

Interreligious Dialogue Getting Involved

A Resource Manual for Columbans
and others who are planning to engage in Interreligious Dialogue in the local
community and in their place of missionary assignment



www.columbanIRD.com

Contents

1. Foreword

PART 1 – Background to and Rationale for Interreligious Dialogue

PAGE

2. What is Interreligious Dialogue? - *Paul Glynn, SSC.* 5
3. Interreligious Dialogue - Intrinsic to the Life and Mission of the Catholic Church
(*abridged from Catholic bishops of England and Wales: 'Meeting God in Friend and Stranger'*) 6
4. Universality of the Golden Rule in the World Religions 17
5. The “Dialogue Decalogue” - *Professor Leonard Swidler* 19

PART 2: Reflections on ‘Lessons Learned from’ and ‘Spirituality of’ IRD.

6. 10 Interfaith Lessons I Have Learned- *Jim Fleming SSC* 22
7. A Spirituality of Interreligious Dialogue “Dialogue makes a Stranger into a Friend”
Sr Rebecca Conlon SSC 23

PART 3: World Religions: ‘Introductions to’ and ‘Immersion Experiences Among’... (Columban authors)

(Hinduism)

8. A Brief Introduction to Hinduism - *Frank Hoare SSC* 26
9. Getting involved in Dialogue in Fiji- *Kurt Pala SSC* 28

(Buddhism)

10. A Brief Introduction to Buddhism- *Eamon Adams SSC* 29
11. Dialogue with Buddhists in Myanmar- *Sr. Kathleen Geaney SSC* 35

(Shinto)

12. A Brief Introduction to Shinto in Japan- *Seamus Cullen SSC* 35

(Islam)

13. A Brief Introduction to Islam- *Paul Glynn SSC* 37
14. Some Do’s and Don’ts Specific to Relating with Muslims 41
15. “The Vision of the Prelature of St. Mary’s, Marawi” (1982) 42

16. ‘Immersion Experience’ - Living With a Muslim Family- <i>Paul Glynn SSC</i>	44
 <u>PART 4: Interreligious Dialogue in Practice</u>	
17. Part (1) - A Practical Guide to Visiting Places of Worship	46
18. Part (2) – A Practical Guide to Planning an ‘Immersion Experience’ Among People of a Different Faith Tradition - <i>Paul Glynn SSC</i>	52
19. 10 Things I Can Start Doing Right Now!	58

Foreword

This resource manual is for Columbans and others who desire to get involved in Interreligious Dialogue. Since the Second Vatican Council Interreligious Dialogue has been recognised as a vital aspect of the Church's missionary charism and an integral part of how Columbans do mission. Over the years many Columbans have continued to be at the forefront of various Dialogue initiatives, with Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims and peoples of many other faith traditions, all aimed at creating greater understanding, cooperation and mutual respect, for the life of the world. The 2012 Columban General Assembly highlights this: *"Columban Mission today engages with peoples of many faiths in an increasingly multi-cultural and interreligious world. Dialogue of life and action, as well as theological reflection, in solidarity with the poor and the exploited earth, deepens our communion with ourselves and others"* {Called to Communion – 2012}.

Wherever Columbans work we are acutely aware that Dialogue between Catholics and peoples of other faiths is an imperative needed to counter a growing polarity created by the course of world events. Dialogue is needed to counter extremism, for example and to promote the justice, peace and care for the Earth that befits our common faith in one God who is Lord of all humankind and of all creation.

Dialogue is needed in order to maintain and to promote the sort of understanding, cooperation and mutual respect that is necessary for life-giving local communities to flourish; communities that cherish the intrinsic dignity of every person and all of creation. Dialogue is living our faith in the presence of people of other faiths. It is a means of loving neighbours who are not of my faith by reaching out to them in a spirit of openness and tolerance.

Interreligious Dialogue is not an easy task. Getting involved in Dialogue can be confusingly difficult at times. This resource manual clearly explains what Dialogue is and what it seeks to achieve and gives practical information on how to engage in Dialogue.

It includes a summary of the Catholic Church's teachings on Interreligious Dialogue, brief introductions to the major world religions that Columbans encounter in countries where they work, plus practical steps on how to get involved in Dialogue in your local community.

Since Dialogue involves the whole community, it is recommended that the contents of this resource be read and reflected upon by all the members of our local Columban group and discussed in small groups. This helps ensure that Dialogue remains an integral part of the mission outreach of each one of us and not just the interest of a few individuals.

Hopefully these pages will help us to rediscover that dialogue can lead to moments when different faith traditions allow us to see the light of God shining in the most surprising of places and so enable us to welcome Christ in the faces of those who are so very different from us.

What is Interreligious Dialogue?

Paul Glynn, ssc.

Interreligious Dialogue - also referred to as *Interfaith Dialogue* - is about people of different faiths coming to a mutual understanding and respect that allows them to live and cooperate with each other in spite of their differences. The term refers to cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions at both the individual and institutional level. The person who engages in Dialogue remains true to their own beliefs while respecting the right of the other to practise their faith freely.

Interreligious Dialogue is not just words or talk. It includes human interaction and relationships. It can take place between individuals and communities and on many levels. For example, between neighbours, in schools and in our places of work - it can take place in both formal and informal settings.

In most countries Catholics live on the same streets; use the same shops, buses and schools as people of different faiths. Normal life means that we come into daily contact with each other. Dialogue therefore, is not just something that takes place on an official or academic level only – it is part of daily life during which different cultural and religious groups interact with each other directly, and where tensions between them are the most tangible.

Interreligious Dialogue is defined as:

“..all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of faith which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment, in obedience to truth and respect for freedom” (Dialogue and Proclamation, Vatican City, 1991 }

This definition tells us that Dialogue is about building constructive relationships with people of other faiths. It is about mutual understanding. It is about each partner respecting the religious freedom of the other.

WHAT DOES DIALOGUE AIM TO ACHIEVE?

Dialogue seeks to:

- Increase mutual understanding, and good relations.
- Identify causes of tension in relations between people of different faiths.
These are often economic, social or political rather than religious.
- Build understanding and confidence to overcome or prevent tensions.
- Break down the barriers and stereotypes which lead to distrust, suspicion and bigotry.

WHAT DIALOGUE IS NOT!

- It is not just the study of comparative religions and reading the sacred texts of other faith traditions out of personal interest and curiosity
- It is not about brushing aside differences and pretending we are all the same.
- It does not aim at coming to a common, unified belief, or a new pluralistic faith.
- It is not a way of converting the other.
In dialogue each party remains true to their own faith.
- It is not a space for arguing, attacking or disproving the beliefs of the other.
It is about increasing mutual understanding and trust

Interreligious Dialogue - Intrinsic to the Life and Mission of the Catholic Church

{This is an abridged version of the teaching document entitled: *Meeting God in Friend and Stranger*
Produced by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (Copyright © 2010)}

I. The Christian Response is one of Dialogue

Belief in God, as expressed in the great religious traditions of humanity, is a force for good in our society today. There are those who would have us believe that this is not so - those who insist that religious beliefs are divisive. Yet the quest for God is rooted in the spirit of every human being and brings with it the quest for holiness, goodness, compassion, forgiveness, perseverance, humility and truth.

Of course, the history of this quest is marked with failure and sin. But so are all of our strivings. The religious quest, properly understood, tackles these failings head on, proclaiming the need for every person to turn away from corruption, selfishness and the misuse of power in the effort to know the mystery of God and the mystery of our common humanity.

The Catholic faith instructs us and guides us not only in the unique pathway to God through Jesus Christ, but also in the manner in which we are to learn about and cooperate with people of other faiths.

➤ *What is Dialogue?*

In 1970, Pope Paul VI wrote an Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam Suam* (His Church) pointing out the centrality of Dialogue in our salvation history:

“Indeed, the whole history of man’s salvation is one long, varied Dialogue which marvellously begins with God and which he prolongs with men in so many different ways”.

In common usage the word ‘dialogue’ usually means a conversation in words, but in the Church’s teaching *Interreligious Dialogue* means far more than that. In 1984 the Vatican department with responsibility for dialogue with other religions described it in this way:

“Dialogue means not only discussion, but also includes all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment”.

{Secretariat for Non-Christians, *Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission* 1984. The name of the Secretariat was later changed to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID)}

In an address to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) in 1990 Pope John Paul II described it even more briefly:

“Dialogue is not so much an idea to be studied as a way of living in positive relationship with others”. {Address to PCID, 26th April 1990}

Interreligious dialogue, then, as the Catholic Church understands it, includes:

- Simply living as good neighbours with those of other religions
- Working together in matters of common concern, such as in issues of justice, peace, the integrity of creation and so forth
- A willingness, according to circumstances, to try to understand better the religion of one’s neighbours, and to experience something of their religious life and culture
- As well as, a more ‘in depth’ form of dialogue involving conversation specifically about spiritual, theological or scholarly matters

Dialogue is above all a frame of mind, an attitude.

➤ ***Being open to discover more about the mystery of God***

In interreligious dialogue we converse, or relate in some other way, with those whose beliefs and values are, at least in part, different from our own. We try to cross the ‘gulf of difference’, and to be open to the truth and the goodness we might find there, however strange their expression might seem to us. In dialogue we can discover to what extent our teachings and values overlap, and where there are real differences.

When there are such differences God may sometimes lead us into further truth about God’s self, because God’s mystery can never be fully within our grasp, and the journey into it is endless. We are always learners, on a pilgrimage towards a greater fullness of truth.

Sometimes, however, in the light of God’s revelation in Christ, we may have to confess that what we are meeting is simply false, and not a glimpse of God’s truth or holiness. It is an essential part of dialogue that, in courtesy, we say so.

➤ ***Dialogue is not a popular option***

Members of other faiths with whom we seek to have dialogue vary considerably. Their concerns and their self-understanding will often challenge our expectations. Some groups or individuals may not want to collaborate at all, because of objections rooted in their religious or cultural traditions, or because of suspicion or fear. The notion of dialogue, especially in the strictest sense of a conversation where both sides are open to listening and being changed by learning and self-correction, and not merely as a form of bargaining, or of arguing and seeking to persuade, can be an utterly alien one. Sometimes those who do take part in dialogue will

be criticised by their co-religionists. Those criticisms often issue from a defective or superficial understanding of the nature of dialogue itself.

➤ *The attitude of humility and respect*

It is useless to come to dialogue full of presuppositions about the other person or community, already convinced (consciously or not) that we know what they believe and how they behave. As far as we can we have to free ourselves of these premature judgments, ‘empty ourselves’ so to speak, so that the other’s real identity can be disclosed to us and we meet the real person and his or her real beliefs, and not some product of our imagination. We must certainly enter dialogue prepared to be surprised and to change our minds. Love of our neighbour, humility, and a respect for the dignity of the other person made in God’s image demand that we do this – or at least try our best to do it. This is the only way of learning the true nature of another’s beliefs and concerns.

We must realise too that the other person will have his or her share of preconceptions about us. We have to listen to these, and with patience make clear what we believe and what our values really are. We have to listen attentively, and speak honestly, in the spirit of Christ, the spirit of love of our neighbour. For a Christian, interreligious dialogue is a profoundly Christ-like work.

