing question of majority/minority relationships, is that while Muslims are in an overwhelming majority in Pakistan, they often see themselves as a minority on the world stage, and in many cases under attack from the ‘Christian West’. As a result, Christians are very often targeted by Muslim fanatics and at times have been violently attacked.

One further reality that exacerbates the Pakistani context is the fragile economic and political situation, which seems to be spiraling out of control. The stability of the government is deeply in question, civil unrest is rising, and over recent months the rapid spread of extreme, distorted forms of Islam is gaining ground in the northern part of the country.

Christian-Muslim dialogue is the priority for many religious groups. It is also one of the 5 priorities of the Archdiocese of Lahore, as prioritized in the Archdiocesan Pastoral Plan of 2007.

The Catholic and Protestant Churches in Pakistan have taken a keen interest in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue in Pakistan. Several institutes have been established where Christian-Muslim dialogue is a prime focus, such as the Christian Study Center in Rawalpindi and the Dominican House and Dominican Peace Center in Lahore. Islam is taught in the seminaries and the Pastoral Institute in Multan. The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Pakistan established a “National Commission for Christian Muslim Dialogue” in 1985. It is now known as the National Commission for Interreligious Dialogue and Ecumenism. In each diocese, there is a Commission for Christian Muslim Dialogue. The Protestant Churches, now known as Church of Pakistan, have taken very significant steps in Christian-Muslim dialogue.

The Dominican friars of Ibn-e-Mariam, Vice Province of Pakistan, are playing an important role in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue in Pakistan. There are Dominican friars such as Fr James Channan OP and Fr Pascal Paulus OP who have specialized in this field, doing post graduate studies in Egypt,

Italy and the USA. In particular, the writer of this paper has participated in hundreds of national and international conferences on interfaith and Christian-Muslim dialogue and has also written articles and commentaries and given interviews for newspapers, magazines, radio and television channels both at national and international levels.

For the past 25 years, many programs have been conducted at the Dominican House in Garden Town, Lahore, and now a new Dominican Peace Center has been built at Pak Arab Housing Scheme in Lahore for the purpose of building bridges among believers of different religions, especially between Christians and Muslims. This will be done through seminars, conferences, workshops and the publication of books and magazines. The Dominican Peace Center in Lahore was inaugurated by His Eminence, Cardinal Jean Louis Tauran, President, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, the Vatican, on 28th of November, 2010. The Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Adolfo TituaYllana, the Archbishop of Lahore, His Grace Lawrence John Saldanha, Chairman of the National Commission for Interreligious Dialogue and Ecumenism, the Most Rev. Andrew Francis, and the Bishop of Islamabad, Most Rev. Rufin Anthony, the Auxiliary Bishop of Lahore, the Most Rev. Sebastian Shah and the Church of Pakistan Bishop, Most Rev. Alexander John Malik, were also present along with several other Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Baha'i leaders to witness this historic event of the blessing of this Peace Center. The Grand Imam of the Badshahi Mosque, Maulana Abdul Khabir Azad, was among the Guests of Honor.

United Religions Initiative (URI) www.uri.org is another important interreligious dialogue organization which has played a significant role in Pakistan. The URI is an international organization established in 1995. It has more than 500 Cooperation Circles (CC) or groups working in 78 countries to promote daily interfaith dialogue and to bring healing and reconciliation to the world. Ms. Heidi Rautionmaa is very active in Finland for this organization. The branch in Pakistan was established in 1998, and now there are 44 groups working all around the country in various fields, such as the education of children, the status of women, youth, human rights, peace and

justice. URI also organized a 1500 mile journey from Karachi to Khyber to welcome the new millennium and give a message of peace and interreligious dialogue. The journey started from Karachi on the 24th of December, 1999 and ended at the Khyber Pass on the 4th of January, 2000. During this 1500 mile journey, several seminars, conferences, peace walks, press conferences, music programs and poetry concerts were organized in different cities of Pakistan, such as in Karachi, Hyderabad, Rahim Yar Khan, Bahawalpur, Multan, Toba Tek Singh, Faisalabad, Lahore, Gujrat, Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Noshera, Peshawar and the Khyber Pass. Thousands of people participated in these programs from different cities and religions. Both the electronic and press media gave prominent coverage to this unique event which was perhaps the largest peace program in the world to welcome in the new millennium.

I am serving as the Regional Coordinator of this organization for Pakistan. URI has also established a website, www.uripakistan.org, and publishes a quarterly magazine called 'UMANG'. Sr Sabina Rifat is the Editor of this magazine. We have also established a women's wing of the URI, and Sabina Rifat is also the URI Pakistan Women's Wing Coordinator. We have organized several capacity building and peace building workshops and interfaith dialogue conferences and seminars from the platform of URI. Grand Imam of the Badshahi Mosque Lahore, Maulana Abdul Khabir Azad, is the Global Trustee of URI for Asia. He organized the first interreligious dialogue conference in history at the Badshahi Mosque.

The Government of Pakistan is interested in promoting interreligious dialogue. President General Pervez Musharraf, and now the present government of Pakistan, under the leadership of Asif Ali Zardari as President and Mr. Yousaf Raza Gilani as Prime Minister, are very much interested in this effort. They have also organized several national conferences on dialogue and celebrated Christmas at Federal and Provincial levels. The festivals of minorities, such as Christmas, Deewali, Holi and Vasakhi are officially celebrated by the government of Pakistan. August 11th is celebrated as Minorities Day. A 5% quota for minorities and 4 seats are reserved for the minorities in the Senate.

Common themes

1. There is a need to promote dialogue in order to break down the barriers of misunderstanding, mistrust and suspicion which are present in both communities. There is a need to build better relations. There is a need to work for peace, justice and the ability to listen to each other's concerns.
2. The essential elements for dialogue must be: the ability to listen, tolerance, a non-judgmental attitude and a commitment not to use dialogue as pretext for proselytizing.
3. There is a need to build mutual relationships based on trust. Very often there is a lack of trust and, therefore, suspicion.
4. There is a great need for ongoing efforts. It is an uphill battle
5. The main areas of Christian-Muslim Dialogue should be: education, increasing the literacy rate, opening schools and vocational centers, and working in the area of justice and respect for human rights.
6. The United Religions Initiative (URI), National Commission for Interreligious Dialogue and Ecumenism, National Council for Interreligious Dialogue and several other dialogue groups are playing a very good and positive role in bringing harmony between Christians and Muslims. The activities at the Peace Center in Lahore and the Christian Study Center in Rawalpindi include publishing books, maintaining a Website and publishing the UMANG magazine. These noble efforts need to be enhanced.
7. There is an urgent need to reach young people at the grassroots level and educate them and start a dialogue of life by participating in the daily events of their lives, whether they be joyful or sorrowful. This will bring positive results and great trust. This approach will work from the bottom up.

Dialogue is not an easy thing in Pakistan. It has many challenges. Our society is becoming more and more radical. However, dialogue is important to ease tensions and guide us to work jointly for a better and more humane Pakistan.

Some problems

Here are some problem areas which create concern in Christian-Muslim relations in Pakistan.

1. The misuse of blasphemy laws. We have lost over 32 Christian lives, and hundreds of houses have been burned. Christians feel very frightened, knowing that they can be accused

of blasphemy at any time. They are reminded of the assassinations of Salman Taseer, Shahbaz Bhatti and the Christian Federal Minister for Minority Affairs.

2. Identifying Christians with the West. There is a misunderstanding in the minds of many Muslims. They think all Western countries are Christian countries. Because they have the concept of an Islamic Republic, they think all Western nations are Christian Republics. We tell them the Vatican is a Christian state in that sense, but that in the rest of the countries in Europe and America and Latin America, there is separation between state and religion. The laws of the West do not necessarily correspond with Christian teachings and values on issues such as abortion and gay marriage.

3. If something happens in the West, for example, the Denmark cartoon controversy, anger is manifested against us. Our Churches are attacked. Our houses are attacked. Our lives are threatened. When one Christian is suspected of doing something wrong, the whole community is made a target of retaliation. The same is the case with the blasphemy laws. When one Christian is accused, every Christian is accused. Entire colonies have been burned, such as those in Shanti Nagar, Sangla Hill, Gojra and Korean Wala.

In Pakistan, we Christians have manifested our solidarity with Muslims on many occasions, such as in the most recent incident of the burning of the Holy Quran in Florida, USA. That sacrilegious act, which was done by the controversial Pastor Terry Jones and his followers, shocked and offended us. We were sure that we would be targeted. The Catholic Archbishop, Lawrence John Saldanha, President of the Catholic Bishops Conference Pakistan, rushed to make a statement on the 22nd of March, 2011 to condemn the burning of the most holy book of Muslims. I also called a Press Conference, along with other Christian religious and political leaders, such as Fr Abid Habib OFM Cap, President of Major Superiors Leadership Pakistan, Fr Nadeem Francis, OFM and Fr Samson Dilawar, as well as political leaders such as Mr. Akram Masih Gill, Member of the National Assembly. We strongly condemned the brutal act of burning the Holy Quran. It is against our Christian teaching and faith. We are taught to respect people of all faiths. This is what the Vatican Council has taught us. This is what the Popes have taught us. This is what Jesus taught us, that we love others as we love ourselves. In our press conference, we declared that Terry Jones is neither a representative of the Catholic nor the Protestant

Church. He is a self-professed pastor. There have also been several demonstrations by Christians all around the country.

There was another agitation in which hundreds of Christians participated. The Church of Pakistan, Bishop Alexander John Malik, Bishop Samuel Robert Azariah and Bishop Azad Marshal have also condemned the burning of the Holy Quran.

On the 28th of March, 2011, there was a joint interreligious conference organized in Lahore by the Minhajul Quran organization and its Christian Muslim Dialogue Forum to come together and work on a strategy to bring healing to the wounds caused by the acts of Terry Jones and his small group of followers.

At times, our mass media plays a very negative role when it exaggerates international events on religious matters. Instead of creating unity, they create division.

There is grave need to work together in dealing with the various problems our society is confronted with: eliminating poverty and illiteracy, rehabilitating the victims of floods and earthquakes, opening educational and vocational centers for both boys and girls, men and women, and providing basic health facilities.

The Church in Pakistan is a minority community. A great many tragic incidents have occurred in the country and abroad that were not of our doing. As a result, we have become the scapegoat, a suffering Church. But Christians are very brave. They believe in the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ. We are not afraid of suffering, for we believe this will come to an end and there will be a resurrection and divine vindication of the righteous. We are a people of hope. We are the people of the risen Christ. We have an important role to play here. We are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. We must not lose our salt and light. We need to keep our candles burning in the darkness around us.

In conclusion, I can say that the Catholic Church is very sincere in promoting dialogue between Christians and Muslims and has taken many steps in this regard. The Church in Pakistan is also doing its best to create a sense of respect and collaboration among the believers of Christianity and Islam. Of course, there is a great need to do much more, which we pray will serve as a fresh breeze of peace, mutual respect and understanding. Thank you very much!

* This lecture was given at Helsinki University, Finland on the 4th of April, 2011.

Chapter Four

Golden Jubilee of Vatican Council II: Interreligious Dialogue and a Pakistani Perspective*

It has been 50 years since the Vatican Council II opened in 1962, and this year we are celebrating its Golden Jubilee. The Vatican Council II was initiated and inaugurated with the extraordinary vision and leadership of Blessed Pope John 23rd. The Council lasted for 3 years and concluded in 1965. One year after the beginning of the Council, Pope John 23rd died, but this extraordinary Council continued and was completed under the grand leadership and vision of Pope Paul VI. This Council was very timely in its response to the signs of the times and the challenges which confronted the world and Church. It evaluated the world situation and offered guidance, inspiration, and a carefully thought out agenda for the Church in order to carry on the mission of Christ.

It was truly an Ecumenical Council, with some representatives of the other Churches being invited as observers. It was a significant step forward and manifested openness towards other Christian Churches as well other religions. The Catholic Church reflected upon its ongoing presence, service, teachings, mission, evangelization, proclamations and renewal, as well as dialogue with the people of other religions. It was searching for a way to see how we could reach out to our brothers and sisters in other religions and jointly play an important role on behalf of peace and harmony in the world, to appreciate what is good in other religions, to play our full role on behalf of social welfare and justice, eliminating intolerance, and having - with patience - a fruitful dialogue.

Since the objective of this presentation is to focus precisely on the relation of the Church towards non-Christian religions, I will confine myself to this perspective only. The Vatican Council II document called *Nostra Aetate* (The Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions) was very carefully and cautiously prepared. It was promulgated on the 28th of October, 1965. It deals explicitly with the attitude of the Church regarding brothers and sisters of other religions. This document encourages the Catholic Church to have an open attitude towards non-Christian

religions. However, seeing the urgency of positive and constructive relations with people of other religions, dialogue had already been officially initiated when His Holiness Pope Paul VI established the Secretariat for Non-Christians on 14th of May, 1964.

Besides *Nostra Aetate*, there are a number of other documents which address the relationship of the Church towards people of other religions. *Nostra Aetate* cannot be taken in isolation from the other documents of Council II. That is why it is important that reference be made to these documents as well, such as *Dignitatis Humanae* (Religious Freedom) on the fundamental question of religious freedom, *Lumen Gentium* (Church), *Gaudium et Spes* (The Church in the Modern World), *Ad Gentes Divinitus* (The Church's Missionary Activity) on theological principles and guidance and *Unitatis Redintegratio* (Christian Unity) on ecumenism.

The Church has taken many concrete steps toward interreligious dialogue in light of the principles laid down in *Nostra Aetate*. As a result, it has learned much from the dialogue and has undertaken pertinent reforms. In the words of Archbishop Michael L. Fitzgerald, former President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, "At first, because of its far-reaching character, *Nostra Aetate* took the Church by surprise. Thus it was necessary that the validity of this document be evidenced on theological foundations. As a result, in fact, it has produced theological advances and developments related to interreligious dialogue and on matters of ecclesiology, the Trinity, and especially pneumatology, which are found in the teachings of various Sovereign Pontiffs and in certain other Church documents."

The documents mentioned above invite us to reflect upon establishing good relations with all religions in the world, and with Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism and Islam in particular.

Some salient features of *Nostra Aetate*:

1. Reflecting upon the modern world, we see that through modern means of transportation and communication, the world has become more united and more like a global village. People of various cultures, nations, and religions travel from one country to the other and from one continent to another, and they develop

bonds of friendship and meet people of diverse religions and cultures. The Church urges us forward for more communion and unity with them, as we read in *Nostra Aetate* No. 1: “In this age of ours, when men are drawing more closely together and the bonds of friendship between different people are being strengthened, the Church examines with greater care the relations which she has to non-Christian religions. Ever aware of her duty to foster unity and charity among individuals, and even among nations, she reflects at the outset on what men have in common and what tends to promote fellowship among them.”

2. There is another important reason to foster dialogue among religions. As human beings, we belong to one community, which is created by God, and share a common destiny, namely God. Therefore, it is important that we reach out for dialogue with people of other religions. No one should be left out in our endeavor to promote good will, tolerance, peace and unity. We are all members of one humanity and community. We read in *Nostra Aetate* No.1, “All men form but one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth (cf. Acts.17:26), and because all share a common destiny, namely God. His providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all men (cf. Wis.8:1; Acts.14:17; Rom.2:6-7; Tim 2:4) against the day when the elect will be gathered together in the holy city which is illuminated by the glory of God, and in whose splendor all peoples will walk” (cf. Apoc.21:23ff). So, the spirit behind this document was that unity must be fostered because we are called to one destiny - our meeting with God.

3. There are several important questions which come to mind: what is our origin? Where are we heading? And what is our destiny? Why are there so many problems in the world? And how can we overcome them? How can we find happiness? Is there anything beyond this world? These are a few of the questions which are asked by the followers of all religions. They try to find answers in the Holy Books, the teachings of the founders of their religions and traditions. Given this context and these phenomena, it is important that we work and share our responses to these questions through dialogue. (cf. *Nostra Aetate* No. 1)

4. There is an openness on the part of the Church to appreciate what is true in other religions. That is another principle which leads us to reach out for dialogue with people of other religions. *Nostra Aetate* No. 2 puts it in the following words: “The Church assures us that it rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of truth which enlightens all men.”

5. The Church also puts emphasis on its mission of proclamation. Proclamation is an imperative and integral mission of the Church, and it must go on side by side with the mission of dialogue. It is important for Christians to witness their own faith and way of life, while respecting spiritual and moral truth among non-Christians. We read in *Nostra Aetate*, “Yet, she proclaims and is duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way, the truth and the life (Jn.1:6). In him, in whom God reconciled all things to himself (2 Cor. 5:18-19), men find the fullness of their religious life.”

6. In *Nostra Aetate* there is special mention of relations with Muslims, who form around 20 percent of the world population and are the second largest religion in the world after Christianity. This document sets up clear guidelines for us as we read about what our attitude should be towards Muslims. In this regard, *Nostra Aetate* No. 3 is of prime importance. It teaches us about some of the common bonds and unifying factors between Christians and Muslims. It also urges us to forget the painful quarrels of the past and invites us to make sincere efforts to achieve mutual understanding. We read in *Nostra Aetate* No. 3: “The Church has a high regard for Muslims. They worship God who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men.... Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus as a prophet, his virgin Mother they also honor, and even at times devoutly invoke her. Over the centuries many quarrels and dissensions have arisen between Christians and Muslims. The sacred Council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding. For the benefit

of men, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.”

In light of *Nostra Aetate* and some other relevant documents, the Church has taken serious steps all around the world to promote goodwill, harmony, peace, tolerance, dialogue and understanding among different religions. The Church has also reflected upon its past and evaluated the causes of misunderstandings among different religions - for example, between Christianity and Islam, and Christianity and Judaism. She looks forward to having positive relations with them and urges Christians to have a new beginning with positive understanding and collaboration (*Nostra Aetate* No. 3).

The Secretariat for Non-Christians was established in May, 1964 by His Holiness Pope Paul VI, and later renamed as The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) in 1988. This Secretariat and the PCID have carried out hundreds of meetings with people of other religions, in particular with Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Jews. Official greeting messages at the end of the month of Ramadan, on the occasion of the Eid ul-Fitr, have been sent to Muslims all around the world since 1969. Sometimes these messages are sent by the Popes as well. Otherwise they are sent by the Cardinal, who is the President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. Goodwill and festival greeting messages have also been sent to Hindus and Buddhists, such as at the time of Vasakhi. Such messages, which are translated into several languages, are received by the followers of these religions with gratitude and appreciation.

There have been official relations established with various organizations of different religions and countries, for example, with Jewish organizations in the world to promote Christian-Jewish dialogue, with Muslims to promote Christian-Muslim dialogue and with Buddhist leaders as well.

Following the spirit of the Vatican Council II, in order to foster unity and charity among individuals, there are two more official documents produced by the Secretariat for Non-Christians, later known as the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue: “*The Attitude of the Church towards Followers of Other Religions: Reflection and Orientations on Dialogue and*

Mission” in 1984 and “*Dialogue and Proclamation*” in 1991. Both of these documents are very helpful to us in gaining an understanding of the reasons and theological basis for interreligious dialogue. For example, in the Dialogue and Proclamation document we read, “The sincerity of interreligious dialogue requires that each enter into it with the integrity of his or her own faith. At the same time, while remaining firm in their belief that in Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and man (cf. 1 Tim 2: 4-6), the fullness of revelation has been given to them, Christians must remember that God has also manifested himself in some way to the followers of other religious traditions. Consequently, it is with receptive minds that they approach the convictions and values of others” (DP No. 48).

The same document goes on to point out that, although the fullness of revelation is to be found in Jesus Christ, all human beings, including Christians, have still to grasp this fullness. There is a continuous growth in the consciousness of the truth, an unending process of learning. So it has been possible to define inter-religious dialogue as a walking together towards truth and a collaboration in the service of humankind (cf. DP No. 13). A further lesson from dialogue is that it requires an attitude of humility, not arrogance. Dialogue does not mean competition.

This document on “Dialogue and Proclamation” adds further reflection based on Vatican II. It notes that according to *Lumen Gentium*, the good is found to be sown not only in the hearts of individuals, but also in the rites and customs of peoples (LG. No. 17). This can be attributed to the action of the Spirit, for as we read in the missionary document of the Church called *Ad Gentes*, “Without doubt the Holy Spirit was at work in the world before Christ was glorified. (AG.4). So Pope John Paul II states that every authentic prayer is the work of the Spirit present in the hearts of people. (DP. 27)

The understanding of the Church as sacrament, which Vatican II emphasized so strongly at the beginning of *Lumen Gentium*, is the very foundation for interreligious dialogue. The Church is a people and indeed a pilgrim people, to which even those who do not know the Gospel are oriented or related in some way. So it is necessary for the Church to be in dialogue. That is also what *Nostra Aetate* teaches us.

Different Forms of Dialogue

There are different forms of interreligious dialogue. Four of them are very well known and popular, as we find them in the documents of the Church. They are the following:

1. **Dialogue of Theological Exchange.** In this type of dialogue, religious leaders and experts of different religions have exchanges on theological topics and beliefs, including doctrinal differences and commonalities.

2. **Dialogue of Life.** This very significant form of dialogue happens when people encounter one another on the human level. Here importance is given to the sharing of joys and sorrows, common concerns and preoccupations. Here people can work on specific projects; for example, care of the handicapped or collaboration in relief work for people affected by natural disasters, such as floods and earthquakes.

3. **Dialogue of Action.** Here people can work together for social justice, respect for the environment, education, and the rights of the people, including minorities, women, children and immigrants. This can lead to a common understanding for the betterment of humanity and help people to live with dignity and overcome crises.

4. **Dialogue of Religious Experience** is a form of dialogue in which there is an exchange of spiritual experiences among people. For instance, sharing how a person feels when he is reading the Holy Bible, Torah or the Holy Quran; how a person might feel when doing meditation, keeping fast and giving alms. This form of dialogue also takes place at the monastic level, when monks share their experiences in the monastery and exchange common elements of the monastic way of life.

In these forms of dialogue, we learn to walk with people of other religions. So, it is quite normal to find Christian leaders standing side by side with Rabbis and Imams, or Buddhist monks and Hindu Swamis in interreligious dialogue programs. In a pilgrim Church, the members are going forward - not alone - but in the company of many other pilgrims. In this fraternal journey, as Pope John Paul II said at Assisi, "either we learn to walk together in peace and harmony, or we drift apart and ruin ourselves and others" (Discourse for the Conclusion of the of the World Day of Prayer for Peace, Assisi, 27 October, 1998).

Therefore, seen in this context and in this light, interreligious dialogue forms an integral part of the Church's mission. It is not an option. As the Church document "Dialogue and Mission" states, it is one element of the "single but complex and articulated reality" which is the mission of the Church. It stands alongside presence and witness, prayer/ contemplation/ liturgy, service/diakonia, and proclamation / catechesis (DM. 13).

It is also important to note here that dialogue does not aim to gain converts to Christianity and increase the numbers of the Church. Pope John Paul II made it clear that "dialogue does not originate from tactical concerns of self-interest, but is an activity with its own guiding principles, requirements and dignity" (*Redemptoris Missio* No.56). This is the understanding of the Church and should obviate any suspicion among non-Christians that Catholic participants have a hidden agenda in dialogue. Rather, there should be mutual respect and sincerity. This attitude is what makes interreligious dialogue not only possible but fruitful.

In summary, the aim of interreligious dialogue is not conversion in the sense of changing one's religion. It is to change hearts, leading to the purification of prejudices and pre-conceived ideas about the religion of others. Dialogue seeks to discover the hidden treasures in the religion and practices of the other.

Interreligious dialogue requires openness on the part of those engaged in dialogue. It also requires some knowledge of one's own religion. Otherwise, those who have insufficient grounding in their own faith will be reluctant to express themselves at interfaith encounters. At the same time, a basic knowledge of the other's religion is also required to avoid misunderstanding. The spirit of dialogue demands that one must not be aggressive or defensive toward the other. We must be ready to learn from each other, acquiring new insights in a process which will help us to deepen our own faith. (Cf. Archbishop Michael L. Fitzgerald, lecture at Brandeis University and Boston College USA, 'What the Catholic Church Has Learnt From Interreligious Dialogue', March, 16, 2006).

Pope John Paul II always made significant efforts to invite and meet leaders and people of other religions. He played an extraordinary leadership role in promoting harmony and peace.

He was a giant of interreligious dialogue and will always be remembered with great respect and gratitude for taking the mission of dialogue to the highest level. Pope John Paul II attended the World Day of Peace at Assisi, Italy in October, 1986, in which religious leaders of all major religions were invited to pray for peace in the world. In October, 2011, His Holiness Pope Benedict also went to Assisi to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of this peace event and observe this day for peace in the world. There were 300 delegates of different religions, and even those who do not believe in any religion were present. Pope Benedict XVI is also very committed to the dialogue mission at all levels of life.

At the international level in many countries, interfaith dialogue commissions have been established by the Episcopal Conferences. At the Asian level, the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC) established a special office called FABC–OEIA (Office for Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue). It has rendered marvelous guidance and leadership in promoting dialogue among the brothers and sisters of other religions in Asian countries. FAC-OEIA organized several conferences with Protestant Churches and believers of other religions, such as Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists in Asia. It has published documents to promote positive understanding along with interreligious and ecumenical dialogue in Asia. These efforts have brought many positive results and much mutual understanding.

Interreligious Dialogue in Pakistan

In light of the Second Vatican Council Documents, addresses and wishes of the Holy Father Pope John Paul II, the National Commission for Christian Muslim Relations, commonly known as the *Rabita Commission*, was established by the Catholic Bishops Conference of Pakistan in 1985. Most Rev. Bishop John Joseph was the founding Chairman of this Commission, and the writer of his article (Fr James Channan OP) was the Executive Secretary. Fr Channan served in this capacity for 17 years. After the death of Bishop John Joseph, Most Rev. Joseph Coutts, (at present Archbishop of Karachi) was the Chairperson of this commission for 3 years. After that, in the year 2000, Most Rev. Andrew Francis became Chairperson and Fr Francis Nadeem,

Executive Secretary. In 2011, the name of the *Rabita Commission* was changed into the *Catholic Commission for Interreligious Dialogue and Ecumenism*. At present, Most Rev. Bishop Andrew Francis is the Chairperson of this Commission and Mr. Jawaid William is serving as its Executive Secretary.

With the establishment of the *Rabita Commission*, a new era in the life of the Church began in Pakistan. The mission was to give official recognition to the interreligious dialogue activities taking place at different levels in the country. Along with the National Commission, there were also commissions established at the diocesan level with the local Bishop as head of the Commission along with diocesan directors. Since the establishment of the *Rabita Commission*, several meetings and conferences with Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Zoroastrians have been organized throughout the country. The members of these commissions continue to reach out to brothers and sisters of other religions to promote interfaith dialogue and harmony. There have been programs on radio and television, as well as publications in newspapers. Joint peace rallies have also been organized and feasts celebrated together. There was a famous *Journey for Peace* from Karachi to Khyber from the 24th of December, 1999 to the 4th of January, 2000 to welcome the new millennium. The *Rabita Commission* was the organizer of this journey, known as *Aman Ka Safar*.

After establishing the *Rabita Commission*, Pakistan has been represented at several national and international forums. In many conferences, such as those in Indonesia, Philippines, Hong Kong, Singapore, Thailand, Nepal, Bangladesh, India and Italy, the Executive Secretary, Fr James Channan OP, represented Pakistan at the official meetings of the Catholic Church and presented reports and papers which highlighted the efforts of the *Rabita Commission* to promote interreligious dialogue in Pakistan.

It is good to mention that after the document *Nostra Aetate*, dialogue with the people of other religions has become very much part of the mission of the Church in Pakistan. Special courses have been taught in the Minor and Major Seminaries, Formation Houses of religious priests and sisters, and catechetical centers and institutes (e.g. Pastoral Institute, Multan). At Christ the King Seminary in Karachi, now called the

National Catholic Institute of Theology, a course was offered for six years on Islam in order to have a better understanding of this religion and thus promote Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Several articles and booklets have also been published on Christian-Muslim dialogue and interreligious dialogue. Fr James Channan wrote a book entitled “Christian Muslim Dialogue in Pakistan”. This book is a collection of his articles, reports and commentaries, which have been published in the international press in various magazines and newspapers in Pakistan, Hong Kong, Italy, Germany, USA, Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, Finland and Sweden. He continues to participate in several national and international conferences. In 2011, he was invited to lecture on Christian-Muslim dialogue and the teaching of the Catholic Church in various universities, such as Helsinki University, Turku University in Finland, Yale University and California State University in the USA and at Dongguk University at Gyeongju Campus, South Korea. He has also participated in international conferences on Christian/Muslim and interreligious dialogue.

In the various interreligious dialogue meetings and conferences in Pakistan, it has been recognized that promoting interreligious dialogue, given the situation in Pakistan where 96% of the people are Muslim, is an important mission of the Church. As a small minority, Christians cannot isolate themselves. We have an important role to play in this land if we are to be the “salt of the earth and the light of the world”. We must play our full role in nation building and in making efforts to bring forth the fruits of dialogue in all its forms; dialogue of theological exchange, dialogue of life, dialogue of action and dialogue of religious experience. Such efforts at dialogue, especially among Christians and Muslims, have played a vital role in making our society a better society amid a deteriorating human rights situation. At times, we have jointly raised our voices against the discriminatory laws in our country, which are often misused to settle personal scores. Christian and other minorities have often felt threatened by militants and fanatics. So, there is a need to work jointly to better the situation of all the citizens of Pakistan. The Catholic Church in Pakistan has played an important role in this area. Along with the Catholic Bishops, the religious Orders,

Societies and Congregations have also made vital contributions. It is worth mentioning that the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), Order of Friar Minors (OFM) and Order of Friar Minors Capuchins, Society of St. Columban and the Dominican Order of Preachers have taken a deep interest in this field and have sent a few of their members for higher studies. The Dominican, Ibn-e-Mariam Vice Province, has built a Peace Center in Lahore for the purpose of promoting peace, harmony and interreligious dialogue in Pakistan through conferences, seminars and the publication of books. This Peace Center was blessed and inaugurated on 28th of November, 2010 by His Eminence, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue at the Vatican. The blessing of the Cardinal has really given a great boost to the interreligious dialogue activities being carried out by the Dominicans at this Peace Center.

Several activities have also taken place to promote peace and harmony among people of different religions in Pakistan. Christians and Muslims have participated in celebrating the major festivals of each another's religions, such as Christmas and *Eid al-Azha*. Goodwill messages from the Cardinal President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue have been exchanged and shared with Muslims. It has been noted that these messages are received by our Muslim brothers and sisters with gratitude and appreciation. Muslim religious leaders and government officials have also been sending Christmas greetings and cutting Christmas cakes on this blissful occasion.

It is also worth mentioning that Muslims and Hindus in our country have also established interreligious dialogue committees and commissions. The government of Pakistan has established the National Harmony Commission to promote dialogue, peace and harmony. Our government has also organized Interreligious Christian celebrations in Islamabad, as well as at the President's House. Here I would like to mention in a special way our Pakistani Christian, Mr. Shahbaz Bhatti, Federal Minister for Minorities Affairs. He was very vocal in promoting interreligious dialogue at all levels of life in Pakistan, and for that reason he had travelled all around the country and to several other countries as well. But alas, he was assassinated by Islamic militants for raising his voice against the misuse of the

blasphemy laws, 295B and 295C, and for trying to bring about changes so that these laws would not be misused. Mr. Salman Taseer, the Governor of the Punjab, was yet another victim of this law. He too was assassinated by a fanatical Muslim for raising his voice against the blasphemy laws in favor of a Christian woman to whom the death sentence had been awarded for committing ‘blasphemy’.

Recommendations

The Catholic Church continues to promote the cause of interreligious dialogue. But at times, we can sense a threat from Muslims who are not open to this. They think that through these dialogue activities, we wish to convert them to Christianity. Such is not the case. It is not the aim of true dialogue in Pakistan or elsewhere. There is a need to do much more in this regard. I would like to make the following recommendations.

1. Make the teachings of *Nostra Aetate* and other documents of the Church more public, and make them available in Urdu, our official language.
2. Train more priests, Religious Sisters and lay people in this field, so that this apostolate becomes much more beneficial.
3. Make use of print and electronic media for the promotion of interreligious dialogue.
4. Seeing the importance of this apostolate, include interreligious dialogue and the teachings of the Church in different documents among the courses to be offered to seminarians and to the students at the formation houses of religious priests and sisters.
5. Organize refresher courses and seminars for the catechists and teachers on a regular basis about the dialogue mission of the Church and its developments, challenges and hopes.
6. Publish handbooks and syllabi for the students in our Christian schools for this purpose so that our coming generations are more prepared for this challenge facing the Church in Pakistan.
7. Recommend and write to our government to include chapters on the basic teachings of different religions along with the importance of interreligious dialogue, and make them part of the curriculum of schools and colleges.

8. Support existing dialogue commissions and committees, and the Peace Center in Lahore, which was established to promote the dialogue mission of the Church in Pakistan.

9. We are living in the 3rd millennium and in a world which has become a global village. We as Christians in Pakistan need to play our full role in this noble mission of the Church in promoting dialogue in our country, which is also a form of Christian witness and proclamation.

Dialogue is an integral part of the ‘Mission and New Evangelization’ which is the theme of this year.

May Peace Prevail On Earth!

* This paper was written for the Golden Jubilee celebration of Vatican Council II at the invitation of *Maktaba-e-Anaweem*, Pakistan and published in its book in October, 2012.

Chapter Five

The State of Religious Freedom in Pakistan*

Introduction

Freedom of religion is a fundamental right of every human being. It must be acknowledged, respected, declared and manifested. It must be safeguarded and practiced at all levels of human society. We are living in a world where there is a lot of talk about religious freedom. Constitutions are made, Charters and Covenants are adopted and declarations announced to ensure the freedom of every human person. Millions of people are raising their voices and thousands of organizations around the globe are working to ensure freedom of thought, creed, expression, religion, and conscience. Human rights activists and non-government organizations are working hard and keep on raising their voices in promoting this. They challenge governments and communities where such freedom is at stake. In this article, the situation of religious freedom is presented in a predominantly Muslim state called the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Historical background of religious freedom in Pakistan

Pakistan has a population of over 140 million, of which 96.14 per cent is Muslim. The religious communities of Christians, Hindus, Sikhs and Zoroastrians together make up only 3.86 per cent. Pakistan was created on 14 August 1947 after the struggle of Muslim leaders, along with Christian and Hindu leaders. The crown for its foundation goes to Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. As a Muslim, he believed in all the fundamental principles of Islam. While paying tribute to the prophet of Islam in Karachi, he said the Prophet was a great teacher, lawgiver and statesman and a great sovereign. No doubt there are many people who do not quite appreciate that, when we talk of Islam, we are talking also of a code which regulates the life and conduct of every Muslim, and extends into politics and economics. It is based on the highest principles of honour, integrity, fair play and justice for all. "In Islam there is no difference between man and man. The qualities of equality, liberty and fraternity are the fundamentals of Islam".¹

Jinnah was a man with a vision, who wanted to make Pakistan an ideal, model democratic state.² He was an ardent promoter of religious liberty, thought and expression. On another occasion he said, “What reason is there for anyone to fear democracy, equality, freedom or the highest standard of integrity on the basis of fair play and justice for everybody?”³

He was a man of peace, religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence. Pakistan was created on the basis of the “Two Nation Theory”. In the words of Justice Dr. Javed Iqbal, “When Quaid-i-Azam led the struggle for Pakistan on the basis of the ‘Two Nation’ theory, he undoubtedly meant the Hindu and the Muslim nations. But when Pakistan had been established, he shifted the emphasis and thought only in terms of one “Pakistan”. In other words, he used Islam as the basis of nationhood in Pakistan (Millat) but adopted the Western concept of State based on secular nationalism (Qaum)..... The political ideal of Quaid-i-Azam was to establish a secular state (and not an Islamic State in Pakistan)”.⁴ So when Pakistan came into existence, there was no longer any concept of the “Two Nation Theory”, but only one nation. The Muslims found it impossible to live with Hindus in the sub-continent because of their very different religious values, cultures and faiths. Jinnah advocated the idea of a separate home for Muslims, Pakistan. His ideal of the state, however, was based on western secular philosophy. His dream was to make Pakistan a democratic and secular state and not a theocratic state. He was also very clear in thinking that all religious minorities in Pakistan would be treated on equal basis. This was obvious from his speeches and from comments he had made at different times and occasions.

In his first presidential address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan in Karachi on 11 August 1947, he said: “.... I cannot emphasize this too much. We should begin to work in that direction, and in course of time, all these angularities of the majority and minority communities, the Hindu community and the Muslim community ---- because even as regards Muslims you have Pathans, Punjabis, Shia, Sunnis and so on, and among the Hindus you have Brahmans, Vashnawas, Khattris also Bengalis, Madrasis and so on ---- will vanish. You are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to mosques or any other place

of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed ----- that has nothing to do with the business of the State ----- Now, I think we should keep that in front of us as our ideal, and you will find that in the course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the State”.⁵

This was the dream of Jinnah. He wanted people of all faiths to respect one another and not interfere in matters of state, working jointly for the welfare and prosperity of the newly born country.

As stated above, Pakistan was created as an independent state on the basis of the “Two Nation Theory”. This claim was made on the grounds that Hindus and Muslims living in an undivided India were two nations and that it was impossible for them to live together in one country. This two nation theory was approved in an all-India Muslim League meeting in Lahore on 23 March 1940. This is the Lahore Resolution, which is in fact the “Magna Carta” or the “Declaration of Independence” for Pakistan. It assured full protection for the religious freedom of the minorities who would be living in this newborn country. It reads: “----That adequate, effective and mandatory safeguards should be specially provided in the constitution for minorities in these units and in the regions for protection of their religious, cultural, political, administrative, and other rights and interests in consultations with them and in other parts of India where the Muslims shall be specifically provided for in the constitution for them and other minorities for the protection of their religious, cultural, economic, political, administrative and other rights and interests in consultation with them”.⁶

It is very clear from this resolution that the struggle for Pakistan was not for the establishment of a theocracy. Another thing is that the word “Islam” is not even mentioned in it. The plan for the partition of India was announced on 3 June 1947, and on 15 August 1947 the Indian subcontinent was divided into the two sovereign states of Pakistan and India. On 10 August 1947, Jinnah made it very clear that Pakistan was not to be a theocratic state. “Make no mistake”, he said, “Pakistan is not a theocracy or anything like it”.⁷

It was on 11 August 1947 that the flag of Pakistan was approved. Liaquat Ali Khan, the first Prime Minister of Pakistan, said in relation to the flag: “This flag is not only for the minorities currently in the country, but will also represent those who eventually will be in Pakistan. This is not the flag of any political party or sect. It is the flag of all Pakistan”.

Analyses of these above mentioned speeches of Jinnah and Ali Khan show that 1) Pakistan is to be a Republic where there will be a government and rule of law; 2) religion will have no part in the governance of the country, nor will the state impose any religion; 3) there is to be no concept of “majority and minority” communities. Pakistan belongs to all the citizens of the country, irrespective of their religion, caste or creed, which has nothing to do with the business of the State; 4) all citizens are to be equal before the law, and shall have the same constitutional Rights; and 5) all citizens of the country will work in unity for this newly born state of Pakistan.

That was the dream of the founder of Pakistan. However, after the death of Jinnah on 11 September 1948, as a prominent Christian lawyer, M.L. Shahani put it, “the infant nation fell prey to palace intrigues and vested interests which took refuge in religion and used religious parlance in the socio-political field. A radical change was introduced in the socio-political corpus through the Objectives Resolution passed by the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan on 12 March, 1949. It provided an Islamic base to the new state, although it also stated, ‘wherein adequate provisions shall be made for the minorities freely to profess and practice their religion and develop their cultures’.⁸ Since Islam was made fundamental to the new Pakistan, it brought radical changes to the policies of the government after the death of Ali Jinnah. Such changes were a departure from the stand taken earlier by Jinnah and his colleagues”.⁹

Constitutions and legal system

Three Constitutions have been enforced in Pakistan since its independence in 1947. Some reference to these Constitutions of 1956, 1962 and 1973 will be proper before we come to the present state. The first two Constitutions of 1956 and 1962 were abrogated by martial law regimes, whereas the 1973 Constitution was held in abeyance by another General, Muhammad Zia ul

Haq, when he seized power by overthrowing the elected government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto on 5 July 1977. After 4 interim and 4 elected governments between 1988 and 1999, the country returned to military rule once again on 12 October 1999, headed by General Pervez Musharraf. Again the constitution of the country was put in abeyance. It is a tragedy that Pakistan has been ruled by military generals for about 30 of its 57 years of independence. No real democratic government has ever emerged to fulfill its manifesto and plans.

Here is a very brief survey of what the three Constitutions say about religious freedom. Article 18 of the 1956 Constitution provides the rights of religious freedom as follows:

“Subject to law, public order and morality, a) every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice and propagate his religion; and b) every religious denomination and every sect thereof shall have the right to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions”.¹⁰

Article 10 of the 1962 Constitution and Article 20 of the 1973 Constitution guarantee this right of religious freedom in the same language, but article 2 of the 1973 Constitution postulates that “Islam shall be the State religion of Pakistan”. It was through this 1973 Constitution that the country was named the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. This Constitution was framed and enforced during the government of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. His manifesto was based on Islamic socialism. When Bhutto started losing political ground, in order to please the religious lobby, he imposed prohibitions and closed all nightclubs, gambling houses and race courses. He also changed the weekly holiday from Sunday to Friday. As a consequence of this decision, the Pakistan economy suffered badly from having three non-working days in a week – Friday, Saturday and Sunday. After about 25 years, another Prime Minister of Pakistan, Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, reintroduced Sunday as the weekly public holiday, but the change back to Sunday was made not for religious but business reasons. The decision produced a lot of financial benefits.

It was during the reign of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto that, through another amendment, seats were reserved for non-Muslim citizens in the National and Provincial Assemblies. All these new

changes, however, could not save Bhutto and his regime. It was Bhutto who declared the Ahmedi community to be non-Muslims through a ruling of the National Assembly in 1974. Bhutto was overthrown by General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq on 5 July 1977. However, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was responsible for making Pakistan an Islamic Republic.

General Muhammad Zia ul-Haq, in order to prolong his regime, took full advantage of the Islamic system and ideology promoted by Bhutto. He went further and made Pakistan a rigid Islamic state by introducing Islam into every aspect of life and by promulgating many Islamic laws. He created Federal *Sharia* Courts, introduced the compulsory deduction of *Zakat* (Islamic religious tax) from bank accounts of Muslims and promulgated the *Hudud* Ordinance - Islamic Laws about theft, adultery, rape, drinking and selling liquor, as well as the Law of Evidence. He also promulgated the Ordinance of Separate Electorates for non-Muslims. Under this system of separate electorates, Muslims voted only for Muslim candidates and non-Muslims for non-Muslim candidates for National Assembly and for the 4 Provincial Assemblies of Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan and North West Frontier Province. This mode of elections created a big division between Muslims and non-Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Sikhs and Zoroastrians in Pakistan. The minorities immediately felt themselves to be second class citizens, isolated from the mainstream and discriminated against on the basis of their religions. So they began to raise their voice in protest of this electoral system.¹¹

With the introduction of Islamic laws in Pakistan and the declaration of Pakistan as an Islamic State, the religious freedom of the people was affected. In the words of a Muslim human rights activist, Rashid Rehman, "Islam does accept and gives the right of religious freedom. But it does not give the right to a Muslim to change his religion. The Muslim who is converted to another religion is declared apostate and thus condemned to death. There is a verse in the Holy Quran that says "Let there be no compulsion in religion" [*Al-Baqrah* (2):256]. Rehman wished and hoped that this verse of the Holy Quran could be put into practice.

In the view of a prominent Christian lawyer of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, M. L., Shahani, himself a convert from Hinduism to Christianity, “Religion does not provide any system to govern the people. The government of the people is separate from the religion. Therefore, there should be a total separation of Church/religion and state.” Seeing the situation of Pakistan, he is of the opinion that religion is being used to arouse the sentiments of the people. This is what Zia ul-Haq did to prolong his regime. In the Pakistani context, when we read the words “subject to law” in the Constitution, we know it means “subject to Islamic law” and not to the law of secular government of the people.

The Constitution of 1973 states that Pakistan is an Islamic republic; Islam is the state religion and Islam is a core element of the country’s national ideology. Religious freedom is “subject to law, public order, and morality.” People do have freedom of speech and they are generally free to discuss and debate public policy issues, and minorities are free to practice their religion, but it is hard for them to grow prosperous alongside the mainstream majority population because of various social problems and discrimination.

Minorities and religious freedom

Pakistani Muslims enjoy the freedom to practice their religion. They can preach their religion freely. They are given a lot of time on state television and radio, and the printed media is full of Islamic thoughts, values and religious practices. The study of Islam is a compulsory part of the syllabus of all Muslim students. Muslims cannot, however, embrace another religion or convert to it. That would put their lives in danger.

Pakistani minorities also have, to a certain extent, religious freedom. They are allowed to practice their religion and have freedom to worship, have religious processions and celebrate religious festivals. They can publish religious literature and make audio cassettes and video films of a religious nature. They can organize religious conventions in public places. On some religious occasions, for example at the Christmas and Easter festivals, Radio Pakistan and Pakistan Television provide 20 minutes of television and 30 minutes of radio time for the broadcasting of religious plays, speeches and messages. Minorities can give their children a religious education, but only

at home and in private schools. But they are not allowed to preach their religion.

Role of the media

The media has a very important role to play in creating harmony, peace and tolerance among the people of a nation. In Pakistan, neither printed nor electronic media have played a significant role in promoting religious freedom and harmony. Some English newspapers do have a balanced policy of tolerance, religious freedom and human rights, but Urdu newspapers have not generally played a positive role in this regard. They promote Islamic values but do give some coverage to Christian events on particular occasions. For the Pakistani Hindus, however, who make up about 1.5 percent of the population, State-run television hardly covers their religious festivals, such as *Dewali* and Holi, which are usually ignored. Pakistani Sikhs have started receiving some coverage at the celebration of the birthday of their founder Hazrat Baba Guru Nanak and the festival of *Vesakhi*.

The challenge is for the Pakistani media to promote religious tolerance. With the coming of a few private television channels (Geo, Indus Vision, ARY Digital) and the policies of several English newspapers (The News, The Nation, Dawn, Daily Times) and some Urdu newspapers (*daily Khabrain, Daily Paksitan, Daily Ausaf and Daily Jang*), and also with the policies of the present government, there is some progress in creating a positive projection of the role of minorities and of their contribution in creating social harmony and understanding. The government-run Pakistan Television (PTV), radio and several private television channels (such as Geo, ARY One World, Indus Vision) are broadcasting programmes on minorities, such as coverage of their festivals and their role in nation building. Christian, Hindu and Sikh religious and political leaders, human rights activists, promoters of justice and peace and outstanding Christian singers, sportsmen, women, and social workers are being interviewed, and their achievements are acknowledged on these television networks and radio shows. Minorities have also been invited to take part in talk shows on dialogue, peace building, civil society and justice issues. This is a good and

positive sign. The media in Pakistan have to play a very positive and unbiased role in nation building and religious freedom.

Political system and the impact of extremists

General Pervez Musharraf sacked the government of Nawaz Sharif in October 1999 after a coup. He brought some relief to non-Muslims in Pakistan by denationalizing Christian schools and colleges, which had been nationalized by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1972. In 2002, the Musharraf government abolished the system of Separate Electorates and thus restored the system of Joint Electorates as well as the special reserved seats for minorities in both the Provincial and National Assemblies. The announcement brought relief to all those who work for the promotion of justice and human rights, and was especially welcomed by the minorities who had struggled for 23 years for the restoration of Joint Electorates. General Musharraf, who has also been President of Pakistan since mid-2002, has assured all citizens of Pakistan that they will enjoy equal religious freedom, with no discrimination against anyone.

The extremist religious and political parties have a very strong hold on the policies of Pakistan. This is what Kazy Javed revealed when he said that while in 1979 there were 37 religious political parties, in the year 2000 the number has reached 485. This is matter of grave concern and alarm. In the last general election, on 10 October 2002, the religious parties under one alliance called *Mutahida Majlis Amal* (United Action Forum) won about 40% of the seats in the national and provincial assemblies. They also won a good number of seats in the Senate of the four Provinces. The alliance has formed a government in the North West Frontier Province and a coalition government in Baluchistan Province. It has announced its intention to form strict Islamic laws in these provinces. The government is helpless before the demands, pressure and demonstrations of such religious groups. When President Musharraf wanted to amend the Blasphemy Law 295 C of the Pakistan Penal Code in order to have cases registered by the local magistrate rather than by the local police officers, the religious parties reacted so strongly that Musharraf was forced to reverse his own decision.¹²

Section 295C of the Pakistan Penal Code states, “The use of derogatory remarks, etc. in respect of the Holy Prophet, whether by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation, or by any imputation, innuendo or insinuation, which directly or indirectly defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine”.

This law has been misused to settle personal scores, and dozens of people have been put in jail. Some Christians were among those booked under the law. So far no one has been executed.

Most Pakistani Christians and Hindus feel that they have some religious freedom in Pakistan, but they do not enjoy equal rights. M. Prakash, a prominent Hindu leader, politician and lawyer, laments that the Hindu community is discriminated against on the basis of religion. According to him, there is not a single Hindu in the armed forces of Pakistan. The members of his community are looked upon with suspicion, although they are native Pakistanis and are not associated with any other country. Their loyalties are with their homeland Pakistan.

An outstanding Christian personality, Group Captain Cecil Chaudhry, a 1965 war hero of Pakistan, human rights activist and promoter of justice and peace, while addressing a consultation in Multan on the state of religious freedom in Pakistan on 14-15 March 2003 said, “To me, there is no religious freedom in Pakistan... . Why do I say this? It is because when you talk of religious freedom, a lot of us tend to see a very narrow prospect of it. Yes, we can go to Church without any hindrance. Yes, we can celebrate Easter and Christmas without any hindrance. Yes, we can have a little bit of time on radio and television on Easter and Christmas. So, can we say we have religious freedom? I don't think that it is religious freedom, religious freedom is a very wide perspective. Every individual citizen of a state should be totally free to profess, practice and propagate whatever religion he belongs to. There should be no bars upon him. Even the majority population of this country has no religious freedom. Because if one changes his religion, he is declared an apostate and he can be shot dead by any other fanatic Muslim. God did not give us religion to persecute each other. He gave us religion

to live in peace, harmony and love. For the past 56 years, we have not seen religious freedom in Pakistan”.

Commenting on how religion is misused in Pakistan for political gains and purposes, he said, “Unfortunately, religion has been used as a crutch. This crutch has been used politically in my country. We had some secular minded leaders of Pakistan, like the great Muhammad Ali Jinnah. This was obvious from his speech of 11 August 1947. But as Pakistan progressed, the government of Pakistan failed successively. The first Prime Minister of Pakistan, Liaqat Ali Khan in 1948, put the country on the road to destruction. And in the late 1970s, new religious parties and fundamentalists emerged during the regime of Zia al-Haq. He divided the whole nation. During his time, the national assembly became a religious assembly. And when religion takes on such importance in the political life of the country, obviously you will find sectarianism. It will grow into extremism and then into terrorism. This is what happened with Pakistan. When the state laws discriminate on the basis of religion, there is no religious freedom. When you are able to persecute a religious community only because such persecution is justified by the Pakistan Penal Code, then obviously there is no religious freedom”.

The situation in Pakistan has also made it evident that when governments become weak and their stability is threatened, they take shelter in religion. They use religion as a shield, as Kazy Javed, a prominent Muslim philosopher and writer, observed in a consultation on religious freedom in Multan on 14-15 March 2003. He pointed out that the regime of Bhutto, followed by that of Zia ul-Haq, fully supported fundamentalist religious political parties and several *Madrassahs* (Muslim mosque schools and seminaries, established by Zia). Before 1979, there were only 800 *Madrassahs* in the country, whereas the number reached 20,000 by 2000. These *Madrassahs* were funded from the *Zakat* fund - a compulsory deduction from the bank accounts of Muslims. Money received from some Islamic countries has also been used for these schools.

The educational system and *Madrassahs* (Mosque Schools)

The educational system in general is very much under the influence of Islamic ideology. Almost every subject, whether

Urdu, social studies, history or general knowledge, is taught according to Islamic teaching. There is no mention of Pakistani minorities such as Christians and Hindus taking part in the nation building, freedom movement and independence of Pakistan, whereas, in fact, the Pakistani Christians and Hindus played decisive roles in the creation of Pakistan and in making West Punjab part of the country. They voted in favor of this country,¹³ but their contribution is very much absent from our history books. There is nothing on religious tolerance or harmony in our curricula. Islam is presented as the true religion. Other religions, especially Hinduism, are looked down upon. This is very unfortunate and creates a biased mentality. There is a grave need to revise the curriculum and take out lessons which degrade other religions.

The *Madrassahs* are playing a positive role for the education of children. The education given in some *Madrassahs*, however, is based on religious intolerance, fanaticism, and a discriminatory attitude towards women, minorities, and other sects of Islam. Children are being educated like the *Taliban* of Afghanistan. In December 2002 and January 2003, a survey of 488 students was conducted by Dr. Tariq Rahman, a prominent columnist and scholar, on the theme of “Tolerance and militancy among school children”.¹⁴

Here is the survey report of Dr. Rahman:

Survey Report in Tables

TABLE 1

Urdu-medium students	230
English-medium students	116
<i>Madrassah</i> students	142
Total	488

TABLE 2

What should be Pakistan’s priorities?

a) Take Kashmir away from India by an open war? (*in percentage*)

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Don’t know</u>
Urdu	39.56	53.04	7.39
English	25.86	64.65	9.48
<i>Madrassah</i>	59.86	31.69	8.45

Analysis: Most students realize that an open war with India would be disastrous. However, the *Madrassah* students are the most militant and the English medium ones are the least.

TABLE 3

What should be *Pakistan's* priorities?

- b) Take Kashmir away from India by supporting *Jihad* groups to fight the Indian army? (*in percentages*)

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Don't know</u>
Urdu	32.61	45.22	21.74
English	22.41	60.34	17.24
<i>Madrassah</i>	52.82	32.39	14.78

Analysis: once again, *Madrassah* students support this policy, but even they are unsure because the percentage of *don't know* is high even for them. Urdu-medium students are in between and English medium ones overwhelmingly reject this policy.

TABLE 4

What should be Pakistan's priorities?

- c) Support the Kashmir cause through peaceful means only (i.e., no open war or sending *Jihadi* groups across the line of control)? (*in percentage*)

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Don't know</u>
Urdu	76.65	18.26	6.08
English	72.41	18.97	8.62
<i>Madrassah</i>	33.80	54.93	11.27

Analysis: Most students, except *Madrassah* ones, aspire for a peaceful solution to the Kashmir issue, although many of them had also ticked the militant options given above.

TABLE 5

What should be Pakistan's priorities?

- d) Give equal rights to *Ahmadis* in all jobs, etc? (*in percentage*)

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Don't know</u>
Urdu	46.95	36.95	15.65
English	65.52	9.48	25.00
<i>Madrassah</i>	12.68	82.39	4.93

Analysis: The *Madrassah* students are highly intolerant of the *Ahmedis*. The English medium students are most tolerant of them. The Urdu medium ones are in between, but they tend to be intolerant too.

TABLE 6

What should be Pakistan's priorities?

- e) Give equal right to Pakistani Hindus in all jobs, etc?
(in percentage)

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Don't know</u>
Urdu	47.39	42.17	10.00
English	78.45	13.79	7.76
<i>Madrassah</i>	16.90	76.06	7.04

Analysis. Once again the English medium students are the most and the *Madrassah* ones the least tolerant. However, the overall level of tolerance, except among the Urdu medium students, is higher than it is for Ahmedis.

TABLE 7

What should be Pakistan's priorities?

- f) Give equal right to Pakistan Christians in all jobs, etc? (in percentage)

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Don't know</u>
Urdu	65.65	26.52	7.39
English	83.62	8.62	7.76
<i>Madrassah</i>	18.31	73.24	8.45

Analysis: The tolerance for Christians is higher than for Ahmedis and Hindus. However, *Madrassah* students are mostly intolerant of them.

TABLE 8

What should be Pakistan's priorities?

- g) Give equal right to men and women as in Western countries? (in percentage)

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Don't know</u>
Urdu	75.22	17.39	7.39
English	90.52	6.03	3.45
<i>Madrassah</i>	16.90	77.46	5.63

Analysis: The support for women's equal rights from the Urdu and English-medium schools was tremendous. The *Madrassah* students opposed such equality and even some who ticked "yes" sometimes added words like 'as in Islam' in front of their answers.

Dr. Rahman says that from this survey, one can see that most of our young people are biased against minorities. They do not want

them to be treated as equal citizens. Those who do support equal rights for them are the students of elite English medium schools. What is most disturbing is that the *Madrassah* students are the most intolerant and militant against minorities. The future does not seem so promising for minorities, since these *Madrassahs* are increasing in number and they are flooded with students from the lower classes.

Seeing this response of students from different medium schools, it seems that it would be a good idea if our government would monitor what is taught in *Madrassahs*. The curricula should be evaluated and changed to one more tolerant for people of all faiths. Minorities and their roles in nation-building, education, health and defence are ignored. As a result, there is a lack of appreciation of religious freedom and tolerance for minority communities.

There is hope, however, that the curricula will be revised. National curriculum goals are outlined in the Curriculum Document of Primary Education, classes K-V (Kindergarten to five), integrated and subject based. The general goals of the primary education curriculum for K-V are, for example, to provide for the overall growth and development of the child; to create in the child a sense of citizenship in their community, country and world; to promote the intellectual development of the child; and to promote a spirit of appreciation for religious and cultural activities and festivals of all communities. If the new curriculum embraces these goals, then this will certainly result in a big change in society, making it more tolerant and human.¹⁵

There are some signs of hope in changing the mentality of *Madrassah* students, as the present government officials are taking some firm steps in this regard. Modern education for *Madrassah* students is stressed by the present government. This was revealed by the Education Minister, Mian Imran Masood, while addressing *Madrassah* teachers and students at a seminar in Lahore on 18th August, 2004. He said that the students of *Madrassahs* were talented, and by imparting them with modern education, along with the Islamic studies, they must be made into ideal students. He also said that the network of *Madrassahs*, functioning in the world on a self-help basis, is a great educational system and may be the biggest Non-Government

Organization in Pakistan. This NGO is providing free books, food and boarding facilities to more than 1.5 million students. Addressing the teachers, the Education Minister said that teachers of these schools will have to play an important role in producing responsible and useful individuals who may be able to show the Western world, by their thoughts and actions, that Islam is a religion of tolerance and peace which guards human rights and can raise voices against discrimination in every walk of life.¹⁶

Role of Christian religious leaders

The role of the Pakistani Bishops, both Catholics and Church of Pakistan (Protestants), and other religious leaders, is commendable in this situation. They are aware of the challenges which Christians are faced with. They keep on raising their concerns. They have made several efforts in promoting social harmony, peace-building and interreligious dialogue. They have been raising their concern about the present state of religious freedom in Pakistan, and they have been very vocal both at national and international levels in the pursuit of improving the present state of religious freedom.

During a Consultation on Religious Freedom in Multan, Pakistan, Bishop Samuel Robert Azariah from the Church of Pakistan said, “The rulers of Pakistan have used religion for their own interests. By increasing intolerance among the people, they have made their religion a source of violence. The problem of religious freedom is not restricted to minorities only, but to Muslims as well. The expression of religious freedom in Pakistan has been disturbed. We do not know who should be blamed for this situation of intolerance and mistrust. Is it modern technology, culture, leadership or a lack of identity? [I say that] the entire blame goes to the leadership. This has happened because we have not given proper education to our people for religious freedom and tolerance. Therefore, the responsibility lies with the leadership. The leaders of different religions in Pakistan have restricted religious freedom and have created divisions among the people.”

In the words of Bishop Azariah, “we need to educate our people and create in them a sense of respect, peace, justice and reconciliation. Our preaching should not be limited to the places

of worship but must be shown through actions in our lives”. There should be a separation between state and religion to create a more humane society full of tolerance and respect.

Representing the Catholic Bishops Conference of Pakistan, His Grace Lawrence John Saldanha, Archbishop of Lahore and President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Pakistan, said, “September 11, 2001 marked a new era in the history of the world and indeed of Pakistan. The whole scenario changed and relations between Muslims and Christians all over the world were severely damaged. In Pakistan too, Christians immediately felt themselves more vulnerable and powerless, as Pakistan became a frontline state in the ‘war against terrorism’. It was a very strange situation where the government took a pro-American stance, but the common Muslim people felt emotionally one with the Muslims of Afghanistan”.¹⁸

As the war began in Afghanistan, and the bombs began to kill innocent civilians, the backlash took place in Bahawalpur, a quiet town in central Pakistan, where gunmen attacked St. Dominic’s Church on 28 October 2001 and massacred 15 Christians and one Muslim guard. At regular intervals, several other attacks were carried out on churches and schools, and a total of 43 Christians have died. The latest attack was on Christmas Day in 2002, when three young Christian girls died in a grenade attack, and several were wounded. It was the worst year in the history of Muslim-Christian relations in Pakistan.

The Bishops of Pakistan strongly condemned the acts of violence while promoting interfaith dialogue and social harmony. In the words of Archbishop Saldanha, “The Bishops, while condemning these acts of violence, also adopted a policy of social harmony through a grassroots committee of Muslims and Christians who would be able to support one another. It worked quite well”.

In response to the sensitive situation we are faced with, the Bishops of Pakistan have issued several pastoral letters and directives to Christians “to be prudent and vigilant”. There are also a few hopeful signs, and they are, in the opinion of Archbishop Saldanha, that “there is more ecumenical cooperation – after a long time of cool relations, the common danger has brought Catholic and Protestant leaders closer to each other for joint action and the issuing of statements”. There is a

revival of the National Christian Action Forum, an ecumenical body that monitors the situation and plans strategies for dealing with problems.

Another hopeful sign was found in the first public address of Prime Minister Sardar Zafar Ullah Khan Jamali to the nation on 11 March 2003. This was the first speech by the Prime Minister in which he publicly acknowledged the contribution of minorities to the development of Pakistan and declared them equal citizens – President Pervez Musharraf has repeatedly called minorities equal citizens of Pakistan.

The Church is committed to manifesting its loyalty to Pakistan. It will also keep on working for peace, harmony and religious freedom, but it cannot do so alone. The collaboration of all Christian denominations in Pakistan, and also members of the Muslim community, are needed at all levels, from the grassroots to the Prime Minister and the President of Pakistan. There is a good slogan that has been flashed by the regime of President Musharraf: “*Sab se pehle Pakistan*” (First of all, let it be Pakistan).

Signs of Hope

General Pervez Musharraf, President of Pakistan, and his government have talked much about good government and accountability. One convention was held on human rights at the government level in Islamabad, declaring an agenda to defend and promote marginalized sections of society and provide justice and equal human rights to all. He has banned five religious militant Muslim groups, which was a very bold step, and has given relief to the people of Pakistan. The Government has sponsored seminars in the provincial capitals to promote a sense of religious freedom and human rights. The Government also began revising mandatory school curricula to incorporate human rights issues. Such policies of Musharraf clearly indicate his desire to see the fulfillment of the vision which Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the Father of the Nation, had for Pakistan, which was to make Pakistan not a theocratic state, but a secular one. International organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Franciscans International, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Dominican International at the United Nations, The United State Commission on International Reli-

gious Freedom and several other international human rights, justice and peace commissions and organizations are promoting the betterment of religious freedom in Pakistan.

Christian religious and political leaders, along with human rights activists, have been raising their concern about discriminatory laws and violations of religious freedom in Pakistan. Leaders of other religious minorities and many Muslims are doing the same. On many occasions, minority members had meetings and conferences with Muslims about difficulties, lack of religious freedom, discrimination and equal rights. Religious minorities are an integral part of Pakistan. There is a need for all to be treated as equal citizens. The government of Pakistan needs to take some concrete steps toward making it a reality.

Some suggestions

Here are some suggestions which might help lead to a better situation regarding religious freedom in Pakistan:

1. It was a dream of the founder of the nation, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, to make Pakistan a secular state and not a theocratic state. Therefore, it would be good to get back to the vision of this great leader and thus make Pakistan a country where people of all religions enjoy equality, respect, and religious freedom.
2. It would be good if the government of Pakistan would establish rules, regulations, and even a constitution framed in accordance with the United Nations Universal Charter on Human Rights. It would also be good if Pakistan would ratify the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Optional Protocol, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention against Torture.
3. There is a need for wider consultation on the state of religious freedom in Pakistan. There is also a need to promote a culture of peace, healing, reconciliation and dialogue among people of all religions. These efforts will make Pakistan a more tolerant state where all citizens enjoy equality and freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.
4. It would be helpful if the educational system of Pakistan was revised in a way which generates religious tolerance and acceptance of others with discrimination towards none.
5. It would also be good if the role of minority communities in nation-building were highlighted and projected in the curricula.

All national heroes, irrespective of their religious affiliation, should be given prominence in the syllabus.

6. It would be of great help if there were special chapters on interfaith dialogue and harmony.

7. If the government will further promote human rights, tolerance, justice, peace, and gender balance in the country, it can serve as a solid foundation to bring change to society.

8. There can be positive change if the government will fully utilize both print and electronic media to educate people for building a just civil society.

9. It will be good if the government of Pakistan repeals all discriminatory legislation which violates the religious, social, political, economic and cultural right of minorities.

Conclusion

As one can see from the different perspectives provided by the media, the law, the constitution, the education system, and the religious leaders, there is a need to improve the state of religious freedom in Pakistan. This improvement would create an atmosphere in the country where every citizen could enjoy full religious freedom in every respect. Although some steps have already been taken by the government in this regard, much more needs to be done. There is a need to mobilize the whole nation for this noble task. There is also a need for all laws and regulations in the country to be made to correspond to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to the 1966 Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Pakistan should ratify the covenants, which it has not yet done, and make and promulgate laws in this spirit.

It is good to see that efforts are being made and voices are being raised for the religious freedom of all at every level of life. It is not an easy task. It is a big challenge for the whole country. It is a challenge for all Pakistanis to work jointly for the religious freedom of all citizens, so that everyone will enjoy equal rights, religious freedom and dignity.

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¹⁰ Constitution of Pakistan, 1956

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Chapter Six

Pacem in Terris: Its Influences and Challenges to Catholics/Christians in Pakistan*

First of all, I congratulate Bill Purcell and the Center for Social Concerns of Notre Dame University for organizing the Catholic Social Tradition Conference entitled: “Peace Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow: Celebrating 50 Years since Pacem in Terris” - the encyclical of Pope John XXIII. This is indeed a very significant international conference, and I feel immense peace and joy in participating.

I am deeply impressed that the organizers have given such importance to my country, Pakistan, which is confronted with many challenges and crises. On one hand, there are people who are determined to promote peace, justice, human rights, reconciliation, healing, interreligious dialogue, and equality for all with discrimination towards none. On the other hand, there are people and forces that are contrary to peace. They keep on promoting terrorism, extremism, fanaticism, violence, injustice, and conflicts of all sorts based on religious, ethnic, political, geographical and linguistic affiliations.

There is a constant struggle between good and evil, light and darkness, justice and injustice, and fanaticism versus respect for all and religious freedom. We are living in very challenging times.

In such a situation, the encyclical of Pope John XXIII is of prime importance. It has set before men and women of good will an immense task for all, and especially for us in Pakistan. For example, in number 163 of the encyclical, we read: “Hence among the very serious obligations incumbent upon men of high principles, we must include the task of establishing new relationships in human society, under the mastery and guidance of truth, justice, charity and freedom – relations between individual citizens, between citizens and their respective states, between states, and finally between individuals, families, intermediate associations and states on the one hand, and the world community on the other. There is surely no one who will not consider this a most exalted task, for it is one which is able to

bring about true peace in accordance with the divinely established order.”

Although this encyclical was written 50 years ago, it is very significant for our times as well. Its importance in Pakistan is even more relevant, and it poses for us great challenges in overcoming the crises we are faced with and establishing lasting peace in Pakistan. This encyclical has established principles that are featured in some of the documents of the Vatican Council II. All Popes after John XXIII - Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI - gave prime importance to truth, justice, charity and religious freedom. I am sure our newly elected Pope Francis will also give the same importance to these truths so that peace may prevail on earth. Pope Francis chose his name following the great example of St. Francis of Assisi, who is a model of peaceful co-existence with the whole of creation, and in following our Savior Lord Jesus Christ – the Prince of Peace. It is wonderful to know that *Pacem in Terris* was the first encyclical that the Pope did not address to Catholics only, but to “all men of good will”. So it is for all the people of Pakistan, both Christians and Muslims, and people of all other religions. It encourages and inspires us to do what is good based on truth, justice and charity to bring peace and harmony to our society. Peace is an ongoing process, not just an absence of armed conflict – of which, unfortunately, we have plenty in Pakistan. We are living in a war-like situation after the horrific events of 9/11. To come out of this war-like situation is an uphill battle. We go two steps forward and one step backward. However, our struggle will not end until there is peace all around us. True and lasting peace, I believe, can be achieved only when we have peace in our hearts, peace in our families, peace in our cities and nations. We cannot give what we do not have. If we have peace in our hearts, only then will we be able to give it to others.

Pope John tells us how difficult the task of peace is and how few there are who are dedicated to this task. In the encyclical (No.164), we read and I quote: “Considering the need, the men who are shouldering this responsibility are far too few in number, yet they are deserving of the highest recognition from society, and we rightfully honor them with our public praise. We call upon them to persevere in their ideals, which are of such

tremendous benefit to mankind. At the same time we are encouraged to hope that many more people, Christians especially, will join their cause, spurred on by love and the realization of their duty. Everyone who has joined the ranks of Christ must be a glowing point of light in the world, a nucleus of love, a leaven of the whole mass. He will be so in proportion to his degree of spiritual union with God.”

For both Christians and Muslims in Pakistan this message is even more relevant now, in the year 2013, when we are confronted with so many problems.

Historical background of Christianity

Historically speaking, the establishment and planting of the seed of Christianity in the sub continent goes back to the period from 45 A.D. to 52 A.D., when, according to the Parthian Tradition, St. Thomas the Apostle came three times to this land, which is Pakistan today. He followed the command and mission given to him by Jesus Christ. In the Gospel according to St Matthew 28:18-20 we read: “Jesus came up and spoke to them. He said, ‘All authority in heaven and 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 commandments I gave you. And look, I am with you always, yes, to the end of time.” This is what St Thomas did for our land. He travelled all the way from Jerusalem and arrived here after much hardship, but with great enthusiasm to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. That very site, Sir Koop, close to Texila, is about an hour’s drive from Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan. He preached and evangelized to the people here. From this historical fact, we see that Christianity was born here during the very first century of the Christian era. However, for several centuries, Christians remained a small minority, as is true even today. So, we have to find our role to play as a religious minority.

Islam, which dates from 610 AD, was introduced in this land in 712 AD with the arrival of Muhammad Bin Qasim. Later on Islam was spread here, especially by the Muslim *Sufis* (mystics), such as Khawja Muin ul-Din Chishti, Baba Farid, Baha ul-Din Zikria, Shah Ruken-e-Alam and Data Gang Baksh. They played a major role in spreading the message of Islam and converting

people to the new faith. Their shrines even today attract millions of Muslim pilgrims from all over.

Pakistan acquired its independence on the 14th of August, 1947, from the British Raj under the able leadership and struggle of *Quaid-e-Azam* (Great Leader) Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The Christian political leadership took an active part in the Pakistan movement and favored Muhammad Ali Jinnah, voting in favor of Pakistan. They thus opted to remain in this land. The Christians of Pakistan are sons and daughters of this soil.

Since the creation of Pakistan, Christians have remained a tiny minority of 3.5 million (2%), with Muslims forming an overwhelming majority of 180 million (96%). There are 7 Catholic Dioceses and 8 Church of Pakistan (Protestant) Dioceses.

The character of Pakistan underwent a radical change with the military coup of General Muhammad Zia ul-Haq in July 1977. He led Pakistan to become a strict Islamic state through a change in the Constitution. Pakistani minorities were removed from the main political stream through the apartheid system of 'Separate Electorates'. The Separate Electorates system made Christians and all other minorities into second class citizens. Zia ul-Haq was the person responsible for creating hatred and violence in the name of religion. He suppressed our basic human rights and our dignity and violated our religious freedom. He supported militancy in the country, providing weapons to militant groups. Through the efforts of minorities and constant criticism and condemnation of the system, it was finally abolished by another military dictator, General Pervez Musharraf, in 2002.

Pope John laid great emphasis on basic human rights, in this order: the right to life, bodily integrity, food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care and necessary social services (a.11), the right to respect for one's person, a good reputation, freedom to search for the truth, freedom of speech and freedom of information (a.12), the right to worship (a.14), freedom to choose one's state of life and to form a family (a.15), freedom of initiative in the economic field, the right to work (a.18), the right to adequate working conditions (a.19), a proper wage (a.20), private property (a.21), freedom of assembly and association (23), the right to the juridical protection of rights (a.27) and the right to act freely and

responsibly (a.34). This is what we want to see realized in Pakistan. We are struggling so that we may have peace on earth, especially in our land. For that we have to work very hard, keep on raising our voices and be ready to make sacrifices if required. Pope John also reminds us that people possessing these rights have the duty to claim them as marks of their dignity (a.44). Moreover, these rights must be acknowledged and respected by others, and effectively fulfilled (a.32). They should be regulated so that no one can threaten others in the exercise of their rights, and so that when rights are violated, they can be completely restored. Pope John praises the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (a.144). We as Pakistani Christians are doing our best to fulfill our civic duties. We are faithful citizens of our country and have made every effort toward the development and prosperity of Pakistan. Our services are recognized by the government in different walks of life, especially in the armed forces, education, interfaith dialogue, peace building, film, art, music, literature and social work.

Pope John reminds us that the worst offense against peace is war. He quotes Pope Pius XII, who said: "Nothing is lost by peace; everything may be lost by war" (a.116). Pakistan chose to join the war against terrorism. As a result, over 43,000 Pakistanis have been killed by terrorist and suicide attacks and bombings. This loss of life is much higher than our losses in two wars against India in 1965 and 1971. Pope John very clearly addressed the miseries of war and wrote that international differences must be settled not by force, nor by trickery, but by assessing the conflicting positions and reconciling the differences (a.93). That is very much needed in Pakistan - to settle disputes through dialogue and not by force. That is the major lesson for all international disputes: avoid war and settle problems through dialogue with all parties concerned. Pakistan must find ways to resolve all issues through dialogue and not war. That is the idea which Pope John firmly presented in *Pacem in Terris*.

Our mutual challenges and issues

There are 4 main challenges we are confronted with. These were discussed and agreed upon in high level meetings of 20 intellectuals and religious leaders (I was part of this group) gathered in Turkey in March, 2012 to discuss the situation in

Pakistan. These challenges concern all the citizens of Pakistan. They are:

1. **Modernity versus Orthodoxy:** That is, conflicting views between the liberal and conservative versions of Islam, cultural values, social norms, and varying degrees of interpretation of some fundamental tenets of Islam that lead to conflicts and the division of Muslims into liberal and orthodox followers. Orthodoxy was started by the Deobandi school of thought in Pakistan, according to the prominent Pakistani scholar and analyst Imtiaz Gul. Issues include the role of minorities in an Islamic state which has the right to implement *Sharia* and to declare *Jihad*; The role of women in society; Who has the right to decide among conflicting views about pictures, photos, art and culture, and the question of whether to use an Islamic or a global banking system. Mainstream parties need to be secular and should not promote misuse of religion.

2. **Misuse of religion in conflicts:** This means the use of Islam by politicians and governments for political ends, like misinterpreting the concept of *Jihad* – an idea that the Americans, Pakistanis and others invoked to launch the anti-Soviet *Jihad* in Afghanistan. The Pakistani army invoked the same idea in its political objectives in Indian Kashmir, thereby inviting and inciting the people to violence and the exclusion of others. This also is at the root of Indo-Pakistan tensions.

3. **Misplaced perceptions of non-Muslims:** This includes rigid, clichéd views of people from the West and followers of other faiths, such as the stereotyping of Hindus, Jews, and Christians. Another related dimension of this phenomenon is the sense of superiority among Muslims, who, because of training and teachings, consider Christians, Hindus and other non-Muslims to be lesser Pakistanis. I would also like to add the biased syllabus which is taught to children in the schools. It presents a very negative picture of Christians and Hindus. There are misrepresentations of their religious beliefs. They are looked down upon, and Islam is presented as the superior religion.

4. **Crisis of identity:** This means that people are not really sure how to prioritize their identity, i.e., whether they are Pakistanis first, Punjabis first, Balochis first, Muslims or Christians first. Essentially, the over-emphasis on religion has obscured the

‘nationhood’ of people living in Pakistan. They have failed to live as one nation and are still divided along ethnic lines. The Taliban and Al-Qaeda-inspired ideology has added another dimension to this conflict, because for Islamists the entire world belongs to Muslims.

Some successes in meeting these challenges

1. Our Christian community is very vocal, and it raises its voice against the injustice and discrimination done to it, as well as to other religious minorities that are victimized because of gender and caste.

2. We have been playing and continue to play a very prominent role in the field of education through our schools and colleges. Christians are running two types of schools - English Medium and Urdu Medium. The English Medium schools are mainly for economically well off Muslims and Christians. It is a great service and witness by Christians. Several heads of States and Prime Ministers, such as Ms. Benazir Bhutto, Nawaz Sharif, Shaukat Aziz and Yousaf Raza Gillani, and Presidents such as General Pervez Musharraf and Asif Ali Zardari have been educated in our Christian schools and colleges. Several other top officials are the former students of Christian educational institutions.

3. The Christian community is a pioneer in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue. This has been going on since the birth of Pakistan in 1947 at different levels and in different forms, such as dialogue of life, dialogue of words, dialogue of deeds, dialogue of religious experience and dialogue among intellectuals. An official dialogue commission known as “National Commission for Christian Muslim Dialogue” (*Rabita Commission*) was established in 1985 by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Pakistan, with Bishop John Joseph as its first Chairperson and myself as Executive Secretary. Such dialogue commissions were also established at the diocesan level as well.

4. **Christian Study Center, Rawalpindi:** This center was established around 1967 by the Protestant Churches, with the exclusive aim of promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue. The CSC is ecumenical in nature. It organizes seminars, workshops and conferences on peace building, education, human rights and Christian-Muslim dialogue. It also publishes a magazine called

“*Al-Mushir*” (The Councilor), with articles on peace and harmony between Christians and Muslims. The CSC has been carrying on this work very successfully.

5. Dominican Peace Center, Lahore: This center is another very important institution which is playing a significant role in spite of all the difficulties we are confronted with. A couple of Dominican friars are highly qualified in Christian-Muslim dialogue, and they are well known both nationally and internationally for promoting peace and interfaith dialogue. The climax of this Dominican apostolate was manifested in the building of a ‘Peace Center’ in Lahore, which was inaugurated and blessed on the 28th of November, 2010 by His Eminence, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue at the Vatican.

On that grace-filled occasion, many notable Christian personalities were in attendance: the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Adolfo Titu Yllana, the President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Pakistan, Archbishop Lawrence John Saldanha, President, Catholic Bishops Conference Pakistan, Bishop Andrew Francis, Chairman, National Commission for Inter-religious Dialogue and Ecumenism, Bishop Rufin Anthony, Bishop of Islamabad/Rawalpindi Diocese, Bishop Alexander John Malik from the Church of Pakistan (Protestant) and Fr Abid Habib, OFM Cap. President of the Major Religious Superiors Leadership Conference. And from the Muslim side, there was Maulana Abd ul-Khabir Azad, Grand Imam of the second largest mosque in Pakistan, *Badshahi Mosque* in Lahore (this mosque is so large that 100,000 people can offer prayers at a time), along with several other dignitaries. It was a manifestation of how important this apostolate is and how people of good will, both Christians and Muslims, are taking the challenge of Christian-Muslim dialogue very seriously.

From the beginning, it was my dream to build such a center, and it gave me immense joy to see this dream become a reality. With myself as Director, we regularly organize meetings, seminars and conferences. The Center has already earned a good reputation at both the national and international levels. In this Peace Center, we organize and celebrate International Days, such as the International Day of Peace, International Women’s Day, the

International Day of Rural Women, International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, World Interfaith Harmony Week, and International Labor Day. Festivals of Christians and Muslims, such as Christmas and *Eid al-Fitr*, are jointly celebrated. We publish a quarterly magazine called *Umang*. The launching ceremony for new publications is also arranged here. This includes three of my books: the English “Christian Muslim Dialogue in Pakistan”, and two Urdu books entitled “*Pakistan Main Masihi Muslim Mukalama*” (Christian Muslim Dialogue in Pakistan) and “*Muhabat Ka Rasta*” (Path of Love). My latest book is in the pipeline to be published by the end of 2013.

We have also established a library which offers a good range of books on different topics, both Christian and Islamic. The ‘*Nostra Aetate Foundation*’ from the Vatican has sent books to the Center on Christian teachings, including commentaries, mysticism and encyclicals. We hope to further enhance the activities of our Peace Center with programs to promote peace, dialogue and harmony. We plan to further build our library into a good resource for all who want to do research on peace, capacity building, peace education, peace building and Catholic social teachings.

6. **United Religions Initiative (URI):** The URI is another organization working to promote interfaith dialogue, harmony, justice and peace. URI is an international organization operating in 82 countries. There are 43 URI CCs (Cooperation Circles) in Pakistan, which I have established. They try their best to build a culture of peace, healing and reconciliation. URI is a registered NGO with the UN, and its representative there, Ms. Monica Willard, is the UN President of the Religious NGOs. The Regional Office of the URI is located at the Peace Center in Lahore. “The purpose of the United Religions Initiative is to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings.”

7. To further enhance this important work of Christian-Muslim dialogue, two Muslim scholars - Mr. Sohail Ahmed Raza, Director of Interfaith Relations at Minhaj ul-Quran International and Dr. Muhammad Zaman Nazi, Professor at Forman Christian

College (Chartered University) in Lahore, were sent to Rome after receiving a Vatican scholarship from the *Nostra Aetate Foundation* to study Christianity at various universities, such as at Pontifical Gregoriana University, St Thomas Aquinas University (Angelicum) and the Pontifical Institute of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language (PISAI). Mr. Sohail successfully completed his studies this year in June and came back as a transformed person. He is contributing immensely in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue. Prof. Muhammad Zaman Nazi is studying in Rome right now and will complete his studies in June and return to Pakistan.

8. The Catholic Bishops' Conference Pakistan and Major Superiors Leadership Conference Pakistan issued a Joint Statement on 12th November, 2008. It was issued in response to the strong wave of terrorism and extremism our country is currently facing. This statement, echoing the *Pacem in Terris*, says, "Realizing that this [present situation] has created complex difficulties in all walks of life, we also realized that we are called to be signs of hope for all. In order to be so, we have decided to take the following concrete steps:

- (i) Promote the faith formation of our communities through catechesis, Bible studies with prayer, and by means of the media.
- (ii) Organize awareness programs in Parishes, Institutions, families, and so on, in order to bring about peace, harmony and better understanding among diverse faith communities.
- (iii) Work for interreligious dialogue on life and ecumenism."

In light of this statement, the Catholic Church in Pakistan is committed to promoting peace, harmony and inter-religious dialogue.

Four Pillars of peace

In his message for World Day of Peace 2003, Pope John Paul II said: "Peace calls for 4 essential conditions: "Truth, Justice, Love and Freedom". Pope John Paul II proposes these "pillars of peace", inspired by Pope John XXIII's encyclical "Pacem in Terris". The year 2003 marked the 40th anniversary of this great encyclical. These pillars provide a very firm foundation for peace to be established. This is what we need in the world, and this is

what we need in Pakistan. However, our country will have to go a long way to accomplish these goals.