The challenge of difference, the task of meeting the followers of another religion in true dialogue, is the demanding one of combining genuine love and respect, and openness to unexpected truth and goodness, with a firm grasp of our own Christian faith and a readiness to be led by its light. The Catholic Church today, as we shall explain, recognises the presence of what is true and holy in other religions as being ‘rays of the Truth’ and ‘seeds of the Word’; but the Church is also cautious about identifying those ‘rays’ and those ‘seeds’ too hastily. This caution should mark our dialogue, not to undermine it but to ensure its integrity.

II. The Church’s Teachings on Inter-religious Dialogue

One of the legacies of Pope John Paul II is the example he gave of seeking to engage with people of other religions. In his many journeys across the world he pointed out the path of dialogue. He was the first pope to enter a synagogue, and the first to enter a mosque. In 1986, 1993 and 2002 he was joined at Assisi by leaders of the world’s religions, and by other Christian leaders, in order to pray for peace.

In his first public address as Pope in April 2005 Pope Benedict XVI said that while his first priority would be dialogue with other Christians, his second would be interreligious dialogue. During his visit to Turkey in November 2006, Pope Benedict declared that dialogue was not an option but a necessity. In an address to the President of the Turkish Religious Affairs Directorate he said:

‘Following the Biblical tradition, the Second Vatican Council teaches that the entire human race shares a common origin and a common destiny: God, our Creator and the goal of our earthly pilgrimage. Christians and Muslims belong to the family of those who believe in the one God and who, according to their respective traditions, trace their ancestry to Abraham. The human and spiritual unity in our origins and our destiny impels us to seek a common path, as we play our part in the quest for fundamental values so characteristic of the people of our time.’ {www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/november/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20061128_pres-religious-affairs_en.html}

The Second Vatican Council's document *Nostra Aetate* (Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions) is the principal statement of the Church's teaching authority on the general subject of inter-religious dialogue. The Declaration begins thus:

"In our age, when the human race is being daily brought closer together and contacts between the various nations are becoming more frequent, the Church is giving closer attention to what is its relation to non-Christian religions. In its task of promoting unity and charity among people, indeed also among nations, it now turns its attention chiefly to what things human beings have in common, and what things tend to bring them together." {*Nostra Aetate* 1}

➤ ***Christ is our only Saviour yet God wills the salvation of all peoples***

In all its teaching the Catholic Church keeps a careful balance between insisting that God truly wills the eternal salvation of all people and insisting, with equal force, that Christ is the one and only means and mediator of this salvation. The Church also keeps a balance between recognising what is true and holy in other religions and, yet, insisting on the importance of an explicit faith in Christ and membership of the Church through Baptism. Thus the promotion of dialogue has not diminished the necessity of proclaiming the Gospel and calling those who do not believe in Christ to conversion while fully respecting the liberty of each person.

In all this discussion, of course, we must never forget the fundamental truth that judgment about people's eternal salvation belongs to God, and to God alone.

Three themes recur constantly in the Church's teaching on Dialogue:

- The unity of the human race,
- The need to be open to all that is true and holy in other religions and
- The call to dialogue.

➤ ***The Unity of the Human Race***

The Church's positive attitude to people and communities belonging to other religions is based on its conviction that the human race is one:

- One through its origin in the one creative act of God,
- One in physical descent,
- One in its predicament caused by sin and need of salvation, and
- One in God's saving purposes.

This is a profoundly biblical conviction. This is how *Nostra Aetate* puts it:

"All nations are one community and have one origin, because God caused the whole human race to dwell on the whole face of the earth. They also have one final end, God, whose providence, manifestation of goodness and plans for salvation are extended to all..." {*Nostra Aetate* 1}

The unity of all humanity was very prominent in the thinking of Pope John Paul II. For him, this unity is the best place to begin when reflecting on the plurality of world religions. The unity is not merely a biological one: the Pope refers to a 'mystery of unity', a glimpse of God's loving design for those he created in his own image and likeness. As yet we only understand a little of this divine purpose, but we do know that it is centred

upon Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, crucified and risen. In an important address to the Roman Curia after the 1986 World Day of Prayer for Peace at Assisi, he said:

“Accordingly there is only one divine plan for every human being who comes into this world, one single origin and goal, whatever may be the colour of his skin, the historical and geographical framework within which he happens to live and act, or the culture in which he grows up and expresses himself. The differences are a less important element, when confronted with the unity which is radical, fundamental and decisive. The divine plan, unique and definitive, has its centre in Jesus Christ, God and man, ‘in whom people find the fullness of religious life and in whom God has reconciled all things to himself’.” {Pope John Paul II, Address 22nd December 1986}

Since all human beings are created in God’s image they all have an equal dignity as persons and as images of the personal God, with the rights and duties which flow from this. One of these rights is the right to religious freedom. The Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on Religious Freedom, known as *Dignitatis Humanae*, makes this point very clearly:

“This Vatican synod declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. Such freedom consists in this, that all should have such immunity from coercion by individuals or by groups, or by any human power, that no one should be forced to act against their conscience in religious matters, nor prevented from acting according to their conscience, whether in private or in public, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits. This synod further declares that the right to religious freedom is firmly based on the dignity of the human person as this is known from the revealed word of God and from reason itself.” {*Dignitatis Humanae* 2}

All this is relevant to the whole field of interreligious relationships and dialogue. The right to religious freedom is based on our equal dignity before God; but as a basis for dialogue the recognition of this right must be reciprocal, because dialogue can only work properly as a dialogue between equals.

People across the world ask the same ultimate questions about their lives, questions often asked with deep anxiety: What is the meaning and purpose of our life on earth - does it have any meaning at all? Is there a God, and if so what is God like? Why is there suffering – has it a meaning? What is the secret of true happiness? What happens after death? These common questions show how human beings are united in their restless search for meaning.

➤ ***The Need to be open to what is True and Holy in other Religions***

“The Catholic Church rejects nothing of those things which are true and holy in these religions. It regards with respect those ways of acting and living and those precepts and teachings which, though often at variance with what it holds and expounds, frequently reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens everyone” {*Nostra Aetate* 2}

The Catholic Church believes that our unity is also revealed in the fact that this presence of what is true and holy is not accidental. It is what the Council calls ‘*a ray of the one Truth*’ and, in the Decree on Mission *Ad Gentes* (To the nations), ‘*seeds of the Word*’ (*Ad Gentes* 11). In other words, the presence of what is true and holy is directly related to the revelation of Christ and to his Church.

However, the Church believes in the unique position of Christ as the incarnation and revelation of the Word of God, and the one Saviour of all. Christ is:

“...the way, the truth and the life’ in whom people find the fullness of religious life and in whom God has reconciled all things to himself.” {Nostra Aetate 2}

Our faith in Christ gives us the assurance that whatever is true and holy in other religions is not an alternative to the Gospel, but a preparation for it. The aspirations of humanity, and the answers offered by the various religious traditions, all have their fulfilment in Jesus Christ. It is therefore essential for the Church, in faithfulness to the Gospel, to balance the affirmative statements about other religions with an honest confession of what our faith sees as lacking (what still needs to be completed) in those religions.

Equally important however is that this assertion that Christ is the only Saviour does not imply the superiority of individual Christians over everyone else. What Christians have received is totally unmerited on their part. It is an assertion rather of the bountiful goodness of God and of the awesome responsibility Christians have of living up to what they have received, of being humbly thankful for it, and of being ever ready to share it with others.

Jesus himself gave this warning: *‘From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded’* {Luke12:48}. The Second Vatican Council and subsequent papal teachings affirm the active presence of the freely given, saving power of Christ (‘grace’) outside the visible, institutional confines of the Church:

‘There are those who without any fault do not know anything about Christ or his Church, yet who search for God with a sincere heart and, under the influence of grace, try to put into effect the will of God as known to them through the dictate of conscience: these too can obtain eternal salvation. Nor does divine Providence deny the helps that are necessary for salvation to those who, through no fault of their own, have not yet attained to the express recognition of God yet who strive, not without divine grace, to lead an upright life. For whatever goodness and truth is found in them is considered by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel, and bestowed by him who enlightens everyone that they may in the end have life.’ {Lumen Gentium 16}

This grace is intimately related to Christ, the fruit of his sacrifice on the Cross, and bestowed on those outside the visible Church through the presence of the Holy Spirit. This grace of God, however, is still related to the Church. It does not make members of other religions ‘Christian’, but enlightens them in a way appropriate to their particular situation.

➤ ***The Holy Spirit is at work in other religions***

The Presence of the Holy Spirit in members of other religions is a remarkable feature of the teaching of Pope John Paul II. In the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (Mission of the Redeemer) he says:

“The Spirit manifests himself in a special way to the Church and in her members. Nevertheless his presence and activity are universal, limited by neither space nor time. The Spirit’s presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions. Indeed, the Spirit is at the origin of the noble ideals and undertakings which benefit humanity on its journey through history. Again, it is the Spirit who sows the ‘seeds of the Word’ that are present in various customs and cultures, preparing them for full maturity in Christ.” {Redemptoris Missio 28}

Although the Holy Spirit’s presence in history and in other religions cannot be equated with the abundance of the Spirit’s gifts to the Church, it is nevertheless the same Divine Spirit who is at work in them, the source of whatever is true and holy, and bringing them into a positive relationship with the Church. It must

be stressed that the Spirit who is active in other religions is always profoundly one with Christ, and not an alternative to Christ.

It is the same Spirit who is was at work in the human coming-to-be of Christ, and in Christ's life, death and resurrection. This Spirit is bestowed on the Church.

The Spirit, then who is at work in other religions and supremely in Christ himself, is one and the same Spirit who gives life to the Church. Because it is the same Divine Spirit who is at work in both, the Church and other religions have a positive relationship to each other.

By that God-given presence and action we are deeply related, though at the same time sadly distant from each other. The Church is not only 'passively' related to other religions because of the Spirit's presence: the Church has an active role in the salvation of all people. The Church is the sign and instrument of a communion with God and with each other that begins in this life and is completed hereafter. The Church is called to work actively for this by its prayer, by its preaching, by its proclamation of the Gospel and calling people to faith in Christ, and also by interreligious dialogue.

Each Religion is related to the Church in its own way

The Second Vatican Council presents the various religions as each having its own distinctive relationship to the Church. It follows that our approach to each, and any dialogue with it, will have its own character.

➤ *Islam*

Despite the fact that there are profound theological differences between the two religions, Islam shares with Christianity many common traditions and ideas, as well as a long history of both creative and hostile encounter. Although Jews, Muslims and Christians within their own respective tradition understand God and relate to him in a different way, they all worship the one God. In various different ways, all claim Abraham as their ancestor and honour his close relationship with God. For reasons that are all too obvious, it has never been more urgent that Christians and Muslims learn how to dialogue with, and better understand, one another. The Second Vatican Council speaks of Muslims in *Nostra Aetate* 3:

"The Church also looks upon Muslims with respect. They worship the One God living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to humanity and to whose decrees, even the hidden ones, they seek to submit themselves whole-heartedly, just as Abraham, to whom the Islamic faith readily relates itself, submitted to God. They venerate Jesus as a prophet, even though they do not acknowledge him as God, and they honour his virgin mother Mary and even sometimes devoutly call upon her. Furthermore they await the Day of Judgment when God will require all people brought back to life. Hence they have regard for the moral life and worship God especially in prayer, almsgiving and fasting. Although considerable dissensions and enmities between Christians and Muslims may have arisen in the course of the centuries, this synod urges all parties that, forgetting past things, they train themselves towards sincere mutual understanding and together maintain and promote social justice and moral values as well as peace and freedom for all people."