The Church of Pakistan Bishops (Protestant) are also vigorously promoting justice, peace, religious freedom and dialogue among religions. The Rt. Rev. Dr. Alexander John Malik, Bishop of Lahore diocese, and The Rt. Rev. Samuel Robert Azariah, Bishop of the Raiwind diocese and Moderator of the Church of Pakistan, have established interreligious dialogue along with justice and peace committees. They are ardent promoters of ecumenical dialogue. The Catholic Church and other Churches also observe the Week of Christian Unity from 18 to 25 January every year. Several seminars, conferences and prayer services are conducted to observe this week of Christian unity in a befitting manner.

The Christian community is playing an important role in politics, although further improvements could be hoped for. I would like to mention our pride and hero Mr. Shahbaz Bhatti. He was an international personality, a well recognized and respected political leader, a human rights activist, and a promoter of justice, equality, peace, religious freedom, interfaith dialogue and ecumenism. As Federal Minister of Religious Minorities, he was able to convince the government to approve 4 seats for minorities in the Senate, declare the 11th of August as Minorities Day, and establish a 5 % minority quota in the federal services. He also played a leading role in abolishing the apartheid system of Separate Electorates. He was vocal in criticizing the misuse of the controversial blasphemy laws. He was assassinated by militants on the 2nd of March, 2011 in Islamabad. I am sure his sacrifice will always be remembered with admiration. I hope and pray that one day he will be declared a saint and a martyr by the Catholic Church.

Mr. Akram Masih Gill has served as State Minister in the Ministry of National Harmony. The Ministry's purpose is to promote harmony, peace and dialogue among people of different religions and especially among Christians and Muslims. Mr. Paul Bhatti has served as the Advisor to the Prime Minister for this National Harmony Ministry. He is also making efforts on behalf of peace and interfaith dialogue.

The Ministry of National Harmony organized several conferences under the leadership of Akram Masih Gill and Paul

Bhatti. One of the most significant of these was the National Conference on the theme of “Living Together with Diversity: Inter-faith and Inter-Cultural Dialogue” (20th of February, 2013) in which His Excellency, Raja Pervaiz Asharaf, Prime Minister of Pakistan, was the Chief Guest. I was honored to speak on behalf of Christians at this conference, where I highlighted and emphasized the need for interfaith harmony, justice, equal rights for all and human dignity. After two days, National Harmony ran another National Conference on the 22nd of February on the same topic, and His Excellency, Asif Alif Zardari, the President of Pakistan was the Chief Guest. After these conferences, the ‘Islamabad Declaration’ was issued.

As Chief Guest, Prime Minister Ashraf highly appreciated the efforts of National Harmony in organizing this conference. He said that interfaith harmony and peace are imperative needs in Pakistan. All religions preach a message of peace, love and respect for the rights of the other. No religion preaches the killing of others. This message was also preached by the mystics, and the people liked that very much. There is only a small number of people who have rejected this message of love, peace and harmony. No religion gives me the right to force upon others my will, and to do what I want. The Prime Minister said we must follow our own religions, and we must not force our religious philosophy on others. Let us respect each other’s religions. This is the need of our time. If we do not do it today, then when will we do it? We want to live in peace and reach out for dialogue with our neighbors. Let us take this message to every home, that our religions do not teach us to hate one another. Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and all other religions teach and preach a message of love. We must learn to live in peace with the rest of the world. There should never be wars among religions or wars among civilizations.

In his inaugural speech, Dr. Paul Bhatti said that we are all one as a nation and we totally reject all forms of intolerance, hatred and violence done in the name of religion. Our country has become a symbol of terrorism in the world. All of us must work to promote interfaith dialogue and harmony. Mr. Akram Masih Gill, State Minister, emphasized that our government has established this ministry to create a culture of peace.

I was also invited to give a speech on behalf of the Christian community in Pakistan. I emphasized that dialogue among religions is our greatest need in these times. Religious leaders have an important role to play in promoting interreligious dialogue and peace. We must use every forum for this purpose and, in particular, religious leaders must promote this message in places of worship, such as mosques, churches and temples.

During the round table discussion after the break, the following points emerged as very strong recommendations from the “Pakistan Interfaith and Harmony Conference” to the Government of Pakistan. This conference came up with the “Islamabad Declaration”, based on the sharing and suggestions of several Muslim, Christian and Hindu leaders:

1. Establish an Interfaith Dialogue Council in which prominent personalities of all religions will be represented.
2. The word ‘Minorities’ should be discarded and replaced with some other appropriate word like ‘non-Muslims’ for Pakistani Christians, Hindus, and members of different religions. (This will give them a sense of respect and equality.)
3. Special chapters must be part of the education curricula in the schools, covering interreligious dialogue and fundamental teachings on peace, love, tolerance and reconciliation with other religions (e.g. Christianity, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and others).
4. The government must take appropriate measures to prevent the misuse of blasphemy laws. More than 1.200 persons (men, women and children) have been accused and booked under these laws (295 B and 295 C) to settle personal scores or land disputes.
5. The electronic and print media need to give more coverage to interfaith dialogue and peace programs in the country.
6. The root causes of terrorism, violence and intolerance must be tackled to make Pakistan an abode of peace and harmony.
7. The government of Pakistan must take steps to take the message of interfaith harmony and peace to the grassroots level, forming dialogue groups at district and local levels.

It is worth mentioning that our Muslim brothers and sisters are also very much in favor of dialogue among religions and cultures. Several dialogue organizations have been established by Muslims, such as Maulana Abdul Khabir Azad, Hafiz Zubair

Ahmed Zaheer, Maulana Javed Akbar Saqi, Allama Zubair Abid, Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi, Pir Shafat Rasool Noori, and Mualana Hafeez Jalandhry. This is a good omen. These religious leaders have organized and participated in many interfaith conferences, both in Pakistan and around the world. They are ardent promoters of human rights, religious freedom, interfaith dialogue and respect for all. Very often they appear on TV to ease tensions which arise among Christians and Muslims, and between Hindus and Muslims.

There are many challenges that we are faced with. Such is the situation in which we have to play an important role for the betterment of society, and such is our role as a minority. That in itself is a thing of beauty – we are called to be the “salt of the earth and light of the world.” (cf. Matt.5:13-14). We must never lose our salt and light. We no doubt will have to present the face of the suffering Christ. Our Church is a suffering Church in Pakistan. Persecution of Christians is not something new for us. Christianity has been facing such persecution right from its birth. But suffering is not the end. Our model is Jesus Christ, who suffered, died and rose on the third day. Our sufferings are the same. They do not lead to disappointment or defeat. They lead us to victory. What is required from us is to remain faithful and bear these hardships with courage, determination and commitment. Christ is our model.

“Pacem in Terris” offers us great inspiration and helps us to meet the challenges we are confronted with. I believe that we shall overcome someday. And one day universal peace in truth, justice, charity and liberty will be established as envisioned by Pope John XXIII. Amen!

May Peace Prevail On Earth!

May Peace Prevail in Pakistan!

* This Keynote address was presented during the international conference on *Pacem in Terris* at Notre Dame University, South Bend, Indiana, USA on 22nd of March, 2013.

Chapter Seven

The Status of the Christian Minority in Pakistan* Testimony before the US Commission for International Religious Freedom

Pakistan is a country which became independent on the 14th of August, 1947. The religious minorities consist of Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Parsi, Kalash and a few other smaller religious groups which opted to stay in this country. Pakistan is predominantly Muslim, with Muslims making up 96% of the population. And 4% are minorities, among whom Christians are the largest, numbering over 3 million or 2% of the total estimated population of 140 million.

The father of the nation, Mr. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, dreamed of Pakistan as a democratic state where all people will have equal rights and obligations and religion will have nothing to do with the policies of the state. In his speech to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, August 11, 1947 he said, "You are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed - that has nothing to do with the business of the state.... We are all citizens and equal citizens of one state."

Since the inception of our country, the religious minorities have not been treated well, and at times they have been segregated politically, religiously, socially and economically. The minorities belong to the poorest economic classes. At times they feel like aliens in their own homeland.

The supreme law of the country is Islamic; the head of state, the president, must be Muslim, and the Prime Minister of the country must also be Muslim, since the oath suits only a Muslim believer. The teaching of Islam is compulsory for Muslim students, whereas the students of minority communities cannot be taught their own religion. Muslims are allowed remission in their jail sentences for religious attainments (such as learning the Holy Quran by heart), while there is no such concession for non-Muslims.

Politically, Christians and all other religious minorities are segregated from the mainstream through an unjust system of Separate Electorates where a Muslim can vote only for a Muslim

candidate and a Christian can vote only for a Christian. This is religious apartheid. Christians are deprived economically and belong to the poorest class. Not a single Christian owns, for example, a mill or a factory or any other big business in Pakistan. They are discriminated against religiously and subjugated socially.

Although Christians are allowed to practice their religion 'freely', this is limited only to their homes and Church compounds. Interestingly, this word 'freely', which was part of the Objectives Resolution, passed by the First Constituent Assembly on 12th of March, 1949, was deliberately deleted from paragraph no. 6, when this document was made part of the Constitution by the Presidential Order No. 14, of General Muhammad Ziaul Haq in 1985. We were very shocked by this deliberate deletion of the word "freely". Nevertheless, Christians can make videos, audio cassettes, and films, play dramas, and publish religious material. But if any Muslim considers anything to be against Islam, then not only one Christian but the whole Christian community could be victimized in retaliation. This is what happened to a Christian village called Shantinagar on 6th of February 1997, when a Muslim made an announcement in a mosque that a Christian had desecrated a copy of the Holy Quran. This announcement was absolutely false, but it resulted in burning the whole village of Shantinagar into ashes. I visited this place personally, three days after the incident. This village looked war-stricken, as most of the houses, churches and shops were blown away with hand grenades and bombs. Other neighboring villages were not spared either. Over 14 churches were destroyed in several villages, including a big church in Khanewal City. Hundreds of Bibles, hymn books and holy pictures were burnt to ashes. This act of vandalism resulted in making 20,000 persons homeless. Not a single person has been given punishment or sentenced to jail for this vandalism by a mob of angry fanatical Muslims. The inquiry report of the judicial commission, made in 1997, headed by Justice Tanvir Ahmed Khan, judge of the Lahore High Court, has never been made public so far.

Some concrete examples of persecution and discrimination in Pakistan

There are many similar examples regarding religious minorities in Pakistan.

1. **Family Laws.** The laws of the country do not safeguard the family laws of Christians. If a Christian woman is abducted and declares that she has embraced Islam, her first marriage is declared null and void.

2. **Separate Electorates.** There is a prevailing system of separate electorates. It is apartheid in the name of religion, where Muslims and Christians cannot vote for each other. Muslims must vote for Muslims and Christians for Christians. There was some hope that the present military government would replace Separate Electorates with Joint Electorates. But all hopes diminished when General Pervaiz Musharraf, Chief Executive, while announcing the plan of devolution of power on 14th of August 2000, did not abolish this system of Separate Electorates. On the 22nd of February, 2000, Musharraf had promised a high level delegation of Catholic and Protestant bishops and laity at Lahore in the Army Guest-House that Joint Electorates would be restored, but he did not fulfill his promise. This happened due to the pressure and influence of the religious fundamentalists upon the present regime.

3. **Nationalization of Christian schools and colleges.** The government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Prime Minister of Pakistan, nationalized most of the Christian schools and colleges in 1972. Several governments, such as those of Benazir Bhutto, Muhamamd Khan Junejo, Nawaz Sharif and even the present government, made promises to denationalize these Christian institutions, but so far most of these schools and colleges are not returned to their Christian owners. This injustice, mainly done to the Christian minority, has affected not only them but the system of education as a whole. It has resulted in the degradation of the educational standard. Qualified teachers were replaced by unqualified teachers who were relatives of the politicians and bureaucrats. This also affected the Christian atmosphere and the teaching of the Christian catechism to the students of their community. All the buildings of such schools have been turned into ruins. Can you believe that since 1972, when our educational

institutes were nationalized, not a single trained Christian teacher has been hired by the government of Pakistan? It is another example of injustice in the name of religion.

4. **Teaching of the Christian catechism.** In Pakistan, it is compulsory for Muslim students to study Islam. In schools and colleges, non-Muslims are obliged to study Islam in the absence of alternative arrangements for studying civics or morals. A petition filed in the Lahore High Court for direction regarding Bible teaching to Christians was dismissed in 1998. An inter-court appeal against that dismissal is now pending. (State of Human Rights in 1999)

These are a few examples, out of many, where we feel that we are discriminated against. These are the circumstances our Christian community is living in. There is increased violence done in the name of religion and there is no remedy offered to the minorities.

However, I would also like to state that not all Muslims are like this. There are many Muslim human rights activists, promoters of justice and peace, and social workers who help Christians and raise voices for their rights. However, there is certainly a very strong group of fanatical Muslims who keep on fueling not only sectarian violence, but also hatred against minorities. Our government also seems helpless in face of their pressure. This is what has happened when the Chief Executive, General Pervaiz Musharraf, proposed a procedural change in the registration of cases under blasphemy laws. He announced this proposal during the Human Rights and Dignity Convention in Islamabad on 21st of April 2000. Later on, in our opinion, he was forced to withdraw this proposal under the pressure of certain fundamentalist religious groups. The same thing happened with the restoration of joint electorates, and the denationalization of Christian schools and colleges. We have the example of a Christian Minister for Minorities, Youth and Sports, Derrick Cyprian, who resigned in protest on 14th of August 2000 after none of his recommendations were accepted by the government, including the restoration of a joint electorate. David Alisha, Secretary General of the Minority Advisory Council Punjab, also resigned in protest against the apartheid policies of the present government.

Such are the circumstances that the Christian community has to live in. In spite of all these problems, the Christians are, and will remain, faithful to their religion. They will also remain loyal to their beloved homeland. They are vocal and keep on raising their voices against the injustices and discrimination done to them. Christians in Pakistan are inspired by the Holy Bible and the history of the Church where Christians have been persecuted, humiliated, looked down upon, and even killed. They have learned to live in such conditions. They are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. They will never fail to be salt and light. They have learned to pray for those who persecute them. This is what Jesus taught, and this is what Christians are doing in Pakistan. For example, Jesus said:

How blessed are you who are poor: the kingdom of God is yours.

Blessed are you who are hungry now: you shall have your fill

Blessed are you who are weeping now: you shall laugh.

Blessed are you when people hate you, drive you out, abuse you, denounce your name as criminal, on account of the Son of man.

Rejoice when that day comes and dance for joy, look! – your reward will be great in heaven. This was the way their ancestors treated the prophets. (Luke 6: 20-23)

Some may ask why the Muslims of Pakistan treat Christians like this. There could be several possible answers. One could be that Muslims think Islam is in danger. Another might be that it is done in retaliation for anti-Muslim events in the West. Many Muslims feel they are not treated well in some western countries. Indeed, several Muslim countries were colonies of Western countries. Therefore, they treat Christians accordingly.

Culture of peace and justice through interfaith dialogue

As Pakistani Christians we will keep on playing our role to build bridges among Christians and Muslims. We want to work for a culture of peace and tolerance. We want to bring healing to wounded hearts and reconciliation among our Muslim and Christian communities. We want peace in our homes and in our country. But there can be no real peace without justice. For this purpose, there are a couple of interfaith dialogue groups working

throughout the country to bring healing among Muslims and Christians. They are working for peace-building and reconciliation.

These associations include such groups as: The National Commission for Christian Muslim Dialogue, (*Rabita Commission*), The Pakistan Association of Interreligious Dialogue, The Faith in Action Group, The National Muslim Christian Dialogue Association, The United Religions Initiative (URI), The Muslim Christian Dialogue Forum, The Muslim Christian Peace Trust, and the *Masihi Muslim Aman Council* (Muslim Christian Peace Council) to mention a few.

It has been strongly felt that we need to restore trust among these religious communities. We have a long history of conflict and mistrust, but now we must move on and work for the dawn of peace and tolerance. We have entered the new millennium and must make every effort to eliminate religiously motivated violence and join hands to create a culture of peace and justice and bring healing to a wounded world. For this noble task, we have organized several seminars, conferences and workshops to bring about better understanding and positive thinking among Christians and Muslims. This allows us to make our problems known to each other and seek a possible remedy.

One result of such interfaith dialogue is that now there are several groups all over the country working to promote harmony. Christians and Muslims, along with believers of other faiths in Pakistan, organized a 2000 mile *Aman Ka Safar*, or Journey for Peace, from Karachi to Khyber Pass to bring a message of peace to Pakistan and to the whole world. The peace journey began on 24th of December 1999 and concluded on 4th of January 2000 at Khyber Pass with prayers and hymns of peace. Most of the Muslim political parties and several religious leaders are aware of the problems of Christians. Most Muslim political parties are in favor of joint electorates. These include the Pakistan People's Party, Pakistan Millat Party, Tehreek Insaf Party, Pakistan Workers Party and Pakistan Awami Tehreek.

I acknowledge with thanks that there are many Muslims such as Ms. Asma Jahangir, I.A. Rehman, Abid Hasan Minto, Rashad Rahman, Ms Hina Gillani, Safdar Hasan Siddiqui, Kazy Javed, Justice Nasim Hasan Shah and thousands of other Muslims who

put their lives at risk to speak for the rights of minorities. There are several human rights organizations that are working for the rights of people in general and minorities in particular. Because of these friends we hope that things will be better in future.

We are for change at the grassroots level. We want to establish relations on an equal level with a dialogue which will build trust. We are for the religious freedom of all. There is a need to change the mindset of both Christians and Muslims. There is a need for a conversion of the heart. Our media can play a major role in this conversion. This conversion can come when we reflect upon the strong message of love, tolerance, and respect for humanity that our mystics (*Sufis*) taught, such as Buleh Shah, Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai, Waris Shah, Baba Farid Shakar Ganj, St Francis of Assisi and St Catherine of Siena. Their wisdom, insights, simplicity of life, and spirituality has a lot to teach us. Above all, our sacred scriptures can mold our hearts of stones to hearts of flesh.

Recommendations

First of all, I extend my invitation to each one of you to come to Pakistan and experience and observe the political, religious, social and economic situation we are living in. Here are some recommendations to improve the present status of all religious minorities.

1. That the government of Pakistan effectively implement the provisions of fundamental rights contained in the Constitution of Pakistan.
2. That the government abolish the system of Separate Electorates. I make an urgent appeal to the world community to write to the authorities of Pakistan to restore the system of Joint Electorates immediately. General Pervaiz Musharraf is authorized by the Supreme Court of Pakistan to change any law which he judges necessary.
3. That the government of Pakistan be prevailed upon by the international community to improve the status of human rights and its policies towards various religious minorities.
4. That the government of Pakistan establish an interfaith dialogue commission to promote inter-religious peace, harmony and tolerance and use the media for this purpose.
5. That the government make policies towards a more modern, liberal and secular Pakistan as deemed fitting by Mr. Muhammad

Ali Jinnah, the father of the nation. All those articles in the Constitution must be repealed which create a sense of alienation and discrimination towards religious minorities.

6. That the textbooks in Pakistani schools and colleges be rewritten and all material which creates a sense of hatred and a biased mentality against the various religious minorities be removed. That the role of minorities in the creation and development of Pakistan be publicized and included in school and college textbooks. That the students of minority communities be provided their own religious curriculum as one of the subjects in schools and colleges. That religious freedom and basic religious values of all religions be part of the textbooks in schools and colleges.

7. That prisoners from the minority community be given reduced jail terms when they study and take exams for their own religions, in the same manner as Muslim inmates who get their jail terms reduced if they learn the Holy Quran by heart.

8. That all schools and colleges nationalized in 1972 be returned to the minorities unconditionally.

9. That at least one fact finding delegation of a human rights organization visit Pakistan every year to observe the conditions of various religious minorities.

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Chapter Eight

Ut Unum Sint*

On Commitment to Ecumenism

Encyclical letter of His Holiness Pope John Paul II

Introduction and theological background of the Encyclical

When we look into the very recent history of the world, we find that many significant changes have taken place. This era has seen many new inventions and political changes where many countries have won their freedom from colonial powers. There has been great emphasis on human freedom, rights, equality and social justice. There has been a grave sense and awareness of coming closer to other nations and countries. There has also been an impetus to work for the betterment of humanity. Humankind has stepped on the moon and is commanding outer space. Scientific advantages have also changed the face of the earth, and it is a step further to see the whole world as a global village.

The church was not and is not oblivious to all these events and is well aware of all that is taking place in the world, particularly after World War II. For instance, under Pope John XXIII, the Church was inspired to reflect upon its past, work in the present and get ready for the future. Pope John XXIII felt that the Church must meet the challenges of its times. It was the same pope who gave a new vision to the Catholic Church. God did use him and inspired him with the Holy Spirit to read the signs of the times and act accordingly. He had an important mission of bringing unity and understanding among different Churches as well as among different religions. When he summoned the Vatican Council II in 1962, it surprised everyone. There was amazement both in and outside the Catholic Church.

The Vatican Council II took place from 1962 to 1965. It was an ecumenical council. Representatives of other Christian Churches, both male and female, were invited to participate in this Council as observers. Although they were not allowed to speak in the general sessions, they could share their views and speak in the sessions of the different commission meetings.

The Council took many dramatic measures and approaches, which surprised and even shocked some Christians. For example, this Council said that a lot of emphasis must be placed on

making a local Church in every situation, whether in the West, USA, Latin America, Asia or Africa. This Council decided to celebrate Mass in the local language. The Church is the people of God, and everyone has an important role to play. The gap between the religious and the laity must be minimized. Each one has an important role to play in the Church, according to his or her vocation. All are members of the body of Christ. The Church must open its doors and windows to let fresh air come in. The Catholic Church 'officially' recognized other Churches, saying that the grace of God is present in them and that the Holy Spirit also works in the sister Churches and 'rays of truth' are present in them. All peoples have been created by God, and He (God) wants the salvation of all. This council publicly confessed its errors, shortcomings and condemnations of other churches in the past and sought forgiveness for these mistakes. This condemnation was both of other Christian Churches in the East and West and of the believers of other religions such as Islam. When this Council was summoned in 1962, it was at the same time as the German theologian Kari Rahner had remarked on the Vatican II's attempts to grapple with a world Church. At that time, the Church was primarily a Western Church. It was a sort of exporting Church, and in this context a conquering Church.

Karl Rahner said that we are in the third period of Christian history. The first period was that of Jewish Christianity from the first to the second century of the Common Era. The second was a long period which started with the third century and lasted until 1965. This was the period of European culture and Church, and everything was imposed upon others by the West. The third period started from 1965 and is still going on. Here comes the global dimension of the Church. The age of this period is very young. This period marks a significant break from the old ways of thinking and understandings of the Church, which lasted for centuries.

It was Vatican Council II which taught and brought many significant changes. This aspect of the council is the key element, and it gave a new life, understanding, and approach to the Churches in reaching out to the brothers and sisters of other Churches.

Pope John XXIII observed; ‘What unites us is much greater than what divides us’. Here are some examples. First of all, there is a hierarchy of beliefs, and almost all the Churches believe in these. They include belief in one God, in Christ, in the incarnation, sufferings, death and resurrection of Christ and the divinity of Christ. All Christian Churches believe in the Holy Trinity. They all believe in baptism. In the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church called *Lumen Gentium*, we read “Christ, the one Mediator, established and ceaselessly sustains here on earth His holy Church, the community of faith, hope, and charity as a visible structure. This Church, constituted and organized in the world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in union with that successor, although many elements of sanctification and of truth can be found outside of her visible structure. These elements, however, as gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, possess an inner dynamis toward Catholic unity.”¹

As we read this paragraph, we find a significant change or rather ‘conversion’ in the teaching of the Catholic Church. We read here that the Church subsists in the Catholic Church. As many may recall, there was a big problem in the past, as the Catholic Church once thought and preached that she is the only true Church and there are no signs of truth in other Churches. There were many accusations in the Catholic Church. The word ‘subsists’ means that truth is to be found in the Catholic Church in its fullness, but at the same time, various dimensions of the Church of Christ are to be found in the other Churches as well. And the catholicity in its fullness is in the Church of Christ, and not only in the Catholic Church. It is also interesting to note that the words ‘Roman Catholic Church’ are not mentioned in this document. Church is a mystery, which means that one cannot explain it fully. It is a pilgrim Church. The head of the Church is Christ. The Church is the bride of Christ. The members of the Church are the people of God.

Lumen Gentium also teaches us as to who are the people who belong to this Church. We read:

“The Church recognizes that in many ways she is linked with those who, being baptized, are honored with the name of Christian, though they do not profess the faith in its entirety or do

not preserve unity of communion with the successor of Peter. For there are many who honor Sacred Scripture, taking it as a norm of belief and of action, and who show a true religious zeal. They lovingly believe in God the Father Almighty and in Christ, Son of God and Savior. They are consecrated by baptism, through which they are united with Christ. They also recognize and receive other sacraments within their own Churches or ecclesiastical communities. Many of them rejoice in the episcopate, celebrate the Holy Eucharist, and cultivate devotion toward the Virgin Mother of God. They also share with us in prayer and other spiritual benefits.”²

So, one can see clearly that the Catholic Church fully recognizes the sacraments of baptism, the Holy Eucharist and marriage in the other Churches. All of us as Christians believe in the same God, Sacred Scripture and Christ. In a nutshell, most of the basic beliefs are the same. There is another reference from *Gaudium et Spes*, where one can see that the Vatican Council II came to the conclusion that there is a universal salvific will of God: “For, Since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associate with this Pascal mystery.”³

Unity in diversity

It is the will of Christ that there be unity among Christians. But what kind of unity and what kind of diversity? Should there be unity in diversity? Should doctrinal differences remain?

In the history of the Church, one finds that after the death of St. Peter the Apostle, it was St. James who was head of the Church in Jerusalem (Israel), and Paul was head of the Pauline Church in Antioch (Turkey). Paul’s Church was a communitarian Church. It was a gentile Church, a non-Jewish Church, whereas, the Church in Jerusalem was a Jewish Church. There was diversity in the Church, but also a very strong unity. Although there was a fundamental diversity in the Church, as we see in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles of St. Paul, this diversity was a matter of structure. It was the same Holy Spirit which was working in them all, and there was a strong bond of unity in this diversity. We read in the letter of St. Paul to the Galatians 3:26-28: “It is through faith that all of you are God’s sons in union

with Christ Jesus. You were baptized into union with Christ with the life of Christ himself. So, there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free men, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus.”

It is a fact that in spite of many common beliefs and common elements of unity, there have been problems, misunderstandings, different doctrines and divisions among the ‘people of God’. For this rift and division, one Church alone cannot be blamed. Rather, all Churches share and are responsible for this separation. The Vatican document on Ecumenism No. 3 affirms this division, saying: “From her very beginning, there arose in this one and only Church of God certain rifts (cf. I Cor. 11:18-19, Gal. 1:6-9; 1 Jn. 2:18-19), which the apostle strongly censures as damnable (cf. 1 Cor. 1:11 ff, ; 11:22). But in subsequent centuries, more widespread disagreements appeared, and quite large Communities became separated from full communion with the Catholic Church - developments for which at times men of both sides were to blame.”

Furthermore, in the same number, we read that although there have been differences and divisions: “The brethren divided from us also carry out many of the sacred actions of the Christian religion. Undoubtedly, in ways that vary according to the condition of each Church or Community, these actions can truly engender a life of grace, and can be rightly described as capable of providing access to the community of salvation.”

So, here one finds that the Catholic Church expresses a sincere desire to relate with brothers and sisters of other Churches. There are still some problems found between Churches. However, in spite of all problems and difficulties of this sort, the attitude of the Catholic Church is very different now. She wants to promote unity with her separated brothers and sisters of other Churches and communities. She puts a lot of stress on ecumenism and urges dialogue among the sister Churches. A very strong recommendation in the document on Ecumenism says to avoid judgment, and urges unity with separated brothers. We read in the document: “The ‘ecumenical movement’ means the activities and enterprises which, according to various needs of the Church and opportune occasions, are started and organized for the fostering of unity among Christians. These are: first, every effort

to eliminate words, judgments, and actions which do not respond to the condition of separated brethren with truth and fairness and so make mutual relations between them more difficult; then, 'dialogue' between competent experts from different Churches and Communities.... Through such dialogue, everyone gains a truer knowledge and more just appreciation of the teachings and religious life of both Communions.... Finally, all are led to examine their own faithfulness to Christ's will for the Church and, wherever necessary, undertake with vigor the task of renewal and reform".⁴

The Catholic Church, in spite of the differences, urges us to have dialogue with other Churches and wants that it should be done for the betterment of humanity. All Christians must work for unity, for it was the desire of Jesus Christ who said, 'that all may be one' (Jn. 17.21). The Vatican Council II documents also stress the need to have discussion on theological problems and resolve them. They speak for dialogue on an equal footing. This will help us to know the attitude of separated brothers and sisters and thus lead to a better understanding (cf. No. 9). The Council also urges that future bishops and priests should have mastered a theology carefully worked out in the way of dialogue, and not polemically oriented, especially where it concerns the relations of separated brethren with the Catholic Church. The formation of priests and bishops will create significant progress in bringing about unity and understanding. It will further help to form a faithful laity.⁵

The Catholic Church mentions the special position of the Eastern and Western Churches. It is from the Eastern Churches that the Church of the West has taken many things: for example, its liturgy, spiritual tradition, and jurisprudence. The same can be said about basic dogmas of faith, such as that of the Trinity, and God's Word made flesh. The Churches in the East have suffered much to preserve this faith. This heritage has been handed over by the apostles. The Eastern Churches carry on the apostolic succession, just as the Catholic Church does.

In the West, the Churches and ecclesial Communities separated from the Apostolic See of Rome during the crises of the middle ages. However, there still is a strong bond, as both types have been living together for centuries. These Churches differ from the Catholic Church, but also differ between themselves in

several teachings and beliefs. There are weighty differences between these Churches and the Catholic Church, not only of a historical, sociological, psychological, and cultural nature, but especially in the interpretation of revealed truth. Nevertheless, ecumenical dialogue can still take place, in spite of all these differences. ⁶ Many confess Jesus as God and Lord and as the sole Mediator between God and man. They differ in faith and views with regard to the role of Mary in the work of salvation and in their views concerning Christ, God's word made flesh, and the work of redemption. There is also a difference on matters regarding the Holy Eucharist. However, the sacrament of baptism unites all of us, and ecumenical dialogue must flow from it. We are strengthened by the grace of baptism.

Another very important document of the Vatican Council II called *Nostra Aetate* guides us in many areas of dialogue, not only with other Churches but also with people of other faiths, such as Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Jews. We read in this document: "The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions. She looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and of life, those rules and teachings which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men". ⁷

This document has changed the attitude of the Church towards other religions. It has given a new way of looking at people of other faiths. There is a lot of emphasis on the need to promote interfaith dialogue. This is seen as the mission of the Church, and also as a sign of the present times. The Church cannot afford to ignore the reality that there are millions of people who are not Christians.

Ut Unum Sint

In the encyclical of Pope John Paul II, called *Ut Unum Sint*: On Commitment to Ecumenism, issued in 1995, one can very clearly observe Pope John Paul II pointing out that it is God's plan for the Catholic Church to be committed to ecumenism. This will have the result of gathering all Christians to unity. The Church is the people of God. Together we must give witness of Christ to the whole world. It is the will of God. We read in the encyclical: "The unity of all divided humanity is the will of God. For this

reason he sent his Son, so that by dying and rising for us he might bestow on us the Spirit of love. On the eve of his sacrifice on the Cross, Jesus himself prayed to the Father for his disciples and for all those who believe in him, that *they may be one*, a living communion. This is the basis not only of the duty, but also of the responsibility before God and his plan, which falls to those who through Baptism become members of the Body of Christ, a body in which the fullness of reconciliation and communion must be made present".⁸

It is also a sign of the times, and the Catholic Church commits itself to ecumenism as a duty. This is a sign of commitment to Christ. It gives us hope for a better future. There are many reasons that there should be dialogue. As mentioned earlier, this document bases itself on those reasons. This unity does not merely mean a coming together or a collection of individuals; it has much more depth, as the encyclical states: "It is a unity constituted by the bonds of the profession of faith, the sacraments and hierarchical communion. The faithful are one because, in the Spirit, they are in *communion* with the Son and, in him, share in his *communion* with the Father: Our *fellowship* is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ". (1Jn.1:3). For the Catholic Church, then, the *communion* of Christians is none other than the manifestation in them of grace by which God makes them share in his own *communion*, which is his eternal life".⁹

It is a historical fact that there have been misunderstandings on both sides, on that of the Catholic Church and other Churches. Pope John Paul II says: "There have been crises which have shaken her, the infidelity of some of her ministers, and the faults into which her members daily fall. The Catholic Church knows that, by virtue of the strength which comes to her from the Spirit, the weakness, mediocrity, sins and at times the betrayal of some of her children cannot destroy what God has bestowed on her as part of his plan of grace".¹⁰

The pope has stressed an urgent need for interior conversion and repentance. This is in the light of the Vatican Council II. There is a need for personal and communal conversation. Each one is urged to be more radically converted to the Gospel. This is also the plan of God. There is a need for holiness of life, prayer, and public prayer. The pope goes one step further in saying that the

expression of truth can take different forms. The renewal of these forms of expression has become necessary for the sake of transmitting to the people of today the Gospel message in its unchanging meaning.¹¹

The pope has also given a lot of importance to ecumenical prayer. Ecumenism supports the Christian mission and its credibility. It must be especially present in the life of the Church and in every activity aimed at fostering Christian unity. It is suggested that we keep on having such prayers until Christians come to perfect communion and overcome all obstacles, and then it will be possible to have a common celebration of the Eucharist. There are courageous witnesses of many martyrs in our century, both Catholic and members of the other Churches, who have given witness and serve as proof that can we overcome divisions for the sake of the Gospel.

Pope John Paul II reminds us that Christ calls all disciples to unity. There is a need to renew this call today. Commitment to ecumenism must be based upon the conversion of hearts and upon prayer, which will lead to the necessary purification of past memories. There is a need for mutual forgiveness and reconciliation. There is a need to re-examine the painful past and the hurts which continue even today. All are invited by the power of the Gospel to acknowledge with sincere and total objectivity the mistakes which were made. There is the need for a calm, clear, right and truthful vision of things that can lead to more fulfilling ecumenical relations.

In light of the Vatican Council II, the Catholic Church has committed herself to ecumenism. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, there is a need to carefully interpret 'signs of the times'.

The Catholic Church acknowledges and confesses the weaknesses of her members. She feels the need to be constantly renewed. The Encyclical is meant as a contribution to this most noble goal of increasing unity among all Christians. It seeks to encourage the efforts of all who work for the cause of unity.

In the first chapter, one reads that the reason for ecumenism is that unity is the will of God concerning divided humanity. That is why God sent his Son. Jesus prayed to the Father for his disciples and for all those who believe in him, that they may be one: *Ut*

Unum Sint. It is through baptism that all have become members of the body of Christ.

The pope states that the way of ecumenism is the way of the Church (No. 20). The Vatican urges ecumenism. This sacred Synod exhorts all the Catholic faithful to recognize the signs of the times and to participate in the work of ecumenism'. (Vatican II, Decree of Ecumenism No. 4) It is a duty of the Christian conscience enlightened by faith and guided by love. Jesus himself prayed that '*they may all be one*' (Jn. 17.21, and also 1Jn 1:3). It is a challenge for the Church to work for unity. All Christians are brothers and sisters, and there are many positive elements present in other Churches and ecclesial Communities: "All of these, which come from Christ and lead back to him, belong by right to the one Church of Christ. The separated brethren also carry out many of the sacred actions of the Christian religion. Undoubtedly, in many ways that vary according to the condition of each Church or Community, these actions can truly engender a life of grace, and can be rightly described as capable of providing access to the community of salvation". (No. 13 quoted from the document on Ecumenism No. 15)

There is a need for renewal and conversion, and there is a call to repent. There is a need for personal conversion and communal concession. There is a need to forgive and forget. Forgiveness is a sign of love. There is no need to condemn the other side. There is need for continuous renewal, concession and reform. There is need for the Church to re-examine herself in light of the Gospel. That is what Pope John XXIII asked for when he called the Second Vatican Council, and that is what Pope Paul VI did in the following years.

It was Vatican Council II which, in 1965, rescinded the 1054 excommunication of the Eastern Churches. In ecumenism, there is primacy of prayer. There is a need for a change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians. Prayer must be guided by love. Have common prayer services. Prayer is the soul of the whole ecumenical movement. When Christians pray together, the goal of unity seems closer. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is celebrated in January. In some countries, it is celebrated around

Pentecost. It has become a widespread and well-established tradition. Pope John Paul II himself has attended many ecumenical meetings and participated in prayer sessions. For example, common prayer with the Primate of the Anglican Communion at Canterbury Cathedral (May 29, 1982) and meetings held in the Scandinavian and Nordic Countries (June 1-10, 1989), in North and South America and in Africa, at the headquarters of the World Council of Churches (January 12, 1984) and in the Eucharistic Liturgy in the Church of Saint George at the Ecumenical Patriarchal (November 30, 1979), as well as the service held in Saint Peter's Basilica during the visit of venerable patriarch Dimitrios I (December 6, 1987) to Rome. Many leaders of other Churches have visited the Pope in Rome. These are all very strong steps and signs of ecumenical cooperation and goodwill. (cf. No.24-25)

The second part of the Encyclical is dedicated to ecumenical dialogue. Here the pope gave a direct, moving and impressive reply to the need for dialogue and those who feel that not enough attention is given to this dimension. In No. 32 the Pope says: "Ecumenical dialogue is of essential importance. Through such dialogue everyone gains a truer knowledge and a more just appreciation of the teaching and religious life of both Communions. In addition, these Communions cooperate more closely in whatever projects a Christian conscience demands for the common prayer, where this is permitted. Finally, all are led to examine their own faithfulness to Christ's will for the Church and wherever necessary, undertake with vigor the task of renewal and reform" (Second Vatican ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegration*, no. 4)

"Prayer and dialogue go together. Deeper and more conscious prayer makes dialogue more fruitful. Dialogue depends upon prayer and prayer becomes the more mature fruit of dialogue. 'Dialogue cannot take place merely on a horizontal level, being restricted to meetings, exchange of points of view, or even the sharing of gifts proper to each Community. It has also a primarily vertical thrust, directed towards the One who, as the Redeemer of the world and the Lord of history, is himself our Reconciliation. This vertical aspect of dialogue lies in our acknowledgement, jointly and to each other, that we are men and women who have

sinned. It is precisely this acknowledgement which creates within brothers and sisters living in Communion with one another that interior space where Christ, the source of the Church's unity, can effectively act with all the power of his Spirit, the Paraclete.”¹²

Dialogue can serve as a means of resolving disagreements, disputes and different viewpoints. Ecumenical dialogue prompts the parties involved to question each other in the spirit of understanding, and so is a step towards unity.

Pros and cons of the document

Pope John Paul II wants to renew this call in the present age. It is a challenge for Christians to break down barriers, walls of division and distrust. It is a challenge to overcome obstacles and prejudices which thwart the proclamation of the Gospel of Salvation in the Cross of Jesus, the one Redeemer of all humans. There is a need for commitment to ecumenism based upon the conversion of hearts. There is also a need for commitment to prayer, which will also lead to the necessary purification of past memories. Guided by the Holy Spirit, there is a need for forgiveness and reconciliation. Christians are called to re-examine together their painful past and hurts of the past. There is a need for calm, clear-sighted and truthful vision of things. This vision, enlivened by divine mercy, is capable of freeing people's minds and of inspiring in everyone a renewed willingness in proclaiming the Gospel to all men and women of every race and nation. There is a need to interpret carefully the 'signs of the times'. As the world is at the threshold of the new millennium, there is a need to increase the unity of all Christians until they reach full communion.

The Encyclical is pastoral in character. It seeks to encourage the efforts of all who work for the cause of unity. The Church has suffered and will continue to suffer opposition and persecution. But the hope which sustains her is unshakable, just as the joy which flows from this hope is indestructible. In effect, the firm and enduring rock upon which she is founded is Jesus Christ, her Lord.

It is in God's plan that the Catholic Church bases her ecumenical commitment to unity with all Christians. To believe in Christ means to desire unity; to desire unity means to desire the Church;

to desire the Church means to desire the communion of grace which corresponds to the Father's plan for all eternity. Such is the meaning of Christ's prayer; that they may be one '*Ut Unum Sint*'.

In light of the Second Vatican Council, the need for interior concretion is emphasized. There is a need for personal conversion as well as communal conversion. Each one is urged to be more radically converted to the Gospel and, without ever losing sight of God's plan, change his or her way of looking at things. Prayer is the soul of ecumenical renewal and of the yearning for unity; it is the basis and support of everything the Council defines as 'dialogue'.

Dialogue is an indispensable step along the path toward human self-realization, the self-realization both of each individual and every human community. In the words of Pope Paul VI, dialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas. In some ways, it is always an 'exchange of gifts'. Dialogue helps to overcome division and lead us closer to unity. Dialogue is not only the duty of the Apostolic See, it is also the duty of individual local or particular Churches. A special commission has been established for this purpose. It is one of the Church's priorities.

Ecumenical dialogue is of essential importance. Through such dialogue, everyone gains a truer knowledge and a more just appreciation of the teaching and religious life of both Communions. It contributes to the common good. Ecumenical dialogue is marked by a common quest for truth, particularly concerning the Church. In fact, truth forms consciences and directs efforts to promote unity. Dialogue serves as an examination of conscience. One must recognize his/her sins. Not only personal sins must be forgiven and left behind, but also social sins, which is to say the sinful 'structures' which have contributed and can still contribute to division and to the reinforcement of division. So there is need for a 'dialogue of conversion', and in the words of Pope Paul VI, 'dialogue of salvation'. Dialogue cannot take place merely on a horizontal level, being restricted to meetings, exchanges of views or even sharing of gifts proper to each Community. It has also a primary vertical thrust, directed toward the One who, as the Redeemer of the world and the Lord of history, is himself our Reconciliation.

There must be every possible form of practical cooperation at all levels: pastoral, cultural and social, as well as that of witnessing to the Gospel message. This will yield the fruits of 'grace upon grace' (Jn,1.16). The Universal brotherhood of Christians has become a firm ecumenical conviction.