➤ *Hinduism*

Hinduism is not strictly a single organised religion, but a whole family of religions rooted in the Indian sub-continent, and its members comprise over 80% of the vast and diverse population of India. There are also Hindus living in other countries around the world, including large communities in Fiji and Britain. Hindus

witness to our human yearning for the divine, to the importance of family life and to the possibility that different religions can live together in peace. The Second Vatican Council thus pays tribute to the ancient, profound and richly varied Hindu traditions:

“In Hinduism the divine mystery is explored and propounded with an inexhaustible wealth of myths and penetrating philosophical investigations; and liberation is sought from the distresses of our state either through various forms of ascetical life or deep meditation, or taking refuge in God with loving confidence.” {Nostra Aetate 2}

In his first visit to India, Pope John Paul II praised the ‘*spiritual vision of humanity*’ at the heart of Indian religious culture:

“India has so much to offer to the world in the task of understanding man and the truth of his existence. What she offers specifically is a noble spiritual vision of humanity – humanity as a pilgrim of the Absolute, travelling toward a goal, seeking the face of God.” {Pope John Paul II: Address to the Followers of the Various Religions of India, 1986}

➤ **Buddhism**

For Christians, dialogue with Buddhists is quite different from dialogue with Jews or Muslims because no personal creator God plays a significant part in Buddhism. What makes Buddhists what they are is not because of a creed nor even primarily the ascetical practices they follow, but rather their personal commitment to search for truth as the Buddha did. Buddhism has attracted many in the West because of its high moral standards, its teaching about meditation, its commitment to compassion, peace and justice, and its great respect for nature and the environment. *Nostra Aetate 2* affirms:

“In Buddhism, according to its various forms, the radical inadequacy of this changeable world is acknowledged and a way is taught whereby those with a devout and trustful spirit may be able to reach either a state of perfect freedom or, relying on their own efforts or on help from a higher source, the highest illumination.”

Pope John Paul II reinforced this on a visit to Korea in 1984:

“...the Korean people throughout history have sought, in the great ethical and religious visions of Buddhism and Confucianism, the path to the renewal of self and to the consolidation of the whole people in virtue and in nobility of purpose. The profound reverence for life and nature, the quest for truth and harmony, self-abnegation and compassion, the ceaseless striving to transcend – these are among the noble hallmarks of your spiritual tradition that have led, and will continue to lead, the nation and the people through turbulent times to the haven of peace. Our diversity in religious and ethical beliefs calls upon all of us to foster genuine fraternal dialogue and to give special consideration to what human beings have in common and to what promotes fellowship among them...” {Pope John Paul II: Address to the Leaders of the Various Religions of Korea, 1984}

III. The Church Proclaims the Reign of God through Dialogue

Because the Church believes in the unity of the human race, and in the God-given presence of truth and holiness in other religions it calls each one of us to engage in interreligious dialogue, where we come to ‘*Meet God in Friend and Stranger*’. It also teaches us that through interreligious dialogue the *Stranger* can become a *Friend*.

However, this call by the Church is also a response to the God who at all times calls to the Church to his presence in the midst of life. We must be sensitive to the signs of the times: God calls to the Church through the passing events of history and, in particular, through the features so characteristic of our own time, the greater closeness of peoples thanks to modern communication and the migration of peoples of very differing religious traditions between countries.

Dialogue, therefore, has become part of the contemporary Catholic Church's understanding of her Christ-given mission to be the sign and instrument of uniting all people to God and to each other. It is not optional, and is intrinsic to our understanding of the Church today.

➤ ***Witnessing to the Reign of God; Christ's Peace; Christ's Selfless Love***

About Interreligious Dialogue being an integral part of mission, Pope John Paul II has this to say:

"Interreligious dialogue is part of the Church's evangelising mission. Understood as a means of mutual knowledge and enrichment, dialogue is not in opposition to the mission 'ad gentes'. Indeed it has special links with that mission and is one of its expressions." {Redemptoris Missio 55}

He is reminding us here that *Evangelisation* does not only mean explicitly proclaiming Jesus Christ and calling followers of other religions or unbelievers to conversion. The work of evangelisation is much wider than that. Christians *evangelise* and the Church as a whole *evangelises* whenever, by Christ's power and the Holy Spirit, in any way whatever, they enable the Reign of God to permeate the minds and hearts, the cultures and activities of the world of their time. Jesus himself, after all, did not only proclaim the 'Good News of the Kingdom of God' by his powerful words and his mighty acts, but also by his very presence and behaviour, by everything he said and did. When by God's grace Catholics live according to the Gospel and its values, we are evangelising, and so bringing Christ's saving presence into the world in which we live. This is how *Nostra Aetate* (2) expresses the same point:

"Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, as well as their social life and culture."

Interreligious Dialogue is an example of what *Nostra Aetate* is recommending here and it clearly helps to unite people more closely in communion with God and with each other. Dialogue is an aspect of the Church's complete mission to be the 'Sacrament of this Communion', an 'Instrument of Peace'. This is a vital part of evangelisation.

The longing for peace is of course shared by all people of good will, Christian and non-Christian. For a Christian, however, the love of one's neighbour and the desire for the unity of humanity in Christ is a further motive, based on our Christian faith. Our faith, in fact, takes us even further, into the radical Christian spirituality of 'putting on Christ', carrying his Cross, and following him through death to resurrection. The Christian approach to dialogue is at its heart an entering into the costly love of Christ for humanity, which reached its fullest expression in the story of his Passion from Gethsemane to the Cross. This story is not only a human story, though it is most certainly that; it is the story of God's own involvement in our story, a God we confess to be Father, Son and Spirit.

"In this dialogue of salvation, Christians and others are called to collaborate with the Spirit of the risen Lord who is universally present and active. Interreligious dialogue does not merely aim at mutual understanding and friendly relations. It reaches a much deeper level, that of the spirit, where exchange and sharing consist in a mutual witness to one's beliefs and a common exploration of one's respective religious convictions."

It cannot be emphasised too strongly that interreligious dialogue is not a covert form of *proselytising* (dishonest or aggressive persuasion). It is, as we have said, part of evangelisation, which is a wide group of activities whose primary example is admittedly proclamation, but it is still distinct from proclamation. In dialogue we are not trying, by underhand means, to convert the other person. Dialogue is an honest witnessing to our belief, and a sincere listening to the belief of the other person. A Christian who loves Our Lord, and truly believes in him, and whose friendship with the dialogue partner is genuine, may of course desire and pray that through dialogue, Christ will be better known, recognised and indeed loved by that dialogue partner. The non-Christian partners in dialogue may quite likely have the same desire regarding their own religion. That does not make the dialogue dishonest; in fact it ensures its sincerity, especially when the level of trust between partners allows them to honestly divulge these desires to one another.

Dialogue with our brothers and sisters of other religions is obeying the command to love our neighbour. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) reminds us that this means being a neighbour to the religious ‘other’, and by so doing manifesting and putting into effect God’s saving love for all God’s children. Charity is the greatest of all the virtues {1Cor: 13:13}. It is only when honest witnessing is combined with a humble and respectful listening, that God can come to us anew and the Kingdom of God can grow within us like a mustard seed; so true listening requires both charity and humility. This can only happen if, by the grace of the Spirit, we open ourselves to the God who is beyond our thought, and who can come to us in such surprising ways. Indeed, for a Christian, the impulse to be open to others and place ourselves at their service is inspired by the example of Christ’s own reconciling love.

➤ ***Allowing ourselves to be evangelised through the mystery of God in the ‘Other’***

Dialogue follows naturally from the Catholic Church’s Christ-centred and Church-centred view of other religions. By discovering what is true and holy in them, we discover the relationship each has to Christ and the Church. In dialogue we must not be surprised, but actually expect to find that God is already there, and that Christ has gone before us with ‘seeds of the Word’. It is in dialogue that we meet and are moved to collaborate with the same Holy Spirit we have received ourselves. Real dialogue begins when we encounter the irreducible ‘otherness’ of the other religion, and are led to identify not only what, from our Christian perspective, we must reject as false in it, but also to grasp at the fringes of God’s unsearchable mystery - his transcendent ‘Otherness’ - in the presence of elements of truth and holiness in the very strangeness of what our dialogue-partner believes and stands for. God, who is the ‘Other’, will always be greater than our understanding. Dialogue should make us exclaim with St Paul:

“O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor? Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever. Amen.” {Rom 11:33-36}

➤ ***We need to be secure in our own faith. Otherwise, we have nothing to offer***

It should be obvious from all we have said that in any deeper and more continuous kind of spiritual dialogue both sides need to be thoroughly well grounded and formed in their own religious tradition. We have to have outgrown defensiveness and the desire to please, both of which spring from insecurity and plain ignorance. It is when we are well-versed and mature in our religious tradition that we can open ourselves to the God who can always surprise us. Again in his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* Pope John Paul II reminds us:

“Those engaged in this dialogue must be consistent with their own religious traditions and convictions and be open to understanding those of the other party without pretence or closed-mindedness, knowing that dialogue can enrich each side. There must be no abandonment of principles or false irenicism, But instead a witness given and received for mutual advancement on the road of religious enquiry and experience and at the same time for the elimination of prejudice, intolerance and misunderstandings. Dialogue leads to inner purification and conversion which, if pursued with docility to the Holy Spirit, will be spiritually fruitful.” {Redemptoris Missio 56}

➤ ***Dialogue is a witness to Hope and Trust in God***

For a Christian to enter dialogue with someone of another religion is not only an expression of the Christian virtue of charity or love of neighbour: it is also a lively expression of hope. By this we mean hope and trust in the God whose will it is to bring all human beings to salvation, and who, in Christ and the Holy Spirit is already at work in all that is true and holy in other religions. In these present days this loving God is calling the Church to take the path of dialogue as part of its mission to work for the greater communion of human beings with one another and with God. This communion, the Reign of God, has its beginnings here and now, and will reach its completion, we believe, in a fullness of life and communion beyond this earthly life. That, in summary form, is our Christian hope and it is precisely that hope which motivates the work of dialogue.

“The Church urges all her sons and daughters to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions” {Nostra Aetate 2}.

We are urged us to enter into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Both discussion and collaboration are expressions of the Church’s mission. By discussion we discover and respond to the presence of the true and the holy. By collaboration we work together for the greater recognition of the dignity and unity of all human beings. In recent years the Church has been accustomed to refer to this discussion and collaboration by distinguishing four interdependent forms of dialogue:

➤ ***Dialogue of Life***

This is when people of different religions simply try to live in an open and neighbourly way with one another, in the same town or street, or in the same place of work. Obviously this is not restricted to religious believers, nor need it be anything sophisticated, but when believers practise this out of their own faith-conviction it is a most effective form of dialogue. To do this what matters is not so much the level of one’s religious formation as the quality of one’s faith. At a deeper level, especially among Columbans and other missionaries, Dialogue of Life also means ‘immersion’ in the lives of a people of a different faith, learning their language and culture and sharing in their religious expression.