There is the need for solidarity in the service of humanity. This is possible through taking a stand in the name of Christ on important problems concerning man's calling and on freedom, justice, peace and the future of the world. This is one of the tasks which constitute the mission of Christians: that of reminding society of God's will in a realistic manner, warning the authorities and their fellow citizens against taking steps which would lead to the trampling of human rights.

There is a joint International commission for theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. This Commission was established in 1979. It has been working very successfully. Their working together is like a body (Church) breathing with her two lungs.

The Catholic Church has also restored fraternal relations with the ancient Churches of the East which rejected relations with the dogmatic formulations of the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon. All these Churches sent official observers to the Second Vatican Council. Their Patriarchs have honored the popes by their fraternal visits. These visits have been very joyful.

There is a 'Joint Working Group' which was established in 1964 to work with the World Council of Churches. Since 1968, Catholic theologians have been admitted as full members of the Theological Department of the Council, the Commission of Faith and Order. This Dialogue has been ongoing, and it continues to be very fruitful. There have been meetings with different Churches in Germany, the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Scandinavian and Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland). Pope John Paul II has said that the ecumenical task is 'one of the pastoral priorities' of his Pontificate. Ecumenism is not only an internal question for the Christian Communities but is a matter of the love which God has in Jesus Christ for all humanity.

Fruits of dialogue and plan for the future

This encyclical is very timely as we approach the third millennium. There is a grave need for commitment to ecumenism. The *Ut Unum Sint* inspires us that there is a grave need for conversion of heart and mind, which will lead to the purification of past memories. There is a need for genuine reconciliation. There is an urgent need to work for justice and peace. There is a need to take stand to raise our voices against the injustice done in the world. There is a need to have ecumenical dialogue at all levels, be it dialogue of word, deed, theological exchange, religious experience of development work, or work for justice and peace. It is of prime importance to create universal solidarity and harmony.

Conclusion

As we are entering the new millennium, it is the need of the time that we open our hearts and minds and reach out for dialogue. Let us pray together; let us celebrate together; let us work for the promotion of human dignity, reconciliation, healing, peace and justice. The Catholic Church has opened its doors for fresh air to come in. The fruits of dialogue have been discovered and strong appeals made to make a fresh start. It is a wonderful step forward for Vatican Council II.

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Chapter Nine

Canonization of Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II: its meaning for Asia

Looking towards the canonizations on 27 April
Roncalli and Wojtyła in Asia*

Two great religious leaders and supreme pastors of the Catholic Church namely; Blessed Pope John XXIII and Blessed Pope John Paul II have a great historical significance for the Church in the modern world. They enjoy great respect in the hearts and minds of the Catholics. All other Christian denominations and believers of different religions have also paid rich tribute to their tremendous leadership. Pope John XXIII set a tone and agenda for the 20th century and how to read the signs of the time and how Church should respond to the challenges it is confronted with in the modern world. The invocation of the Vatican Council II by Pope John was a clear sign that how the Church can respond to the challenges in the modern world and how to make message of Christ relevant. Although he died in the year 1963 his vision, mission and inspiration is strongly reflected in the 16 documents of the Vatican Council II, which respond to the situation of the Church in the age lived, whether it is religious freedom laity, religious life, evangelization mission, proclamation, dialogue, and Church in the modern world. These documents have renewed the approach of the Church to its members and people of all religions. These have great significance for the Christians in Asia as well.

Pope John Paul II being supreme pastor of the Church led his flock for 26 years. He took us from the second millennium to the third millennium as a great dynamic leader. He left remarkable and very significant impact not only on the Church but also upon the people of all religions and political states as well. He was respected by all whether Christians or non-Christians; Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Zoroastrians and people of different spiritualities. He was the most travelled Pope — Supreme Pastor of the Catholic Church. He travelled around the globe and left lasting marks upon humanity. He was very humble, dynamic, open to the people of other religions and great promoter of

interreligious dialogue and ecumenism. He also made pastoral visits to several Asian countries such as: Pakistan, India, Singapore, Philippines, Hong Kong and South Korea etc. He was very warmly welcomed by the inhabitants of these countries and has left lasting marks upon us — the Asian inhabitants.

Asia is the cradle of all major religions; Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Islam, Shintoism and Sikhism. God sent his Prophets and revealed holy books upon them. It is the dwelling place of two third of the world population. The land of Asia manifests the plan of salvation of the entire world. God revealed himself through the Hebrew Scripture (Old Testament) and finally through his only son Jesus Christ — so that whoever believes in him may have eternal life for Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.

On the other hand we find that Asia is confronted with many crises and challenges such as of; poverty, illiteracy, injustice, child labour, discrimination on the basis of caste, creed and gender is very common in Asia. There are millions of people who are living below poverty level. They do not have enough to eat, clothes, or have shelter to live in. There is also a strong wave of terrorism, fanaticism, fundamentalism. In some countries terrorist attacks and suicide bombings have become very common. There is a lack of cleaning water. Millions of people have died of religiously motivated violence. There are problems faced by women as they are not given just rights and status in the society. There is a grave issue of law and order. There is a grave need of interfaith harmony, peace, acceptance and respect of one another. There is grave need of freedom of religion and its expressions. In such a scenario I find that Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II have great significance to bring a positive change in the society. Both left lasting impact and significance upon the Church in Asia. It is a reality that in Asia — the place where Jesus Christ was born — Church remains a tiny minority of about 3 per cent. The continent of Asia is most populated. Two third of the world populations lives here and most of the people belong to other religions. They are either, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Zoroastrians, Jains, and Sikhs etc. Christians

remain a tiny minority. The Church in Asia is “Salt of the earth and light of the world” (Mt 5:12-13).

In our Asian situation the Encyclical of Pope John XXIII *Pacem in Terris* is of prime importance. It can influence immensely for the struggles of Asian people on how to address many challenges we are confronted with as well as the challenge of dialogue among people of different religions and especially between Muslims and Christians. It also poses many challenges to us as well. *Pacem in Terris* has set before men and women of good will an immense task for all, especially for us living in Asia. For example, in number 163 of the Encyclical, we read: “Hence among the very serious obligations incumbent upon men of high principles, we must include the task of establishing new relationships in human society, under the mastery and guidance of truth, justice, charity and freedom — relations between individual citizens, between citizens and their respective states, between states, and finally between individuals, families, intermediate associations and states on the one hand, and the world community on the other. There is surely no one who will not consider this a most exalted task, for it is one which is able to bring about true peace in accordance with the divinely established order”.

Although this Encyclical was written 51 years ago, it is very significant for our times as well. Its importance in Asia is even more relevant, and it poses for us great challenges in overcoming the crises we are faced with and establishing lasting peace in this continent. This Encyclical has established principles that are featured in some of the documents of the Vatican Council II. It is wonderful to know that *Pacem in Terris* was the first Encyclical that the Pope did not address to Catholics only, but to “all men of good will”. So it is for all the people of Asia, for Christians and Muslims, and people of all other religions. It encourages and inspires us to do what is good based on truth, justice and charity to bring peace and harmony to our society. Peace is an ongoing process, not just an absence of armed conflict.

In this Encyclical Pope John laid great emphasis on basic human rights, in this order: the right to life, bodily integrity, food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care and necessary social services, the right to respect for one’s person, a good reputation, freedom

to search for the truth, freedom of speech and freedom of information, the right to worship, freedom to choose one's state of life and to form a family, freedom of initiative in the economic field, the right to work, the right to adequate working conditions, a proper wage, private property, freedom of assembly and association, the right to the juridical protection of rights and the right to act freely and responsibly. This is what we want to see realized in Asia.

Pope John Paul II has left a great inspiration for the people of Asia. He was a great religious leader. He was for the freedom of religion. He was for ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. He reached out to meet and welcome people of different religions both in the Vatican and to whichever country he went.

He gave boost to the Christians in Asia in his Encyclical Letters. In particular his Encyclical *Ecclesia in Asia*, offers us ongoing inspiration and great courage to be proud to be Asian Christians. It serves as a remarkable guide for preaching, proclaiming Christ to the people around us and thus for the expansion of the Church. The document stated that "just as in the first millennium the Cross was planted on the soil of Europe, and in the second, on the soil of America and Africa, we can pray that in the Third Christian Millennium a great harvest of faith will be reaped in this vast and vital continent of Asia" (EA,1). So the mission of proclamation is entrusted to it. The same Encyclical Pope John Paul acknowledges of the "importance of dialogue as a characteristics mode of the Church's life in Asia" (EA, 3) He explains that dialogue "is not simply strategy for peaceful coexistence among peoples; it is an essential part of the Church's mission.... A veritable vocation for the Church" (EA, 31). Dialogue is "more than a way of fostering mutual knowledge and enrichment; it is a part of the Church's evangelization mission, an expression of the mission *ad gentes*" (EA). This dialogue is linked with evangelization. So both dimensions of the mission of the Church are of prime importance in Asia. There is also great emphasis on ecumenism.

Therefore, it is really wonderful that both of the great Popes will be canonized. Their life and teachings will remain a great inspiration for the people of Asia. It will help us in our mission of evangelization, interreligious dialogue, ecumenism, of

speaking for human rights, equality, justice, freedom of thought and freedom of religion and expression of religious practices. Their lives help us to keep on struggling for equal rights of all, for collaboration among nations and religions. To speak for the rights of the oppressed, minorities and marginalized. They also inspire us to be firm in our faith, no matter how many difficulties or challenges come in our way as Christians. We must keep Christ in front of us who suffered, died and rose on the third day for us and for our salvation. Let us be proud as Christians, the followers of Christ and as Asian as Christ — the Word of God — was incarnated in Asia.

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Chapter Ten

Concept of *Puja* in Hinduism*

Worship is an essential part of every religion. Through worship, one attempts to express reverence for the Ultimate Reality. Through worship, the devotee attempts to enter the sacred state of communion with that which is worshipped. In the world around us we see that rituals, sacraments, prayers and spiritual practices are used to create a sense of sacred atmosphere, or perhaps a state of consciousness in which people hope to touch or be touched by the eternal. Generally speaking, through worship, believers address the divine. The element of worship is a common factor in different religions, including Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism. In this essay, one type of Hindu worship called *Puja* will be discussed and elaborated upon.

In Hinduism, worship takes many forms, among which are recitation of the name of the deity, congregational singing, night vigils of prayer and song, oblations and fire sacrifices, meditation and pilgrimage.¹ These worships may take place at home, in the village, in the city temple, or in private. *Puja* is one of the most popular and significant forms of worship in which a Hindu expresses devotion to the deity.² *Puja* is performed both at home and in the temple. It is a ritual offering of hospitality to a god as a most welcome and honored guest. Sometimes this worship is also offered to a spiritual leader called a *guru*. In the words of Jonathan Z. Smith, “It is a personal ritual of devotion in which the devotee offers service, prayers and comforts to the god in exchange for the god’s blessing.”³

With regard to the origin and etymology of the word *puja*, scholarly opinion is divided. Many scholars have argued that *puja* was initially a Dravidian practice native to India. In the view of Sanskritist Paul Theme: “The term *puja* is derived from the Sanskrit (and hence Aryan) *prc*, ‘to mix’, a reference to the *mahuparka*, or mixture of honey and water that was commonly offered to guest in ancient Indian times... it had once referred primarily to a ritual of guest worship. The offering and gestures characteristic of *puja* are in fact still utilized in India to honor distinguished guests, as well as other meritorious persons, sacred

plants and animals, and occasionally also weapons or tools. Furthermore, elements from ancient guest ritual such as offering a seat and washing the feet still play a significant role in conventional *pujas*.⁴

So *puja*, on the one hand, is an individual's worship toward the deity in which hospitality and gifts are offered, and on the other hand, through this *puja*, service and comforts are provided to God, who is believed to be alive in the symbol or image. This divinity is believed to be the one who protects and showers blessings upon the devotee. It is not a communal worship. It is a private and personal devotion to the deity. *Puja* is a method of approaching divinity. "*Puja* in its simplest form is the welcoming of a most desired guest, the deity."⁵ Through this form of ritual, a devotee can approach spiritual leaders, animals or plants as well. The ritual serves as a gesture of thanks for the blessings received and seeks protection for future life.

There are four types of settings in which *puja* is performed. It can be done at home, in the city or village temple, or at the time of festivals. Since it will not be possible to deal with all of these types of *puja* in this short essay, I will confine myself to only the type of *puja* which is performed at home.

Puja at home is the most popular, important, visible, and common form of Hindu worship.⁶ Nearly every Hindu home has a shrine where pictures or small images of various deities are kept. In many homes, one can find a special prayer room set aside for *puja*. A home altar is generally crowded with images, pictures, and statues of different deities. A special and favorite deity of the family presides from a central, slightly elevated position. Each deity receives attention, although the family deity or the deity whose feast day it is receives special offerings. If the devotee has a *guru*, a picture of him or her is usually part of the shrine, and one honors the *guru* as well as the deities as adored guests. The duration of performing this *puja* could last from one to three hours. This worship is performed daily. The timing is usually after the morning bath and after one has washed in the evening. Both males and females can perform *puja*.

According to Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, "In daily life, a Hindu (generally the wife, who is thought to have more power to intercede with the gods), makes an offering (*puja*) of fruits or

flowers before a small shrine in the house. She also makes offering to local snakes or trees, obscure spirits (benevolent and malevolent) dwelling in her own garden or at crossroads or other magical places in the village.⁷

Females are free to do *puja*. They are not allowed, however, to approach the shrine during menstruation, for they are considered unclean. In many homes, it may be the wife who worships a picture or image of Rama, Krishna, Shiva, or a local deity in the kitchen, locus of the hearth, where she prepares the food that unites the family with its ancestors and gods.⁸

Every family or individual does *puja* according to the sect to which one belongs. These who do *puja* of Vishnu as the supreme deity are known as Vaishnavas. Those who do *puja* of Shiva are called Shaivas, and those who are devotees of the Goddess are Shaktas.⁹

There is a certain pattern to performing *puja*. There are sixteen traditional steps, or *upacaras*. But a devotee is free to follow all or most of these depending on his or her will. These steps in *puja* begin with an invitation to the deity to enter the image. Then the deity is offered a seat and water to wash his/her feet. This follows an offering of water for sipping to cleanse his/her mouth and lips. The image is then bathed, dried, and presented with pieces of cloth or clothing and a sacred thread. Gifts of perfume of fragrant ointment, flowers, and incense are presented to the deity and then placed before the deity to eat. After the feasting of the deity, the worshipper circumambulates the image and respectfully bows before the deity. Repeating the deity's holy name, the devotee places flowers on the image as the final offering. Waving of lamps accompanied by a devotional hymn often follows the *puja*. Food and flowers that have been received and blessed by the deity during the service are then shared among the devotees, who in partaking of the food partake of the god's grace and favor.¹⁰

In *puja*, the deity's image is treated as if it were a living king or queen. The statue of the deity is treated as if the deity is really present in it. The food offered to the deity is believed to be actually absorbed by the deity in an invisible and rather mystical process. The good attention of the devotee is at the heart of the *puja*. The *puja* is supposed to be done properly, with the right

spirit, right fullness of heart and right manners. Performance of *puja* with such attitude and manner brings the full attention of the deity to communicate with the devotee.

Spiritual goal of Hinduism

In order for us to better understand the significance of *puja* in Hinduism I will now explain the spiritual goal of the religion out of which *puja* springs. There are four aims of life in Hinduism, and those are called: 1. *Karma*, 2. *Artha*, 3. *Dharma*, and 4. *Moksha*. That means duty and virtue, wealth and statecraft, pleasure and happiness, and finally, liberation from existence on earth. The first three aims of life are empirical, whereas the fourth one is transcendental.¹¹

This fourth aim of liberation is commonly known as *moksha*. *Moksha* is the highest, and is variously described as state of unalloyed bliss, the self's absorption in the absolute and enjoying the attitude of the deity's presence."¹² It is the spiritual goal of Hinduism. It means "liberation" that is, liberation from the cycles of rebirth.

As the concept of *moksha* is the main concern of Indian religious thought, it lies at the very base of the *Upanishad*. However, this notion is neither found in old Vedic literature, nor in the *Samhitas*, nor in the *Brahmanas*.¹³ The notion of *moksha* became more belabored in both the *Mahabharata* and the Laws of Manu. This concept gives an idea of immortality, and it results in a privileged position, the major effect of which is to avoid cycles of rebirth. The essential point is that *moksha* is liberation from the ties of action (*Karma*) and from *samsara*, the endless chain with no beginning. In achieving this goal, the practitioner expects to never come back to the world again. There are some ascetic traditions which teach that this release may take place before one's physical death. These traditions speak of such a person as "*Jivanmukta*, the person who is released while still alive."¹⁴

In the *Bhagavad-Gita*, there are three paths of self-discipline which lead to freedom, or *moksha*. These paths are through action (*Karma Yoga*), through knowledge (*Jnana Yoga*) and through devotion (*Bhakti Yoga*). In order to achieve the goal of *moksha*, the believer is encouraged to engage in following the spiritual disciplines or paths called *yoga*. This will lead to a state of purity, balance, wisdom, knowledge and peacefulness of mind.

This state is also described as *sattvic*. To increase these qualities of *sattvic*, one needs to follow the path of *yoga*. *Karma* is the path of action in the world. *Jnana* is the path and way of wisdom, and it deals with knowledge and mind. By following this path, the seeker develops spiritual virtues such as calmness, renunciation and concentration. Here the believer has an intense longing for liberation. The ultimate wisdom is spiritual insight. *Bhakti* is the path of devotion. Here the center of the believer's aim is personal devotion to the deity and worship of the supreme being. This path leads to unity, which is the ultimate reality and is the state of *moksha*.¹⁵

In Hinduism, there are social classes and every person must perform a regulated *dharmā* (duty) according to this class. A Hindu person belongs to one of these four social classes/castes: *Brahmin* (priest), *Kshatriya* (ruler), *Vaishya* (merchant) and *Shudras* (laborer). Roles are set for each class/caste, and people from these social classes must perform their duties faithfully to attain *moksha*.

There are also four stages of life. The first stage is that of *Brahmacharya* (student), in which religious and spiritual education is received. The second is that of *Grihastha* (householders), in which the individual is married and discharges family and social obligations. In the third stage of *Vanaprastha* (retiree), the individual retires to a forest to meditate on the spiritual truths. In the fourth and final stage of *Sannyasin* (wanderer), the individual renounces the world and is free from the first three stages of life, which are governed by *Dharma*. The fourth stage is that of the ascetic, and it is beyond *Dharma*.¹⁶

“The pursuit of *moksha*, according to some ethicists, requires one to undergo the life state of an ascetic (*sannyasin*).¹⁷ According to other ethicists, however, the first three human aims, especially *Dharma*, are necessary conditions for attaining *moksha*. Though *Dharma* has no transcendental reality, it is metaphysically related to *Karma*, or the law of moral causation. According to the law of *Karma*, every deed of an individual is the result of his past deeds, and what the person will be in future depends upon what deeds he is performing now. Good deeds done will bring good effects, and bad deeds done will result in bad effects. The enjoyments

and suffering of one's present life are the results of one's past life and will have a significant impact on one's future life. Therefore, to achieve *moksha* one must perform good moral deeds and social action in the group one belongs to. Castes are the social groups through which the law of actions (*karma*) operates. So it is necessary that a person perform his duties faithfully in the social group into which he is born. Good actions and discipline will lead to *moksha* and save the devotee from the painful cycle of rebirth.

Here are two stanzas taken from the *Bhagavad-Gita*, which sums up the spiritual goal of Hinduism:

*Whatever you do - what you take,
what you offer, what you give,
what penances you perform -
do as an offering to me, Arjuna!
You will be freed from the bonds of action,
from the fruit of fortune and misfortune;
armed with the discipline of renunciation,
your self liberated, you will join me.*¹⁸

Many modern Hindu leaders, such as Swami Vivekananda Mohandas Gandhi, and Aurobindo Ghose, have stressed the necessity of uniting spiritual life with social concern. They feel that spiritual and social aspects are interrelated, and we cannot do without either. One is bound to perform the duties set by the religion and the stage of life one is in. This will lead the *atman*, or soul, to an eternal escape from *samsara*, the *Karma-run* wheel of birth and rebirth.

To sum up to the spiritual goal of Hinduism, one can say that it is an "escape from the *Karma-run* wheel of birth, death and rebirth, which is called *samsara*." To escape from *samsara* is to achieve *moksha*, or liberation from the limitation of space, time and matter through realization of the immortal Absolute."¹⁹ The achievement of this goal may take many lifetimes, depending on how much good or bad one has done. This state of *moksha* is of eternal peace, bliss and immortality. This goal is very much related to one's deeds on earth. These deeds are interrelated with one's social actions. Moreover, this liberation can also be achieved while the person is still alive.

The relationship between religious practice and the spiritual goal

There is a very strong relationship between the religious practice of *puja* and the spiritual goal of *moksha* in Hinduism. The ritual of *puja* comes under the third path called *Bhagti*, or devotion to reach the goal of *moksha*. In *puja*, the personal god is invoked through prayer formulations known as *mantras*. Here one finds a foundation of a relationship with the Lord which is built upon love and confidence. It is in return for this *puja* that the god, through his benevolence, grants his devotee deliverance from the cycle of rebirth. “Sometimes, *moksha* appears as a favor granted by the god, owing nothing at all to human effort.”²⁰ It is possible that the devotee may achieve his spiritual goal while performing *puja* as a gift from the god which he is worshipping. There are several traditions in Hindu religion which state that *moksha* is won by worshipping a personal god.”²¹ There are some epic poems in the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, which state that liberation, given in a mythological context, is granted by gods. Esnoul mentions one such reference, saying, “One of the most striking examples is provided by Krishnaism. In the separate forms of a child, a warrior, and a lover, the hero Krishna is a permanent actor in the quest for salvation of his worshippers.”²² This notion further strengthens the strong relations between *puja* and *moksha*. As related earlier, the deity is treated as living being, and he can grant liberation to his devotee. Krishna is also a manifestation of the idea that deities are not separate, but rather an essential part of an individual, whether male or female. There is a deep and profound satisfaction in welcoming and fulfilling the needs of the deity. Most Hindus perform such *puja* in order to win the deity’s favor for some request, or, in the case of a vow, to fulfill a promise made at the time of request, which has since been favorably answered.

There is a verse in the *Bhagavad-Gita* where one reads Krishna saying to the devotee,

*The leaf or flowers or fruit or water
that he offers with devotion
I take from the man of self-restraint
in response to his devotion.*²³

The devotee seeks the happiness of the god so that his own life may be happy. Service is offered to the deity as a gesture of submission and belief in him. In *Puja*, the devotee welcomes the deity as an honored guest. He serves the deity and believes that the deity blesses him. He is offering thanksgiving for many gifts received in his life, such as of food, clothes and animals. The sincere performance of the ritual of *puja* will save the soul of the devotee from the *Karma*-run wheel of birth and rebirth called *samara*, and his atman (soul) will be led to *moksha*. The performance of one's social duties is also an essential part of the life of the person. It depends upon social actions and how faithfully they are performed. Doing good deeds and action will result in a good life in the future, and bad actions will result in a bad life in the future. The performance of *puja* is believed to save the person from a bad life in the future. It is a sign of spiritual life and spiritual growth as well. By doing *puja*, the devotee has the *drshana* of the deity. Psychologically, also, a person feels very confident and at ease when he performs *puja*. There is a feeling of being close to the deity.

The performance of *puja* is an essential part of the life of all Hindus. It is a must for an adult in his stages as householder, retiree, and wanderer. For example, it is the head of the family, mother or father, who has to do *puja* at home. The *puja* is the basic ritual of people in Hinduism, and it shares basic elements of *Bhakti*. It cannot be separated from the life and duties of a Hindu believer. It serves as a vehicle to reach the divine. It gives a personal touch to the devotee. It helps him to concentrate, meditate and make the deity a part of his everyday life. There is a close relationship expressed through offering and granting comforts to the deity. The performances of such an act will free him from the cycle of rebirth, and he will attain *moksha*. Therefore, there is a very strong bond between this ritual and the ultimate spiritual goal.

The things I have found

I have found that *puja* plays an important role in the life of a Hindu believer. It is performed in homes, villages, temples and shrines. It is to show that gods are in every sphere of life. They are "part and parcel" of daily living. Through *puja*, they are welcomed and honored as guests. This brings spiritual

satisfaction and psychological relief. In doing *puja*, the devotee feels that his god has come to visit. This god will certainly protect the devotee and his family.

Puja is an essential part of life for a Hindi believer. This helps him to attain his spiritual goal of *moksha*. Moreover, daily lives are directed by and relationships with other people are inspired from this action. *Puja* is done at certain times of the day, and the rest of the time is dedicated to performing social duties. So, *puja* is a part of the two dimensions of life, towards God and towards society. I see that one thing leads to another. Actions, knowledge and devotion will result in immortality and eternal bliss and peace, saving worshippers from samsara. I have learnt that *puja* is not a communal but a private ritual. I have also discovered that both men and women can perform this ritual. *Puja* is not only performed for a divine or heavenly being, but it can also be performed for a *guru*, who is a spiritual leader, and is believed to have attained the state of *moksha*. By performing this ritual, one is spiritually renewed and psychologically satisfied. I also realized that adults who do *puja* see it as part of the duty of whatever stage they are in life. There is no mention of children performing this ritual.

One can find several similarities with *puja* in several devotional practices of Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Jews and Jain. For example, the devotion to Mary in Christianity and the *puja* of Buddha in Buddhism, which includes reverence of his bodily relics and items that the Buddha had touched or used, such as *Bodhi* Tree. This cult is extended to the images of *Buddha* and *bodhisattvas*.²⁴ In Islam, too, one can see many rituals and practices which show the same sort of cult, such as when Muslims visit the shrines of *Sufi* saints.

By way of conclusion, it can be said that *puja* practices are common in several religions, although they vary in significance and degree and also in how the divinity is approached and understood. However, the goals and patterns seem to be very much the same and are seen as part of daily life. *Puja* is also interconnected with social life. It is one of the ways which lead to the achievement of the goals of eternal life in Hinduism as well as in other religions.

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Chapter Eleven

'We are the people of hope'

Dominicans and Education in Pakistan *

Fr James Channan, OP and Sr Josephine Michael, OP

Introduction

Dominican Friars and Sisters have been playing a significant role in the field of education in Pakistan, not only since independence in 1947, but even before Partition. The first Dominicans to arrive in that part of the sub-Continent which is now Pakistan were Friars from the Roman Province of Italy in 1931, followed soon afterwards by Dominican Sisters, also from Rome, in 1933. Later on, they were joined by Friars from St. Joseph's Province, New York, United States of America and by Sisters from Malta and America. Responding to the great need for education, these early missionaries established a number of schools and hostels, including several in remote areas and villages. Both Muslim and Christian students were offered a quality education which included Gospel values and a great emphasis on the teaching of truth, justice, peace, love, equality, honesty, respect and the search for knowledge. As the later twentieth century unfolded, young Pakistani women and men joined these missionaries and, over time, entirely replaced them, continuing and expanding the educational work begun by them. Indeed, the very great challenges of Pakistan's socio-political, religious and economic context in recent decades have only heightened the critical need for education of various kinds and at all levels. It is that context, in all its complexity, which continues to inspire Pakistani Dominicans to devote themselves chiefly to the apostolate of education, and it is the particular features of that context which largely shape the nature of their response. If that context presents great difficulties and challenges to be overcome, it also offers potential resources in the reserves of powerful human and religious gifts among the people.

The challenging context of education in Pakistan

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan, established out of great conflict and violence in 1947 as a homeland for Muslims of the sub-Continent, naturally has a huge majority Muslim population (approximately 96%). But it is also multi-cultural and multi-

religious, with minority groups of Christians, 1.8% Hindus 1.6% Zoroastrians, Tribal and Sikhs. Throughout its sixty-six year history, Pakistan has continued to experience great political turmoil, suffering under military regimes for many of those years, enduring tensions between political parties and religious leaders, and struggling to move forward from a still very constraining level of economic and human development.¹

These circumstances have given rise to many problems and have negatively affected both social harmony and the education system. Fundamentalism, for example, leading to the infamous blasphemy laws and other discriminatory regulations, continues to create a dangerous and insecure environment, especially for Christians and other minorities. Poverty is another serious hindrance to progress. Many people cannot afford education, even if there were sufficient schools, resulting in a high level of adult illiteracy (approximately 45%²). The totally free *madrassas* run by Islamic mosques (sometimes including militant and terrorist groups) offer only the basic teachings of the Quran, but not the common government-prescribed syllabus, which is also largely based on Islamic teaching and is very limited. In fact, even though Islam emphasises the importance of education – proclaiming that its essence is “to know Allah” - the *madrassas* are quite deliberate in not teaching modern science, seeing it as merely a product of the West and likely to lead Muslim children to adopt a Western life style. As a result, many students are ill-prepared for modern society.³

While Pakistan’s social and political difficulties obviously have a damaging effect on issues of schooling, in a circular cause-and-effect pattern, it is evident that a number of serious shortcomings in the education system itself contribute significantly to the

¹Pakistan, ranked at 146 out of 186 countries on the Human Development Index which measures health, education and income, is among the countries at the lower end of the human development scale. See United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Report 2013, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR2013>

²The UNDP Report 2013 assesses Pakistan’s adult literacy rate at 54.9%.

³See article by Shoaib Adnan of Karachi, found at www.hamariweb.com

critical problems within the country.⁴ In addition to the problems noted above, inequalities of various kinds are rife. There is the *different medium of education* (Urdu or English) between the public and private sectors, which creates division among the people and contributes to high drop out rates as well as high rates of illiteracy. *Disparities* between regions in the *resourcing of schools* create another inequality. For example, schools in the Province of Baluchistan (the largest by area) are less well-resourced than the most populous Province of Punjab, and in the very poor Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), the literacy rate is a deplorable 29.5% for males and 3% for females (national overall literacy 54.9%). *Gender discrimination* is a major drawback not only for the education system but for the entire nation.⁵ The current ratio of boys to girls in primary school is 10:4, a cause for great concern, and in many areas, females are prevented from going to school at all. *Technical education*, so critical in today's world, is also sadly lacking. Exacerbating all these problems is the often poor quality of education resulting from *inadequately trained teachers*, especially in government schools, and underlying all of them is the *low level of government funding for education* compared to a larger percentage of Pakistan's national budget spent on the armed forces.

Within this bleak picture of the difficulties besetting Pakistani education, a political event in 1971 which seriously affected Christians, and consequently the whole nation, was the *nationalization of Christian (Urdu medium) schools*. School properties belonging to dioceses were appropriated by the government and the opening of any new Christian schools was prohibited. In what was virtually an overnight promulgation, a well-established Christian education system built up over the years was destroyed. English medium schools, whose students were largely Muslim, were not nationalized and so continued to operate regularly,

⁴For a full discussion of the problems summarised here, see Hina Rehman and Nurshad Khan, "Flaws in Pakistan's Educational System" in *Abasyn Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol 4, No.1,70-83, at <http://64.17.184.140/wp-content/uploads/2012/12>

⁵ The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2013 (which measures 'four pillars' of socio-economic gender inequality) places Pakistan in the 2nd worst position of those countries surveyed – 135 out of 136 countries. See www.weforum.org/issues/global-gender-gap-report-2013

whereas mainly Christian children from the Urdu medium schools went into the hands of Muslim teachers. This caused great concern for Christian parents who feared that their children were learning only *Islamyat* (Study of Islam) and wrong notions about Christianity.⁶ Further aggravating this unhappy situation, Christian students suffered discrimination in the nationalized schools. After three decades of enduring this situation, in an act of political reversal, these schools were denationalized again in 2001.

The imperatives for action arising from reflection on all these circumstances of recent history are clear. Since good quality education is the most important element of any nation's developmental progress, it is of paramount importance that the present situation be improved, so that children are not deprived of their basic right to acquire knowledge. A cause for hope is that within the heritage of the people of Pakistan, there are potentially significant resources which can be drawn upon for this purpose.

Potential resources in Pakistani heritage for promoting progress

The multi-cultural and multi-religious heritage of Pakistan includes several guiding principles and traditions which point to and encourage the way forward. It also includes the example of certain role models capable of inspiring both teachers and students to strive for excellence in education.

Built into the nation's founding values are the ideals inherent in Islam itself. According to Islam, education is the right of every human. As the Holy Prophet says, 'To acquire knowledge is the duty of every Muslim. And whoever teaches another performs an act of worship.' Unfortunately, due to the social and economic situations outlined above, these ideals are far from always realised in practice.

Of central importance for the topic under discussion is the Christian tradition with its long heritage of fostering the intellectual life in the service of faith. For not only was it necessary in the early years of Christianity to develop a rational

⁶Due to the suddenness of the government take-over, the Church was ill-prepared for alternative parish arrangements for the catechetical, moral and spiritual formation of Christian students, a task previously carried out by the schools.

way to understand and express Christian faith; it was and is in studying the 'book of creation' in all its dimensions that we come to know the Creator. Within that same Christian tradition, and further emphasizing the importance of study for preaching and teaching, is the Dominican tradition. It was Dominic himself who introduced study and learning as an essential part of the Dominican way of leading others to salvation, and we see this charism exemplified again in Thomas Aquinas, who urged us to share what we have contemplated,⁷ in Catherine of Siena who learnt the way of Christ in order to lead others to salvation, and in many other Dominican forebears.

Embodying this charism in a unique way in the twentieth century, and of special significance for Pakistani Dominicans, especially the School-Missionary Sisters, is their founder, Mother Luigia Tincane.⁸ Dedicated to serving the development of culture and education wherever there was need, her example and teachings have continued to inspire and encourage the Sisters in their commitment to the noble mission of teaching. 'No suffering is keener than an unsatisfied yearning towards knowledge, no poverty more painful than that of the mind... no joy ... greater than the possession of truth'... [which] 'has strong appeal on our being; our spirit yearns for it as does a hungry beggar, until he [sic] has found what he needs'. Those who founded other communities of Sisters also have their particular ethos and example which inspire their followers.

There are also eminent Pakistanis, scholars and leaders, who in spite of obstacles, have not only advanced in religious knowledge but who have gained expertise in secular scientific fields as well. In recent history, for example, there are people such as the nation's founder, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Allama Muhammad Iqbal, and Sir Syed Ahmed Khan.⁹ Outstanding women scholars and leaders have also led the way, for example; Fatima Jinnah, Benazir Bhutto, Asma Jahagir, Hina

⁷It was Thomas who gave us the well-known motto, *contemplari et contemplare aliis tradere* – to contemplate and share with others the fruits of contemplation.

⁸LuigiaTincani(1889-1976), faithful follower of St. Dominic and St. Catherine, was declared Venerable by the Church in June 2011.

⁹See reference in footnote 2 above.

Jillani, Sherry Rehman, Fehmida Mirza, Shreen Mazari, Mira Falbous, Maleeha Lodhi, Azra Abbas, Kishwar Naheed etc.

The very problems themselves, too, can be seen to present a potentially positive force for change. For in their pervasive and negative impact on people, coupled with deep hunger for learning and aspirations for freedom and self-realization, the obstacles can positively energize people to work for change.

A recent eminent example of this positive force activated by oppression is the very courageous teenager young girl, Malala Yousafzai from the Swat Valley in northern Pakistan, where females are mostly prevented from going to school. With courage beyond her teenage years, Malala continued to speak out as an advocate of education for girls, risking her very life in the process. Narrowly surviving assassination, Malala has gained international recognition and has received several awards from various nations and organisations, including Harvard University. She is the face of girls and women who hunger for education in Pakistan – or indeed elsewhere – in spite of militant challenges and threats, and has become a universal symbol of courage in the cause of education for girls.

The educational work of Dominican Sisters in Pakistan

In the midst of this very challenging social environment in Pakistan, strengthened in the memory of Dominican forebears, and encouraged by the power of hope, Dominican Sisters of four apostolic congregations are committed to the work of education, both formal and informal, in a number of ways and across a wide area.¹⁰ What the Sisters do, where they do it, and how they approach their work gives a glimpse of the nature and emphases of their ministry.

Both elementary and higher grade schools operate in numerous places in the dioceses of Rawalpindi/Islamabad, Faisalabad, Lahore, Multan, and the Apostolic Prefecture of Quetta. These schools, both English language and Urdu medium, cater for

¹⁰ The apostolic Congregations include Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena, the Union of St. Catherine of Siena Missionaries for Schools, the Dominican Sisters of Malta, and the Dominican Congregation of Our Lady of the Rosary. All are supported by the prayer of the contemplative Dominican Nuns at the Monastery of the Angels in Karachi.

Muslim and Christian students. In the English medium schools, which tend to be more middle class, the majority of students are Muslim, though quite a good number of Christians now also study in English medium schools. In the Urdu medium schools, which cater more for the children of poorer families, the fee is nominal and the majority of students are Christian. However, this is changing due to a government policy which converted Urdu medium schools into English medium schools.

From the very beginning, the Sisters have made considerable efforts to make education accessible to the children of poorer families (often the Christians) and for those unable to get to schools. One of the ways in which they have done this is by establishing schools in the bastis (the poor colonies/villages on the outskirts of larger cities and towns) where fees are either non-existent or nominal. They have been able to do this by subsidizing these schools with income derived from the more middle class English medium schools.

Another means to help provide education for children from rural villages where there may be no schools at all are the hostels established near the Sisters' schools in the towns and cities. In the early years of establishing the Dominican mission in Pakistan, Bishop Cialeo Benedict OP, who also asked the Sisters to open an orphanage for girls and boys, was a keen promoter of these hostels. Such safe and secure residential arrangements near the schools have been of particular benefit for village girls who would otherwise have no real options. Though the Sisters themselves do not conduct tertiary education institutes (though some Sisters teach in them), hostels are also provided for those girls and boys attending colleges and universities.

In fact the Sisters are keenly aware of the need to empower girls and women, who suffer a high degree of inequality in Pakistan. (See figures quoted above in this article.) The Sisters know well that education is the key to improving equality, so they constantly try to improve awareness about women's own rights and potential, as well as promoting understanding about the right of education for all. They also offer a range of support ministries for children and adults, not only in formal schooling, but in the many informal ways that learning and formation can proceed. Support ministries include social and medical work, sewing

centers where those unable to continue at school can learn useful skills, and a range of pastoral assistance in parishes – sacramental preparation, spiritual formation and family life needs – child care, hygiene information, visitation of families and sick people.

It is above all the spiritual and professional approach which Sisters try to bring to their ministries which infuse them with special value. As Luigia Tincani believed, teaching was not to be seen as a job, but rather as a mission: ‘Consider the souls of your students as something holy, a good which God entrusted to you and for which you are responsible to God alone’. So the Sisters work hard to form themselves professionally, undertaking preparatory studies as part of their religious commitment and service for God. They know that the learning relationship between teacher and student is at its best when, as Thomas Aquinas said, the teacher’s own fire of knowledge can light the flame in the other’s mind. To keep this ‘fire’ burning as brightly as possible, the Sisters regularly arrange refresher courses, seminars and days of recollection in order to improve their own level of knowledge and competence in methodology. This not only enhances personal self-confidence but encourages moral and spiritual growth as well. The spirit of Mother Tincani, as well as the example of the other founders, constantly encourages the Sisters in fostering the best interests of their students. She held that at the heart of the Christian vocation was the call to be an educator: ‘To be a Christian is to be a disciple and an imitator of Christ, so that nobody could ever be a Christian (alter Christus) without feeling compelled to be an apostle and educator of others’.

The work of the friars

The educational work of the Dominican Friars, with their smaller numbers, is less extensive than that of the Sisters, yet it is no less significant in its goals and the manner in which it is delivered. Schools, serving both Christian and Muslim students, and staffed by both Muslim and Christian teachers and professors, are operated in the Warispura and Bahawalpur parishes, and a college and school is also established by a Dominican friar Aldino Amato of Italian origin in a village no. 6/4-L, near

Okara.¹¹ These schools and colleges are rendering tremendous services to the Pakistani Christians and Muslims. As with the Sisters' schools, the intentional mingling of believers of the two faiths is seen as an opportunity to promote interfaith understanding at the grass-roots level as 'dialogue of life'.

In addition to these schools, the running of parishes and the offering of retreats and days of recollection, the Friars also administer the Pastoral Institute of Multan, a well recognized adult education facility not only in Pakistan but in the rest of the world as well. This institute, built in 1971 by the Dominicans, was the first adult education institution of its kind to offer a range of courses for Christian laity. It offers one year Religions Teachers Course (RTC) as well as English Language classes, courses are tailored to meet the needs of catechists, teachers, those seeking basic Christian formation, and religion teachers. The Institute publishes two magazines - Focus and Achchha Charwaha (Good Shepherd) - serving the needs of the whole Church in Pakistan. At present also, the Director of the Institute is a friar and another is a member of the teaching staff.

Promoting interreligious understanding and dialogue has been an area of prime importance for the Friars from their very beginning in Pakistan. This ministry gained even further significance when a long-time dream was realized in November 2010 - the establishment of the Dominican Peace Centre in Lahore, the first of its kind in Pakistan. Dedicated to improving interfaith dialogue and harmonious social relations, especially between Christians and Muslims, this Centre is a place of meetings, conferences, sharing, celebrations of international days announced by the United Nation, publication and scholarly research.¹²

In the usual Dominican way, and faithful to the charism of Dominic himself, the Friars pay great attention to ensuring a high level of education for all those delivering services – whether in the schools, the parishes, or places of adult formation, as well as

¹¹The school in the village No. 6/4-L, Okara is established by Fr Aldino Amato OP.

¹²Editorial note: The Director of the Peace Centre, James Channan OP, is often invited to lecture at national and international conferences in Europe, the United States, and various Asian countries. He has received several national and international peace awards.

in the national and diocesan seminaries,¹³ where some Sisters also teach. Studies include all those areas of expertise necessary to support the various ministries – e.g. theology, sacred scripture, philosophy, Islamic studies, Arabic language, interfaith and Christian Muslim dialogue, spirituality, counseling, ecumenism and liturgy. A number of Friars also preach through the written word - in books published (both in Urdu and English) and in their scholarly research.