➤ ***Dialogue of Action***

This is where those of different religions collaborate in working for greater human freedom and development, such as in matters of peace, justice and the integrity of creation.

➤ ***Dialogue of Theological Exchange***

Here specialists and scholars seek to deepen their understanding of one another’s religious heritage, and their appreciation of one another’s spiritual values.

➤ *The Dialogue of Religious Experience*

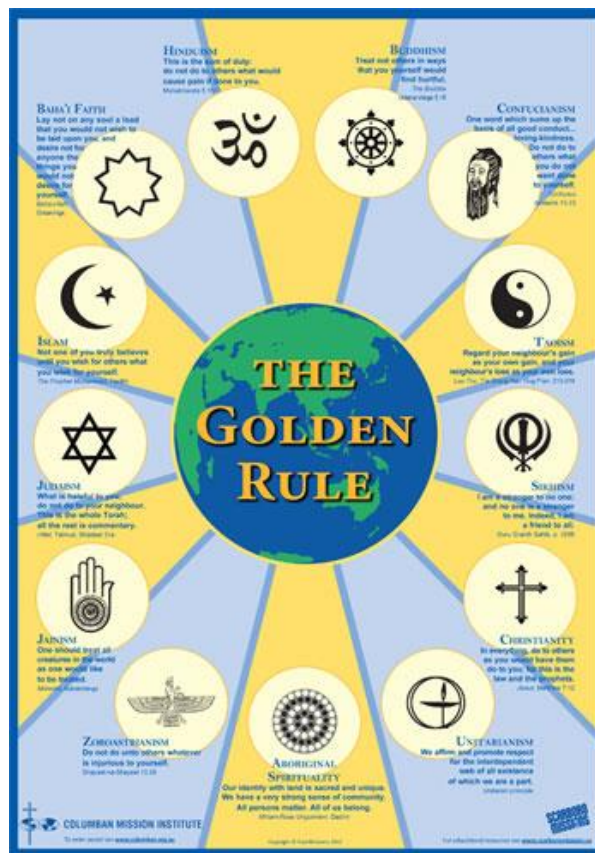
In this dialogue believers who are well grounded and formed in their own religious tradition share their spiritual riches, e.g. regarding prayer and contemplation, faith, and ways of searching for God or the Absolute.

Whatever the form of dialogue, it is important that Christians enter it aware of their Christian identity and humbly confident in it, so that dialogue will enrich their understanding and living of their faith. At the same time, dialogue is not just about academic, theological or spiritual matters. It is also, and most importantly, about living together and collaborating in the promotion of human dignity and welfare.

Pope John Paul II has reminded us that dialogue is:

“...not so much an idea to be studied as a way of living in a positive relationship with others”. {Address to PCID, 26th April 1990}

Universality of the Golden Rule in the World Religions



Christianity	<i>In all things, do unto others as you would have them do unto you; for that is the meaning of the law and the prophets. (Matthew 7:1)</i>
Confucianism	<i>Do not do to others what you would not like yourself. Then there will be no resentment against you, either in the family or in the state. (Analects 12:2)</i>
Buddhism	<i>Do not hurt others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful. (Udana-Varga 5,1)</i>
Hinduism	<i>This is the sum of duty; do nothing onto others what you would not have them do unto you. (Mahabharata 5,1517)</i>
Islam	<i>No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself. (Imam Al-Nawawi's Forty Hadiths: No. 13)</i>
Judaism	<i>What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow humans. This is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary. (Talmud, Shabbat 31d)</i>
Daoism	<i>Regard your neighbour's gain as your gain, and your neighbour's loss as your own loss. (Tai Shang Kan Yin P'ien)</i>
Zoroastrianism	<i>That nature alone is good which refrains from doing to another whatever is not good for itself. (Dadisten-I-dinik, 94,5)</i>

www.columbanIRD.com

THE DIALOGUE DECALOGUE

Ground Rules for Interreligious & Inter-ideological Dialogue

By Professor Leonard Swidler

FIRST COMMANDMENT: *The primary purpose of dialogue is to learn, that is, to change and grow in the perception and understanding of reality, and then to act accordingly.*

Minimally, the very fact that I learn that my dialogue partner believes “this” rather than “that” proportionally changes my attitude toward her/him; and a change in my attitude is a significant change in me. We enter into dialogue so that *we* can learn, change, and grow, not so we can force change on the *other*, as one hopes to do in a debate—a hope realized in inverse proportion to the frequency and ferocity with which debate is entered into. On the other hand, because in dialogue *each* partner comes with the intention of learning and changing her/himself, one’s partner in fact will also change. Thus the goal of debate, and much more, is accomplished far more effectively by dialogue.

SECOND COMMANDMENT: *Interreligious, inter-ideological dialogue must be a two-sided project—within each religious or ideological community and between religious or ideological communities.*

Because of the “communal” nature of inter-religious dialogue, and since the primary goal of dialogue is that each partner learn and change her/himself, it is also necessary that each participant enter into dialogue not only with her/his partner across the faith line—the Lutheran with the Anglican, for example—but also with his coreligionists, with his fellow Lutherans, to share with them the fruits of the interreligious dialogue. Only thus can the whole community eventually learn and change, moving toward an ever more perceptive insight into reality.

THIRD COMMANDMENT: *Each participant must come to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity.*

It should be made clear in what direction the major and minor thrusts of the tradition move, what the future shifts might be, and, if necessary, where the participant has difficulties with his/her own tradition. No false fronts have any place in dialogue.

Conversely—each participant must assume a similar complete honesty and sincerity in the other partners.

Not only will the absence of sincerity prevent dialogue from happening, but the absence of the assumption of the partner’s sincerity will do so as well. In brief: *no trust, no dialogue.*

FOURTH COMMANDMENT: *In interreligious, inter-ideological dialogue we must not compare our ideals with our partner’s practice.*

Rather, we should compare our ideals with our partner's ideals, our practice with our partner's practice, e.g., compare the Hindu practice of burning live widows (*suttee*) with the Christian practice of burning witches.

FIFTH COMMANDMENT: *Each participant must define her/himself.*

Only the Jew, for example, can define what it means to be a Jew. The rest can only describe what it looks like from the outside. Moreover, because dialogue is a dynamic medium, as each participant learns, s/he will change and hence continually deepen, expand, and modify her/his self-definition as a Jew—being careful to remain in constant dialogue with fellow Jews. Thus it is mandatory that each dialogue partner define what it means to be an authentic member of her/his own tradition.

Conversely—the one interpreted must be able to recognize her/himself in the interpretation.

This is the golden rule of interreligious hermeneutics, as often reiterated by the “apostle of interreligious dialogue,” Raimon Panikkar. For the sake of understanding, each dialogue participant will naturally attempt to express for him/herself what he/she thinks is the meaning of the partner's statement; the partner must be able to recognize him/herself in that expression. The advocate of “a world theology,” Wilfred Cantwell Smith, would add that the expression must also be verifiable by critical observers who are not involved.

SIXTH COMMANDMENT: *Each participant must come to the dialogue with no hard-and-fast assumptions as to where the points of disagreement are.*

Rather, each partner should not only listen to the other partner with openness and sympathy but also attempt to agree with the dialogue partner as far as is possible while still maintaining integrity with her/his own tradition; where she/he absolutely can agree no further without violating her/his own integrity, precisely there is the real point of disagreement—which most often turns out to be different from the point of disagreement that was falsely assumed ahead of time.

SEVENTH COMMANDMENT: *Dialogue can take place only between equals—both coming to learn - or “par cum pari” as Vatican II put it.*

Both must come to learn from each other. Therefore, if, for example, the Muslim views Hinduism as inferior, or if the Hindu views Islam as inferior, there will be no dialogue. If authentic interreligious, inter-ideological dialogue between Muslims and Hindus is to occur, then both the Muslim and the Hindu must come mainly to learn from each other; only then will it be “equal with equal,” *par cum pari*. This rule also indicates that is no one-way dialogue. For example, Jewish-Christian discussions begun in the 1960s were mainly only prolegomena to interreligious dialogue. Understandably and properly, the Jews came to these exchanges only to teach Christians, although the Christians came mainly to learn. But, if authentic interreligious dialogue between Christians and Jews is to occur, then the Jews

must also come mainly to learn; only then will it too be *par cum pari*.

EIGHTH COMMANDMENT: *Dialogue can take place only on the basis of mutual trust: approach first those issues most likely to provide common ground, thereby establishing human trust.*

Although interreligious, inter-ideological dialogue must occur with some kind of “communal” dimension, that is, the participants must be involved as members of a religious or ideological community—for instance, as Marxists or Taoists—it is also fundamentally true that it is only *persons* who can enter into dialogue. But a dialogue among persons can be built only on personal trust. Hence it is wise not to tackle the most difficult problems in the beginning, but rather to approach first those issues most likely to provide some common ground, thereby establishing the basis of human trust. Then, gradually, as this personal trust deepens and expands, the more thorny matters can be undertaken. Thus, as in learning we move from the known to the unknown, so in dialogue we proceed from commonly held matters—which, given our mutual ignorance resulting from centuries of hostility, will take us quite some time to discover fully—to discuss matters of disagreement.

NINTH COMMANDMENT: *Persons entering into interreligious, inter-ideological dialogue must be at least minimally self-critical of both themselves and their own religious or ideological traditions.*

A lack of self-criticism implies that one’s own tradition already has all the correct answers. Such an attitude makes dialogue not only unnecessary, but even impossible, since we enter into dialogue primarily so *we* can learn—which obviously is impossible if our tradition has never made a mistake, if it has all the right answers. To be sure, in interreligious, inter-ideological dialogue one must stand within a religious or ideological tradition with integrity and conviction, but such integrity and conviction must include, not exclude, a healthy self-criticism. Without it there can be no dialogue—and, indeed, no integrity.

TENTH COMMANDMENT: *Each participant eventually must try to experience the partner’s religion or ideology “from within.”*

A religion or ideology is not merely something of the head, but also of the spirit, heart, and “whole being,” individual and communal.

John Dunne, *The Way of All the Earth* (New York: Macmillan, 1972) here speaks of “*passing over*” into another’s religious or ideological experience and then coming back enlightened, broadened, and deepened. While retaining our own religious integrity, we need to find ways of experiencing something of the emotional and spiritual power of the symbols and cultural vehicles of our partner’s religion—and then come back to our own, enriched and expanded, having experienced at least a little of the affective side of our partner’s religion or ideology.

10 Interfaith Lessons I Have Learned

Jim Fleming SSC

Columban Jim Fleming has had long experience in Muslim-Christian dialogue both in Pakistan and now in Britain. These are some of the lessons he has learned over his many years of Dialogue.