Conclusion

In this brief account of our Dominican mission in Pakistan, we have outlined the ways in which we seek to respond to the challenging signs of our times. Though our country is living through a very difficult period, politically, socially and economically, though violence is common and hatred is rife, and though corruption and injustice infect even the field of education, we strive to make a difference, for the sake of our people's well-being. Educating in such an environment is an uphill battle. But *we are the people of hope*, and we will never give up making every effort to transform our country into a peaceful place in which to live. Through our prayer and study, through seeking to live the gospel values of love, justice, equality and truth, we offer our work in education, in social advancement, in faith formation and in interfaith and Christian-Muslim dialogue. We know that education is a key to progress – a quality education delivered in an environment where respect, tolerance and forgiveness are experienced realities, and where both girls and boys can develop their God-given talents for their own fulfillment and for the betterment and development of the Pakistani nation.

* This article was written at the invitation of Sr. Gabrielle Kelly OP and Fr Kevin Saunders OP, for publication in the 2nd edition of 'Towards the Intelligent Use of Liberty: Dominican Approaches in Education', Australia

¹³Seminaries where Friars and some Sisters also teach include: St. Thomas', Faisalabad, St. Mary's, Lahore, St. Francis Xavier National Major Seminary, Lahore and the National Catholic Institute, Karachi.

PART TWO

INTERVIEWS

A Friar in a Muslim Nation

Interview by Joop Koopman, USA

As Pakistani troops battle Islamic extremists, and some three million people are uprooted from their homes facing rapidly deteriorating conditions, the mission of Father James Channan, O.P., is put into sharp relief. He tends a flock that is part of a Catholic community, accounting for just 1 percent of a population of 170 million. (Protestants make up another 1 percent.) In that setting, he said on a recent visit to New York, interfaith dialogue is of paramount importance.

Fr. Channan is the Vice-Provincial of the Ibn-e Mariam (Son of Mary), the Dominican Vice-Province of Pakistan. It was founded in 1982, after Friars from the Province of Rome brought the Order to the Country in 1931. According to Fr. Channan, the Church's "mission of interfaith dialogue goes hand in hand with proclamation." In Asia, said the Friar, who was born into a family whose forbears were among the first converts to Catholicism in 1880 in the land which is Pakistan today, "where Christians make up only 2 percent of the population, dialogue is crucial, as we must find ways to work with other religions in promoting peace and harmony in our societies." Drawing on both their intellectual and spiritual resources, he said, Dominicans practice "interfaith dialogue as a form of evangelization." And while for Christians, of course, "the plenitude of truth is found in Jesus Christ, the Church recognizes that God's mercy is evident in other religions as well, and that these contain rays of truth," he added, noting that *Nostra Aetate*, one of Vatican II's key documents, provides guidelines for the Church's dialogue with other religions.

Now completing a third term as Vice Provincial, Fr. Channan is truly a veteran of engaging other faiths. He spent 10 years as Consultor for the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and 5 years as Consultor to the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims. He performed similar functions on behalf of Pakistan's Catholic Bishops National Commission for Christian Muslim Dialogue, commonly known in Pakistan as the "Rabita Commission," as well as the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences. He plays a leading

role in the international United Religions Initiative as Regional Coordinator for Pakistan.

In Pakistan, said Fr. Channan, a key component of inter-religious dialogue is what he calls "the dialogue of life," which expresses itself in Christian-Muslim collaboration in the running of schools, hospitals and social welfare programs. The two communities also jointly celebrate each other's feast days, such as Christmas, and the Muslim feast called "Eid al-Fitr," which is celebrated at the end of Ramadan, the month of fasting.

Currently, Christians and Muslims in Lahore are teaming up to organize aid missions to internally displaced families in Mardan who fled from the Swat Valley to avoid the fighting between the military and extremists. Fr. Channan said, however, that the campaign and military action of the government of Pakistan against Taliban followers is succeeding thanks to the support of the population at large, including the Christian community. "The government had to act, and it had no other option than to take military action," said the Friar.

Operating five parishes and four houses of formation for the Dominican students, the Vice-Province, headquartered in the city of Lahore, counts 22 ordained Friars, a Dominican Cooperator brother, five philosophy students in Lahore, and four theology students in Karachi. Eight candidates are about to enter the novitiate, while 24 young men are discerning their potential vocation in a pre-novitiate college level program in Multan. The Dominican Order, and the Catholic community at large, including about 250 Dominican Sisters belonging to five congregations, is flourishing, said Father Channan. The Vice-Province has also sent three missionary Friars to Taiwan.

"Christians are known and respected for their hard work and honesty," he said, and despite their small number, they play key roles in the country with a presence in key ministries, governorships, and the educational establishment, as well as the army and navy. Many in the country's leadership are graduates of Pakistan's excellent and extensive Catholic school system, which includes several colleges. Both Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari and his late wife, Ms. Benazir Bhutto - who was assassinated last year - attended Catholic schools. The same is true for Yousaf Raza Gillani, the country's prime minister.

“Spiritually and practically,” said the Friar, Christians in Pakistan “are the salt of the earth and light of the world.”

Unfortunately, Western media focus only on the unrest in the country, presenting a picture of chaos and instability. While there is some truth to that image, of course, said Fr. Channan, “there are many good things going on,” such as the empowerment of women in peace-building through education, a trend that is particularly despised by Muslim extremists. Thanks to Christian-Muslim collaboration on that front, today some 33 percent of members of provincial assemblies as well as the National Assembly are women, including the speaker of the National Assembly and several federal and provincial ministers.

Asked about the blasphemy laws that were instituted in 1991, Fr. Channan reported that some 400-plus cases have been brought before the court. It may surprise Western observers that the bulk of the charges were brought against Muslims, not Christians, although the latter were involved in some of the more dramatic cases. What’s more, most of the court cases, explained the Friar, involved business disputes or arguments over land. The law was invoked most often, he said, “to settle personal scores, and hinged on false accusations” of desecration of the Quran and Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam.

The blasphemy laws continue to be misused. Very recently Christians and Muslims clashed around the cities of Kasur and Faisalabad. Muslims attacked the Christians and damaged their properties, charging that they had desecrated the Quran. “It will be better if such laws are totally repealed, or at least some amendments made to safeguard, especially minorities, so it is not misused,” the Friar said.

“Christians still suffer discrimination in the country,” said Father Channan, and along with the rest of the population they are threatened by extremist bombing campaigns. An attack last year on a Central Intelligence Agency compound in Lahore damaged the archbishop’s residence, the cathedral, and the Sacred Heart School, which is attended by two of the Friar’s nieces, Zoya Maria and Zara Pervaiz. Nevertheless, Fr. Channan said that he is committed to staying in Pakistan to continue to build up the Vice-Province.

Along with his fellow Friars, Fr. Channan is proud of the Dominican roots in Pakistan and the legacy of the Province of St. Joseph (which has been collaborating with the Province of Rome in Pakistan since 1956). Two stalwarts of Pakistan's Dominican community recently passed away. In March, the legendary Fr. James Nuttall, O.P. died. He had spent 37 years in Pakistan. He started as a Friar of the Province of St. Joseph, but formally became a member of the Vice-Province of the Son of Mary, helping the Order grow in Pakistan. Based at the Holy Rosary Priory in Faisalabad, he was devoted to parish work and the evangelization of Hindu tribes. At the time of his death, Fr. Nuttall was the only remaining American Dominican priest in Pakistan, where he now is buried.

Fr. Channan came to the US early this summer to attend a conference of the United Religious Initiative in San Francisco. His stay at St. Vincent Ferrer Church in New York coincided with the sad news of the death of Fr. Chrys McVey, who had spent 42 years in Pakistan before leaving for Rome in 2002 to serve as assistant to the Master of the Order. Like Fr. Nuttall, Fr. McVey was much beloved by Catholics in Pakistan.

Father Channan's biggest need today is finding funds to pay for the formation of Dominican students and for campaigns to attract more vocations. Then there is the Interfaith Dialogue Center in Lahore, which is scheduled to be completed this year. Unfortunately, the Vice-Province's endowment fund has taken a big hit due to the global recession. But income also derives from teaching stipends, parish work, and generous donors in Pakistan and abroad. "We need a lot prayers and financial help from friends and donors to carry on our apostolates in the country and beyond," said Fr. Channan.

* *This interview was taken by Mr. Joop Koopman in New York, USA and published in the Dominican Daily of St. Joseph Province, New York, USA on 10 July 2009.*
http://www.op-stjoseph.org/blog/a_friar_in_a_muslim_nation/

Dialogue with James Channan OP*

Interview by Fr Victor Edwin SJ, from New Delhi, India

James Channan OP is a Dominican priest and has 30 years of experience working for Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Pakistan. He served for 17 years as Executive Secretary of the Pakistan Catholic Bishop's National Commission for Christian-Muslim Relations and for 15 years as Consultor to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. He has authored *Christian Muslim Dialogue in Pakistan*. This interview was done by Victor Edwin SJ for *Salaam*.

Fr Victor: Father James, I was told you were initiated into the mission of dialogue with Muslims by Swiss Jesuit Father Robert J. Bütler. Would you kindly tell us about his ministry in Pakistan and his contribution to Christian-Muslim dialogue?

Fr James Channan: Fr. Robert J. Bütler SJ was in Pakistan for more than 40 years, and he spent almost all of these at Loyola Hall, in Lahore. He was a great scholar of Islam and was known among Muslims scholars, who used to come to visit him in Loyola Hall. He knew several languages, including German, French, English, Italian, Arabic and Urdu, taught Italian at the University of the Punjab in Lahore for some time and wrote several articles on Islam.

He established a library at Loyola Hall with many books on Islam and Christianity. These books were mainly in English. He was an ardent promoter of the study of Islam and of Christian-Muslim dialogue. He was very devoted to the mission of dialogue, and he carried it out at various levels, but particularly the dialogue of words, deeds and theology. He established a hostel for college boys, most of whom were Muslims.

It was in 1977 that I came to Lahore to study Islam and Christian Muslim dialogue. On the request of my superior, Fr Chrys McVey OP, Fr Bütler very generously agreed to let me stay at Loyola Hall for my 6 months of pastoral experience. He advised me on what books I should read in my study of Islam. I would return from time to time to share my summaries and reflections with him. In the meantime, I was admitted to an institute of Arabic language in Lahore to learn Arabic. It was at this time that I grew in a deeper knowledge of Islam.

Before coming to Loyola Hall, I was already very interested in promoting Christian Muslim dialogue and I had expressed my desire to Fr Chrys McVey OP. I had an inner feeling and conviction that God had a special role for me to play in the Pakistani context, where most of the people are followers of Islam.

This was the time when several initiatives were taken by the Catholic Church to promote dialogue among religions in the light of the teachings and documents of Vatican II. The Secretariat for Non-Christians was established in Rome in May 1964, and several meetings and conferences had already begun for Christian-Muslim dialogue. I felt that I was called to respond to this important mission of the Church, and so I opted to follow this mission of dialogue with our brothers and sisters of the Muslim world. Fr Bütler SJ was a great help as a guide in this field.

Fr Bütler has played an important role in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue in Pakistan, and I see him as a pioneer of this work in my country. He dedicated his life to this field, and he will always be remembered with great esteem, respect and appreciation.

Q. *How do you promote dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Pakistan?*

James: I have been fully engaged in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue in Pakistan since 1985, when I returned to Pakistan after completing my licentiate in Islamic Studies and Arabic from the Pontifical Institute for Islamic Studies and Arabic Language (PISAI) in Rome. I was appointed as the founding Executive Secretary of the Catholic Bishops' National Commission for Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Pakistan and served for 17 years in this capacity.

I was later appointed by the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, as a Consultor to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue for 10 years, and then as a Consultor to the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims for 5 years.

I emphasize a dialogue of life, particularly at the grassroots level. I have established 40 groups in various parts of Pakistan for the purpose of interreligious dialogue so that a greater understanding can be developed and harmony among religions and cultures can

be strengthened. I have written several articles and have given lectures and interviews in various media at national and international levels on this topic. I have also organized many conferences and seminars to further spread this understanding. Thus far the outcome of all these efforts has been very positive and encouraging. Now several dialogue groups have been established by various organizations in the country. It is really very good to see that, along with Christians, Muslims have also established many dialogue groups throughout the country.

Q. *How do the Churches in Pakistan view dialogue with Muslims?*

James: The Churches in Pakistan have made Christian-Muslim dialogue a top priority. Both Catholic and non Catholic Churches have established dialogue groups which have put a lot of emphasis on the dialogue of life.

Q. *What are the difficulties in the mission of dialogue with Muslims in Pakistan, and what promise does this ministry hold for the people of Pakistan?*

James: There are a couple of difficulties. For example, Muslims do not know much about the Christian faith and its teachings. We do not have enough books or articles which we can offer them to read in Urdu. The rise of fanaticism has also created difficulty. While we are from this land and are the sons of this soil, in many people's minds Pakistani Christians are often associated with the West. Also, our educational curriculum does not offer teachings on interreligious and Christian-Muslim dialogue. So, that too is a difficulty. In spite of all of this, I see the future of this mission of dialogue with Muslims as very promising. Many more Muslims and Christians are engaged in and are being qualified in this field. I have met a couple of college and university students who are doing relevant and needed research. Some students, like those of Islamabad University, Quaid-e-Azam University and Baha-ud-Din Zikria University are writing theses to obtain Master's and doctoral degrees. Electronic and print media are also playing a role in promoting dialogue and harmony.

The Government of Pakistan has also established Interreligious Dialogue Commissions at national as well as local levels. Very recently the Government here co-sponsored with the Spanish government an Interreligious Dialogue Conference in Madrid, Spain from 6- 9 April, 2010. The ambassadors, high officials, and

delegates of 33 Asian and European countries played a role at this conference. Their focus was dialogue among religions and cultures. I was part of the Pakistani delegation for this conference.

Q. *I was told that Christians give a lot of importance to reading the Bible in Pakistan. Do you see it as a sort of influence from Muslims and their respect for the Quran?*

James: It is true that Christians in Pakistan give a lot of importance to the reading of the Holy Bible. This is increasing. The reading of the Holy Bible makes our faith firmer. It strengthens us in our pains and difficulties. It comforts and consoles us. It also reminds us that God is there to help us and that Christ protects us. But I don't think it is because of Muslim influence.

Q. *In many parts of the world today, Christian communities are becoming divided and weakened in their faith. What of the Christians of Pakistan?*

James: In my observation, the Pakistani Christians have become more devoted and firm in their faith. They feel joy in expressing their faith in public. I have seen that the number of Christians going to the church for feast days has dramatically increased. Most of the time, churches are full and people have to sit outside. There are so many that often the celebration of the Holy Eucharistic is arranged outside in spaces that can accommodate the crowds. It is good to see the strong faith of the Christians in Pakistan. They feel very united and comforted when they go to the church for religious ceremonies. At times Christians face difficulties and suffering on account of their faith, but they meet this suffering with their faith.

* This interview was given by Fr Victor Edwin S, New Delhi, India in April, 2010 and put on a website.
www.islamicstudiesassociation.blogspot.com

Interview with Fr James Channan

on his visit to Fuji Sanctuary, Japan in March 2007

Fr James Channan Visits Fuji Sanctuary

A Special Report

On 29th of March, 2007, Fuji Sanctuary (the home of Byakko Shinko Kai) was privileged to receive a visit from Fr James Channan OP, a Dominican Priest and Regional Coordinator for the United Religions Initiative (URI) in Pakistan. Since 1985, Fr Channan has worked intensively to promote Christian-Muslim and interreligious dialogue in Pakistan and other parts of the world. He is the author of numerous articles, and a book entitled *Christian Muslim Dialogue in Pakistan*.

Among his numerous honors, Fr Channan has received the Pioneer of Christian Muslim Dialogue in Pakistan Award, conferred in December 2005 by Archbishop Michael L. Fitzgerald, M. Afr., President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Vatican. The award was announced by the Catholic Bishops National Commission for Interreligious Dialogue and Ecumenism, Pakistan.

An earnest proponent of the movement for world peace through prayer, Fr Channan has been instrumental in placing Peace Poles in key locations throughout Pakistan and Azad Kashmir. Among these are places of worship, study centers, the Minar-e-Pakistan (National Monument Pakistan), and a missile site near the Indian border in Muzaffarabad, Azad Kashmir. On 20th of May, 2007 at Fuji Sanctuary, in company with longtime peace worker and colleague Maulana Muhammad Abdul Kabir Azad, Grand Imam of the Badshahi Mosque in Lahore, Pakistan, Fr Channan delivered the Keynote Address at the Symphony of Peace Prayers ceremony.

Fr Channan's March visit to Japan was to attend a meeting of the Dominican Provincials of Asia-Pacific held in Tokyo. Earlier in March he was elected to the post of Prior Vice Provincial of the Dominican Friars, Ibn-e-Mariam, Vice Province in Pakistan, a position he has held twice previously (1991-1995 and 1999-2003)

Interview with Fr Channan

Prior to his arrival at Fuji Sanctuary, Byakko had the opportunity of asking Fr Channan some questions concerning his background and experiences. A portion of that interview is shown here.

Fr Channan: we are honored and delighted to welcome you here today. I believe that our readers would be interested in knowing about the events that have brought you to this point in your life. To begin with, when did you first start to feel that you wanted to work for world peace and interfaith dialogue?

James: I have always felt a natural desire to contribute to world peace, and this feeling came strongly to the forefront while I was doing my seminary studies at Christ the King Seminary in Karachi. I spent six years in Karachi, starting in 1974. During that time it came to my mind that I should do something that was very much needed in Pakistan and throughout the world: I felt that I should study Islam, and should engage in Christian-Muslim dialogue. I felt that God was calling me to do something unique, something that had never been done before.

At that time Fr Chrys McVey, OP was my Student Master. Fr McVey is an American who came to Pakistan in 1960 to work as a Dominican Priest and missionary. Now, he is in Rome, working under the Master General of the Dominican Order, Fr Carlos Azpiroz Costa, OP, as his Socius (Assistant) for Apostolic Life and as Promoter General of the Dominican Family. Fr McVey inspired me very much. He had traveled to many parts of the world and had a very broad outlook. In particular, he had a very gentle approach toward Muslims, and encouraged dialogue among religions.

Another source of inspiration was my professor, the late Fr Archie de Souza. Fr de Souza was a Pakistani, a Catholic Priest, and a scholar of Islam. He taught me about Islam for four years. He was my Moderator when I wrote my thesis on *Fasting in Islam and Pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj)*. Later on we became companions in promoting Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Pakistan, as members of the National Commission for Christian Muslim Dialogue (also known as the *Rabita Commission*).

And thus, when my Vice Provincial (the priest in charge of all Dominican friars in Pakistan), Fr McVey, asked me one day what I would like to do in the future, I spontaneously replied that I

wanted to specialize in Islam. And that is how this long journey took firm roots and has continued until today.

Q. When did your interest in Islam first take shape?

James: I was brought up in an atmosphere that naturally prepared me for this calling. I was born in 1952, and grew up in a Muslim community, in Military Dairy Farm Salerno in Okara. I joined with my friends and neighbors in celebrating the Muslim feasts, and in daily life I shared their joys and their sorrows. I went to a Muslim school, and studied under Muslim teachers. Although most of the students at the school were Muslim, there were some Christian students also. So, I was brought up in an atmosphere that naturally prepared me for Muslim-Christian dialogue.

Q. Was anyone in your family a Muslim?

James: No, all my family members have been Christians for many generations. There are many such families in Pakistan.

Q. When were you ordained to the priesthood?

James: On the 9th of April, 1980 in Warispura, Pakistan. After being ordained I worked for two years in a parish in Sahiwal, in the diocese of Faisalabad. At the end of those two years my Vice Provincial, Fr McVey, asked me if I would like to go on to higher studies.

Q. Did you enjoy your parish work?

James: Yes, very much. I was very happy doing my daily work as a priest, celebrating Holy Mass with the people, visiting my parishioners at their homes, visiting the sick and afflicted, organizing Christmas programs, administering sacraments and so on. However, since going on to higher studies would give me the opportunity to study Islam, I decided to follow my Vice Provincial's suggestion and pursue studies in Islam and the Arabic language in Rome, Italy. That was how it happened that, in September, 1982, I went to Rome, Italy to the Pontifical Institute for Islamic Studies and Arabic Language (PISAI). I studied there for three years from 1982 to 1985. After earning my Licentiate in Arabic and in Islamic Studies, I returned home to Pakistan in 1985.

Q. While you were in Rome, did you have an opportunity to meet His Holiness Pope John Paul II?

James: Yes, I did. I met him while I was studying in Rome in 1983 and also met him several times after that as well. My last meeting with Pope John Paul II was in 2002. I attended these meetings as Consultant to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and also as Executive Secretary of the National Commission for Christian Muslim Dialogue.

Q. I believe you have held many meaningful posts during your years of service. Could you tell our readers about some of them?

James: I returned to Pakistan in 1985, after having completed my studies in Rome. It was in 1985 that Pope John Paul II appointed me as Consultor to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. Also in 1985, on the advice of Pope John Paul II, the Catholic Bishops of Pakistan established the National Commission for Interreligious Dialogue. The late Bishop John Joseph served as Chairperson, and I served as Executive Secretary. The Directors of Christian-Muslim Dialogue were appointed by the Catholic Bishops in six dioceses: Lahore, Islamabad, Faisalabad, Multan, Hyderabad, and Karachi. I had the privilege of serving on this Commission for 17 years. I feel very happy that this kind of dialogue is now being talked about and practiced all around the country in various forums and organizations. It is very satisfying to see that a tiny seed which was sown about twenty years ago has grown into a big tree and is bearing fruit.

In 1991, I was elected Vice Provincial (Executive Director) of the Dominican Order in Pakistan, for a four-year term. I was elected again in 1995 and a third time in 2007. It is a matter of great honor and privilege for me that the Dominican friars have expressed their deep trust in me by electing me three times. From 2001 to 2007, I also served as Director of the Pastoral Institute in Multan. And now that I have been elected Vice Provincial for the third time, I have relocated to Lahore, since that is our Provincialate. Since March of this year, I have been living and working in the Dominican House in Lahore. This house was opened in 1984, with three aims in mind: Christian-Muslim dialogue, the promotion of Punjabi language and culture, and the University Apostolate.

Q. Have you had many opportunities to travel during the course of your work?

James: Yes, indeed. I have had opportunities to travel all around the world. I have traveled to Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Italy, Hong Kong, Nepal, Thailand, Malta, Spain, France, Egypt, USA, Germany, England, Australia, Ireland, Colombia, Brazil, Qatar, and many other countries to participate in interfaith dialogue. I also participated in several international meetings which were organized by the Federation of Asia Bishops' Conference (FABC). Within the FABC I served as Regional Secretary for South Asia in its Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA)

Q. How long did you serve in the FABC?

James: For three years as Regional Secretary of the FABC-OEIA for South Asia. This service gave me a great deal of exposure to other Asian cultures, and the opportunity to meet leaders from many faiths: Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Sikhism, Baha'ism, Zoroastrianism, and other tribal religions.

I feel so grateful to the Dominicans for their support of me, especially to my Vice Provincial, Fr Chrys McVey, who fully supports me in this field.

Q. We have heard that in 1988 a very significant event took place. Would you tell us about it, please?

James: In 1988, an international conference of the World Muslim Congress (WMC) was held in Karachi, Pakistan. Muslims from 56 countries were invited, and representatives from 52 countries were able to attend: ambassadors, heads of state, and other high-ranking officials participated. The purpose of the WMC was to promote unity among Muslims, and Christians were also honored. His Holiness Pope John Paul II was invited to participate. He was unable to attend personally, but he sent a message, and he kindly asked that I read his message. It was a great honor for me to read the message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II, which was much appreciated by those present, and was also well covered in the media. The late General Muhammad Zia al-Haq, the President of Pakistan,

presided over the conference, and many ambassadors from various countries were also present.

Q. Now that you have resumed the post of Vice Provincial of the Dominicans, what does your present work involve?

James: There are 43 professed Dominican Friars in Pakistan. Among these professed friars, we have nine philosophy students in Lahore and two theology students in Karachi. There are two students who have completed their priestly studies and are waiting for priestly ordinations.

Besides these friars, we have two novices in Warispura, Faisalabad and 31 students in our Louis Hall House of Formation in Multan. The students in Multan are college students, and they are our candidates to become Dominican Priests or Cooperative Brothers. They will study for four years in the colleges in Multan and then move to the next stage of formation.

We are currently conducting several apostolates in our country which involve parish work, justice and peace work, the formation of our Dominican students, interfaith dialogue, ecumenism, youth work, prison ministry, retreats and recollection days, and so on. We also have a mission in Iran with two Dominican friars from our Vice Province serving there.

As head of the Dominicans, my responsibility is to take care of all the friars, make assignments, arrange for their studies in Pakistan, and also send them abroad for higher studies, and represent our friars at the national and international levels. In short, I am responsible for the entire administration of the Dominican friars. I try my best to serve them with all the abilities God has given me. Most of the decisions are made with the consultation and approval of my Council members.

Q. In the meantime, do you still pursue your interfaith activities?

James: Yes, I regularly participate in and organize conferences, seminars, workshops, and programs to promote interfaith dialogue and peace. I am a Global Trustee and Regional Coordinator of the United Religions Initiative (URI). I also participate in the conferences and programs of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP), and in the World Peace Prayer Society, founded by Masahisa Goi, as well as the National Commission for Interreligious Dialogue and

Ecumenism (*Rabita Commission*). And of course, I have great expectations for the Symphony of Peace Prayers ceremony organized by Byakko Shinko Kai.

I continue writing articles and have given interviews on radio and television stations in Pakistan and abroad. Very recently, I gave live interviews on three Pakistani radio stations: Radio Pakistan Lahore, Radio Pakistan Islamabad, and FM 103. I was also interviewed by Pakistan Television (PTV). All these interviews were related to interfaith dialogue and the promotion of peace among religions and cultures. In my interviews I have mentioned the extraordinary work which is being done by the World Peace Prayer Society, the Goi Peace Foundation, and Byakko Shinko Kai. I am deeply impressed by the activities of these peace organizations, and I am looking forward to closer cooperation with them. That will be a wonderful joint venture.

Q. Do you have any special hope or dream for the future?

James: Yes, I have a dream of establishing a peace center in Lahore. This center will serve as a hub of peace and interfaith dialogue activities. I want to establish a library in the center and an auditorium for conferences. If the means will allow, I would like to build places of worship for all religions, for example, a small church, a mosque, Hindu and Shinto temples, a Sikh Gurdwara, and a place of worship for the Baha'i community. It will be the first of its kind in Pakistan. I hope that someday my dream will be fulfilled. I have already started working on it. Peace is very much needed throughout the world, and I would like Pakistan to serve as a strong base in the development of world peace.

While Taking a Tour of Fuji Sanctuary

Fr Channan's arrival at Fuji Sanctuary was awaited with happy anticipation on the part of all the staff and volunteers. Once at the Sanctuary, Fr Channan strolled through its grounds to see its main points of interest, guided by Byakko President Taira Tanaka. Portions of their conversation are shown below.

Looking at the 7-21 Writings (Main Building, lower floor)

Outside the 7-21 room, Fr Channan is greeted by a dozen volunteers who unanimously exclaim in Urdu: *Pakistan Mein Aman Qaim Rahay!* (May Peace Prevail in Pakistan!) Fr Channan rewards them with a big smile.

Taira: This big sheet of papers that you see in front of you is filled with handwritten prayers for peace in Pakistan. We have 198 rolls of these prayer sheets, each measuring 7×21 meters. We have one sheet for each country in the world. The one we have unrolled and are showing you now is for Pakistan. We unrolled it because we knew that you were coming here today. At the top of the sheet, there is a sentence written in big letters, stating our firm intention to continue praying for Pakistan until the cherished aims of each one of the Pakistani people have been accomplished.

James: This is very, very impressive.... The prayers are written entirely in Urdu. Did the people write them from right to left as we do in Pakistan?

Taira: Yes, they did. Please take a look at this one. You can see the name of the person who wrote the prayers. The prayer is handwritten in the Urdu language, but the writer's name is written in Japanese.

James: This is very impressive and powerful. How many times has the prayer been written on this sheet?

Taira: 7,100 times. Each prayer contains a message of love from the people of Japan to the people of Pakistan.

James: I will take photos of this and show them to the people of Pakistan. When did you begin writing these prayer sheets?

Taira: We began in 1986, twenty one years ago.

James: Is each prayer written in the language of that country?

Taira: Yes, a country's language is an important part of its identity.

James: I would like to share this experience with the people of Pakistan. I would like them to know that at Byakko Shinko Kai you are praying not just for the people of one country or one religion, but for the people of all countries and all religions.

Large Mandalas (Main Building, ground floor)

Taira: These are handwritten mandalas. Each mandala carries its own shining message. (Pointing to a mandala) This mandala carries the meaning of "I am child of God". (Pointing to another mandala) This mandala carries the meaning of "All human beings are children of God".

James: Are they written in Japanese?

Taira: Yes, they are.

At the outdoor World Map (in front of the large Globe)

Taira: This is a sacred place. This used to be the place where we gathered to pray for world peace. Finally we needed a bigger space to pray in, so we made a new prayer field. On this ground we created a big world map, where each country has its own land, with its own peace pole.

James: Whose idea was it to make peace poles?

Taira: The idea came from Masahisa Goi, Founder of the World Peace Prayer Society. That idea is very beautiful, because a peace pole does not have the name of any individual or organization on it, just a message of peace.

At the outdoor Prayer Field

Taira: Every month, between 3,000 and 5,000 people gather in our outdoor Prayer Field to pray for peace in each country and in all the other regions of the world. At present, there are 192 countries.

James: On 20th of May, during the Symphony of Peace Prayers Ceremony, people of various religions will be praying with us in Lahore, Multan, and other cities in Pakistan.

Taira: We are very happy to know that. The existence of each country has a very profound spiritual meaning. Each country has an important role to play in creating world peace.

In the Office

James: What other work do you do here?

Taira: We make preparations for our monthly prayer ceremonies, and we communicate with people around the world who are praying for world peace. We also conduct seminars and other such activities.

James: Do you publish a magazine?

Taira: Yes, we publish a monthly magazine in Japanese and a quarterly magazine in English.

James: I am really very impressed by my visit here, and I feel very honored that all of you greeted me so warmly.

Taira: It has been a great honor for us. We really appreciate your taking time out from your busy trip to come and see us.

* This article was published in Byakko Magazine, issue # 102
Fall 2007, vol. 14 no 4 Japan

Interview during the Dominican General Chapter Rome, Italy 2010

Q. Is this your first Chapter?

Answer: No, in fact it is my third Elective General Chapter as Prior Vice Provincial of the Ibn-e-Mariam, Vice Province of Pakistan. It has been a grace-filled experience, and I feel fortunate to have participated in three Elective General Chapters: in Mexico City, Mexico in 1992, in Providence College, Providence, USA in 2001 and now Rome in 2010. Besides these, I have also participated in the General Chapter in Bogota, Columbia in 2007.

The participation in such General Chapters of the Dominican Order of Preachers has enlightened my heart and mind, as they give me great exposure to the entire leadership of the Dominican Order from all around the world. In these Chapters, I have experienced the mechanism of how the Master of the Order is elected, how consultation is done, how the names are proposed, how the priorities are set, how challenges surface, how we can respond to these challenges, and how we can carry out our mission as Dominicans throughout the world. It is a great spiritual experience as well to see how the mission of St Dominic has gone on for the last 800 years. As you know, the Dominican Order is present in 102 countries serving God, and the people of God live in so many ways and apostolates.

While working in the Church, and as members of the Order of Preachers, we preach the kingdom of God and the centrality of Christ. Coming to gather here in Rome from all around the globe is a very blessed time when we as Capitulars, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, will choose our next Master of the Order for a period of nine years.

For me it has been a tremendous experience to see the Capitulars coming from all around the world, and I have experienced a great sense of being a member of the Dominican family. I experience that we are together as one family no matter where we come from: East, West, North, or South. Our father St Dominic has made us brothers to one another, and for that I feel proud.

Q. What perspective do you bring as Vice Provincial of Pakistan?

Answer: The Vice Province was born on the 4th of December, 1982, thanks to the hard work of very dedicated Dominican missionaries from the Roman Province of Italy and St Joseph Province of the USA. The Italian Dominicans came to the territory which is Pakistan today in 1931. They were followed by the American Dominicans in 1956. I pay rich tribute to these missionaries who gave so many years of their lives to Pakistan.

Pakistan is a country with 180 million people, of whom 96% are Muslim, and 2% are Christians. Our Dominicans are serving the Church and the people of God in Pakistan through different apostolates, such as in parishes and schools, promoting justice and peace, visiting prisoners in jail, organizing youth groups and participating in inter-religious and Christian-Muslim dialogue. Inter-religious dialogue is one of our priorities in Pakistan because we are surrounded by Muslims. We are very much encouraged by Vatican and papal documents, Acts of the Dominican General Chapters and Acts of our Vice Provincial Chapters.

The documents and programs organized by the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue inspire us, guide us, and lead us to reach out for dialogue with the people of all religions. We must reach out to others to make this world a more peaceful and humane place, with respect for all.

So, coming to the Chapter I bring this perspective: that the Order as a whole should keep on emphasizing our mission of preaching, teaching, inter-religious dialogue, community building and justice and peace. I hope that the new leadership we choose will further inspire us to enhance these apostolates.

I feel that the future is very promising for our Vice Province. We have 36 professed friars, 4 novices and 22 young aspirants. This gives us great hope. Our life is challenging and difficult, but, with the grace of God, we are confident and keep on giving a Dominican witness of Christ in our land.

Q. What challenges do you face in carrying out this mission?

Answer: At present, Pakistan is going through a lot of turmoil. It is very unfortunate that our country has become a land which is confronted with the challenges of fanaticism, terrorism, and violence. The 9/11 incident happened only once in the USA, but

we are faced with such incidents every day in our country. Public places, markets, schools, hospitals and places of worship, such as mosques, shrines of Muslim saints, and our churches have been attacked quite frequently, and thousands of people have lost their lives. There is no place in Pakistan right now that we can say is a safe place. It seems as if every place in Pakistan is an easy target for the terrorists. These terrorists and suicide bombers do not respect their own lives, and they do not respect the lives of others. They blow themselves up and attack others, whether they are men, women or children. Seeing such uncertainties and disturbances in the country, it is important that we bring a healing presence to the people of Pakistan and change the mindset of these terrorists. Our religion and that of Muslims do not allow for terrorism and the killing of others. All religions teach respect for life, peace and acceptance of others and respect for all.

At this time when the future seems very dark, and people feel helpless, we as Pakistani Christians and Dominicans have a very important role to play, which is to bring hope to our people. In our country we are the salt of the earth and light of the world. Muslims of Pakistan know that Christians are very firm in the faith, and that we follow a Christ who forgave others and loved his enemies. We do not respond to violence with violence or hatred with hatred. We have a prophetic role to play in Pakistan, which is to bring healing to a wounded humanity. We are called upon to play our full role - to create a culture of love, peace, care and justice. Our model is Christ, who said "Love one another as I have loved you."

The Church in Pakistan is a suffering Church, and attacks against Christians have increased recently. Our churches, hospitals and schools have been attacked, and over 300 houses of Christians in places such as Shanti Nagar, Korian Wala, Sangla Hill and Gojra have been burned by fanatics. This is our situation, dangerous and uncertain. However, as I have said earlier, we are people of hope, and our hope is that one day we will overcome. In spite of all these sufferings, the Christians of Pakistan continue to have a very strong faith.

Q. The people of Pakistan are enduring their worst natural disaster at this moment. What has it been like, and how can the Dominican Family help?

Answer: 2010 has seen the worst floods of our history, caused by the monsoon rains. The deluge of rain and the devastating floods are the worst in the history of Pakistan, and perhaps the world. 20 million people have become victims of these floods. They have lost their homes, livestock, and crops. And the area which is affected by the floods is larger than the entire territory of the United Kingdom! The damage done to our country by these deadly rains and floods is more than that of all three calamities: the earthquakes in Haiti, the earthquake in Pakistan in 2005, and the Asian Tsunami.

These floods have also tremendously affected our Dominican family in Pakistan. Our houses, schools, and convents have also been damaged. Over 100 members of our Dominican laity have been severely affected in various villages, like the Holy Rosary Parish of Warispura, the Christian village of Khushpur, and around Jhang. In addition, crops like cotton and maize have been destroyed, and famine has been predicted for next year.

In this situation, the Vice Province of Pakistan has established a committee of 4 friars, 2 sisters, and 2 lay Dominicans. We are reaching out, making personal visits and giving relief items both in cash and in kind. So far, we have helped 36 members of the Dominican laity, as well as another 30 Christians and around 400 Muslim families by providing food items, medicine, tents and cash to them. The situation caused by this flood needs long-term planning. People need medicine, rehabilitation, and food.

I want to express my gratitude to the members of the Dominican family who have expressed their solidarity with us, are praying for us, and have also sent in generous donations to help these people, especially the members of the Dominican family who are affected by these rains and floods. God bless them!

Please pray for the Dominican family which is our family in Pakistan, and if you would like to help and donate to our Dominican relief work in Pakistan, your help will be much appreciated.

* This interview was published by the Dominican website:

www.coria.op.org/roma2010

Interview of Fr James Channan OP

for the Italian Newspaper “Avvenire” 22 Jan, 2013

Question by Stefano Vecchia:

Pakistan as a state and its founding principles are under strong pressure today. Where is Pakistan heading, and how is the Christian minority living in this difficult time?

Answer by Fr James Channan OP

Pakistan is going through the most difficult time of its history of 65 years. There is so much turmoil and disturbance all around that one is hard pressed to know where we are heading. The law and order situation is very poor, and religious, ethnic and sectarian violence has become very common. Every day dozens of people are killed. There is no justice in these killings and violence. No one feels secure in Pakistan. Along with that, there are the man made crises: electricity, natural gas and jobs. Our government as a whole seems incapable of resolving any of these critical issues. Our country is headed toward becoming a failed state.

Our nation on the whole has strayed from the vision of its founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah. He was in favor of a secular and democratic state. But at present we do not find in Pakistan a secular state. It is an Islamic state. Christians are also faced with an uncertain and critical situation. We are faced with the same crises and turmoil.

Q. You are the Director of the Peace Center in Lahore and a long-time, qualified participant in interreligious dialogue. What is the meaning of both “peace” and “dialogue” in a country where both seem out of tune with the everyday reality, while factionalism, violence and instability seem to be dominant?

Answer: The situation in Pakistan is very dangerous and violent. But I do see signs of hope, as we find that there are still many people of good will who want to bring my country out of this grave situation. I am convinced that most of the people of Pakistan are peace loving people, and they want to live harmoniously. They are longing for peace and for a secure Pakistan. In this scenario, I see a great role for the promoters of

peace and dialogue. We have the challenge of changing the mindset of those who are fanatics, violent and intolerant. This I am trying to do by fostering respect for all and encouraging people to accept what is good and denounce what is evil. In this situation, our government has to play a vital role and take strict and prompt action against those who are damaging the peace and good name of our country. As peace activists and promoters of interfaith dialogue, we have an imperative role to play as signs of hope, tolerance and respect for all. This is a sign of the times and the need of the hour.

Q. What is the role of religious radicalism in the present situation, and how must politics cope with it?

Answer: Unfortunately, religious radicalism is on the rise in Pakistan, and there does not seem to be an immediate end to it. However, to come out of this situation, our political leaders have to play a decisive role. They must discourage radicalism in all forms. There is an urgent need to implement anti-terrorism laws. There is a need to apprehend those who carry out terrorist attacks on both security forces and civilians. If these culprits are arrested and justice is done, then there will be hope for a better future.

Q. The late Shahbaz Bhatti and today Paul Bhatti and others, through the All Pakistan Minorities Alliance (APMA) or by different means, have been trying to elevate Christian (and minority) participation to a different political level. How will a new consciousness and participation help the minorities in their struggle for justice and equality?

Answer: There are good fora provided to the minorities to raise their voices for equality, justice and deep concern in the Parliament. There are minority representatives in the Senate with 4 reserved seats and in the National Assembly with 10 reserved seats (now raised to 14 by the present government). There are representatives of minorities in all 4 Provincial Assemblies. Moreover, we have Paul Bhatti, the brother of late Shahbaz Bhatti, as Advisor to the Prime Minister of Pakistan, and also Mr. Akram Gill as State Minister and head of the National Harmony Commission. Through these fora and responsible posts, the deep concern for justice and equality can be ensured. Our political

leaders need to show commitment and courage to raise their voices against all the injustice done to minorities.

The APMA (All Pakistan Minorities Alliance) does not seem so active and effective now after the assassination of Shahbaz Bhatti, Federal Minister of Minority Affairs. Shahbaz Bhatti was a great leader, and all the religious minorities were listening to his call. After his death, as I said, the APMA is not so active and effective due to the lack of his dynamic leadership. I have heard of a drift (division) in the APMA, which is not a good omen. The revival of the APMA is needed.

Q. Are the “cases” of Asia Bibi and Younis Masih indicative of the pressure put on minorities, and how may they develop due to the situation?

Answer: The pressure is there, but after the case of Rimsha Masih, a minor Christian girl with signs of Down Syndrome, who was accused under the blasphemy laws and later released by the Islamabad High Court, there is a very strong move felt among the religious leaders, political leaders and human rights activists that fake cases such as that against Rimsha must be avoided, and those who falsely accuse minorities to settle their personal scores must be challenged. There were vehement protests at the arrest of Rimsha. However, such cases of false accusation are still common, and one has to be very careful about what one says and writes. Minorities need to keep on raising their deep concern about the misuse of blasphemy laws in the country. And in this regard, the Catholic Church can play a vital and positive role.

Interview with Fr James Channan OP

By the Accion Verapaz Organization, Madrid, Spain

The first question that arises is, after the floods of 2010, what is the current situation in Pakistan: homeless and displaced people, damage, and so on?

Answer: The 2010 floods in Pakistan were the worst in our history. They left 20 million people homeless, their houses destroyed. Countless animals were killed, and millions of acres of crops were either destroyed or underwater. The current situation is slightly better, as some of the people were given new homes, food, clothes, medicine and tents. Many farmers were also given seeds and fertilizer for their crops. The situation is still bad, with many people homeless and displaced. Most of the people were not able to recover damages. The government of Pakistan did very little for these suffering people. Most of the relief was given through NGOs. We as Dominicans were able to help build homes and provide food, clothes and seed and fertilizer for crops to many Christian and Muslim families in the flood-affected areas. There are still many people without shelter and homes.