1. Relate to others as equal partners in the search for truth.
2. Recognize that listening as well as speaking is necessary for a genuine conversation. Remember the words of St. Francis of Assisi: "Preach the Gospel always, and when necessary use words."
3. Treasure the sense of wonder that comes with encountering the new, the unusual and the surprising. Record such experiences in a journal if possible.
4. Be hungry for knowledge about the other person's culture and religion. Learn to understand what others actually believe and value. And allow them to express their beliefs and values in their own terms.
5. Be honest in sharing your beliefs and do not try to water them down to accommodate. Other people see through this and lose respect for you.
6. Do not misrepresent or disparage other peoples' beliefs and practices.
7. Be aware of your own need for ongoing conversion to your own faith beliefs. Remember, it is not our job to convert others to our beliefs, but, rather, to be faithful to our own beliefs.
8. Respond to others as a gift, not as a threat.
9. Be sensitive to vulnerable people and do not try to exploit them.
10. Remember that it's our differences that can make a difference, so rejoice in the richness of our diversities.

www.columbanIRD.com

A Spirituality of Interreligious Dialogue- “*Dialogue makes a Stranger into a Friend*” Rebecca Conlon, Columban Sister, Pakistan

Genesis 18: 1-15

The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. ² Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

³ He said, “If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord,^[a] do not pass your servant by. ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. ⁵ Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant.”

“Very well,” they answered, “do as you say.”⁶ So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. “Quick,” he said, “get three seahs^[b] of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread.”

⁷ Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. ⁸ He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.

⁹ “Where is your wife Sarah?” they asked him. “There, in the tent,” he said.

¹⁰ Then one of them said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.” Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. ¹¹ Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, “After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?”

¹³ Then the LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I really have a child, now that I am old?’” ¹⁴ Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son.” ¹⁵ Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, “I did not laugh.” But he said, “Yes, you did laugh.”

I would place the core of my spirituality of Interreligious Dialogue in the heart of the Trinity with special emphasis on Rublev’s Icon on the Trinity which was originally entitled:

“The Welcome that makes a Stranger into a Friend”



This is what Dialogue is...making a stranger into a friend.

Sitting with this Icon opens up for me the whole world of what the essence of dialogue is all about.

Here we find the three angels seated around a table drinking from the same cup, with an empty space in the foreground, set for the guest or stranger.

They share the same meal.

Each one is there for the other...each one of them giving of oneself to the others, defenseless before the other with attitudes of total non-resistance, vulnerability and tenderness which are all qualities of Dialogue.

Here we also experience welcome and hospitality and are given a welcome which makes us into friends of theirs. The invitation is permanent on their side as the space at table is always there.

There they chat with us about themselves, make us feel at home and share with us their life.

What is implied here is much more than hospitality...this calls me to not merely welcome strangers but to love them.

The challenge is to accept that the real reason it is important for us to welcome Muslims and peoples of other faiths to our tables is that our halt on the journey, is to welcome our Muslim brothers and sisters, who are strangers but who can be angels bearing God's message of a future different from the one we imagined. All we need do is look at the world today torn apart in conflict, especially in the Middle East, and see how this dream, if lived out would be truly a Kingdom experience.

Jesus is our model. He begins his mission in Galilee of the Nations, Galilee of the foreigners, half-Gentile in population, half-pagan in cult, a land populated by people considered suspect by the institutions in Jerusalem. *'Can anything good come from Nazareth?'* Yet Jesus says to his disciples after the Resurrection: *'I will go ahead of you to Galilee'*. Even more intriguing is Jesus' command to the women: *'Go and tell my brothers to set out for Galilee. There they will see me'* {Mt.28:10}. *'There'* means not in Jerusalem, not in Rome but *'outside the camp'*.

Living among Muslims, the Jesus in whom I believe is *Someone* whose uniqueness lies in his unqualified acceptance of others in their differences.

Jesus presented all these others who are *'not one of us'* as models for belief and action...

the Syro-Phoenician woman, the Good Samaritan, the lepers, women, publicans and prostitutes... those who live outside the camp.

The Jesus of faith is a surprising and beckoning God who reveals himself little by little in the present...and especially when Christians and Others meet.

So the common ground and search in Dialogue is a mutual touching into this inner life/ground. We let the other's belief and life question and enrich our own and through this openness we will add breadth and depth to our own understanding of our own inner life and the Mystery of all. The only real meeting point of Dialogue is in the center of the Incarnate and being incarnated.

As I now face an alien world, a worldview very different from my own, I feel challenged to inquire, investigate, engage and enter this new world which organizes and processes the world very differently from my way. This involves bracketing my own prejudices. On this spiritual journey which involves a crossing over to the other and a coming back I have been deeply enriched by the richness of such experiences. I try to inhabit the world of the other which expands my vision and gives me empathy for the other.

A lot of my ministry brings me 'outside the walls'. I have spent much of my life here visiting the women in the local Psychiatric Hospital who are all Muslims. From here I would go to the Women's Shelter where there was much pain and suffering and these too were Muslims. For the past twelve years or so I have been going to the Women's Prison where I am accepted by the staff and prisoners and feel very much a sense of belonging with them all. All of these are Muslims except for the occasional foreigner imprisoned for drug trafficking.

Unfortunately due to the escalation in violence and the '*Talibanization*' (the rise in influence of Taliban Islamist extremism) of life here, it can be difficult and scary going to the prison these times for valid reasons. This dialogue of life with the abandoned women of this society locked-in in these institutions is a real place where the crossing over in dialogue happens as one enters the life and God-experience of the other. The women's unfailing faith in God carries them through and I am enriched and blessed to journey with them in their struggle and deep faith, so closely and freely. Their God has 'a big heart'.

This is a Dialogue of Common Action for Justice. As Columban Sisters we have supported a Muslim couple who are lawyers and helped them to set up an NGO to reach out to women on the margins. In the past Justice and Peace was fully alive here and we were deeply involved in it. But now the torch has been passed onto the newer generations. JPIC was a great meeting place of people from Hinduism, Islam and Christianity who had a common thrust and mission.

On one occasion I felt targeted when two men from the Mosque came to the house to give me the Holy Quran and enquired about my nationality and my whereabouts. This was a moment of pressure because at the same time the Church in Sukkur had been set ablaze. Luckily our cook was tactful enough not to receive the Quran but this encounter had all the signs of becoming trapped and getting caught in the infamous blasphemy laws. This led to high level meetings and police protection day and night and total indoor confinement advised by police. It was scary as I was alone. A Muslim friend wanted to give me protection but I felt it was better to stay undercover lest I bring trouble on her and her family. Gradually I ventured out when the dust had settled and, as usual, life goes on again until we come up against the next hurdle.

Our dialogue of life during the floods was very special. We journeyed with a Balochi Tribe who were abandoned by the side of the road and for one year we helped them stay alive and well, gave them tents and within a year built 40 houses for them and within two years they had legal ownership of their own homes. During the handing over ceremony of the houses, and later of land, we prayed with them, read from our Bible and invited the *Mulvi* (Islamic leader) to pray and bless the situation which was a beautiful moment of a dialogue of shared prayer. When we go to their village we are showered with blessings from Allah.

Dialogue is not an easy road to travel. It is a pilgrimage of the heart and a road to personal conversion. This means a letting-go of prejudices and being open to a new way of seeing.

For the moment, we must keep Rublev's Trinity before us as we reach out and give the..... *The Welcome that makes a Stranger into a Friend!*

A Brief Introduction to Hinduism

By Frank Hoare SSC

One of the most difficult things about Hinduism is to define it as a religion. For it is so well intertwined with its culture, philosophy and day to day life. Hence, some define Hinduism as a way of life. Hindus call their religion *sanatan dharma* i.e. eternal law/order.

Origins

Hinduism is derived from the Persian word for India. It differs from Christianity and other Western religions in that it does not have a single founder, a specific theological system, or a single system of morality or a religious organization as such.

Its roots are traceable to the Indus valley civilization around 2000 BC. Its development was influenced by many invasions over thousands of years. One of the major influences occurred when Indo Europeans invaded Northern India. They brought with them their religion of Vedas. These beliefs became mixed with the indigenous Indian native beliefs.

Beliefs

Hindus believe in a vast universe or sequences of universes which fluctuate in endless repetition over time. This is *samsara*. Humans and all living beings are reborn again and again in this immense universe of space and time. One's future life is ruled by the law of *karma* – living a good moral life leads to a higher next life and living an evil immoral life inevitably results in a lower form of next life. The ultimate aim of humans according to Hinduism is to escape this ever turning wheel of time and action. This is called *moksha or mukti* (salvation or ultimate freedom).

At the heart of Hinduism, is the monotheistic principle. For the philosopher, Shankar Acharya, monism was the fundamental principle of reality. Connected to this are some forms of *yoga*. For most Hindus, though, God is separate from humans and is approached through *bhakti* i.e. loving devotion. Even though, during the first few centuries CE (Common Era) many Hindu sects emerged, with each dedicated to a specific deity, at the heart of Hinduism is this monotheistic principle.

More than 800 million Hindus throughout the world, worship one or more of these deities, all of whom symbolize the *one supreme consciousness or being-Brahman*. What we take to be a universe of separate forms, according to this principle, is actually one supreme force or energy or one supreme personal god manifest in a variety of ways.

Most fundamental of the Hindu deities are the trinity of **Brahma** (Creator), **Vishnu** (Protector) and **Shiva** (Destroyer of Evil/Transformer). Almost every **god** has his counterpart -a **goddess** who is a manifestation of various attributes and especially of **Shakti** (power). Depending upon one's view, Hinduism can be looked upon as a *monotheistic*, *Trinitarian* or *polytheistic* religion. The divine force pulsating in the stars of the sky and the blade of grass at our feet cannot be adequately expressed in human language but its reality and power are present and may be approached for assistance for whatever need the human being has.

If we really want to catch a glimpse of the divine hidden in Hinduism, we must be ready to set aside too much *rationalization* and surrender to the mystery as it unfolds, keeping in mind the following saying: "*A wise man has to walk long to find God, while a child is always in the arms of God.*"

Frameworks and Rituals

Hinduism provides people with a series of frameworks for living life. The four goals of life are: **artha** i.e. material and social well-being; **kama** i.e. sensual pleasure; **dharma** i.e. religious and moral duty and **moksha** i.e. spiritual freedom and escape from rebirth. The four stages of life are the scholar, the householder, the hermit and the homeless wanderer. The four classes of society are: 1) **Brahmins** (priest scholars); 2) **Kshatriyas** (soldiers, military); 3) **Vaishyas** (farmers and merchants); 4) **Sudras** (peasants and servants). People outside these classes are known as **Harijans** (outcasts, untouchables).

Hinduism, even though it has temple worship and festivals, is nevertheless a home based religion. Most ordinary Hindus will do a daily form of worship which is basically offering the symbols of life to the god after carefully washing. S/he will keep the altar and image of the god clean, and offer water, food (sweetmeats), flowers and light (from an oil lamp or candle). **Aarati** i.e. circular waving three times of a small tray on which there is a piece of lighted camphor in front of the image is a common form of worship which is also done in the temple and after communal readings of the scriptures such as the *Ramayan*.

Most of the 16 sacraments of the Hindu religion are also celebrated in the home usually through the offices of a **pundit** (scholar priest). Marriages are traditionally celebrated in the compound with great color, ritual, symbol and feasting. Funeral rituals are carried out in the home before the dead person is taken to be cremated. **Hawan puja** (symbolic offering of food to the god through the sacrificial fire) is done as part of the marriage, mourning ceremony and may be done as a religious duty on its own in the home. Readings from one of the scriptures to which relatives and friends are invited are also common. In many places groups of people gather on Tuesday and/or Fridays to hear a section of the **Ramayana** sung, recited and explained. These organized groups often take on themselves the celebration of the different Hindu festivals which occur during the year. **Diwali** – the festival of lights is the most important of these festivals for many Hindus. It commemorates the return of Ram, the incarnation of Vishnu, from 14 years of exile to his throne.