Q. One of the alerts that originated after the flood was the famine in 2011 caused by the destruction of crops. Very little data came to Spain through the media. How was this issue resolved, as well as similar problems deriving from the floods?

Answer: Yes, there was famine after the floods, and over 500 people died, and others endured starvation or got sick because of drinking unclean water and food. Many children and women are still suffering health problems due to these floods.

Q. In fact, in 2011 the monsoon rains and flooding affected 9 million people, many of whom were still recovering from the disaster of 2010, especially in southern Pakistan. What was the response?

Answer: The response to the flooding in 2011 was not as much as it was in the year 2010. There was very little help from the government and NGOs. Some NGOs did not come personally to help because of the deteriorating law and order situation in the country. They did not feel safe to work here. However, some

Church organizations came to provide relief to these suffering people. It was much appreciated and received with thanks.

Q. What flood-related tasks are you still working on?

Answer: Our main task, as Dominicans, of providing relief to the victims of the floods was completed last year. We helped over 1,000 Christian and Muslim families either to rebuild their homes or to get them repaired. There are still some families who are in grave need of financial help to build simple one-room homes. If we get some financial help, we can provide them relief and help them to rebuild their homes.

Q. Although Accion Verapaz presented a report about the aid sent to Pakistan, can you tell us something that we may have overlooked in this report?

Answer: I think you have done a marvelous job in informing all the generous donors of Accion Verapaz in Spain and elsewhere about the Dominican relief work done in Pakistan. It was made possible through your generous grant. Thank you on behalf of all the Dominican friars, Sisters and Dominican laity for raising funds for us. You made it possible for us to help hundreds of the most deserving families in building and repairing their homes and giving them other relief goods. Please extend my sincere and heartfelt thanks especially to the Dominican Monastery of Nuns, who were very kind in sending generous donations to provide relief to these suffering people. Also sincere thanks to the friars and each member of Accion Verapaz and other Christian brothers and sisters who came to our help in that difficult time.

The assistance you have provided goes equally to Muslims and Christians. Remember that 96% of Pakistan's population is Muslim, and less than 2% is Christian.

Q. In this line, tell us about the United Religions Initiative in Pakistan that you coordinate, and the Peace Center in Lahore.

Answer: Yes, it is very true that Muslims are 96% and Christians are only 2%. We as Christians are the salt of the earth and the light of the world in our country. We are confronted with a lot of problems - extremism, terrorism and discrimination due to religion, gender and social status. We as Christians, though a very tiny minority, want to play our full role in promoting peace and harmony among people of different religions, especially

Christians and Muslims. We want to bring about healing and reconciliation in our society and work for justice and equality. For that reason, especially to encourage dialogue and harmony between Christians and Muslims, we have established the Dominican Peace Center in Lahore. This Peace Center was blessed and inaugurated by His Eminence Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran on the 28th of November, 2010. We organize dialogue programs and send publications from here. We are establishing a library to provide research facilities to both Christians and Muslims. The United Religions Initiative (URI) is another international organization which is working to promote peace and harmony in the world. I am honored to work with URI in this noble task.

Q. Would you like to convey something to the Accion Verapaz donors who contributed to alleviate the situation after the 2010 floods?

Answer: I express my sincere thanks to each and every donor of Accion Verapaz. You are bringing smiles of gratitude to the faces of many suffering families around the world. The Muslims and Christians of Pakistan have experienced your generosity when they were severely affected by devastating rains and floods and you came to help them with your prayers and with financial gifts which provided shelter, food, clothes and medicine to them. I shared with them that this relief was provided by our brothers and sisters of Accion Verapaz in Spain. All of them were very delighted to know about you and expressed their sincere gratitude to you. God bless Accion Verapaz!

Keep up the great humanitarian work you are doing for suffering humanity without borders. You are manifesting your love and care for people around the globe. That is really wonderful. God bless you! Keep up this great Christ-like work!

Dominican priest wages peace through dialogue in troubled Pakistan

By George Raine, San Francisco, USA

The odds that a Catholic priest can help bring peace and make interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance flourish in troubled Pakistan would seem long.

Some 35,000 people have been killed in the country since Sept. 11, 2001. In a population of 180 million, 96 percent are Muslim, 2 percent are Hindu and Christians are but 1.8 percent. Extremists – perhaps 10 percent of Pakistanis, while 90 percent are peaceful people – grab the headlines in the seemingly endless wave of religious violence.

But Dominican Father James Channan is an optimistic man, and has been for the 35 years he has waged peace in Pakistan, the last 14 years as regional coordinator for San Francisco-based United Religions Initiative, the world's largest grassroots interfaith organization.

Father Channan was in San Francisco for speaking engagements this month and said that he continues to be inspired to bring people of different faiths together, in particular accommodating Muslim-Christian dialogue.

“In Pakistan I see great hope,” said Father Channan. “The dialogue is not just coming together, sitting around a table to talk and have a cup of coffee. My work is aimed at having dialogue at every level of life.”

The United Religions Initiative was launched in 2000 by the former head of the Episcopal Church in California, Bishop William Swing, as a kind of United Nations for religions. Officed in the Presidio of San Francisco, it is now a global network of more than 500 grassroots organizations, called Cooperation Circles, dedicated to peace and justice through interfaith and cross-cultural cooperation. It has a presence in 78 countries.

Father Channan manages the URI effort in Pakistan, having organized 44 interfaith groups, as well as directing a new Dominican Peace Center in Lahore with a similar agenda. Each of these groups has an emphasis, while all of them keep front of mind working toward bringing down Pakistan's staggering illiteracy rate of more than 50 percent, and giving people a lift out of poverty. The poor, he noted, often succumb to the temptation of joining radical extremists.

“People are poor and they lack vocational training,” said Father Channan, a 59-year-old Pakistani. “We work with them. Another

group may work for children in schools, promoting harmony in the minds of children. Another may make posters that demonstrate a sense of unity and peace. Another group is working for the betterment of women, promoting education, providing them with vocational training, and helping women who become victims of domestic violence and also who have been sexually abused,” he said.

It is not uncommon, he added, for Christian women to be kidnapped and forced to convert to Islam. Those women are helped as well, he said.

The work is accommodated by mutual respect and the rewards are meaningful, but Pakistan is a dangerous place for minorities, he said.

Indeed, the country’s lone Christian cabinet member, Shahbaz Bhatti, the federal minister for minorities who was an outspoken critic of Pakistan’s blasphemy laws and a Catholic, was assassinated in March, triggering condemnation around the world. His position has not been filled. Meantime, a radical Islamic party this month launched a campaign seeking a ban on the Bible, described as a “pornographic” and “blasphemous book.” In recent years, the homes of 300 Christians have been set afire.

“Nobody in Pakistan is safe,” said Father Channan. “A person goes to the market, whether Muslim or Christian, and she does not know whether she will be coming back home or not. Police officers are not safe. Our army is not safe. Our political leaders are not safe. Our human rights leaders are not safe. Some of them have been killed,” he said.

“I don’t feel safe. However, I am not afraid to do the work which I am doing,” said Father Channan, “to promote harmony, to bring reconciliation, to bring a message of respect and tolerance. That is my mission. That is what I am inspired to do, and it was what Jesus Christ taught me by his example.” He added, “He suffered. He died, and he rose up on the third day, so that is a great model for me and an inspiration.”

From the June 24, 2011 issue of Catholic San Francisco.

- See more at: http://www.catholic-sf.org/news_select.php?newsid=16&id=58696#sthash.oJ0dAOm2.gchoUyFm.dpuf

PART THREE

COMMENTARIES, TRIBUTES AND ESSAYS

Faith in Pakistan

A Tribute by Bishop William E. Swing

On Tuesday evening I had the pleasure of introducing Father James Channan, URI's Regional Coordinator for Pakistan, at a reception in his honor. After covering a few background facts—his degrees in Islamic Studies and Arabic Language and Counseling and his role as a founder of URI Pakistan — I tried to give the audience some context for his forthcoming address.

“You will hear Father Channan often use words like ‘peace,’ ‘tolerance,’ and ‘harmony,’ words that could sound slightly hollow to an American audience. But in a land where, because of what you believe about God, your house might be burned to the ground, you might be falsely accused of blasphemy, you might be blown to bits by a bomb, or beaten to death by a mob, ‘peace,’ ‘tolerance,’ and ‘harmony’ are muscular, risky and dangerous words. This is the kind of life that Father Channan lives, and this is at the core of URI's agenda in Pakistan.

“A couple of years ago there was a devastating earthquake in a remote Pakistani mountain range — so remote that relief workers at first couldn't get to the victims. Among the first responders up the mountain was a small group of URI folks with blankets and tents, with Father Channan providing the leadership.

“Last year 11 million Pakistanis were displaced by massive flooding. Among the first responders with medicine and supplies was a URI contingent under the leadership of Father James.

“When Pakistan came into being in 1947/8, 24 percent of its land was forest. Today less than 2.5 percent is forest. URI environmentalists—Christians and Muslims—are speaking out, teaching conservation and planting trees.

“A couple of years ago when hundreds of homes of people from a minority religion were burned to the ground in the Swat region and some believers were burned alive, Father James and a URI group showed up in solidarity and gave charity.

“And in March, one of Father Channan's closest associates was pulled from his car and riddled with bullets, a man whom the government had put in charge of protecting the rights of religious minorities.

“I can confidently predict that tonight in Pakistan there are small groups of people — Taliban, Al Qaeda — gathered to plot disaster. But let's look at the other side. There are also tonight small groups of people — URI people in Cooperation Circles — gathered to plot peace, tolerance and harmony in Pakistan. And they could use a little help from their friends.

“URI’s work is essential for the health and the promise of Pakistan, and URI is blessed to have the leadership and courage of Father James Channan.”

After I spoke, Father Channan got up and told how his family had lived as Hindus in that land for centuries until they converted to Christianity in the latter part of the 19th century. He talked about going to Muslim schools as a child, and switching to Roman Catholic schools. He talked about being a priest and an interfaith leader in his country. And at his most passionate moment he said, .I love my country. “I love Pakistan.”

Amidst all of the craziness that goes on there, Father Channan has a powerful faith in Pakistan.

* *This article was written by The Rt. Reverend Bishop William E. Swing, Founder and President of United Religions Initiative and published on URI website www.uri.org, USA*

Interfaith in Pakistan

Fr. James Channan speaks out for Unity Made Visible

“We have 9/11 every day in Pakistan,” said Fr. James Channan, Regional Coordinator for the United Religions Initiative (URI) in Pakistan, speaking on “Interfaith in Pakistan” at the Chapel at Croton Falls on Sunday, July 10, 2011. He explained that more than 35,000 people in his country have been killed by terrorists, making ordinary life very unsafe. There are now guards outside of mosques and churches. And it was a particular shock when Shahbaz Bhatti, a Christian who had been appointed Federal Minister for Minorities, was assassinated in March 2011 for his stance on the blasphemy laws, often used as an excuse for persecution. Fr. Channan believes that ignorance is the root cause of terrorism, and thus education is the real key to a brighter future.

Fr. Channan, a Catholic priest who has dedicated his life of Christian service both to his own faith and to promoting harmony among people of diverse faiths, was the guest of Unity Made Visible, a Cooperation Circle of the United Religions Initiative in northern Westchester, New York. He was invited by Rev. Deborah Moldow, an interfaith minister at the Chapel who is a longtime friend of Fr. Channan. Deborah and Fr. James met many times over the URI’s formative years, at the URI’s Charter signing in 2000, and at the United Nations, where Deborah represents the World Peace Prayer Society. Their friendship deepened through the Society as Fr. Channan began planting Peace Poles in many important locations in Pakistan, including at the new Peace Center he inaugurated in Lahore in 2010.

Unity Made Visible is known for its Learning Series, introducing representatives of various faith traditions that may be less familiar to local residents. UMV has also hosted other guests from abroad as part of this series, in a continuous quest to broaden our horizons of faith. Among the diverse audience who attended the talk by Fr. Channan were Rev. Paul Briggs, pastor of Antioch Baptist Church; Renuka Kumar, who is a frequent representative of Hinduism at the Interfaith Sundays at the Chapel, and her son Samir; Rev. Gail Burger of the Presbyterian

Church U.S.A.; and Dr. Mahjabeen Hassan of the American Muslim Women's Association.

Dr. Hassan, who grew up in Pakistan, stressed her pride in the education she received at Dominican schools. She noted that in those days, people were grateful to the Catholics for the educational opportunities they provided. Dr. Hassan expressed shame that her fellow Pakistani Muslims were not more vocal against the extremists, saying, "Our Muslim leaders are so silent that it is deafening!"

Fr. Channan has done extraordinary work building inter-religious harmony through the URI in Pakistan, which now has 44 multifaith Cooperation Circles, an impressive achievement in a nation where some 97% of the citizens are of the same religion. The Cooperation Circles include Muslims, Christians, Hindus and Baha'is, and a small number of Buddhists. URI Pakistan also boasts one of the United Religions Initiative's three Global Council trustees from the Asia region, Maulana Syed Muhammad Abdul Khabir Azad, the youngest Grand Imam of Badshahi Mosque, which is the largest mosque in Lahore, Pakistan.

When asked the first two priorities of his work, Fr. Channan did not hesitate. "Interfaith harmony is my top priority," he said, "And my second is the empowerment of women." He described the excellent work of Sr. Sabina Rifat, who has launched a Women's Wing for URI Pakistan, which provides both trauma counseling and employment training for disadvantaged women of all faiths.

Unity Made Visible is grateful to Fr. Channan for sharing his extraordinary life and work with us. We will feel connected to URI Pakistan every International Day of Peace, when we rededicate the Peace Pole at Antioch Baptist Church – and the same will be true for the Chapel at Croton Falls, which will also rededicate its Peace Pole in honor of the IDP.

May Peace Prevail in Pakistan!

Ms. Deborah Maldow,
United Nations, New York, USA

James Channan OP
Pioneer of interfaith dialogue in Pakistan

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GEORG EVERS

For over 30 years, the Pakistani Dominican Father James Channan has been active in interreligious dialogue between Christians and Muslims, and in peace-building work. In Pakistan and abroad, because of his experience, his commitment and his perseverance in seeking dialogue despite repeated disappointments and negative experiences, he has been much in demand and honored with various awards. His entire working life as a Dominican, he has devoted to Christian-Muslim dialogue and understanding among religions in Pakistan.

James was born on 15 October 1952 in the district of Okara in Pakistan. In 1969, he completed his high school education at St. Vincent School in Chak No 133/16-1, Mian Channu. He spent the next 4 years at Dominican Formation House (Louis Hall) in Multan. During this time, he studied at Willayat Hussain Islamia College Multan and obtained a Bachelor's degree from the University of the Punjab in Lahore. In September 1973, he entered the novitiate at Dominican House Bahawalpur and after one year made First Profession (Vows). From 1974 to 1980, he received 6 years of philosophical and theological studies from Christ the King Seminary in Karachi.

During this period of study, James Channan spent six months in the house of the Jesuits in Lahore for an internship in 1977, which introduced him to the Swiss Jesuit P. Bütler, a pioneer of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Pakistan, dialogue work and the study of Islam. During this internship, James Channan also began study of the Arabic language at the Institute of Arabic Language.

After completing his seminary studies, he was ordained a priest on 9 April 1980 in Faisalabad. After his ordination, he had two years of pastoral work in Sahiwal parish. Then James Channan went to Rome in 1982 to study at the Pontifical Institute for Islamic Studies and Arabic Language (PISAI), and after 3 years of study obtained his Licentiate degree in 1985. Years later, in 1996, he continued his academic training by earning a Master's degree in Pastoral Counselling from the Emmanuel College,

Boston. He also studied World Religions at Harvard University in Cambridge, USA, and took a course in peace building in 2003 from the American University in Washington, DC. He crowned his academic career recently with the award of an honorary doctorate in theology on 11 December 2012 from Pakistan Theological Seminary of the Pakistani Protestants of the International Gospel Mission based in Norway for his commitment to interreligious dialogue and peace. The formal presentation of the doctorate was held in the presence of over 400 guests in Lahore. That his mother could be present at this ceremony gave the celebration its particular character. In an interview, James Channan has emphasized the role of his parents on his way to a religious and priestly career. They have made many sacrifices in order to let him go this route. In Pakistani culture, as the eldest son of seven siblings, he was supposed to work for the preservation of the family and ensure the well-being of his siblings. His parents had assured him, however, that they would cope, and thus gave him the freedom to follow his call to be a priest without creating any difficulty for him.

When James Channan returned to Pakistan after completing his studies abroad, he was appointed director of the dialogue center of the Dominicans in Lahore in 1985, which he led for 10 years, and where he established a dialogue circle of Christians and Muslims, which, despite the deterioration of relations between Christians and Muslims in Pakistan, continues to exist and gives a positive impetus for interfaith understanding among religious groups in the country. Within his religious community of Dominicans, James Channan was elected three times as the Prior Vice Provincial of the Dominicans in Ibn-e-Mariam Vice Province, Pakistan. In the National Conference of Major Superiors of Pakistan, he has held important leadership positions over the years. At the national level, in 1985, James Channan was selected by the Pakistani Bishops' Conference as Secretary of the Episcopal Commission for Christian-Muslim dialogue, a position he held until 2002. The dialogue and peace work of James Channan was internationally recognized. From 1985 to 1995, he was appointed by Pope John Paul II as Consultant to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and then from 1999-2004 as Consultant to the Vatican Commission for

Religious Relations with Muslims. He was a founding member and then Regional Coordinator of the United Religious Initiative (URI), Pakistan. URI is an international organization presently working in 82 countries to promote interreligious dialogue, peace and harmony. URI was founded in 2000 in San Francisco, USA. For 30 years, James Channan has traveled to many continents and countries to participate in numerous international conferences on interreligious dialogue and contributed reports and position papers. As director of the nationally and internationally renowned Pastoral Institute Multan, which he headed from 2001 to 2007, James Channan has organized numerous seminars on interreligious dialogue with the participation of Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Baha'is, and started a number of peace initiatives. One of the most significant events was the 1500 mile long Journey for Peace from Karachi to the Khyber Pass, which took place from 24 December 1999 to 4 January 2000. Another peace initiative was the planting of "Peace Poles", which he has carried out in several cities in Pakistan in recent years. These "Peace Poles" are an initiative of the World Peace Prayer Society in Japan, which has planted Peace Poles in more than 180 countries. This diverse dialogue and peace work has also given rise to publishing activities, including book and magazine articles and many interviews that have been published in multiple languages and countries. James Channan is currently head of the Dominican Peace Center in Lahore, which was opened by Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, on 28 November 2010.

Looking back on his youth, James Channan stressed in an interview that he had had good experiences of coexistence between Christians and Muslims in his hometown, from which lasting friendships were formed. To date, he is close friends with Muslims from different professions, including judges, teachers, doctors, social workers and volunteers in peace work. Half of the participants were Muslims in the celebration of his First Mass in his hometown, Dairy Form Salerno in Okara. James Channan's most beautiful experience of dialogue with Muslims was when, in January 2004, he was invited by Maulana Muhammad Abdul Khabir Azad, Grand Imam in the Badshahi Mosque - the 2nd

largest mosque of Pakistan in Lahore. In this grand mosque, 100,000 people can pray at the same time. James was invited to participate as a representative of Christians in an interfaith conference. It was the first time in the 350 year history of the mosque that a Christian could preach in the central mosque of Muslims. It is these positive experiences of mutual respect and friendship that give James Channan the power to overcome setbacks and continue his dialogue and peace work. The contribution of James Channan to understanding among religions and his commitment to peace in the country have also been recognized on a national level, as he was awarded the Pakistani Peace Prize in September 2012 by the Government of Pakistan.

James Channan has often been asked by outsiders why he continues to promote dialogue in spite of many setbacks and disappointments, and despite the increasing discrimination against religious minorities in Pakistan. His answer may seem too easy “at first sight” when he notes that there is no alternative to dialogue if you want a peaceful coexistence among Muslims, Christians and members of other religions. For the Christian minority in Pakistan, accounting for just 2 percent of the population, dialogue is a necessity if Christians are to survive in this 96 percent Muslim country. Since the founding of Pakistan, Christians have understood themselves as citizens who wish to carry the country along with Muslims. Time and time again, Christian organizations, guided by the spirit of charity, have offered to all those affected, regardless of their religious affiliation, relief from natural disasters such as major floods. Christians have joined Muslims in condemning the denigration of the reputation of the Prophet Muhammad of Islam through cartoons, movies in the Western media and the burning of the Holy Quran in the U.S., showing solidarity with them. In dialogue, Christians want to promote cooperation and coexistence between Muslims and Christians on the basis of mutual respect and equality. Only on the path of dialogue will it be possible to reduce existing tensions and misunderstandings. Although James Channan describes himself as an optimist, he is a realist who can appreciate the difficulties and resistances to understanding and dialogue properly. In recent years, the radical Muslim groups, especially the Taliban, have

contributed to an increasing Islamisation of Pakistani society and increasing discrimination against religious communities. This Islamisation of Pakistani society at all levels began under the dictatorship of General Zia al-Haq (1977-1988), who is responsible for the introduction of anti-blasphemy laws and the associated legal uncertainty that burdens today's social life in Pakistan. In his fight against religious intolerance and hostility between religious communities in Pakistan, James Channan has pointed out the flaws in the textbooks of the country, in which systematic intolerance is being taught as a form of indoctrination, which is responsible for the pervasive sectarian violence in the country. This negative indoctrination occurs mainly in the form of all students in primary schools and universities being compelled to take "Islamic Studies" courses, in which Islam is presented as the best and only true religion while the other religions are described as inferior and wrong.

We learned just how strong the resistance of Islamist groups in Pakistan could be when Shabbaz Bhatti, the Catholic Minister for Minorities, was murdered by radical Muslims in March 2011 because of his efforts to abolish the blasphemy laws or to make changes in these laws. It was not only the murder itself, but the applause of the killers among learned circles of radical Muslims which made clear how strong are the forces in Pakistan that promote radical Islamisation. In an interview shortly after the assassination of Bhatti, James Channan has the general safety threat in Pakistan described clearly when he states: "No one is safe in Pakistan. If someone, no matter whether he is a Christian or a Muslim, goes to the market, he cannot be sure to come back. All those working for human rights are at risk in our country. I also do not feel safe. But I do not fear for myself. My work to promote harmony, to create reconciliation and to proclaim the message of mutual respect and tolerance will continue. This is my mission. That is what I feel inspired by, and that is what Jesus Christ taught me with his example. He suffered and died, but he rose again from the dead. He is the greatest role model and my inspiration." In the celebration of the UN International Day of Peace in September 2012 in Lahore, James Channan expressed in his speech his determination to engage more unequivocally on behalf of interreligious understanding and

peace: “We will not stop working for peace, tolerance and religious harmony, no matter how difficult and challenging the circumstances may be.”

Dr. Georg Evers
Mission specialist
Germany

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<http://www.forum-weltkirche.de/de/personen/16261.james-channan-op.html>

**Who is My Neighbor?
The Church of Pakistan and the challenge of a church
of the poor and for the poor***

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07/2013 JAMES CHANNAN OP

It was so inspiring and encouraging at the same time to hear the words of our Pope Francis: “Oh, how I want a poor church for the poor.” This statement really deeply touched my heart and soul. When I look around me and reflect on the situation of Christians in Pakistan, this statement is very true. It reveals the reality of our situation in Pakistan. The message of Pope Francis is that Christ can be experienced in our midst. It calls on us to make our way to the poor.

Poverty and the wealth of Jesus

The message of Pope Francis reflects very much the life and preaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was himself poor. When we read about the life of Jesus and reflect, we realize that he was very poor, economically speaking. His parents were poor. His mother Mary belonged to a very poor family, and his father Joseph was also poor, a carpenter who had to work hard to feed his family. We know that Jesus was accustomed to his father at work. We can read anywhere that Jesus did not live a luxurious life. He was a simple, poor man; he had no land, no palace, no servants and no arable land. He was a poor man who needed no soldiers or bodyguards to protect him. He stood with both feet on the ground, and it was easy to reach him. The people felt comfortable to approach him, to talk to him in search of mercy, to ask for the forgiveness of sins, to ask for healing, so they asked him even to raise the dead to life. We will find a wealth of evidence of such events in the Gospels. Jesus himself did not have the necessary financial resources to feed the crowd. Rather, he simply asked his disciples how much food they had there. With the five loaves and two fishes, as we read in Matthew that Jesus blessed, a crowd of over 5000 men, women and children were satiated (Mt 14:13-21; cf. Mt 15:32 to 39).

Jesus also had no boat. He traveled on the boats of his disciples. He rode on a donkey that did not belong to him in the city of Jerusalem. The Last Supper was prepared by someone

else. These are all indications that Jesus had led a very simple life. And Jesus himself says:

“The foxes have holes, and birds have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Mt, 8:20).

Despite all this material deprivation, Jesus was very rich in mercy, in compassion, in forgiveness of others, in the healing of the sick, in the adoption of the downtrodden and oppressed, the marginalized, the untouchables, the dying and the sick. Jesus has so much to offer because of his wealth, his love and compassion. Sometimes Jesus even condemned the materially rich, such as the rich young man who was not able to follow Jesus because he was bound to his material wealth. Jesus sees the danger when someone is being held captive by his material wealth and therefore warns his disciples, “It is hard for a rich man to get into the kingdom of heaven. Again I say to you it is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Mt 19:23 f).

The mission of Jesus

To proclaim the Good News to the poor was the real mission of Jesus Christ. And it is said in the Gospel: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to the poor, I bring good news, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight. To let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18 -19)

This passage of the Gospel explains the purpose and agenda of the mission of Jesus. He was sent to the poor, prisoners and oppressed. All the people who fall under this category were the target of the mission of Jesus. Christ loved the poor. Because they longed for justice, they needed acceptance and respect, and they longed for dignity in their lives. And poverty demands distance from material things that keep us from following Jesus. Jesus comforts the poor and weak when he says: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.” (Mt 5:3 to 6)

The Pakistani Church has a long history. It is a story of a church that has always been financially poor. We are very proud that our

roots go back to the first century. According to tradition, it was the Apostle Thomas himself, who penetrated into what is now Pakistan in the years 45-52 AD, to preach the word of God and to proclaim the Good News. According to tradition, it was the site of Sir Co-op near Texila (about an hour's drive from the capital Islamabad today), where St. Thomas did this.

When we look back on the life and history of the Church in Pakistan, we will see that it was the poor of this country, weak and marginalized, discriminated against and despised by the rich, who accepted the message of Jesus and embraced Christianity. They were baptized and accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Christians in Pakistan

Christians were an indispensable part of the movement for Pakistan's independence, its progress and its success. Politically, there were Christians such as SP Singha, spokesman for the Punjab Assembly Legaslative, C. Gibbons, Joshua Fazal Din and Chandu Lall, who fought side by side with Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. Christians have played a very important role in the province of Punjab becoming part of Pakistan, because their votes were crucial to ensure that the Muslim League received the necessary majority. And in the end it was SP Singha, a Christian Speaker, who in 1945 proclaimed the victory of the Muslim League.

Today Punjab is the largest and most important province of Pakistan. 110 million of the 180 million citizens of the country live in the province of Punjab. 75 percent of the approximately 3.5 million Pakistani Christians also live there. Also, most priests and followers of the church come from Pakistani Punjab.

Many leaders of the country who are Christians also come from Punjab, including Shahbaz Bhatti, who was the Federal Minister for Minorities Affairs of the Federal Government. On 2 March, 2011, however, he was shot dead by extremists. Julius Salik, State Minister for Minorities, Peter John Sohotra, Member of the National Assembly, and Paul Bhatti, former advisor to the Prime Minister, are other examples of prominent Christian politicians. In the history of Pakistan. Christians have played an important role both in the army leadership and the judiciary. At this point, it is necessary to mention AR Cornelius. He was Chief Justice of

the Supreme Court of Pakistan. It was he who had prepared the draft of the Constitution of Pakistan, which was then enacted under President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1973. But the fields of music and art in Pakistan also contain many famous Christians.

The influence of the Christian churches in Pakistan is certainly due to the importance of their Lund training facilities, which have become a national symbol for the education and training system. The Foreman Christian College (University) in Lahore, St. Patrick's College in Karachi, La Salle Schools, Jesus and Mary and the Presentation Sister Schools nationwide have a very high reputation for the excellent education they offer. Their standards are never compromised. Most Christian schools and colleges serve the masses of the poor, both Christians and Muslims. Significantly, these schools are greatly appreciated not only by Christians but also by Muslims. People praise the high standard of education and the moral values that are taught there. Many famous Muslim politicians in the country have studied at Christian educational institutions. These include, among others, the former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, the Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, Yousuf Raza Gilani, the State President Pervaiz Musharraf, Asif Ali Zardari and the President of the Supreme Court, Nasim Hasan Shaw.

There are two types of schools that are run by the Christian churches: those in which the language of instruction is English and those in which the language of instruction is Urdu. The latter in particular are educational institutions for the poor. These institutions cannot charge fees, because the students would not have the money to pay school fees. A very high proportion of students are Muslims. Even if it is difficult, Christian churches ensure the maintenance of these schools, as they are for us an important testimony as a Christian community, sent to the poor.

A church of the poor for the poor also faces many problems, such as discrimination, oppression and false accusations - all these things are not unknown to us. We have learned to live in these difficult and challenging situations. Sometimes our lives seem to be in danger, but we are not afraid to bear witness of Christ our Lord. We loudly protest against injustice. We raise questions, both on a national and international level. While we live as Pakistanis in Pakistan, we will continue to play our role in

building our nation with all the services necessary for a country in which none will be discriminated against.

Interreligious dialogue - an integral part of the mission of the Church

Allow me to introduce another important field in today's Pakistan designate, which has met with high appreciation and esteem despite some hostility to the Christian experience: it is the inter-religious dialogue between Christians and Muslims. The Christian Study Center in Rawalpindi and the Dominican Peace Center in Lahore are nationally known and recognized, but both centers are also highly appreciated internationally for the important task of dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Pakistan. I myself was three times Vice-Provincial of the Dominican Province of the Vice-Ibne Mariam and over 15 years consultant to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Vatican's Commission for Relations with Muslims. Since 2010, I have been the Director of the Center for Peace in the Dominican Lahore. Dialogue is an essential part of peace work in Pakistan. It is a great honor that Dr. Georg Evers introduced me in this magazine in the March / April 2013 issue as the "pioneer of inter-religious dialogue in Pakistan." For about 30 years, I have been involved in interreligious dialogue. For me, this dialogue is an essential part of the mission of the Church. It is an instrument to promote mutual respect between Christians and Muslims, but also cooperation.

The legacy of St. Thomas, apostle to the Gentiles, was continued by missionaries such as the Franciscans, the Capuchins, the Dominicans and the Jesuits, and many women of religion. This country is very rich in faith. The Church of the poor is strong. And she is engaged in a variety of apostolates: education, preaching, dialogue, evangelization, pastoral, youth, women, children, justice and peace, faith formation, service to the poor, living in poverty, the marginalized, the sick, orphans and prisoners. In Pakistan, the church as an institution does not view its faith community as including only members. Rather, it includes people of all religious communities, such as Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Zoroastrians and indigenous peoples. Much importance is attached to dialogue with Muslims, who make up 96 percent of our population. Most Muslims are also very poor,

and many of them are also discriminated against. There are many examples and incidents of injustices suffered by these Muslims. They are victims of an unjust class system, terrorism and fanaticism. In this context, we must ask ourselves: How can we fulfill Jesus's command, when he tells us, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. Similarly, the second is: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Mt 22:37-40). But who is our neighbor? My neighbor is a Christian and a non-Christian as well. My neighbors are Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and members of other religious communities. With all of them I come into daily contact. This is also the reason why the Christian social services, such as education, health care, and aid to victims of floods and earthquakes are not reserved for Christians, but extended to all those around us. By helping the poor and needy around us, we feel that we fulfill the command of Christ, who taught us to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Allow healing

In the context of Pakistan, there are so many places and situations that need healing. The point is to promote respect for each other, mutual understanding and dialogue among people of different religions, especially Christians and Muslims. In this context, we see very clearly that our poor church is also a church for the poor. By highlighting the dialogue between Christians and Muslims at all levels of life, we realize the mission of Jesus Christ. And there are many challenges and obstacles in our apostolate of dialogue. But we, despite our suffering, sometimes discriminated against by others, sometimes misunderstood, continue our apostolate, to promote dialogue and harmony and never give up being Christians. Meanwhile, the importance of dialogue in Pakistani society is perceived, and dialogue groups have been established throughout the country. To allow healing, forgiveness, a positive understanding of each other and aid for the marginalized and underprivileged is an integral part of our mission as a church throughout Pakistan.

A poor church for the poor in Pakistan

The message of our Pope inspired us greatly, so that we reflect on our new mission, our options for the poor. In them we find Christ, who told us: “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink: I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison and you came to me ... What you did for the least of my brethren, you did it to me.” (Mt 25: 35 ff.) So, if we, the poor, needy, helpless and marginalized, help those around us, then we will help Christ himself. We cannot remove ourselves from the poor around us. We need to belong to them. Jesus has commanded us to separate ourselves from material goods and to be poor for the poor: “Take nothing for the way, no walking stick and no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt” (Lk 9:3) This shows that if we go out with nothing, we will feel closer to the poor, to whom we are sent. We'll be inseparable from them.

In Pakistan, we have to play a meaningful role as a poor church for the poor. This means to be the salt of the earth and light of the world, as Jesus taught (cf. Mt 5:13 f). This is what we are called to. We as Christians need to give light, and we must never stop being salt. This is our life, and that is the life of the poor Church for the poor in Pakistan. God bless Pakistan!

James Channan OP

A Dominican monk and theologian, Director of the Dominican Peace Center in Lahore, Pakistan

TIP

Fr James Channan OP was invited in March this year by Notre Dame University in the U.S. on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the encyclical “Pacem in Terris” to give a lecture on the impact and challenges of this encyclical for Christians in Pakistan. As part of this lecture, he discusses in detail the importance of interfaith dialogue in Pakistan. Read the presentation on the homepage of the global initiative called “United Religions Initiative” - an initiative of different religions and faith communities, which is dedicated to peace through cooperation between the religions.

<http://www.forum-weltkirche.de/de/artikel/16714.wer-ist-mein-naechster.html>

James Channan OP

Pionier des interreligiösen Dialogs in Pakistan

Georg Evers

Seit gut 30 Jahren ist der pakistanische Dominikanerpater James Channan im interreligiösen Dialog zwischen Christen und Muslimen und in der Friedensarbeit tätig.

In Pakistan und im Ausland ist er wegen seiner Erfahrung, seinem Engagement und seines Durchhaltevermögens, den Dialog trotz Enttäuschungen immer wieder zu suchen und sich von negativen Erfahrungen nicht abschrecken zu lassen, viel gefragt und mit verschiedenen Preisen geehrt worden. Seine ganze Lebensarbeit als Dominikaner hat er, bis auf eine kurzfristige Pastortätigkeit, dem christlich-islamischen Dialog und der Verständigung zwischen den Religionen in Pakistan gewidmet. Geboren wurde James Channan am 15. Oktober 1952 im Distrikt Okara in Pakistan. 1969 endete seine Schulausbildung mit dem Abitur an der St. Vincent Schule in Mian Channu, einer Distrikthauptstadt in der Provinz Punjab. Die nächsten 4 Jahre verbrachte er in einem Ausbildungs- und Vorbereitungszentrum der Dominikaner in Multan. Während dieser Zeit erwarb er nach Studien am Williyat Hussain Islamia Kolleg in Multan den Bachelorgrad von der Punjab Universität in Lahore. Im September 1973 trat er in Bahawalpur in das Noviziat der Dominikaner ein und legte ein Jahr später die ersten Gelübde ab. Seine philosophische und theologische Ausbildung erhielt James Channan von 1974–1980 im Christkönigsseminar in Karachi. Während dieser Studienzeit hat James Channan 1977 in Lahore ein halbes Jahr ein Praktikum im Haus der Jesuiten in Lahore verbracht, wo ihn der Schweizer Jesuit P. Bütler, ein Pionier des christlich-islamischen Dialogs in Pakistan, in die Dialogarbeit und das Studium des Islam einführte. Während dieses Praktikums hat James Channan am Institut für Arabische Sprache auch mit dem Studium der arabischen Sprache begonnen.

Nach Abschluss seiner Studien wurde er am 9. April 1980 in Faisalabad zum Priester geweiht. Nach seiner Priesterweihe folgte ein kurzer zweijähriger pastoraler Einsatz in einer Pfarrei

in Sahiwal. Danach ging James Channan nach Rom, wo er 1985 am Päpstlichen Institut für Arabisch-Islamische Studien (PISAI) ein Lizentiat machte. Jahre später hat er 1996 seine akademische Ausbildung mit dem Erwerb eines Magistergrads in Pastoraler Beratung (Pastoral Counseling) und mit einem Studium der Weltreligionen an der Harvard Universität in Boston sowie mit einem Kurs in Friedensarbeit (Peace Building Course) 2003 an der amerikanischen Universität in Washington abgeschlossen. Gekrönt wurde seine akademische Laufbahn vor kurzem mit der Verleihung eines Ehrendoktors in Theologie, der ihm am 11. Dezember 2012 auf Vorschlag der theologischen Hochschule der pakistanischen Protestanten von der in Norwegen beheimateten International Gospel Mission für seinen Einsatz für den interreligiösen Dialog und die Friedensarbeit verliehen wurde. Die feierliche Überreichung der Doktorwürde fand in Lahore in Gegenwart von über 400 Gästen statt. Dass auch seine Mutter bei dieser Zeremonie anwesend sein konnte, verlieh der Feier ihr besonderes Gepräge. In einem Interview hat James Channan die Rolle seiner Eltern auf seinem Weg zum Ordens- und Priesterberuf herausgestellt, die viele Opfer gebracht hätten, um ihn diesen Weg gehen zu lassen. Als ältester Sohn von sieben Geschwistern wäre ihm eigentlich die in der pakis tanischen Kultur übliche Rolle zugefallen, für den Erhalt der Familie zu arbeiten und die Versorgung seiner Geschwister sicherzustellen. Seine Eltern hätten ihm dagegen versichert, dass sie zurechtkämen, und ihm damit die Freiheit gegeben, ohne Gewissensbisse seiner Berufung zu folgen.

Als James Channan nach Abschluss seiner Studien im Ausland nach Pakistan zurückkehrte, wurde er 1985 zum Direktor des Dialogzentrums der Dominikaner in Lahore ernannt, das er 10 Jahre leitete und wo er einen Dialogkreis von Christen und Muslimen gründete, der über die Jahre hinweg, trotz der Verschlechterung der Beziehungen zwischen Christen und Muslimen in Pakistan, weiter bestanden und positive Impulse für die interreligiöse Verständigung zwischen den Religionsgruppen im Land gegeben hat. Innerhalb seiner religiösen Gemeinschaft der Dominikaner hat James Channan dreimal das Amt des Vizeprovinzials der pakistanischen Dominikaner-Vizeprovinz Ibn-e Mariam ausgeübt. Auch in der nationalen Konferenz der

Höheren Ordensoberen Pakistans hat er über die Jahre wichtige Leitungsfunktionen innegehabt. Auf der nationalen Ebene wurde James Channan 1985 von der pakistanischen Bischofskonferenz zum Sekretär der bischöflichen Kommission für den christlich-muslimischen Dialog bestimmt, eine Funktion, die er bis zum Jahre 2002 ausübte. Auch international wurde die Dialog- und Friedensarbeit von James Channan anerkannt. Von 1985 –1995 war er Mitglied des Päpstlichen Rates für den interreligiösen Dialog und danach von 1999–2004 Konsultor der Vatikanischen Kommission für die interreligiösen Beziehungen mit den Muslimen. 2005 wurde er Gründungsmitglied und danach regionaler Koordinator des pakistanischen Koordinationskreises der interreligiösen Dialoginitiative »United Religious Initiative« (URI), die 2000 in San Francisco gegründet wurde.

Seit 30 Jahren hat James Channan in vielen Kontinenten und Ländern an zahlreichen internationalen Konferenzen zum interreligiösen Dialog teilgenommen und eigene Beiträge beigesteuert. Als Direktor des national und international bekannten Pastoralinstituts in Multan, das er von 2001–2007 leitete, hat James Channan zahlreiche Seminare zum interreligiösen Dialog mit der Beteiligung von Muslimen, Hindus, Sikhs und Bahai organisiert und eine Reihe von Friedensinitiativen angestoßen. Besonders beachtet wurde der 1500 Meilen lange Friedensmarsch, der vom 24. Dezember 1999 bis zum 4. Januar 2000 von Karachi zum Khyber- Pass führte. Eine andere Friedensinitiative war das Pflanzen von »Friedenspfählen« (Peace Poles), die er in mehreren Städten in Pakistan in den letzten Jahren durchführen ließ. Diese »Friedenspfähle« sind eine Initiative der Gemeinschaft des Gebets für den Weltfrieden (World Peace Prayer Society), die solche Aktionen in mehr als 180 Ländern durchgeführt hat. Aus dieser vielfältigen Dialog- und Friedensarbeit erwuchs auch seine publizistische Tätigkeit mit Buch- und Zeitschriftenbeiträgen und vielen Interviews, die in mehreren Sprachen und Ländern veröffentlicht wurden. Gegenwärtig ist James Channan Leiter des Friedenszentrums der Dominikaner in Lahore, das im November 2010 von Kardinal Jean Louis Tauran, dem Präsidenten des Päpstlichen Rates für den Interreligiösen Dialog eröffnet wurde.

Im Rückblick auf seine Jugendzeit betonte James Channan in einem Interview, dass er in seinem Heimatort gute Erfahrungen des Zusammenlebens von Christen und Muslimen gemacht habe, aus denen dauernde Freundschaften entstanden seien. Bis heute sei er mit Muslimen aus verschiedenen Berufszweigen, Richtern, Lehrern, Ärzten, Sozialarbeitern und in der Friedensarbeit Engagierten eng befreundet. So wären bei der Feier seiner Primiz in seiner Heimatstadt die Hälfte der Teilnehmer Muslime gewesen. Als das schönste Erlebnis im Dialog mit den Muslimen bezeichnet James Channan, dass er 2004 vom Großiman der Badshahi Moschee, der größten Moschee in Lahore, in der 100 000 Menschen gleichzeitig beten können, eingeladen wurde, als Vertreter der Christen an einer interreligiösen Feier teilzunehmen. Es war das erste Mal in der 350-jährigen Geschichte der Moschee, dass ein Christ in dieser zentralen Moschee vor Muslimen predigen und beten konnte. Es sind diese positiven Erlebnisse gegenseitiger Achtung, Freundschaft und Respekts, die James Channan die Kraft geben, die Rückschläge im Dialog wegzustecken und in der Dialog- und Friedensarbeit weiterzumachen. Der Beitrag von James Channan zur Verständigung unter den Religionen und sein Einsatz für den inneren Frieden im Land wurden auch auf nationaler Ebene anerkannt, als ihm der pakistanische Friedenspreis für das Jahr 2012 verliehen wurde.

Von Außenstehenden ist James Channan oft gefragt worden, warum er trotz vieler Rückschläge und Enttäuschungen und trotz der zunehmenden Diskriminierung der religiösen Minderheiten in Pakistan weiterhin für Dialog und Verständigung eintritt. Seine Antwort mag auf den ersten Blick »zu einfach« erscheinen, wenn er feststellt, dass es zum Dialog keine Alternative gibt, wenn man ein friedliches Miteinander von Muslimen, Christen und Angehörigen anderer Religionen will. Für die christliche Minderheit in Pakistan, die gerade mal 2 Prozent ausmacht, stellt der Dialog eine Notwendigkeit dar, wenn Christen in diesem zu 96 Prozent muslimischen Land überleben wollen. Seit der Staaten gründung Pakistans haben sich die Christen als Bürger verstanden, die mit den Muslimen zusammen das Land voranbringen wollen. Immer wieder haben christliche Organisationen, allen voran die Caritas, bei Naturkatastrophen wie den großen Überschwemmungen 2011 allen Betroffenen

ohne Rücksicht auf ihre Religionszugehörigkeit Hilfe geleistet. Mit Muslimen zusammen haben Christen die Verunglimpfung des Ansehens des Propheten Muhammad durch Karikaturen, Filme in westlichen Medien und die Koranverbrennung in den USA verurteilt und ihre Solidarität mit ihnen gezeigt. Im Dialog wollen die Christen auf der Basis von gegenseitigem Respekt und Gleichberechtigung die Zusammenarbeit und das Zusammenleben zwischen Muslimen und Christen fördern. Nur auf dem Weg des Dialogs wird es möglich sein, die bestehenden Missverständnisse und Spannungen abzubauen. Auch wenn James Channan sich selbst als Optimist bezeichnet, ist er doch Realist, der die Schwierigkeiten und Widerstände gegen Verständigung und Dialog richtig einschätzen kann. In den letzten Jahren haben die radikalen Muslimgruppen, vor allem die Taliban, zu einer zunehmenden Islamisierung der pakistanischen Gesellschaft und wachsender Diskriminierung der anderen Religionsgemeinschaften beigetragen. Diese Islamisierung der pakistanischen Gesellschaft auf allen Ebenen begann unter der Diktatur des Generals Zia-ul-Haq (1977–1988), der für die Einführung der Anti-Blasphemiegesetze und der damit verbundenen Rechtsunsicherheit verantwortlich ist, die bis heute das gesellschaftliche Leben in Pakistan stark belasten. In seinem Kampf gegen religiöse Intoleranz und Feindschaft zwischen den Religionsgemeinschaften in Pakistan hat James Channan auf die Mängel in den Schulbüchern des Landes hingewiesen, in denen systematisch Intoleranz gelehrt werde, eine Form der Indoktrination, die für die vielen religiös motivierten Gewalttaten im Lande verantwortlich ist. Diese negative Indoktrination geschieht vor allem in dem für alle Schülerinnen und Schüler von der Grundschule bis zur Universität verbindlich vorgeschriebenen Fach »Islam-Studien«, in dem neben der Einführung in die Grundlehren des Islam, der als die beste und einzig wahre Religion dargestellt wird, zugleich die anderen Religionen als minderwertig und falsch beschrieben werden. Wie stark der Widerstand der radikalen islamistischen Gruppen in Pakistan ist, musste im März 2011 Shabbaz Bhatti, der katholische Minister für die Minderheiten erfahren, der wegen seiner Bemühungen, die Blasphemiegesetze abzuschaffen beziehungsweise zu ändern, von einem radikalen Muslim

ermordet wurde. Es war nicht nur diese Tat, sondern der Beifall, den der Mörder aus Kreisen radikaler Muslime erfuhr, die deutlich machten, wie stark die Kräfte in Pakistan sind, die eine radikale Islamisierung vorantreiben. In einem Interview kurz nach der Ermordung von Bhatti hat James Channan die allgemeine Gefährdung der Sicherheit in Pakistan klar beschrieben, wenn er feststellt: »Kein Mensch in Pakistan ist sicher. Wenn jemand, ganz gleich ob er Christ oder Muslim ist, auf den Markt geht, kann er nicht sicher sein, zurückzukommen. Alle, die sich für Menschenrechte einsetzen, sind in unserem Land gefährdet. Auch ich fühle mich nicht sicher. Aber ich fürchte mich nicht, mein Werk, Harmonie zu fördern, Versöhnung zu schaffen und die Botschaft von gegenseitigem Respekt und Toleranz zu verkünden, weiterzuführen. Das ist meine Mission. Das ist, wozu ich mich inspiriert fühle und das ist, was Jesus Christus mich mit seinem Beispiel gelehrt hat. Er hat gelitten, er starb, aber er stand wieder von den Toten auf. Damit ist er für mich das große Vorbild und meine Inspiration. « Bei der Feier des internationalen Friedenstages der Vereinten Nationen im September 2012 in Lahore drückte James Channan in seiner Ansprache seine Entschlossenheit, für interreligiöse Verständigung und Frieden sich weiter zu engagieren unmissverständlich aus: »Wir werden uns nicht irre machen lassen, weiterhin für Frieden, Toleranz und religiöse Harmonie zu kämpfen, ganz gleich wie widrig die Umstände auch sein mögen.

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Die Kirche Pakistans und die Herausforderung, eine Kirche der Armen und für die Armen zu sein

James Channan Op

Es war so inspirierend und zugleich ermutigend, die Erklärung unseres Papstes Franziskus zu hören, der sagte: »Ach, wie möchte ich eine arme Kirche für die Armen!« Diese Aussage berührte wirklich sehr tief mein Herz und meine Seele. Wenn ich mich umschaue und die Situation der Christen in Pakistan reflektiere, dann ist dieses Statement unseres Papstes sehr wahr und zugleich bedeutsam. Es offenbart die Realität unserer Situation in Pakistan. Die Botschaft von Papst Franziskus lässt Christus in unserer Mitte erlebbar werden. Sie fordert uns auf, sich auf den Weg zu den Armen zu machen.

Die Armut und der Reichtum Jesu

Die Botschaft von Papst Franziskus reflektiert sehr stark das Leben und die Verkündigung unseres Herrn Jesus Christus, der selbst arm war. Wenn wir über das Leben Jesu lesen und reflektieren, dann stellen wir fest, dass er ökonomisch gesehen sehr arm war. Seine Eltern waren arm. Seine Mutter Maria gehörte zu einer sehr armen Familie, sein Vater Joseph war ebenfalls arm, ein Zimmermann, der hart arbeiten musste, um seine Familie ernähren zu können. Wir wissen, dass Jesus gewohnt war, seinem Vater bei der Arbeit zu helfen. Wir können nirgendwo lesen, dass Jesus ein luxuriöses Leben geführt hat. Er war ein einfacher, armer Mann; er besaß kein Land, keinen Palast, keine Diener und keine Ackerflächen. Er war ein armer Mann, der keine Soldaten oder Bodyguards benötigte, die ihn beschützten. Er stand mit beiden Beinen auf der Erde, und es war einfach, ihn zu erreichen. Die Menschen fühlten sich wohl, auf ihn zuzugehen, mit ihm zu sprechen auf der Suche nach Barmherzigkeit, ihn um die Vergebung der Sünden zu bitten, um Heilung zu bitten, ja sie baten ihn sogar, Tote zum Leben zu erwecken. Wir finden eine Fülle von Hinweisen solcher Ereignisse und Wunderberichte in den Evangelien. Jesus selbst besaß nicht die entsprechenden Finanzmittel, um die Menge zu ernähren. Vielmehr fragte er einfach seine Jünger, wie viel Nahrungsmittel sie dabei hätten. Mit den fünf Broten und zwei Fischen, so lesen wir im Matthäusevangelium, die Jesus segnete, konnte schließlich eine Menschenmenge von über 5000 Personen, Männer, Frauen und Kinder gesättigt werden (Mt 14,13–21; vgl. Mt 15,32–39).

Jesus besaß auch kein eigenes Boot. Er fuhr mit den Booten seiner Jünger. Er ritt auf einem Esel, der ihm nicht gehörte, in die Stadt Jerusalem. Das letzte Abendmahl wurde von jemand anderem vorbereitet. Dies alles sind Hinweise darauf, dass Jesus ein sehr einfaches Leben geführt hatte. Und so sagt denn Jesus selbst: »Die Füchse haben ihre Höhlen und die Vögel ihre Nester; der Menschensohn aber hat keinen Ort, wo er sein Haupt hinlegen kann.« (Mt, 8–20)

Trotz all dieser materiellen Entbehnungen, war Jesus sehr reich an Barmherzigkeit, Mitleid, in der Vergebung anderer, in der Heilung der Kranken, in der Annahme der Geknechteten und Unterdrückten, der Marginalisierten, der Unberührbaren, der Sterbenden und der Kranken. Jesus hat soviel anzubieten aufgrund seines Reichtums, seiner Liebe und seines Mitleids. Bisweilen verurteilte Jesus gar die materiell Reichen wie zum Beispiel den jungen reichen Mann, der nicht in der Lage war, Jesus zu folgen, da er zu sehr seinem materiellen Reichtum verbunden war und ihn nicht loslassen konnte. Jesus sieht die Gefahr, wenn jemand von seinem materiellen Reichtum gefangen gehalten wird und warnt deshalb auch seine Jünger: »Ein Reicher wird nur schwer in das Himmelreich kommen. Nochmals sage ich Euch: Eher geht ein Kamel durch ein Nadelöhr, als dass ein Reicher in das Reich Gottes gelangt. (Mt 19,23f).

Die Sendung Jesu

Den Armen die Frohe Botschaft zu verkündigen war die eigentliche Sendung Jesu Christi. Und so heißt es im Evangelium: »Der Geist des Herrn ruht auf mir; der Herr hat mich gesalbt. Er hat mich gesandt, damit ich den Armen eine gute Nachricht bringe; damit ich den Gefangenen die Entlassung verkünde und den Blinden das Augenlicht: damit ich die Zerschlagenen in Freiheit setze und ein Gnadenjahr des Herrn ausrufe.« (Lk 4,18 –19)

Diese Passage des Evangeliums erklärt das Ziel und die Agenda der Mission Jesu. Er war gesandt für die Armen, Gefangenen und Unterdrückten. All die Menschen, die unter diese Kategorie fallen, waren das Ziel der Sendung Jesu. Christus liebte die Armen. Denn sie sehnten sich nach Gerechtigkeit, sie benötigten die Akzeptanz, den Respekt, und sie sehnten sich nach Würde in ihrem Leben. Und es bedarf der Distanz zu materiellen Dingen, die uns davon abhalten, Jesus zu folgen. Jesus tröstet die Armen und Schwachen, wenn er sagt:

»Selig, die arm sind vor Gott; denn ihnen gehört das Himmelreich. Selig die Trauernden; denn sie werden getröstet werden. Selig, die

keine Gewalt anwenden; denn sie werden das Land erben. Selig die hungern und dürsten nach Gerechtigkeit; denn sie werden satt werden. « (Mt 5,3–6)

Die pakistanische Kirche hat eine lange Geschichte. Es ist eine Geschichte einer Kirche, die in all den Zeiten immer finanziell gesehen arm war. Wir sind sehr stolz darauf, dass unsere Wurzeln bis ins erste Jahrhundert zurückreichen. Gemäß den Überlieferungen war es der Apostel Thomas selbst, der bis ins heutige Pakistan vorgedrungen ist, um in den Jahren 45–52 n. Chr. das Wort Gottes zu predigen und die Frohe Botschaft zu verkünden. Gemäß der Tradition war es der Ort Sir Koop in der Nähe von Texila (etwa eine Autostunde von der heutigen Hauptstadt Islamabad entfernt), wo der Hl. Thomas gewirkt hat.

Wenn wir zurückblicken und das Leben und die Geschichte der Kirche in Pakistan uns anschauen, werden wir sehen, dass es die Armen dieses Landes waren, schwach und marginalisiert, diskriminiert und verachtet von den Reichen, die die Botschaft Jesu annahmen und das Christentum umarmten. Sie wurden getauft und akzeptierten Jesus Christus als ihren Herrn und Erlöser.

Christen in Pakistan

Christen sind ein nicht wegzudenkender Teil der Bewegung Pakistans, der Unabhängigkeit, seines Fortschritts und seines Erfolges. Politisch gesehen waren es Christen wie zum Beispiel S. P. Singha, Sprecher der Punjab Legaslative Assembly, C. Gibbons, Joshua Fazal Din und Chandul Lall, die Seite an Seite mit Muhammad Ali Jinnah – dem Gründer Pakistans – gekämpft haben. Christen haben eine sehr wichtige Rolle gespielt, damit die Provinz Punjab ein Teil von Pakistan wird, denn ihre Stimmen waren entscheidend, damit die Muslim-Liga die notwendige Mehrheit erhielt. Und es war schließlich mit S. P. Singha ein christlicher Sprecher, der 1945 den Wahlsieg der Muslim-Liga verkündete.

Heute ist Punjab die größte und wichtigste Provinz Pakistans. 110 Millionen der insgesamt 180 Millionen Bürger des Landes leben in der Provinz Punjab. 75 Prozent der etwa 3,5 Millionen Christen Pakistans leben ebenfalls im Punjab. Auch die meisten Priester und Ordensleute der pakistanischen Kirche stammen aus dem Punjab.

Zahlreiche führende Persönlichkeiten des Landes, die Christen sind, stammen ebenfalls aus dem Punjab. Zum Beispiel Shabaz Bhatti, der als Bundesminister für die Angelegenheiten von Minderheiten der Bundesregierung angehörte, am 02. März 2011 jedoch von Extremisten erschossen wurde, Julius Salik, Länderminister für

Minderheiten, Peter John Sohtra, Mitglied der Nationalversammlung, Paul Bhatti, ehemaliger Berater des Premierministers etc. In der Geschichte Pakistans spielten Christen sowohl in der Armeeführung als auch im Justizwesen eine wichtige Rolle. Zu nennen ist an dieser Stelle unbedingt auch A. R. Cornelius. Er war oberster Richter des Höchsten Gerichtshofes Pakistans. Er war es, der den Entwurf der pakistanischen Verfassung erarbeitet hatte, die dann unter Präsident Zulfikar Ali Bhutto 1973 in Kraft gesetzt wurde. Aber auch im Bereich der Musik und der Kunst Pakistans gibt es zahlreiche berühmte Personen, die allesamt Christen sind.

Der Einfluss der christlichen Kirchen in Pakistan ist sicherlich auf die Bedeutung einiger ihrer Schul- und Ausbildungseinrichtungen zurückzuführen, die zu einem nationalen Symbol für das Schul- und Ausbildungswesen geworden sind. Das Foreman Christian College (Universität) in Lahore, St. Patrick's College in Karachi, La Salle Schools, Jesus and Mary Schools sowie die Presentation Sister Schools haben landesweit eine sehr hohe Reputation für ihre ausgezeichnete Ausbildung, die sie bieten. Hinsichtlich des Ausbildungsstandards werden keine Kompromisse eingegangen. Die meisten christlichen Schulen und Colleges dienen der Masse der Armen, sowohl Christen als auch Muslimen. Bezeichnenderweise werden diese Ausbildungseinrichtungen nicht nur von Christen, sondern auch von Muslimen sehr geschätzt. Diese loben den hohen Ausbildungsstandard als auch die moralischen Werte, die dort unterrichtet werden. Viele bekannte muslimische Politiker des Landes haben allesamt an christlichen Bildungseinrichtungen studiert. Zu ihnen gehören u. a. die ehemalige Premierministerin Benazir Bhutto, die Premierminister Shaukat Aziz und Yousaf Raza Gilani; zu nennen sind auch die Staatspräsidenten Pervaiz Musharraf und Asif Ali Zardari sowie der ehemalige Präsident des höchsten Gerichtshofes, Nasim Hasan Shaw.

Es gibt zwei Arten von Schulen, die von den christlichen Kirchen geführt werden. Zum einen diejenigen, in denen die Unterrichtssprache Englisch ist und dann die Schulen und Bildungseinrichtungen, in denen die Unterrichtssprache Urdu ist. Besonders die letztgenannten sind Bildungseinrichtungen, die sich an die breite Masse der Armen richten. Diese Bildungseinrichtungen können sich nicht selbst tragen, da die Studierenden gar nicht das Geld hätten, Schulgebühren zu bezahlen. Ein sehr hoher Anteil der Studierenden sind Muslime. Auch wenn es den christlichen Kirchen schwerfällt, den Unterhalt dieser Schulen

sicherzustellen, so sind sie für uns doch ein wichtiges Zeugnis als christliche Gemeinschaft, gesandt zu den Armen.

Eine Kirche der Armen für die Armen zu sein, birgt auch viele Probleme, wie zum Beispiel Diskriminierungen, Bedrängnis, falsche Anschuldigungen etc. – alles Dinge, die uns nicht unbekannt sind. Wir haben gelernt, in diesen schwierigen und herausfordernden Situationen zu leben. Manchmal scheint unser Leben in Gefahr zu sein, doch sind wir nicht verängstigt, Zeugnis abzulegen von Christus unserem Herrn. Lautstark protestieren wir gegen Ungerechtigkeiten, die wir erfahren müssen. Und dies wird auch vernommen, sowohl auf nationaler als auch internationaler Ebene. Während wir als Pakistani in Pakistan leben, werden wir fortfahren, unsere wichtige Rolle zur Errichtung unserer Nation zu spielen und alle nur notwendigen Dienste einbringen, die dazu führen, dass eine Nation entsteht, in der keiner mehr diskriminiert wird.

Interreligiöser Dialog – wesentlicher Bestandteil der Sendung der Kirche

Erlauben Sie mir ein weiteres wichtiges Feld im heutigen Pakistan zu benennen, in dem Christen eine hohe Anerkennung und Wertschätzung trotz mancher Anfeindung erfahren: es ist der interreligiöse Dialog zwischen Christen und Muslimen. Das Christian Study Center in Rawalpindi sowie das Dominican Peace Center in Lahore sind landesweit bekannt und anerkannt. Aber auch international erfahren beide Zentren eine hohe Anerkennung für die wichtige Aufgabe des Dialogs zwischen Christen und Muslimen in Pakistan. Ich selbst war dreimal Vize- Provinzial der Dominikaner der Vize-Provinz Ibne- Mariam und über 15 Jahre Konsultor des Päpstlichen Rates für den Interreligiösen Dialog sowie der vatikanischen Kommission für die Beziehungen mit Muslimen. Seit 2010 bin ich Direktor des Friedenszentrums der Dominikaner in Lahore. Der Dialog ist wesentlicher Bestandteil der Friedensarbeit in Pakistan. Für mich ist es eine große Ehre, dass Dr. Georg Evers mich in dieser Zeitschrift in der Ausgabe März / April 2013 als »Pionier des Interreligiösen Dialogs in Pakistan« vorgestellt hat. Seit etwa 30 Jahren engagiere ich mich nun schon im interreligiösen Dialog. Für mich ist dieser Dialog ein wesentlicher Bestandteil der Sendung der Kirche. Der Dialog ist ein Instrument, den gegenseitigen Respekt zwischen Christen und Muslimen, aber auch die Zusammenarbeit zu fördern.

Das Erbe des Hl. Thomas, Apostel der Völker, wurde fortgeführt durch Missionare wie den Franziskanern, den Kapuzinern, den

Dominikanern und Jesuiten sowie zahlreichen Frauenorden. Dieses Land ist sehr reich an Glauben. Die Kirche der Armen ist stark. Und sie ist engagiert in vielfältigen Apostolaten: Bildung, Verkündigung, Dialog, Evangelisierung, Pastoral, Jugend, Frauen, Kinder, Gerechtigkeit und Frieden, Glaubensformation, Dienst an den Armen, im Elend Lebenden, Marginalisierten, Kranken, Weisen und Gefangenen. In Pakistan versteht sich die Kirche nicht als eine Einrichtung einer Glaubensgemeinschaft, die nur für ihre Mitglieder da ist. Vielmehr geht sie auf Menschen aller Religionsgemeinschaften zu, auf Muslime, Hindus, Sikhs, Zoroastrier und indigene Völker. Viel Bedeutung wird dem Dialog mit den Muslimen beigemessen, die 96 Prozent unserer Bevölkerung ausmachen. Die meisten Muslime sind ebenfalls sehr arm und viele von ihnen werden ebenfalls diskriminiert. Es gibt sehr viele Beispiele und Vorfälle von Ungerechtigkeiten, die diese Muslime erleiden. Sie sind Opfer eines ungerechten Klassensystems, des Terrorismus und Fanatismus. In diesem Kontext müssen wir uns die Frage stellen: Wie können wir Jesu Gebot erfüllen, wenn er uns lehrt »Du sollst den Herrn, deinen Gott, lieben mit ganzem Herzen und ganzer Seele, mit all deinen Gedanken. Das ist das wichtigste und erste Gebot. Ebenso wichtig ist das zweite: Du sollst deinen Nächsten lieben wie dich selbst. An diesen beiden Geboten hängt das ganze Gesetz samt den Propheten.« (Mt 22,37–40). Wer aber ist unser Nächster? Mein Nächster ist Christ und ebenso Nicht-Christ. Meine Nächsten sind Muslime, Hindus, Sikhs und Mitglieder anderer Religionsgemeinschaften. Mit ihnen allen komme ich täglich in Kontakt. Dies ist auch der Grund, weshalb die sozialen Dienste der Christen wie zum Beispiel Bildung, Gesundheitsfürsorge, Hilfe für die Opfer von Überschwemmungen und Erdbeben sowie der Dienst an den Kranken nicht den Christen reserviert sind, sondern allen Menschen um uns herum. Indem wir den Armen und Notleidenden um uns herum helfen, fühlen wir, dass wir das Gebot Christi erfüllen, der uns lehrte, unseren Nächsten zu lieben wie uns selbst.

Heilung ermöglichen

Im Kontext Pakistan gibt es so viele Orte und Situationen, die der Heilung bedürfen. Es geht darum, den Respekt füreinander zu fördern, das Verständnis füreinander und den Dialog unter Menschen unterschiedlicher Religionen, insbesondere Christen und Muslimen. In diesem Zusammenhang sehen wir sehr deutlich, dass unsere arme Kirche eine Kirche für die Armen ist. Indem wir den Dialog zwischen Christen und Muslimen auf allen Ebenen des

Lebens hervorheben, setzen wir die Sendung Jesu Christi um. Und es gibt viele Herausforderungen und Hürden in unserem Apostolat des Dialogs. Aber wir Christen, trotz unseres Leidens, zuweilen diskriminiert von anderen, zuweilen missverstanden, werden unser Apostolat, den Dialog und die Harmonie zu fördern, niemals aufgeben. Inzwischen wird die Bedeutung des Dialogs für die Gesellschaft in Pakistan wahrgenommen und Dialoggruppen haben sich im gesamten Land gegründet. Heilung zu ermöglichen, Vergebung, ein positives Verständnis füreinander, zu den Marginalisierten und Unterprivilegierten zu gehen, ist ein integraler Teil unserer Sendung als Kirche in ganz Pakistan.

Eine arme Kirche für die Armen in Pakistan

Die Botschaft unseres Papstes inspiriert uns sehr, so dass wir unsere Sendung neu reflektieren, unsere Option für die Armen. In ihnen finden wir Christus, der uns sagte: »Ich war hungrig, und ihr habt mir zu essen gegeben; ich war durstig und ihr habt mir zu trinken gegeben; ich war fremd und obdachlos, und ihr habt mich aufgenommen; ich war nackt und ihr habt mir Kleidung gegeben; ich war krank und ihr habt mich besucht; ich war im Gefängnis und ihr seid zu mir gekommen... Was ihr für einen meiner geringsten Brüder getan habt, das habt ihr für mich getan.« (vgl. Mt 25,35ff.). Wenn wir also den Armen, Notleidenden, Hilfslosen und Marginalisierten um uns herum helfen, dann helfen wir Christus selbst. Wir dürfen uns nicht von den Armen um uns herum entfernen. Wir müssen zu ihnen gehören.

Jesus hat uns aufgetragen, uns von den materiellen Gütern zu trennen und arm zu sein für die Armen: »Nehmt nichts mit auf den Weg, keinen Wanderstab und keine Vorratstasche, kein Brot, kein Geld und kein zweites Hemd ...« (Lk 9,3) Dies verdeutlicht: Wenn wir mit leeren Händen losziehen, fühlen wir uns den Armen, zu denen wir gesandt sind, näher. Wir werden untrennbar mit ihnen verbunden sein.

In Pakistan haben wir als arme Kirche für die Armen eine bedeutsame Rolle zu spielen. Das bedeutet, Salz der Erde und Licht der Welt zu sein, wie Jesus lehrte (vgl. Mt 5,13f). Dies ist es, wozu wir berufen sind. Wir müssen Licht schenken und wir dürfen niemals als Christen aufhören, Salz zu sein. Das ist unser Leben, und das ist das Leben der armen Kirche für die Armen in Pakistan. Gott segne Pakistan!

JAMES CHANNON OP

Ordensmann und Theologe, Direktor des Friedenszentrums der Dominikaner in Lahore / Pakistan

TIPP

Fr. James Channan OP war im März diesen Jahres von der Notre Dame University in den USA eingeladen, anlässlich des 50-jährigen Jubiläums der Enzyklika »Pacem in Terris« einen Vortrag über den Einfluss und die Herausforderungen dieser Enzyklika für die Christen in Pakistan zu halten. Im Rahmen dieses Vortrages geht er ausführlich auf die Bedeutung des interreligiösen Dialogs in Pakistan ein. Nachzulesen ist der Vortrag auf der Homepage der weltweiten Initiative mit Namen »United Religions Initiative« – eine Initiative unterschiedlicher Religions- und Glaubensgemeinschaften, die sich dem Frieden durch die Zusammenarbeit der Religionen verschrieben hat.

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GIORNALE QUOTIDIANO POLITICO RELIGIOSO

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Verso le canonizzazioni del 47 aprile

La via asiatica di Roncalli e Wojtyła

di JAMES CHANSSAN

I beati Papi Giovanni XXIII e Giovanni Paolo II rivisitano una grande importanza storica per la Chiesa nel mondo moderno. Godono di grande rispetto nel cuore e nella mente dei cattolici. Anche tutte le altre denominazioni cristiane e i credenti di altre religioni hanno reso profondo omaggio alla loro straordinaria guida. Papa Giovanni XXIII ha definito il suo e l'agenda del xx secolo e ha indicato come leggere i segni dei tempi. L'indizione del concilio Vaticano II da parte di Papa Giovanni è stato un chiaro segno di come la Chiesa può rispondere alle sfide del mondo moderno e far sì che il messaggio di Cristo sia rilevante. Sebbene sia morto nel 1963, la sua visione, missione e ispirazione si riflettono fortemente nei documenti del Vaticano II. Tali documenti hanno rinnovato il modo in cui la Chiesa va incontro ai suoi membri e alle persone di tutte le religioni. Essi rivisitano una grande importanza anche per i cristiani in Asia.

Papa Giovanni Paolo II ha avuto un impatto notevole e molto importante non solo sulla Chiesa. Era rispettato da tutti, cristiani e non cristiani, musulmani, indu, buddisti, sikh, zoroastriani e persone di diverse spiritualità.

L'Asia è la culla di tutte le religioni principali: cristianesimo, induismo, giudaismo, buddismo, taoismo, confucianesimo, zoroastrismo, jainismo, islam, shintoismo, e sikhismo. È il luogo in cui vivono due terzi della popolazione mondiale. Il territorio asiatico manifesta il piano di salvezza del mondo intero. Dio si è rivelato attraverso la Scrittura ebraica (Antico Testamento) e infine attraverso il suo Figlio unigenito Gesù Cristo, affinché chi crede in lui possa avere la vita eterna. Infatti, Gesù è la vita, la verità e la luce.

Se da un lato l'Asia si deve confrontare con molte crisi e sfide come la povertà, l'analfabetismo, l'inquinazione, il lavoro infantile, dall'altro osserviamo che la discriminazione (basata sulla casta, il credo o il genere) è molto diffusa nel continente. Milioni di persone vivono al di sotto della soglia di povertà. Non hanno abbastanza da mangiare, nulla per vestirsi, né un posto in cui abitare. C'è anche una forte emilia di immigrazione. Pertanto, entrambe le dimensioni della missione della Chiesa sono di primaria importanza in Asia. Viene posta anche grande enfasi sull'ecumenismo. Tutte queste dimensioni della missione della Chiesa sono di primaria importanza per noi asiatici.

È dunque davvero una grande impresa che questi due papi insieme,

fanatismo, fondamentalismo. In alcuni Paesi gli attacchi terroristici e gli attacchi suicidi sono diventati un piuttosto comuni. Manca l'acqua potabile. Milioni di persone sono morte per la violenza motivata dalla religione. Le donne devono affrontare le difficoltà di non avere i giusti diritti e un giusto status nella società. C'è un grave problema di giustizia e di ordine. C'è un forte bisogno di armonia interconfessionale, pace, accettazione e rispetto reciproco. C'è un forte bisogno di libertà di religione e delle sue espressioni.

Su questo sfondo, ritengo che Papa Giovanni XXIII e Papa Giovanni Paolo II siano molto importanti per portare un cambiamento positivo nella società. Entrambi hanno avuto un impatto e un significato duraturi per quanto riguarda la Chiesa in Asia. È un dato di fatto che in Asia - il luogo in cui Gesù Cristo è nato - la Chiesa continua a essere una piccola minoranza di circa il 3 per cento. Il continente asiatico è quello più popolato.

Ci vivono oltre due terzi della popolazione mondiale e la maggior parte delle persone appartiene ad altre religioni. Sono musulmani, indu, buddisti, ebrei, zoroastriani, jainisti, sikh, e così via. I cristiani continuano a essere una piccolissima minoranza. La Chiesa in Asia è al sale della terra e la luce del mondo. (cfr. Matteo, 5: 13-14).

Nel nostro contesto asiatico, l'enciclica *Paxem in terris* di Papa Giovanni XXIII è di fondamentale importanza. Può influenzare immensamente gli sforzi di molti asiatici relativi al modo in cui risponde alle molte sfide che si presentano, come per esempio quella del dialogo tra persone di religioni diverse, specialmente tra musulmani e cristiani. E ci pone anche molte sfide. La *Paxem in terris* ha affidato agli uomini e alle donne di buona volontà un compito immenso che riguarda tutti, specialmente noi che viviamo in Asia. Al numero 87 dell'enciclica leggiamo, per esempio: «A tutti gli uomini di buona volontà, siano essi, vengono canonizzati. La loro vita e i loro insegnamenti consumarono a servizio di una ispirazione per la gente in Asia. Ci ausieranno nella nostra missione evangelizzatrice, nel dialogo interreligioso, nell'ecumenismo, nel sostenere i diritti umani, l'uguaglianza, la giustizia, la libertà di pensiero, la libertà di religione e l'espansione delle pratiche religiose.

compiò immenso: il compito di ricomporre i rapporti della convivenza nella verità, nella giustizia, nell'amore, nella libertà: i rapporti della convivenza tra i singoli esseri umani; fra i cittadini e le rispettive comunità politiche; fra le stesse comunità politiche; fra individui, famiglie, corpi intermedi e comunità politiche da una parte e dall'altra la comunità mondiale. Compito nobilissimo quale è quello di amare la vera pace nell'ordine stabilito da Dio».

Sebbene questa enciclica sia stata scritta cinquant'anni fa, è molto significativa anche per il presente. Lo è ancora di più in Asia, e costituisce una grande sfida a superare le crisi con cui ci confrontiamo e a stabilire una pace duratura in questo continente. L'enciclica ha stabilito dei principi poi ripresi in alcuni do-

(n. 6), il diritto al rispetto della propria persona, a una buona reputazione, alla libertà di cercare la verità, alla libertà di parola e alla libertà d'informazione (n. 7), il diritto al culto (n. 8), il diritto di scegliere il proprio sesso e di creare una famiglia (n. 9), la libertà d'iniziativa in campo economico, il diritto al lavoro, il diritto a condizioni di lavoro adatte, a una retribuzione adeguata, alla proprietà privata (n. 10), il diritto di riunione e di associazione (n. 11), il diritto alla tutela giuridica dei diritti (n. 12) e il diritto di agire liberamente e responsabilmente (n. 16). È questo che vogliamo vedere realizzato in Asia.

Papa Giovanni Paolo II ha lasciato una profonda ispirazione alla gente in Asia. È stato un grande leader religioso. Ha sostenuto il dialogo ecumenico e interreligioso. Ha incontrato e accolto persone appartenenti a religioni diverse sia in Vaticano sia nei Paesi da lui visitati. Ha offerto un forte incoraggiamento ai cristiani in Asia con le sue lettere encicliche. In particolare l'esorazione apostolica *Ecclesia in Asia* ci serve da ispirazione costante e ci dà un grande coraggio per essere fieri di essere cristiani asiatici. E ci guida imprime per predicare, per proclamare Cristo alla gente che ci circonda, e quindi per la crescita della Chiesa. Il documento afferma che «come nel primo millennio la Croce fu piantata sul suolo europeo, nel secondo millennio su quello americano e africano, nel terzo millennio si potrà sperare di raccogliere una grande messe di fede in questo continente così vasto e vivace» (n. 1). Così gli viene affidata la missione della proclamazione. Nello stesso documento Papa Giovanni Paolo riconosce «l'importanza del dialogo quale modo carismatico della vita della Chiesa in Asia» (n. 3). Spiega che il dialogo «non è semplicemente una strategia per una pacifica coesistenza tra i popoli; è invece una parte essenziale della missione della Chiesa (...), una vera vocazione». Il dialogo «è ben più che un modo per promuovere la conoscenza e l'arricchimento reciproci; è parte della missione evangelizzatrice della Chiesa, una espressione della missione ad gentes» (n. 3). Questo dialogo è legato all'evangelizzazione cammino di Cristo. Dinanzi a noi dobbiamo sempre avere Cristo, che ha sofferto, morì e il terzo giorno è risuscitato per noi e per la nostra salvezza. Dobbiamo essere fieri come cristiani, seguaci di Cristo, e come asiatici, perché Cristo - il Verbo di Dio - si è fatto carne in Asia.

Dal Pakistan

A firma del direttore del Peace Center dell'ordine domenicano di Lahore, in Pakistan, pubblichiamo, in una nostra traduzione, ampia stralcio dell'articolo che la rivista comboniana europea on line South-World.net dedica alle canonizzazioni di Papa Giovanni XXIII e di Giovanni Paolo II e al loro significato per il continente asiatico.

I documenti del concilio Vaticano II, ed è bello sapere che la *Paxem in terris* è stata la prima enciclica che il Papa ha indiziato non soltanto ai cattolici, ma «a tutti gli uomini di buona volontà». Quindi si rivolge a tutti in Asia, cristiani e musulmani, e alle persone appartenenti a tutte le altre religioni. Ci ispira e ci incoraggia a fare ciò che è bene, basandoci sulla verità, la giustizia e la carità, per portare pace e armonia alla nostra società. La pace è un processo comune, e non solo un'assenza di conflitto armato.

Nella sua enciclica Papa Giovanni ha posto grande enfasi sui diritti umani fondamentali nel seguente ordine: il diritto alla vita, all'integrità fisica, all'alimentazione, al vestiario, all'abitazione, al riposo, alle cure mediche e ai servizi sociali necessari. La loro vita ci aiuta a continuare a lavorare perché tutti abbiano pari diritti e perché ci sia collaborazione tra le nazioni e le religioni. Ci aiuta a schierarsi a favore dei diritti degli oppressi, delle minoranze e degli emarginati. Essi ci ispirano anche a essere saldi nella fede, per quanto numerose siano le difficoltà e le sfide che possiamo incontrare sul no-

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Looking towards the canonizations on 27 April

Roncalli and Wojtyła in Asia

JAMES CHANNAN, OP*

Two great religious leaders and supreme pastors of the Catholic Church namely: Blessed Pope John XXIII and Blessed Pope John Paul II have a great historical significance for the Church in the modern world. They enjoy great respect in the hearts and minds of the Catholics. All other Christian denominations and believers of different religions have also paid rich tribute to their tremendous leadership. Pope John XXIII set a tone and agenda for the 20th century and how to read the signs of the time and how Church should respond to the challenges it is confronted with in the modern world. The invocation of the Vatican Council II by Pope John was a clear sign that how the Church can respond to the challenges in the modern world and how to make message of Christ relevant. Although he died in the year 1963 his vision, mission and inspiration is strongly reflected in the 16 documents of the Vatican Council II, which respond to the situation of the Church in the age lived, whether it is religious freedom, lay, religious life, evangelization mission, proclamation, dialogue, and Church in the modern world. These documents have renewed the approach of the Church to its members and people of all religions. These have great significance for the Christians in Asia as well.

Pope John Paul II being supreme pastor of the Church led his flock for 26 years. He took us from the second millennium to the third millennium as a great dynamic leader. He left remarkable and very significant impact not only on the Church but also upon the people of all religions and political states as well. He was respected by all whether Christians or non-Christians; Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Zoroastrians and people of different spiritualities. He was the most travelled Pope – Supreme Pastor of the Catholic Church. He travelled around the globe and left lasting marks upon humanity. He was very humble, dynamic, open to the people of other religions and great promoter of interreligious dialogue and ecumenism. He also made pastoral visits to several Asia countries such as: Pakistan, India, Singapore, Philippines, Hong Kong and South Korea etc. He was very warmly welcomed by the inhabitants of these countries and has left lasting marks upon us – the Asian inhabitants. Asia is the cradle of all major religions; Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Islam, Shintoism and Sikhism. God sent his Prophets and revealed holy books upon them. It is the dwelling place of two third of the world population. The land of Asia manifests the plan of salvation of the entire world. God revealed himself through the Hebrew Scripture (Old Testament) and finally through his

only son Jesus Christ – so that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.

While on the other side we find that Asia is confronted with many crises and challenges such as: of; poverty, illiteracy, injustice, child labour, discrimination on the basis of caste, creed and gender is very common in Asia. There are millions of people who are living below poverty level. They do not have enough to eat, clothe or have shelter to live in. There is also a strong wave of terrorism, fanaticism, fundamentalism. In some countries terrorist attacks and suicide bombing have become very common. There is a lack of cleaning water. Millions of people have died of religiously motivated violence. There are problems faced by women as they are not given just rights and status in the society. There is a grave issue of law and order. There is a grave need of interfaith harmony, peace, acceptance and respect of one another. There is grave need to freedom of religion and its expressions.

In such a scenario I hope that Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II have great significance to bring a positive change in the society. Both left lasting impact and significance upon the Church in Asia. It is a reality that in Asia – the people of Jesus Christ was born – Church remains a tiny minority of about 3 per cent. The continent of Asia is most populated. Two third of the world populations lives here and most of the people belong to other religions. They are either, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Zoroastrians, Jains, and Sikhs etc. Christians remain a tiny minority. The Church in Asia is "Salt of the earth and light of the world" (Mt. 5:12-13).

In our Asian situation the Encyclical of Pope John XXIII *Pacem in Terris* is of prime importance. It can influence immensely for the struggles of Asian people on how to address many challenges we are confronted with as well the challenge of dialogue among people of different religions and especially between Muslims and Christians. It also poses many challenges to us as well. *Pacem in Terris* was set before men and women of good will an immense task for all, especially for us living in Asia. For example, in number 15 of the Encyclical, we read: "Hence among the very serious obligations incumbent upon men of high principles, we must include the task of establishing new relationships in human society, under the mastery and guidance of truth, justice, charity and freedom – relation between individuals and states on the one hand, and the world community on the other. There is surely no one who will not consider this a most exalted task, for it is one which is able to bring about true peace in



accordance with the divinely established order"

Although this Encyclical was written 51 years ago, it is very significant for our times as well. Its importance in Asia is even more relevant, and it poses for us great challenges in overcoming the crises we are faced with and establishing lasting peace in this continent. This Encyclical has established principles that are featured in some of the documents of the Vatican Council II it is wonderful to know that *Pacem in Terris* was the first Encyclical that the Pope did not address to Catholics only, but to "all men of good will". So it is for all the people of Asia, for Christians and Muslims, and people of all other religions. It encourages and inspires us to do what is good based on truth, justice and charity to bring peace and harmony to our society. Peace is an ongoing process, not just an absence of armed conflict.

In this Encyclical Pope John laid great emphasis on basic human rights, in this order: the right to life, bodily integrity, food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care and necessary social services, the right to respect for one's person, a good reputation, freedom to search for the truth, freedom of speech and freedom of information, the right to worship, freedom to choose one's state of life and to form a family, freedom of initiative in the economic field, the right to work, the right to adequate working conditions, a proper wage, private property, freedom of assembly and association, the right to the juridical protection of rights and the right to act freely and responsibly. This is what we want to see realized in Asia.