Scriptures

The Vedas are the oldest of the Hindu scriptures and much of the four Vedas were concerned with sacrifice. They are believed to have been heard (**Sruti**) by the Rishis and saints and then committed to writing. Other scriptures are classed as **Smriti** (remembered texts) and consist of law books, philosophy treatises, mythological writings and epics (Mahabarat and Ramayana). In the middle of the **Mahabarat** is the most influential of all the Hindu scriptures – the **Bhagavad Gita** which has sometimes been compared with the New Testament of the Bible.

Getting involved in Dialogue in Fiji

Kurt Pala SSC (2015)

The 833,631 population of Fiji is multiracial with the presence of the native Fijians (57.1%), Indo – Fijians (37.6%), Chinese (0.6%), Europeans (0.4%) and Rotumans (1.2%). Religion in Fiji is also as diverse as its population.

Coming from a largely Catholic country, I found the presence of different cultures, traditions and religions interesting, challenging and sometimes strange. I had a lot of questions both pastoral and theological.

For me the pertinent issues and questions were: How do we respond to the plurality of religions? What is mission? Is our mission then to promote the Gospel, convert people or engage in dialogue with these religions? How should I engage with peoples of other religions? What is authentic dialogue?

One important aspect I wanted to examine was the aspect of reconciliation in mission; since our world is a broken world. It is not enough just to talk about our differences, which could sometimes lead to violence or indifference. It is also important to discuss the loss of our relationship with the Creator and, in turn, with the entire Creation.

I once attended a “*pooja*” prayer service that was conducted by a Hindu priest, to give thanksgiving for the first year death anniversary of a mother. At the end of the service, a girl was going around distributing to everyone, what seemed to me to be, a liquid of some sort (later I learned that it was milk). When she came to me I asked what it was and she said “*pooja*” but I just said ‘*Thanks*’ and refused her. On another occasion I attended an Anglican liturgical service. During communion, the priest came up to me and offered me the communion bread. At that time out of respect, I received the bread. Later that day I was so worried and bothered that I spoke with my parish priest and told him about it. When interacting with other religions we have to learn what is allowed and not allowed when it comes to participating in their different services or rituals?

I lived for about 6 months in the village where native Fijians and Indo-Fijians co-exist. My neighbours were Christians, Hindus and Muslims. I was invited to every celebration they had and I attended most of them. I visited their homes and answered their curiosity. I especially enjoyed the food and the *kava*. At Christian, Hindu and Muslim funerals, I had been asked to say prayers and give short speeches in Hindi which was challenging. Dialogue with different faiths in Fiji is more like a dialogue of life. Dialogue is about meeting people where they are. Every day was an encounter of dialogue for me – from buying vegetables at the market, having my hair cut at the local barber, eating at a Chinese restaurant, borrowing books from the city library, to just walking in the streets.

In Suva City, there is a formal interfaith group called Interfaith Search Fiji, which meets every 10th day of the month. Different groups alternately host the said meeting and groups bring appropriate food to share with everyone. At each meeting, they agree upon a theme to be discussed in the next meeting. Using their respective sacred scriptures, they try to briefly explain their understanding of the theme. This is then shared in the next meeting. A summary is sent out after the meeting to every participant.

Interfaith dialogue is an important task and aspect of mission in Fiji. At the surface one can find a high level of tolerance and coexistence among the different groups and religions but the situation in Fiji is also very volatile because of the hidden biases and prejudices groups of people or individuals have towards each other.

A Brief Introduction to Buddhism

Eamon Adams SSC

WHERE COLUMBANS WORK:

*Buddhism has two major traditions, the Theravada and the Mahayana. Columbans live and work among Theravada Buddhists in **Myanmar**, while in **Korea, Japan, China, Hong Kong and Taiwan** and some other countries Columbans tend to live and work among Buddhists who come from some branch or other of the Mahayana tradition. Today there are significant numbers of Buddhists in countries that were once predominantly Christian such as the **USA, Australia, Britain, New Zealand and Ireland**.*

Buddhism and Neo-Buddhism

At the present time it would seem that two types of Buddhism are prevalent in our world: Buddhism and neo-Buddhism. Although an oversimplification, on a geographical basis it is possible to attribute neo-Buddhism to Western and traditionally non-Buddhist countries and Buddhism to traditionally Buddhist countries. At the beginning of this introduction to Buddhism, it is important, I think, to highlight some of the differences between these very different forms of religious traditions. It seems as though many non-Buddhists and Westerners carry a mental image of Buddhism more in keeping with the neo-Buddhist reality than the older more traditional form of Buddhism as practiced in many Asian countries. To help clarify this gap in understanding let us turn to the concept of neo-Buddhism.

Neo-Buddhism or Buddhist rationalism tries to place Buddhism squarely within rationalist, scientific and atheistic settings. Practically, what this means is a form of Buddhism which has been cut-off from its historical roots and its natural constituency of Asian Buddhists. It rejects concepts such as faith, hell, the supernatural and good old-fashioned piety in favour of a much more ‘modern’ and sanitized form of Buddhism which emphasizes meditation, psychological concepts and compatibility with scientific theory. This form of neo-Buddhism can be observed in such popular works as Stephen Batchelor’s *Buddhism without Beliefs* and Jean-Francois Revel’s *The Monk and the Philosopher*. Many, including the above mentioned, interpret Buddhism as standing in opposition to what they understand as ‘traditional religion’. In other words, from this perspective Buddhism is understood as a form of spirituality or thought which opposes concepts such as metaphysics, revelation and faith.

In a similar vein, many Christian observers and students of Buddhism have failed to comprehend the sheer breadth and diversity of the Buddhist tradition by imposing their own theological and religious categories upon the phenomenon of Buddhism. As a result, there has been a tendency in certain circles to view the more conservative forms of Buddhism as being the ‘truest’ or ‘purest’ manifestations of the tradition. This form of ‘Protestant Buddhist’ interpretation has prioritized the Buddhism found in Southeast Asia particularly Sri Lanka, Burma (Myanmar) and Thailand. Two factors have been important in this approach: one, the existence

of a scriptural collection which is comparable in form to the Christian bible; two, a supposed absence of piety and popular religiosity.

One of the best examples of what I have outlined as neo-Buddhism can be seen in the western portrayal of Tibetan Buddhism and the Dalai Lama. More often than not, in Western popular culture and the media Tibetan Buddhism is presented as a type of Buddhism that possesses powerful meditation techniques, deeply philosophical texts and an affinity with scientific theory. And similarly, the Dalai Lama has been idealized as a type of 'Buddhist Pope' who preaches the messages of humanitarianism and non-violence. Although both of the above characterizations can, to a certain extent, be made they are far from the reality of Tibetan Buddhism and would seem to have more in common with Western followers of the Dalai Lama and Tibetans in exile than with the living tradition in Tibet. In reality, amulets, talismans, deities and mandalas play important roles in Tibetan Buddhism and they, contrary to much neo-Buddhist opinion, are not simply symbolic and artistic accessories. Likewise, the Dalai Lama, although respected by the vast majority of Buddhists worldwide is not seen as being the spiritual leader of a supposedly universal style Buddhism.

We need to be aware of the danger of applying a 'one-size-fits-all' Western/ neo-Buddhist hermeneutic to the study of Buddhism. The Buddhist tradition is wide and varied, indeed, to such an extent that it makes more sense to speak of Buddhisms rather than simply Buddhism. With a religion so foreign to the traditional Western/Christian mindset it is essential that we try to rid ourselves off as many preconceptions and Christian biases as possible so as to at least glean what Buddhism means to Buddhists. Wilfred Cantwell Smith describes the challenge facing us (1997, p.132f): *... to understand the faith of Buddhists, one must not look at something called 'Buddhism'. Rather, one must look at the world – so far as possible, through Buddhist eyes. In order to do that, one must know the data of what I have called Buddhist tradition ...*

Becoming a Buddhist

A concrete issue for any religious tradition is how one becomes a member: what does one have to do so as to be called a Christian, a Hindu or a Muslim? In the case of Buddhism this is quite a simple undertaking. This is probably the case because in Buddhism publicly professing membership is only the beginning of a journey and demonstrates nothing more than willingness to seriously investigate the path to liberation for oneself.

In-line with our conversation thus far, in reality there is no such person as a Buddhist in a general sense. One becomes a Buddhist in one sort of Buddhism or the other, in one Buddhist community or school as opposed to others. Therefore, to say that one is a Buddhist does not clarify the situation very much. For a Buddhist, to describe clearly his or her religious affiliations mention ought to be made of the Buddhist tradition in which they practice – of which there are many.

On a concrete level, the most basic and universal demand made of anyone intending to become a Buddhist is to verbally state one's intention to 'take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha'. With this simple declaration a man or woman demonstrates both their openness to the wisdom contained in the Buddhist tradition and their willingness to further investigate that wisdom so as to help them move closer to enlightenment. Collectively these three refuges are known as the 'Three Jewels of Buddhism'. Let us look in more detail at each, in turn.

Buddha

Siddhartha Gautama was born into a royal family in the 5th century BCE in the foothills of the Himalayas, now modern Nepal. Siddhartha lived the life of a wealthy young prince, marrying and having a son. Led by curiosity, Siddhartha made journeys outside of his palace to see what the wider world had to offer. During these ventures he came upon what are called the 'Four Sights': old age, sickness, death and a wandering ascetic. On seeing these realities of life Siddhartha began to wonder what caused suffering and death and, importantly, how these painful realities could be overcome. Thus began his search for liberation from the suffering of life.

At the age of twenty-nine, Siddhartha left the palace and took up the life of a wandering ascetic. For six years he exerted himself in an effort to discover the path to liberation, but without success. Eventually, Siddhartha decided on a new method of practice, that of the 'Middle Way'. This new path was, as the name implies, the middle road between a life of luxury and that of harsh ascetic practice – a moderate way. In a village called Bodhi Gaya while sitting in meditation under a tree, Siddhartha reached enlightenment and in so doing not only became aware of the 'Truth' but also inherited the title of 'Buddha' which means 'the Awakened One'. From this time onwards disciples gathered round the Buddha, he shared his wisdom with them through preaching and began to form a community of searchers. The Buddha died at the age of eighty having spent forty-five years travelling round India teaching and preaching.

Dharma

In Indian religious and philosophical traditions the concept of *dharma* has a long and complex history. For our purposes, however, we can simplify this concept and interpret it as the 'way' or 'teachings' as passed down by the Buddha and later expanded on in the Buddhist scriptures. At its most basic, *Dharma* can be understood to mean the teachings of Buddhism.

At the core of the Buddhist *Dharma* lies the teaching of the Four Noble Truths. These four truths are: 1) Life is suffering. 2) Suffering is caused by craving. 3) Cravings can be eliminated. 4) There is a path which leads to an end to cravings.

The path mentioned in the fourth of the Noble Truths is called the Eightfold Path and it outlines how people ought to live in order to move beyond cravings and as a consequence bring an end to suffering. In Buddhism this cessation of craving, which leads to liberation from the ongoing cycle of death and rebirth is known as *Nirvana*.

Although the Eightfold Path is straightforward and easily memorized, in reality it is a challenging and life changing set of rules which demands earnest commitment. These eight rules for life are: 1) Right Understanding 2) Right Resolve 3) Right Speech 4) Right Action 5) Right Livelihood 6) Right effort 7) Right Mindfulness 8) Right Meditation. This Eightfold Path is a way of self-transformation leading to an emotional, intellectual and moral re-orientation which affects the direction of one's life.

Here, a final word on an important repository of the *Dharma* in Buddhism: Buddhist scriptures. Like many religious traditions the texts of Buddhism were not written until after the death of its founder. The oldest intact collection of these scriptures is the Pali Canon, so called because it was written in Pali in the first century BCE. There are however, many different versions of the Buddhist scriptures and there exists no common

agreement as to a definitive edition – the different traditions, schools and national traditions all differ in their stances towards the Buddhist canon.

While content may differ, one aspect which the majority of Buddhist traditions have in common is the actual structure of the canon. Commonly known as the *Tripitaka* or Three Baskets the scriptures are divided into three collections or baskets: a) the Discourses – teachings and sermons b) the Monastic Rules – rules of discipline for the monastic community c) the Scholastic Treatises – philosophical works. It is within these three collections of the *Tripitaka* that the majority of Buddhist teachings can be found and in the case of *Mahayana* Buddhism or East Asian Buddhism the version most consulted by scripture scholars is the Japanese produced *Taisho Edition*. This collection was produced in the 1930s and is made up of one hundred bound volumes (each volume about one thousand pages in length) containing a total of 2,920 texts, twelve volumes of iconography, three volumes of bibliography and scriptural catalogues.

Sangha

The third of the ‘Jewels’ in which Buddhists take refuge is the *Sangha*. Put simply, the *Sangha* is the whole of the Buddhist community, which is made up of four groupings: a) monks b) nuns c) laymen d) lay women. Such a community will obviously differ greatly depending upon the country and culture in which it is found. For example, a modern *Sangha* as might be found in a Western country such as France or Australia will differ greatly to one found in a country such as Thailand or China. Again, pointing to the danger inherent in making sweeping generalizations about Buddhism.

Though in principle the community or *Sangha* is made up of these four equal groupings; in reality however, most communities give more respect and power to the ordained sections of the *Sangha*. It is often the understanding that monks and nuns are, due to their stations in life, further down the road of enlightenment and are therefore due more respect. Traditionally, it was also an important duty of the lay sections of the community to provide for the monks and nuns material wellbeing. Again, this practice varies greatly from one country to another.

An interesting topic is the second of the mentioned *Sangha* groupings, that of nuns. Although the ordination of Buddhist nuns dates back to the time of the Buddha it was only after much debate and encouragement from his disciples that the Buddha eventually granted permission for women to receive ordination. And even then some special rules were enacted for them which essentially made them subordinate to their male counterparts. An example of one such rule is that instructing senior nuns to treat junior monks as their seniors.

Some of the historical records are sketchy on tracing the development of the nuns’ *Sangha*, but it seems to have become very weak in certain countries from about the twelfth century CE onwards. This was particularly the case in the countries of Southeast Asia where today the nuns’ *Sangha* is particularly weak, if existent at all. In contemporary East Asia, on the other hand, the number of vocations to the monastic life among women is high, with countries such as Taiwan and Korea boasting both high numbers and high academic standards among its nuns.

The Theravada Tradition and the Mahayana Tradition

After the Buddha's death, leadership and decision making within the Buddhist tradition became much more of an issue. Roughly a century after Buddha's death one of the most serious disagreements in the history of Buddhism occurred. This disagreement was between two main groupings who we can call the Elders (*Sthaviras*) and the Universal Assembly (*Mahasanghikas*). Although not completely certain, it seems that the crux of the disagreement was over the status of the Buddha compared to that of an *Arhat*, with the Universal Assembly placing the *Arhat* in a lower bracket than the Buddha. There were many other issues involved in this dispute, too many to deal with here, and the eventual outcome was a schism, which would eventually, after much time, separate Buddhism into two distinct traditions: *The Theravada Tradition and the Mahayana Tradition*.

Finding its roots in the above dispute, the greatest single difference between these two traditions is a matter of emphasis. The *Mahayana* tradition, or the Great Vehicle, instead of placing a premium on individual liberation highlighted the importance of working to save others. This tendency developed until it grew into the very complex and important doctrine of the *Bodhisattva* ideal. And it is this distinction more than any other which drew a dividing line between the *Theravada* tradition and the *Mahayana* tradition.

The Bodhisattva Ideal

The title *Bodhisattva* means an 'enlightened being', a being who postpones their personal liberation in favour of trying to help other sentient beings obtain liberation. Traditionally, the term *bodhisattva* had been used, also in the *Theravada* school, to refer to the manifestations of the historic Buddha in his previous lives as described in the *Jataka* stories of Buddha's different incarnations. However, in the *Mahayana* tradition this concept was developed in a radical fashion which emphasized the necessity of exercising compassion in the way one lives life. This goal of living a compassionate life became central to *Mahayana* Buddhism, eventually becoming known as the *bodhisattva* path. In short, this path demands that believers who have the opportunity to obtain liberation/*nirvana* forgo this and instead use the merit accrued to share with all other sentient beings. When compared to the *Theravada* way of thinking the *Mahayana* tradition places a much greater degree of importance on universal salvation and the believers duty to play an active role in bringing about this salvation.

The Modern Buddhist World

We will conclude our discussion with a brief overview of Buddhism in the modern world. Although certain aspects and tendencies are common to all forms of Buddhism to different and varying degrees, there are others which are unique to particular traditions, schools and national forms of Buddhism. Probably the most uniformed type of Buddhism is the *Theravada* tradition found in Southeast Asia: Burma, Sri Lanka and Thailand. However, these similar manifestations of Buddhism also contain many unique and cultural bound aspects found in only one area or region.

When we turn to the *Mahayana* tradition the picture becomes much more complex and, indeed, colourful. When we speak of *Mahayana* Buddhism we are predominately referring to East Asia, Central Asia and to a much lesser extent countries found in the West. The degrees of variation found in forms of Buddhism within these areas are so wide that we can only mention some of the schools in question and nothing more. To name only a few, in China we have Pure Land, *Huayan*, *Chan*; in Korea *Seon*, *Yeolban*, *Haedong*; in Japan

Shingon, Nichiren, Jodo Shinshu. Add to this the many schools of Buddhism found in Tibet, Taiwan and Vietnam and one gets an idea of the variety of Buddhisms in the modern world.

Finally, when examining Buddhism as found in its various settings it is important to remember that far from being a uniformed tradition it is, in fact, one of huge diversity. Buddhism, over the years, has spread to many countries and cultures and in so doing adapted very well to those local cultures and traditions. Buddhism's flexibility in adapting to changing realities has led to its having become an extremely complex, diverse and rooted tradition. With this in mind we ought to remember that as a religious tradition Buddhism is well deserving of our attentions and efforts so as to understand it as best we can.

Cited works:

- Batchelor, S., (1998) *Buddhism Without Beliefs: A Contemporary Guide to Awakening*, New York: Riverhead Books
Revel, J. F., (2000) *The Monk and the Philosopher: A Father and Son Discuss the Meaning of Life*, New York: Schocken Books
Smith, W.C., (1997) *Modern Culture from a Comparative Perspective*, ed. By J.W. Burbridge, Albany: SUNY

Short List of Suggested General Reading

- Conze, E., (1980) *A Short History of Buddhism*, London: Allen and Unwin
Conze, E., (2001) *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development*, Birmingham: Windhorse
Gombrich, R., (1988) *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*, London: Routledge and Kegan
Harvey, P., (1998) *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
Klostermaier, K., (2002) *Buddhism: A Short Introduction*, Oxford: One world
Pye, M., (1979) *The Buddha*, London: Duckworth
Schmidt-Leukel, P., (2006) *Understanding Buddhism*, Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press
Williams, P., (1989) *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*, London: Routledge
Williams, P. and Tribe, A., (2000) *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition*, London: Routledge

Dialogue with Buddhists in Myanmar

By Kathleen Geaney, Columban Sister, Myanmar

.....Contemplation' is very relevant in our Buddhist context where even trishaw drivers will often engage in a conversation about meditation. Phan in his book: *'Being Religious Inter-religiously'* says that the first act of our Christian God-talk in Asia is not to talk but: " *to be silent, not to preach but to listen, not to teach but to learn.*". Here in Myanmar we experience that we are all pilgrims in search of the Divine. When we encounter the Divine within and around us the divisive fences and walls begin to collapse and we live in hope that every sort of discrimination and prejudice can be overcome.

I find myself reflecting and just giving thanks for the many small yet grace filled moments that fill my life here.

- Moments of wonder when a young Buddhist monk points at the Baby Jesus in the crib and asks "Who is He." And I think this is the question that remains through all the ages.
- Moments of gentleness when a small child in a poor area by the riverside, slips his hand into mine and walks along with me in utter trust and simplicity.
- Moments of hope when Margaret, Theresa and I invite our friends from different faiths for a Christmas celebration and Muslims, Christians, Hindus and Buddhists share a meal joyfully together. The Hindu *Prabu* (priest) says next year let us all welcome the birth of Jesus by speaking of what it means from the perspective of our own tradition.
- Moments of privilege when I sit and listen to people's inner search for God, life, commitment and hope.
- Moments of pain when there isn't enough to go around- not enough understanding to make sense of it all and prejudice and suspicion grow between different ethnic and religious groups and our friends especially now, our Muslim friends, live in fear.
- Moments of gratitude and joy for all the friends who walk the road with us in so many different way and let us walk with them.

A Brief Introduction to Shinto in Japan

By Seamus Cullen SSC

Shinto is the largest religion in Japan, practiced by nearly 80% of the population, yet only a small percentage of these identify themselves as "Shintoists" in surveys. This is due to the fact that "*Shinto*" has different meanings in Japan: most of the Japanese attend Shinto shrines and beseech "kami" without belonging to an institutional "Shinto" religion. And since there are no formal rituals to become a member of folk Shinto, "Shinto

membership" is often estimated by counting those who join organised Shinto sects. Shinto has 100,000 shrines and 20,000 priests in the country.

The word *Shinto* ("way of the gods") was adopted, originally as *Shindo*, from the written Chinese *Shendao* (神道, pinyin:*shén dào*), combining two kanji: "*shin*" (神), meaning "spirit" or *kami*; and "*tō*" (道), (This "to" or "doh" has the same meaning as the "doh" in Judo or Aikido or Shodo (Calligraphy) meaning a philosophical path or study (from the Chinese word *dào*). The oldest recorded usage of the word *Shindo* is from the second half of the 6th century. *Kami* are defined in English as "spirits", "essences" or "gods", referring to the energy generating the phenomena. Since Japanese language does not distinguish between singular and plural, *kami* refers to the divinity, or sacred essence, that manifests in multiple forms: rocks, trees, rivers, animals, places, and even people can be said to possess the nature of *kami*. Kami and people are not separate; they exist within the same world and share its interrelated complexity.