Pope John Paul II has left a great inspiration for the people of Asia. He was a great religious leader. He was for the freedom of religion. He was for ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. He was reached out to meet and welcome people of different religions both in the Vatican and to which ever country he went. He gave boost to the Christians in Asia in his Encyclical Letters. In particular his Encyclical *Evangelium in Asia*, offers us ongoing inspiration and great courage to be proud to be Asian Christians. It serves as a remarkable guide for preachers proclaiming Christ to the people

around us and thus for the expansion of the Church. The document stated that "just as in the first millennium the Cross was planted on the soil of Europe, and in the second on the that of the America and Africa, we can pray that in the Third Christian Millennium a great harvest of faith will be reaped in this vast and vital continent of Asia" (EA, 1). So the vision of proclamation is entrusted to it. The same Encyclical Pope John Paul acknowledges of the "importance of dialogue as a characteristics mode of the Church's life in Asia" (EA, 3) He explains that dialogue "is not simply strategy for peaceful coexistence among peoples, it is an essential part of the Church's mission.... A veritable vocation for the Church" (EA, 3). Dialogue is "more than a way of fostering mutual knowledge and enrichment, it is a part of the Church's evangelization mission, an expression of the mission *ad gentes*" (EA). This dialogue is linked with evangelization. So both dimension of the mission of the Church are of prime importance in Asia. There is also great emphasis on ecumenism. All these dimensions of the mission of the Church are of prime importance for us in Asia.

Therefore, it is really wonderful that both of the great popes will be canonized. Their life and teachings will remain a great inspiration for the people of Asia. It will help us in our mission of evangelization, inter-religious dialogue, ecumenism, of speaking for human rights, equality, justice, freedom of thought and freedom of religion and expression of religious practices. Their lives help us to keep struggling in front of us, for collaboration among nations and religions. To speak for the rights of the oppressed, minorities and marginalized. They also inspire us to be firm in our faith, no matter how many difficulties or challenges come on our way as Christians. We must keep Christ in front of us to suffer, died and rose on the third day for us and for our salvation. Let us be proud as Christians and followers of Christ and as Asian as Christ – the Word of God – was incarnated in Asia.

*Director of the Peace Centre of the Dominican Order in Pakistan

«Viviamo in uno Stato islamico a libertà limitata»



Padre James Channan

l'intervista
L'esperto padre Channan: smarriti i valori democratici

«I casi di accuse false o pretestuose sono molto comuni e personaggi pubblici devono temere come ancora di più del cittadino comune». Così commenta la vicenda dell'ambasciatore Rehman, padre James Channan, frate domenicano, direttore del Centro per la Pace di Lahore ed esperto di dialogo interreligioso.

«Allo stesso tempo, occorrono anche esempi coraggiosi. Non si può abbassare la guardia, occorre che le minoranze continuino a far conoscere la propria preoccupazione riguardo a una legge coercitiva ma sovvente abusata e in questo con-

testo anche la Chiesa cattolica può giocare un ruolo attivo e importante».

Come spiega il costante utilizzo della "legge antiterrorismo" come strumento di repressione e di controllo?

La nazione ha perduto l'ideale del fondatore Muhammad Ali Jinnah, che era favorevole a uno Stato secolare e democratico. Quello che abbiamo oggi non è uno Stato secolare, ma islamico, dove alle minoranze o ai dissidenti è concessa una libertà limitata. Tali restrizioni colpiscono anche i cristiani, che vivono in una situazione di incertezza costante.

«La gente non è integralista. I politici devono arrestare la crescita dei radicali colpendo i terroristi»

In che modo si potrebbe uscire da questa situazione, dalla sopraffazione e dalla violenza che sembrano dominare la vita al Paese? Certamente la situazione del Pakistan è molto difficile e la violenza è diffusa, ma occorre anche essere coscienti che esistono molte persone di buona volontà, impegnate a cercare di cambiare le cose. La po-

polazione è in maggioranza pacifica, vuole l'armonia tra gruppi e fedi e aspira a pace e sicurezza. La sfida è soprattutto per i leader, affinché operino per cambiare la mentalità violenta e intollerante che domina alcuni gruppi e alcune aree. Gli attivisti per la pace e per il dialogo hanno come mal un ruolo essenziale di essere segno di speranza, qui ed ora, senza tentennamenti.

Tuttavia il rischio è concreto anche chi intende operare per la pace e la convivenza, a ogni livello... Sfortunatamente, la crescita dell'islamismo radicale non sembra destinata a un

arresto immediato e in questo anche i leader politici hanno un ruolo decisivo. Occorre che siano applicate le leggi antiterrorismo, che i terroristi vengano arrestati e puniti, che gli abusi non restino ignorati. Senza provvedimenti concreti che siano portati a conoscenza dell'opinione pubblica, la speranza fatica a radicarsi e a crescere. Sono declinate ogni giorno le vittime dell'intolleranza e della violenza e purtroppo la cultura dell'impunità si associa alla latitanza della classe politica e all'arbitrio della legge per rendere il Paese insicuro. (S.V.)

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JAMES CHANNAN

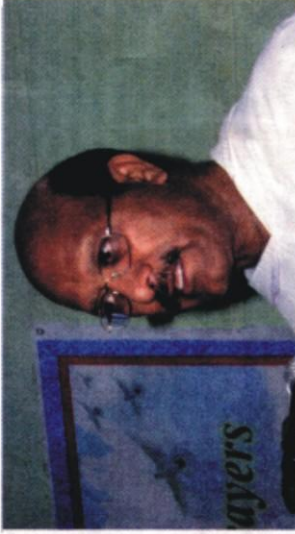
PAKISTANILAINEN PAPPI JAMES CHANNAN: RAUHAN PUOLESTA TOIMIMINEN ON PARASTA RUKOUSTA

MAHII, missä 96 % asukkaista on muslimeita ja 2 % on kristittyjä, uskontojenvälinen vuoropuhelu ja yhteistyö on dominikaanipapille itsetäsmäselvyys. Maassa, missä itsemurhapommittajat iskevät ostoskeskuksiin, sairaaloihin, kouluihin, pelastuskeskuksiin, jopa pyhäköihin ja hartauspaikkoihin, rauhan työ on valttamatöntä. Pakistanilainen James Channan harjoittaa uskondialogia toki myös sydämensä palosta eikä vain pakosta: koskaan ei pidä luopua toivosta parempaan tulevaisuuteen.

Isa James toivoo, että hänen väkivaltaisesta kotimaastaan tulisi paikka, missä ei tapeta minkään uskonnon nimissä. Tämä saa hänet tarvittaessa marssimaan Lahoren katuja kynnätkälukeessa yhdessä muiden kristittyjen, muslimien ja hindujen kanssa, koska uskonnot opettavat kunnioittamaan elämää ja kunnioittamaan toinen toisiansa. Uskontojenväliseen toimintaan Pakistanissa kuuluu vahvasti rauhan, demokratian ja ihmisoikeuksien edistäminen. Välttettävästi Pakistan on tänä päivänä paikka.

missä kukaan ei ole turvassa juuri missään.

Ruohonjuuritason dialogi on tärkeää. Tahtotilaa rauhaan rakentuu ihmisten kesken arjessa. Naisten työ rauhan puolesta saa Channanilta erityistä arvostusta. Kaikkien tyttöjen tulisi saada koulutusta. Tällä hetkellä ainoastaan 36% pakistanalaisista naisista on saanut koulutusta. Miehillä vastaava prosenttiluku on 63. Channan on itse opiskellut alkoiinaan muun muassa Vatikaanissa ja Harvardin yliopistossa.



SWOMEN SOSIAALIFORUMI

2.-3.4.2011
HELSINKI, ANSIS

Second Vatican Council and Papal Statements on Islam

Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* 16, November 21,
1964

“But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place among whom are the Muslims: these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind’s judge on the last day.”

Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate* 3, October 28, 1965

“The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men. Yet she proclaims and is in duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is ‘the way, the truth and the life’ (Jn 1:6). In him, in whom God reconciled all things to himself (cf. 2Co 5:18-19), men find the fullness of their religious life.

“The Church has also a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth (Cf. St. Gregory VII, Letter III, 21 to Anazir [Al-Nasir], King of Mauretania PL, 148:451A.), who has spoken to men. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God’s plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own. Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus as a prophet, his Virgin Mother they also honor, and even at times devoutly invoke. Further, they await the day of judgment and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this reason they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms-deeds and fasting.

“Over the centuries many quarrels and dissensions have arisen between Christians and Muslims. The sacred Council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding; for the benefit of all men, let

them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.”

Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam* 107, August 6, 1964

“Then [we refer] to the adorers of God according to the conception of monotheism, the Muslim religion especially, deserving of our admiration for all that is true and good in their worship of God.”

Pope Paul VI, address to the Islamic communities of Uganda, August 1, 1969

“In our prayers, we always remember the peoples of Africa. The common belief in the Almighty professed by millions calls down upon this continent the graces of his Providence and love, most of all, peace and unity among all its sons. We feel sure that as representatives of Islam, you join in our prayers to the Almighty, that he may grant all African believers the desire for pardon and reconciliation so often commended in the Gospels and in the Qur’an.

“Our pilgrimage to these holy places is not for purposes of prestige or power. It is a humble and ardent prayer for peace, through the intercession of the glorious protectors of Africa, who gave up their lives for love and for their belief. In recall the Catholic and Anglican Martyrs, We gladly recall also those confessors of the Muslim faith who were the first to suffer death, in the year 1848, for refusing to transgress the precepts of their religion.”

Pope John Paul II, address to the Catholic community of Ankara, Turkey, November 29, 1979

“Faith in God, professed by the spiritual descendants of Abraham—Christians, Muslims and Jews—when it is lived sincerely, when it penetrates life, is a certain foundation of the dignity, brotherhood and freedom of men and a principle of uprightness for moral conduct and life in society. And there is more: as a result of this faith in God the Creator and transcendent, one man finds himself at the summit of creation. He was created, the Bible teaches, ‘in the image and likeness of God’ (Gn 1:27); for the Qur’an, the sacred book of the Muslims, although man is made of dust, ‘God breathed into him his spirit and endowed him with hearing, sight and heart,’ that is, intelligence (*Surah* 32:8).

“For the Muslims, the universe is destined to be subject to man as the representative of God: the Bible affirms that God ordered man to subdue the earth, but also to ‘till it and keep it’ (Gen. 2:15). As God’s creature, man has rights which cannot be violated, but he is equally bound by the law of good and evil which is based on the order established by God. Thanks to this law, man will never submit to any idol. The Christian keeps to the solemn commandment: ‘You shall keep no other gods before me’ (Ex 20:30). On his side, the Muslim will always say: ‘God is the greatest.’

“I would like to take advantage of this meeting and the opportunity offered to me by the words that St. Peter wrote to your predecessors to invite you to consider every day the deep roots of faith in God in whom also your Muslim fellow citizens believe, in order to draw from this the principle of a collaboration with a view to the progress of man, emulation in good, and the extension of peace and brotherhood in free profession of the faith peculiar to each one.”

John Paul II, address to representatives of Muslims of the Philippines, February 20, 1981

“I deliberately address you as brothers: that is certainly what we are, because we are members of the same human family, whose efforts, whether people realize it or not, tend toward God and the truth that comes from him. But we are especially brothers in God, who created us and whom we are trying to reach, in our own ways, through faith, prayer and worship, through the keeping of his law and through submission to his designs.

“But are you not, above all, brothers of the Christians of this great country, through the bonds of nationality, history, geography, culture, and hope for a better future, a future that you are building together? Is it not right to think that in the Philippines, the Muslims and the Christians are really traveling on the same ship, for better or for worse, and that in the storms that sweep across the world the safety of each individual depends upon the efforts and cooperation of all?...”

“I salute all these efforts [of civic and political cooperation] with great satisfaction, and I earnestly encourage their extension. Society cannot bring citizens the happiness that they expect from it unless society itself is built upon dialogue. Dialogue in turn is

built upon trust, and trust presupposes not only justice but mercy. Without any doubt, equality and freedom, which are at the foundation of every society, require law and justice. But as I said in a recent letter addressed to the whole Catholic Church, justice by itself is not enough: ‘The equality brought by justice is limited to the realms of objective and extrinsic goods, while love and mercy bring it about that people meet one another in that value which is man himself, with the dignity that is proper to him’ (*Dives in misericordia*, encyclical letter ‘On the Mercy of God’). ‘Dear Muslims, my brothers: I would like to add that we Christians, just like you, seek the basis and model of mercy in God himself, the God to whom your Book gives the very beautiful name of al-Rahman, while the Bible calls him al-Rahum, the Merciful One.’”

Pope John Paul II, address to bishops of North Africa on an *ad limina* visit, Rome, November 23, 1981

“One of the essential characteristics of the life of the Church in Maghreb is, in fact, to be invited to enter upon a constructive Islamic-Christian dialogue. I am anxious to encourage you along this difficult way, where failure may occur, but where hope is even stronger. To maintain it, strong Christian convictions are necessary. More than elsewhere, it is highly desirable that Christians should take part, as you encourage them to do, in a permanent catechesis which completes a biblical renewal course, or more exactly a reading of the Word of God in the Church, with the help of theologians and truly competent spiritual teachers.

“But it can never be said enough that such a dialogue is in the first place a question of friendship; one must know how to give dialogue the time for progress and discernment. That is why it is surrounded by discretion out of a concern to be considerate with regard to the slowness of the evolution of mentalities. The seriousness of commitment in this dialogue is measured by that of the witness lived and borne to the values in which one believes, and, for the Christian, to him who is their foundation, Jesus Christ. That is why it conceals an inevitable tension between the deep respect which is due to the person and the convictions of the one with whom we are speaking, and an unshakeable attachment to one’s faith. This sincere dialogue and this demanding witness involve a part of spiritual abnegation:

how can we fail to proclaim the hope that we have received of taking part in this wedding feast of the Lamb at which the whole of mankind will be gathered one day?

“It is also necessary - among other things, in order to preserve this dialogue in its truth - for this deep hope to remain without yielding to any faintheartedness born of uncertain doctrine. Such a spirit is embodied in the first place in disinterested service with a view to fraternity participating in the development of these countries and to sharing the aspirations of their people. I am anxious to stress here the quality of the work carried out by so many of those cooperators in the discretion and dedication, and by those who supported them.”

Pope John Paul II, address to the bishops of Senegal on their *ad limina* visit, Rome, January 26, 1982

“In this country, which is mainly Muslim, you take care to keep alive in Christians the sense of friendship, a friendship whose sincerity is measured by the effectiveness of the actions it inspires. I do not want to dwell here on this important question of the dialogue between Christians and Muslims, with which I quite recently dealt in my conversations with your confreres in North Africa. But I am anxious to point out the importance of the initiative you have taken in common in this field, in the framework of the Regional Episcopal Conference of West Africa, by creating a special commission to promote such a dialogue.

Pope John Paul II, address to a symposium on “Holiness in Christianity and in Islam,” Rome, May 9, 1985

“All true holiness comes from God, who is called ‘The Holy One’ in the sacred books of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Your holy Qur’an calls God ‘Al-Quddus,’ as in the verse: ‘He is God, besides whom there is no other, the Sovereign, the Holy, the (source of) Peace’ (Qur’an 59:23). The prophet Hosea links God’s holiness with his forgiving love for mankind, a love which surpasses our ability to comprehend: ‘I am God, not man; I am the Holy One in your midst and have no wish to destroy’ (Ho 11:9). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches his disciples that holiness consists in assuming, in our human way, the qualities of God’s own holiness which he has revealed to mankind: ‘Be holy, even as your heavenly Father is holy’ (Mt 5:48).

“Thus the Qur’an calls you to uprightness (*al-salah*), to conscientious devotion (*al-taqwa*), to goodness (*al-husn*), and to virtue (*al-birr*), which is described as believing in God, giving one’s wealth to the needy, freeing captives, being constant in prayer, keeping one’s word, and being patient in times of suffering, hardship and violence (Qur’an 2:177). Similarly, St. Paul stresses the love we must show toward all, and the duty to lead a blameless life in the sight of God: ‘May the Lord be generous in increasing your love and make you love one another and the whole human race as much as we love you. And may he so confirm your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless in the sight of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus Christ comes with all his saints’ (1 Th 3:12-13).”

Pope John Paul II, address to representatives of the Muslims of Belgium, May 19, 1985

“It is a joy for me to have this occasion to meet with you. As the spiritual head of the Catholic Church, I have had many other opportunities both to welcome Muslims in Rome and to visit them in various countries in the course of my travels.

“Today we are meeting in Belgium, a country with a long tradition of hospitality toward persons of diverse religious adherence, whose legislation guarantees the freedom of worship and education. We know that this does not resolve all the problems which are common to the plight of immigrants. Nevertheless, these very difficulties ought to be an incentive to all believers, Christian and Muslim, to come to know one another better, to engage in dialogue in order to find peaceful ways of living together and mutually enriching one another.

“It is a good thing to come to understand each other by learning to accept differences, by overcoming prejudices in mutual respect, and by working together for reconciliation and service to the lowliest. This is a fundamental dialogue which must be practiced in neighborhoods, in places of work, in schools. This is the dialogue which is proper to believers who live together in a modern and pluralistic society.

Pope John Paul II, address to the young Muslims of Morocco, August 19, 1985

“Christians and Muslims have many things in common, as believers and as human beings. We live in the same world,

marked by many signs of hope, but also by multiple signs of anguish. For us, Abraham is a model of faith in God, of submission to his will and of confidence in his goodness. We believe in the same God, the one God, the living God, the God who created the world and brings his creatures to their perfection. . . .

“God asks that we should listen to His voice. He expects from us obedience to His holy will in a free consent of mind and heart.

“The Catholic Church regards with respect and recognizes the equality of your religious progress, the richness of your spiritual tradition. . . .

“I believe that we, Christians and Muslims, must recognize with joy the religious values that we have in common, and give thanks to God for them. Both of us believe in one God, the only God, who is all justice and all mercy; we believe in the importance of prayer, of fasting, of almsgiving, of repentance and of pardon; we believe that God will be a merciful judge to us all at the end of time, and we hope that after the resurrection He will be satisfied with us and we know that we will be satisfied with him.

“Loyalty demands also that we should recognize and respect our differences. Obviously the most fundamental is the view that we hold onto the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. You know that, for Christians, Jesus causes them to enter into an intimate knowledge of the mystery of God and into the filial communion by His gifts, so that they recognize Him and proclaim Him Lord and Savior.

“Those are the important differences which we can accept with humility and respect, in mutual tolerance; this is a mystery about which, I am certain, God will one day enlighten us.

“Christians and Muslims, in general we have badly understood each other, and sometimes, in the past, we have opposed and often exhausted each other in polemics and in wars.

“I believe that today, God invites us to change our old practices. We must respect each other, and we must stimulate each other in good works on the path of God.

Pope John Paul II, address to a group of Christians, Jews and Muslims, February 26, 1986

“Both the Bible and the Qur’an teach that mercy and justice are two attributes most characteristic of God. He, ‘the Just One,’ ‘the

Merciful, the Compassionate,' can bring about these same qualities in mankind, if only we open our hearts to allow him to do so. He wants us to be merciful toward each other. Along this path there are new solutions to be found to the political, racial and confessional conflicts which have plagued the human family throughout history.

“You come from a city that has so much meaning for all of us: Jews, Christians and Muslims. Jerusalem, the city of David, the place of Jesus’ death and resurrection, the site of Muhammad’s night journey to God: this city must be a living symbol that God’s will for us is to live in peace and mutual respect!

“I wish to encourage you in your efforts. In today’s world, it is more important than ever that people of faith place at the service of humanity their religious conviction, founded on the daily practice of listening to God’s message and encountering him in prayerful worship. My prayers and hopes are with you as you pursue your reflection on the God of mercy and justice, the God of peace and reconciliation!”

Pope John Paul II, address to Christians (and others) in Bangladesh, November 19, 1986

“You must try to show your Muslim brethren and the followers of other religious traditions that your Christian faith, far from weakening your sense of pride in your homeland and your love for her, helps you to prize and respect the culture and heritage of Bangladesh. It inspires you to face the challenges of the present day with love and responsibility. . . .

“The Catholic Church is committed to a path of dialogue and collaboration with the men and women of goodwill of every religious tradition. We have many spiritual resources in common which we must share with one another as we work for a more human world. Young people especially know how to be open with each other and they want a world in which all the basic freedoms, including the freedom of religious belief, will be respected.

“Sometimes Christians and Muslims fear and distrust one another as a result of past misunderstanding and conflict. This is also true in Bangladesh. Everyone, especially the young, must learn to always respect one another’s religious beliefs and to

defend freedom of religion, which is the right of every human being.”

Pope John Paul II, Message to the faithful of Islam at the end of the month of Ramadan, April 3, 1991

“To all Muslims throughout the world, I wish to express the readiness of the Catholic Church to work together with you and all the people of good will to aid the victims of the war and to build structures of a lasting peace not only in the Middle East, but everywhere. This cooperation in solidarity towards the most afflicted can form the concrete basis for a sincere, profound and constant dialogue between believing Catholics and believing Muslims, from which there can arise a strengthened mutual knowledge and trust, and the assurance that each one everywhere will be able to profess freely and authentically his or her own faith.

“Injustice, oppression, aggression, greed, failure to forgive, desire for revenge, and unwillingness to enter into dialogue and negotiate: these are merely some of the factors which lead people to depart from the way in which God desires us to live on this planet. We must all learn to recognize these elements in our own lives and societies, and find ways to overcome them. Only when individuals and groups undertake this education for peace can we build a fraternal and united world, freed from war and violence.

Pope John Paul II, address at the General Audience, September 9, 1998

“It must first be kept in mind that every quest of the human spirit for truth and goodness, and in the last analysis for God, is inspired by the Holy Spirit. The various religions arose precisely 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 the doctrines, rites and precepts of the various religions.

“In every authentic religious experience, the most characteristic expression is prayer. Because of the human spirit’s constitutive openness to God’s action of urging it to self-transcendence, we can hold that ‘every authentic prayer is called forth by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the heart of every person’ (John Paul II’s address to the Members of the Roman Curia,

December 22, 1986, n. 11; L'Osservatore Romano English edition, January 5, 1987, p. 7).”

John Paul II, to H. E. Mohammed Sayed Tantawi, Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar, Cairo, February 24, 2000

“Thank you for your kind words. Permit me to continue with your ideas. God created human beings, man and woman, and gave to them the world, the earth to cultivate. There is a strict connection between religions, religious faith and culture. Islam is a religion. Christianity is a religion. Islam has become also a culture. Christianity has become also a culture. So it is very important to meet personalities representing Islamic culture in Egypt.

“I express my great gratitude for this opportunity and I greet all the eminent scholars gathered here. I am convinced that the future of the world depends on the various cultures and on interreligious dialogue. For it is as St. Thomas Aquinas said: ‘Genus humanum arte et ratione vivit.’ The life of the human race consists in culture and the future of the human race consists in culture. I thank your university, the biggest centre of Islamic culture. I thank those who are developing Islamic culture and I am grateful for what you are doing to maintain the dialogue with Christian culture. All this I say in the name of the future of our communities, not only of our communities but also of the nations and of the humanity represented in Islam and in Christianity. Thank you very much.”

Pope John Paul II, at the International Airport, Amman, Jordan, March 20, 2000

“Your Majesty, I know how deeply concerned you are for peace in your own land and in the entire region, and how important it is to you that all Jordanians—Muslims and Christians—should consider themselves as one people and one family. In this area of the world there are grave and urgent issues of justice, of the rights of peoples and nations, which have to be resolved for the good of all concerned and as a condition for lasting peace. No matter how difficult, no matter how long, the process of seeking peace must continue. Without peace, there can be no authentic development for this region, no better life for its peoples, no brighter future for its children. That is why Jordan’s proven

commitment to securing the conditions necessary for peace is so important and praiseworthy.

“Building a future of peace requires an ever more mature understanding and ever more practical cooperation among the peoples who acknowledge the one true, indivisible God, the Creator of all that exists. The three historical monotheistic religions count peace, goodness and respect for the human person among the highest values. I earnestly hope that my visit will strengthen the already fruitful Christian-Muslim dialogue which is being conducted in Jordan, particularly through the Royal Interfaith Institute.”

Pope John Paul II, to the ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt, September 7, 2000

“I have an especially warm recollection of my meeting with Grand Sheikh Mohammed Sayed Tantawi. We both expressed the wish for a new era of religious and cultural dialogue between Islam and Christianity. It is in this context, Mr. Ambassador, that I am particularly pleased that you have spoken of Egypt as a land where unity and harmony are greatly valued and where differences of religion are seen not as barriers but as a means of mutual enrichment in rendering service to the nation. I trust most sincerely that this will always be the case, and that the difficulties that have arisen from time to time will be overcome, especially in view of the widespread willingness and positive conditions for interreligious dialogue and cooperation which can be found in Egypt.

“In a world deeply marked by violence, it is bitterly ironic that even now some of the worst conflicts are between believers who worship the one God, who look to Abraham as a holy patriarch and who seek to follow the Law of Sinai. Each act of violence makes it more urgent for Muslims and Christians everywhere to recognize the things we have in common, to bear witness that we are all creatures of the one merciful God, and to agree once and for all that recourse to violence in the name of religion is completely unacceptable. Especially when religious identity coincides with cultural and ethnic identity it is a solemn duty of believers to ensure that religious sentiment is not used as an excuse for hatred and conflict. Religion is the enemy of exclusion and discrimination; it seeks the good of everyone and

therefore ought to be a stimulus for solidarity and harmony between individuals and among peoples”

Pope John Paul II, on his arrival in Syria, May 5, 2001

“I am thinking too of the great cultural influence of Syrian Islam, which under the Umayyad caliphs reached the farthest shores of the Mediterranean. Today, in a world that is increasingly complex and interdependent, there is a need for a new spirit of dialogue and cooperation between Christians and Muslims. Together we acknowledge the one indivisible God, the Creator of all that exists. Together we must proclaim to the world that the name of the one God is ‘a name of peace and a summons to peace’ (Novo Millennio Ineunte, 55)!”

Pope John Paul II, address on his Visit to the Umayyad Great Mosque, Syria, May 6, 2001

“I give heartfelt praise to almighty God for the grace of this meeting. I am most grateful for your warm welcome in the tradition of hospitality so cherished by the people of this region. I thank especially the minister of the Waqf and the grand mufti for their gracious greetings, which put into words the great yearning for peace which fills the hearts of all people of good will. My jubilee pilgrimage has been marked by important meetings with Muslim leaders in Cairo and Jerusalem, and now I am deeply moved to be your guest here in the great Umayyad mosque, so rich in religious history. Your land is dear to Christians: Here our religion has known vital moments of its growth and doctrinal development, and here are found Christian communities which have lived in peace and harmony with their Muslim neighbors for many centuries.

“We are meeting close to what both Christians and Muslims regard as the tomb of John the Baptist, known as Yahya in the Muslim tradition. The son of Zechariah is a figure of prime importance in the history of Christianity, for he was the precursor who prepared the way for Christ. John’s life, wholly dedicated to God, was crowned by martyrdom. May his witness enlighten all who venerate his memory here, so that they - and we too - may understand that life’s great task is to seek God’s truth and justice.

“Both Muslims and Christians prize their places of prayer as oases where they meet the all-merciful God on the journey to eternal life and where they meet their brothers and sisters in the

bond of religion. When, on the occasion of weddings or funerals or other celebrations, Christians and Muslims remain in silent respect at the other's prayer, they bear witness to what unites them without disguising or denying the things that separate.

"It is in mosques and churches that the Muslim and Christian communities shape their religious identity, and it is there that the young receive a significant part of their religious education. What sense of identity is instilled in young Christians and young Muslims in our churches and mosques? It is my ardent hope that Muslim and Christian religious leaders and teachers will present our two great religious communities as communities in respectful dialogue, never more as communities in conflict. It is crucial for the young to be taught the ways of respect and understanding, so that they will not be led to misuse religion itself to promote or justify hatred and violence. Violence destroys the image of the Creator in his creatures and should never be considered as the fruit of religious conviction.

"It is important that Muslims and Christians continue to explore philosophical and theological questions together in order to come to a more objective and comprehensive knowledge of each others' religious beliefs. Better mutual understanding will surely lead at the practical level to a new way of presenting our two religions not in opposition, as has happened too often in the past, but in partnership for the good of the human family.

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

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

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

"No peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness: this is what in this Message I wish to say to believers and unbelievers

alike, to all men and women of good will who are concerned for the good of the human family and for its future.

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

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

Pope John Paul II, address on the Day of Prayer for Peace, January 24, 2002

“To pray is not to escape from history and the problems which it presents. On the contrary, it is to choose to face reality not on our own, but with the strength that comes from on high, the strength of truth and love which have their ultimate source in God. Faced with the treachery of evil, religious people can count on God who absolutely wills what is good. They can pray to him to have the courage to face even the greatest difficulties with a sense of personal responsibility, never yielding to fatalism or impulsive reactions.”

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

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

Pope Benedict XVI, address to the representatives of the Muslim communities, Castel Gandolfo, September 25, 2006

The circumstances which have given rise to our gathering are well known. I have already had occasion to dwell upon them in the course of the past week. In this particular context, I should like to reiterate today all the esteem and the profound respect that I have for Muslim believers, calling to mind the words of the Second Vatican Council which for the Catholic Church are the *Magna Carta* of Muslim-Christian dialogue: "The Church looks upon Muslims with respect. They worship the one God living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, Creator of heaven

and earth, who has spoken to humanity and to whose decrees, even the hidden ones, they seek to submit themselves wholeheartedly, just as Abraham, to whom the Islamic faith readily relates itself, submitted to God" (Declaration *Nostra Aetate* , 3). Placing myself firmly within this perspective, I have had occasion, since the very beginning of my pontificate, to express my wish to continue establishing bridges of friendship with the adherents of all religions, showing particular appreciation for the growth of dialogue between Muslims and Christians (cf. *Address to the Delegates of Other Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of Other Religious Traditions*, 25 April 2005). As I underlined at Cologne last year, "Inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue between Christians and Muslims cannot be reduced to an optional extra. It is, in fact, a vital necessity, on which in large measure our future depends" (*Meeting with Representatives of Some Muslim Communities*, Cologne, 20 August 2005). In a world marked by relativism and too often excluding the transcendence and universality of reason, we are in great need of an authentic dialogue between religions and between cultures, capable of assisting us, in a spirit of fruitful co-operation, to overcome all the tensions together. Continuing, then, the work undertaken by my predecessor, Pope John Paul II, I sincerely pray that the relations of trust which have developed between Christians and Muslims over several years, will not only continue, but will develop further in a spirit of sincere and respectful dialogue, based on ever more authentic reciprocal knowledge which, with joy, recognizes the religious values that we have in common and, with loyalty, respects the differences. Inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue is a necessity for building together this world of peace and fraternity ardently desired by all people of good will. In this area, our contemporaries expect from us an eloquent witness to show all people the value of the religious dimension of life. Likewise, faithful to the teachings of their own religious traditions, Christians and Muslims must learn to work together, as indeed they already do in many common undertakings, in order to guard against all forms of intolerance and to oppose all manifestations of violence; as for us, religious authorities and political leaders, we must guide and encourage them in this direction. Indeed,

"although considerable dissensions and enmities between Christians and Muslims may have arisen in the course of the centuries, the Council urges all parties that, forgetting past things, they train themselves towards sincere mutual understanding and together maintain and promote social justice and moral values as well as peace and freedom for all people" (Declaration, *Nostra Aetate*, 3). The lessons of the past must therefore help us to seek paths of reconciliation, in order to live with respect for the identity and freedom of each individual, with a view to fruitful co-operation in the service of all humanity. As Pope John Paul II said in his memorable *speech to young people at Casablanca in Morocco*, "Respect and dialogue require reciprocity in all spheres, especially in that which concerns basic freedoms, more particularly religious freedom. They favour peace and agreement between peoples" (no. 5).

Pope Benedict XVI, letter to H.E. Mr. Suhail Khalil Shuhaiber, new Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to the Holy See, December 13, 2007

"I greatly appreciate Your Excellency's reference to your country's acknowledgement of the importance of interreligious and intercultural dialogue for the promotion of peace. Such dialogue—and I think here with satisfaction of the increasing contacts between Muslims and Christians—is essential for overcoming misunderstandings and forging solid relations marked by mutual respect and cooperation in the pursuit of the common good of the whole human family."

Pope Benedict XVI, address to participants in the tenth plenary assembly of the pontifical council for interreligious dialogue, June 7, 2008

"I am pleased to have this opportunity to meet you at the conclusion of the Tenth Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. To all of you taking part in this important gathering I extend cordial greetings. I thank in particular Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran for his gracious words.

"Dialogue *in veritate et caritate*: Pastoral orientations" – this is the theme of your Plenary Assembly. I am happy to learn that during these days you have sought to arrive at a deeper understanding of the Catholic Church's approach to people of other religious traditions. You have considered the broader

purpose of dialogue – to discover the truth – and the motivation for it, which is charity, in obedience to the divine mission entrusted to the Church by our Lord Jesus Christ.

At the inauguration of my Pontificate I affirmed that "the Church wants to continue building bridges of friendship with the followers of all religions, in order to seek the true good of every person and of society as a whole" (*Address to Delegates of Other Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of Other Religious Traditions*, 25 April 2005). Through the ministry of the Successors of Peter, including the work of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and the efforts of local Ordinaries and the People of God throughout the world, the Church continues to reach out to followers of different religions. In this way she gives expression to that desire for encounter and collaboration in truth and freedom. In the words of my venerable Predecessor, Pope Paul VI, the Church's principal responsibility is service to the Truth – "truth about God, truth about man and his hidden destiny, truth about the world, truth which we discover in the Word of God" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 78).

The great proliferation of interreligious meetings around the world today calls for discernment. In this regard, I am pleased to note that during these days you have reflected on pastoral orientations for interreligious dialogue. Since the Second Vatican Council, attention has been focused on the spiritual elements which different religious traditions have in common. In many ways, this has helped to build bridges of understanding across religious boundaries. I understand that during your discussions you have been considering some of the issues of practical concern in interreligious relations: the identity of the partners in dialogue, religious education in schools, conversion, proselytism, reciprocity, religious freedom, and the role of religious leaders in society. These are important issues to which religious leaders living and working in pluralistic societies must pay close attention.

It is important to emphasize the need for formation for those who promote interreligious dialogue. If it is to be authentic, this dialogue must be a journey of faith. How necessary it is for its promoters to be well formed in their own beliefs and well informed about those of others. It is for this reason that I

encourage the efforts of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue to organize formation courses and programmes in interreligious dialogue for different Christian groups, especially seminarians and young people in tertiary educational institutions. Interreligious collaboration provides opportunities to express the highest ideals of each religious tradition. Helping the sick, bringing relief to the victims of natural disasters or violence, caring for the aged and the poor: these are some of the areas in which people of different religions collaborate. I encourage all those who are inspired by the teaching of their religions to help the suffering members of society.

Dear friends, as you come to the end of your Plenary Assembly, I thank you for the work you have done. I ask you to take the message of good will from the Successor of Peter to your Christian flock and to all our friends of other religions. Willingly I impart my Apostolic blessing to you as a pledge of grace and peace in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Pope Benedict XVI, to H.E. Mr. Ali Akbar Naseri, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Holy See, October 29, 2009

"...Faith in the one God must bring all believers closer, impelling them to work together for the defense and promotion of fundamental human values. Among the universal rights, religious freedom and freedom of conscience play a fundamental role, because they constitute the basis of the other freedoms. Defense of other rights that stem from the dignity of the person and of peoples particularly the promotion of the safeguarding of life, of justice and of solidarity must be, in turn, the object of true collaboration. Moreover, as I have often had the opportunity to emphasize, it is an urgent necessity of our time to stabilize cordial relations among believers of different religions, in order to construct a world that is more human and in greater harmony with God's plan for Creation. I am therefore pleased with the existence of the regular meetings, on themes of common interest, organized regularly and jointly by the *Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue* and The Organization of Culture and Islamic Relations. By contributing to the common search for what is just and true, meetings of this kind allow everyone to

grow in reciprocal knowledge and to cooperate in reflecting on the important issues concerning human life..."

Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus* on the Church in Africa in service to Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace, November 19, 2011

Islam

94. The Synod Fathers highlighted the complexity of the Muslim presence on the African continent. In some countries, good relations exist between Christians and Muslims; in others, the local Christians are merely second-class citizens, and Catholics from abroad, religious and lay, have difficulty obtaining visas and residence permits; in some, there is insufficient distinction between the religious and political spheres, while in others, finally, there is a climate of hostility. I call upon the Church, in every situation, to persist in esteem for Muslims, who "worship God who is one, living and subsistent; merciful and almighty, the creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to humanity." If all of us who believe in God desire to promote reconciliation, justice and peace, we must work together to banish every form of discrimination, intolerance and religious fundamentalism. In her social apostolate, the Church does not make religious distinctions. She comes to the help of those in need, be they Christian, Muslim or animist. In this way she bears witness to the love of God, creator of all, and she invites the followers of other religions to demonstrate respect and to practise reciprocity in a spirit of esteem. I ask the whole Church, through patient dialogue with Muslims, to seek juridical and practical recognition of religious freedom, so that every citizen in Africa may enjoy not only the right to choose his religion freely and to engage in worship, but also the right to freedom of conscience. Religious freedom is the road to peace.

Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, September 14, 2012 (excerpt)

Interreligious dialogue

19. The Church's universal nature and vocation require that she engage in dialogue with the members of other religions. In the Middle East this dialogue is based on the spiritual and historical bonds uniting Christians to Jews and Muslims. It is a dialogue

which is not primarily dictated by pragmatic political or social considerations, but by underlying theological concerns which have to do with faith. They are grounded in the sacred Scriptures and are clearly defined in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* and in the Declaration on the Church's Relation to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate*. Jews, Christians and Muslims alike believe in one God, the Creator of all men and women. May Jews, Christians and Muslims rediscover one of God's desires, that of the unity and harmony of the human family. May Jews, Christians and Muslims find in *other believers* brothers and sisters to be respected and loved, and in this way, beginning in their own lands, give the beautiful witness of serenity and concord between the children of Abraham. Rather than being exploited in endless conflicts which are unjustifiable for authentic believers, the acknowledgment of one God – if lived with a pure heart – can make a powerful contribution to peace in the region and to respectful coexistence on the part of its peoples.

23. The Catholic Church, in fidelity to the teachings of the *Second Vatican Council*, looks with esteem to Muslims, who worship God above all by prayer, almsgiving and fasting, revere Jesus as a prophet while not acknowledging his divinity, and honour Mary, his Virgin Mother. We know that the encounter of Islam and Christianity has often taken the form of doctrinal controversy. Sadly, both sides have used doctrinal differences as a pretext for justifying, in the name of religion, acts of intolerance, discrimination, marginalization and even of persecution.

24. Despite this fact, Christians live daily alongside Muslims in the Middle East, where their presence is neither recent nor accidental, but has a long history. As an integral part of the Middle East, Christians have developed over the centuries a type of relationship with their surroundings which can prove instructive. They have let themselves be challenged by Muslim devotion and piety, and have continued, in accordance with their means and to the extent possible, to live by and to promote the values of the Gospel in the surrounding culture. The result has been a particular form of symbiosis. It is proper, then, to acknowledge the contribution

made by Jews, Christians and Muslims in the formation of a rich culture proper to the Middle East.

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

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

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

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

Pope Francis, Message to Muslims throughout the world for the end of Ramadan, July 10, 2013

To Muslims throughout the World

It gives me great pleasure to greet you as you celebrate '*Id al-Fitr*', so concluding the month of Ramadan, dedicated mainly to fasting, prayer and almsgiving. It is a tradition by now that, on this occasion, the *Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue* sends you a message of good wishes, together with a proposed theme for common reflection. This year, the first of my Pontificate, I have decided to sign this traditional message myself and to send it to you, dear friends, as an expression of esteem and friendship for all Muslims, especially those who are religious leaders.

As you all know, when the Cardinals elected me as Bishop of Rome and Universal Pastor of the Catholic Church, I chose the name of "Francis", a very famous saint who loved God and every human being deeply, to the point of being called "universal brother". He loved, helped and served the needy, the sick and the poor; he also cared greatly for creation.

I am aware that family and social dimensions enjoy a particular prominence for Muslims during this period, and it is worth noting that there are certain parallels in each of these areas with Christian faith and practice.

This year, the theme on which I would like to reflect with you and with all who will read this message is one that concerns both Muslims and Christians: Promoting Mutual Respect through Education.

This year's theme is intended to underline the importance of education in the way we understand each other, built upon the foundation of mutual respect. "Respect" means an attitude of kindness towards people for whom we have consideration and esteem. "Mutual" means that this is not a one-way process, but something shared by both sides.

What we are called to respect in each person is first of all his life, his physical integrity, his dignity and the rights deriving from that dignity, his reputation, his property, his ethnic and cultural identity, his ideas and his political choices. We are therefore called to think, speak and write respectfully of the other, not only in his presence, but always and everywhere, avoiding unfair criticism or defamation. Families, schools, religious teaching and all forms of media have a role to play in achieving this goal.

Turning to mutual respect in interreligious relations, especially between Christians and Muslims, we are called to respect the religion of the other, its teachings, its symbols, its values. Particular respect is due to religious leaders and to places of worship. How painful are attacks on one or other of these!

It is clear that, when we show respect for the religion of our neighbours or when we offer them our good wishes on the occasion of a religious celebration, we simply seek to share their joy, without making reference to the content of their religious convictions.

Regarding the education of Muslim and Christian youth, we have to bring up our young people to think and speak respectfully of other religions and their followers, and to avoid ridiculing or denigrating their convictions and practices.

We all know that mutual respect is fundamental in any human relationship, especially among people who profess religious belief. In this way, sincere and lasting friendship can grow.

When I received the *Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See* on 22 March 2013, I said: "It is not possible to establish true links with God, while ignoring other people. Hence it is important to intensify dialogue among the various religions, and I am thinking particularly of dialogue with Islam. At the Mass marking the beginning of my ministry, I greatly appreciated the presence of so many civil and religious leaders from the Islamic world." With these words, I wished to emphasize once more the great importance of dialogue and cooperation among believers, in particular Christians and Muslims, and the need for it to be enhanced.

With these sentiments, I reiterate my hope that all Christians and Muslims may be true promoters of mutual respect and friendship, in particular through education.

Finally, I send you my prayerful good wishes, that your lives may glorify the Almighty and give joy to those around you.

Happy Feast to you all!

From the Vatican, 10 July 2013