At an Interfaith Conference, which has continued for forty eight years here in Japan (I've been attending for the last ten years or so) I met a man who is perhaps the leading expert on Shinto in Japan. It was he who told me something which perhaps is the simplest indication of what is basic to Shintoism. He talked about the word "kami" which we use to mean "god". This Chinese character 神 is made up of two elements. The element on the left originally looked like 示。 When it first came from China the two slanting lines were broken lines and indicated the blood dripping from the sacrificial altar. The shorter horizontal line was the sacrifice lying on the altar, the longer horizontal line. The element on the right of the character gradually developed into its present shape from an icon that was easier to identify as lightning as seen in a thunder and lightning storm. This "lightning" element indicated the feeling of fear. The two elements put together describe the awareness that arises in the person who has had a "god" experience. That experience generates in the person a desire to "worship" but also a feeling of fear. So the word "kami" is not really saying anything about god. It is describing the awareness of the human being in the face of the god reality.

There is a theological grounding given for our own instinctual yearning for a faith that resonates with our own "*matter*"- the natural world. While on the one hand it would seem that Shintoism is finding god in every reality, a better understanding would be that because the god reality cannot be expressed in words, the felt awareness of his/her omnipresence is indicated by the word *kami*. The deep-seated awareness of, and attention to, the detail of things, the popularity of the "haiku" form of poetry which captures this detail, come, I have no doubt from the sensitivity towards the sacredness of everything that is the Shinto heart. I used the word "capture" just now so I hasten to qualify. The essence of the haiku is that it does not attempt to capture the reality of which it speaks. It points towards it and "those who have eyes to see will see".

The most important aspect of the Shinto reality in Japan is the underlying mind-set. It is the mind-set which sees all things as being sacred. It is the deep-seated diffidence towards nature and natural phenomena. This is reflected in the title of a book written by a doctor who lived in the Fukushima area affected by the natural and man-made disasters a couple of years ago. The book is called "*We Don't Ask Why*". For a missionary like me here in Japan I find this reverence towards the "unknown" a delightful environment in which to share my awareness of God.

Most Japanese do not exclusively identify themselves as adherents of a single religion; rather, they incorporate elements of various religions in a syncretic fashion known as *Shinbutsu shūgō* (神仏習

合 *amalgamation of kami and buddhas*. *Shinbutsu Shūgō* officially ended with the Shinto and Buddhism Separation Order of 1886, but continues in practice. Shinto and Japanese Buddhism are therefore best understood not as two completely separate and competing faiths, but rather as a single, rather complex religious system.

(Scheid, Bernhard. "Religion in Japan"- *Hauptseite*, University of Vienna)

It is for this kind of reason, namely, that Shintoism and Buddhism go well together in Japan that I would stress that for the missionary the importance of the contemplative approach to “spiritual” reality must be emphasised. The “doctrinal” approach tends to isolate people from each other and from society at large.

A Brief Introduction to Islam

By Paul Glynn SSC

WHERE COLUMBANS WORK:

23.2 % of the world's population (1.6 billion) adheres to Islam. It is the second-largest religion (after Christianity) and is arguably the fastest-growing religion in the world. Columbans live and work with Muslims mainly in Pakistan, Britain, Australia and the Philippines. However, many other countries, such as Ireland, Chile and Peru, have increasingly significant Muslim populations and Columbans here are working more closely with them.

Islam is a monotheistic religion. Its main beliefs are contained in the *Qur'an* (a book considered by its adherents to be the verbatim word of God), as well as in the teachings and example (called *Sunnah*) of the Prophet Muhammad -*Peace be upon Him*- (PBUH), who is considered by Muslims to be the last prophet of God. Muhammad (PBUH) lived from about the year 570 until 8 June 632 CE in the Arabian Peninsula.

Islam is the verbal noun of the Arabic root-word, s-l-m, which is used in referring to concepts like wholeness, safeness and peace. In terms of religion Islam means “*voluntary and complete submission to God*”.

Muslim

Muslim is the word for one who practises Islam. Believers demonstrate submission to *Allah* (God) by serving God, following God’s commands, and by rejecting polytheism. Muslims believe that *Allah* (God) is One and does not resemble nor can be compared to any person or thing. The purpose of human existence is to worship God.

Muslims also believe that Islam is the complete and universal version of the faith that was revealed many times before throughout history, around the world; including through Adam, Noah (*Nuh*), Abraham (*Ibrahim*), Moses (*Musa*), David (*Dawud*) and Jesus (*Isa*); all of whom are considered prophets in Islam. Muslims consider the Arabic Qur'an to be both the unaltered and the final revelation of God to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The Holy Qur'an, together with the *Hadith* (accounts of the teachings and examples of the Prophet Muhammad –PBUH-) provide a complete system of religious concepts, beliefs and practices. These include the *Six Articles of Faith* and the *Five Pillars of Islam*, which are basic concepts and obligatory acts of devotion and worship.

Islamic Law (Shariah) provides guidance on virtually every aspect of life and society from banking and welfare, to family life and the environment.

Six Articles of faith

1. Oneness of God

Islam's most fundamental concept is strict monotheism, called 'Tawhīd'. While *Allāh* is the term (with no plural or gender) used by Muslims and Arabic-speaking Christians and Jews alike, to refer to God, Muslims reject the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and divinity of Jesus, comparing it to polytheism. In Islam, God (*Allah*), the Creator of the universe and all that is, is beyond all comprehension and Muslims are not supposed to visualize or depict God in any way. *Allah* is described and referred to by certain names or attributes, the most common being '*Al-Rahmān*', meaning "The Compassionate" and '*Al-Rahīm*', meaning "The Merciful".

2. Angels

Belief in angels is fundamental to the faith of Islam. According to the *Qur'an*, angels do not possess free will, and therefore worship and obey God in total obedience. Angels' duties include communicating revelations from God, glorifying God, recording every person's actions, and taking a person's soul at the time of death.

3. Revelations

Muslims believe that God dictated His revelations to the various prophets. Islam teaches that parts of the previously revealed scriptures, the Tawrat (Torah), the Zabur (Psalms of David) and the Injil (Gospels), had become distorted, either in interpretation and/or in content. The *Qur'an* is viewed by Muslims as the final revelation and literal word of God. For Muslims, all earlier revelations through Adam, Moses (*Musa*), David (*Dawud*), Jesus (*Isa*) and others are clearly and unambiguously restated in the *Qur'an*, it, for them, being the fulfillment of all Divine revelation. Muslims believe that the *Qur'an* was revealed to Muhammad (PBUH) by God through the archangel Gabriel (*Jibrīl*) on many occasions between 610 CE until his death on June 8, 632 CE.

Muslims usually regard only the original scripture, revealed in Arabic, as being the true *Qur'an*. Translations of the *Qur'an* into English or any other languages are regarded as being deficient and are referred to as being mere commentaries on the *Qur'an*.

4. Prophets

Muslims identify the prophets of Islam as those humans chosen by God to be God's messengers. They believe that prophets are human and not divine, though some are able to perform miracles to prove their claim. Islam teaches that all of God's messengers preached the message of Islam; i.e. submission to the will of God. The *Qur'an* mentions Adam, Noah (*Nuh*), Abraham (*Ibrahim*), Moses (*Musa*) and Jesus (*Isa*) among others, as being prophets of Islam.

Muslims believe that God finally sent Muhammad (PBUH) as the last prophet (Seal of the Prophets) to convey the final summation of all divine revelations to the whole of humanity. This final revelation is believed to be contained in the *Qur'an* as well as being exemplified in the life, words, actions and personal characteristics of Muhammad (PBUH) called the *Sunnah* ("the trodden path"). The collections of sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) are known as the *Hadith*.

5. Resurrection and judgment

Muslims believe in the "*Day of Resurrection*" and the *Qur'an* emphasizes the resurrection of the body, which is a distinct break with the pre-Islamic Arabian understanding of death. Muslims believe that on '*The Day of Resurrection*' all humankind will be judged according to their good and bad deeds. The *Qur'an* describes this as: "*whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it; and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it*" (Qur'an 99:7-8). The *Qur'an* mentions certain sins that are punishable by hell, such as disbelief in God and dishonesty. However, the *Qur'an* also teaches that God will forgive the sins of those who sincerely repent and that one's good deeds, such as charity, prayer and compassion will be rewarded with entry to heaven.

6. Preordainment

Muslims believe that God has full knowledge and control over all that occurs. Everything in the world that occurs, good or bad, has been preordained and nothing can happen unless permitted by God. According to Muslim theologians, although events are pre-ordained, humans possess free will in that each of us has the faculty to choose between right and wrong, and so each of us is responsible for her/his own actions.

Five pillars of Islam

1. Testimony

A Muslim is one who sincerely believes and is prepared to declare publically, under oath that: "*I testify that there are no gods other than Allah alone and I testify that Muhammad is his Messenger*" ("ašhadu 'al-lā ilāha illā-llāhu wa 'ašhadu 'anna muḥammadan rasūlu-llāh"). This testimony, known as the *Shahadah*, is a foundation for all other beliefs and practices in Islam. Muslims repeat this testimony every time they pray. Conversion to Islam requires reciting the *Shahadah* in the presence of the Muslim community.

2. Prayer

Practising Muslims are obliged to pray five times a day. These prayers are called *Ṣalāh* or *Ṣalāt*. Prayer is intended to focus the mind on God, and is seen as a personal communication with *Allah* that expresses gratitude and worship through complete submission. *Salat* consists of various body movements and gestures, which include standing, bowing and prostrating in direction of the *Kaaba* (the black, stone centre-piece in Mecca), while reciting Arabic verses from the *Qur'an*. Congregational prayers in the mosque are led by an *Imam*.

The five *salat* prayer times are, *Fajr* (pre-dawn), *Dhuhr* (midday), *Asr* (afternoon), *Maghrib* (sunset) and *Isha'a* (night). On Fridays, during the *Dhuhr* prayer, the *imam* (or other invited theological leader) preaches a sermon to the local congregation and worshippers gather at the mosque in large numbers.

3. Alms-giving

The Islamic term: '*Zakāt*' means giving a fixed portion of one's wealth to help the poor and needy. Giving *Zakat* is a religious obligation for those who can afford to do so. The amount of *Zakat* to be paid on capital assets (e.g. money) is 2.5% per annum for those Muslims who can afford it. The *Qur'an* and the *Hadith*

also urge Muslims to give much more than this as an act of voluntary alms-giving to the poor (which is called *Sadaqah*).

4. Fasting

During the Holy Month of *Ramadhan* (or *Ramazan*) fasting from all food and drink must be performed from sunrise till sunset. The Ramadhan fast, called *Sawm*, encourages a feeling of nearness to God, gratitude for blessings received, dependence on *Allah*, atonement for sins, and helps Muslims to focus their minds on the hungry and needy. *Sawm* is not obligatory for those whom it would constitute an undue burden. For many Muslims, Ramadhan is a time to make a special effort to fulfill religious obligations that tend to get neglected at other times of the year.

5. Pilgrimage

Every able-bodied Muslim who can afford it is obliged to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in his or her lifetime. This pilgrimage, called the '*Hajj*', has to be done during the Month of *Dhu al-Hijjah* in the city of Mecca. Rituals of the *Hajj* include spending time in the desert of Arafat praying and worshipping God, as Abraham (*Ibrahim*) once did, symbolically stoning the devil while resolving to live a good life and worshipping around the *Kaaba* (black, stone center-piece in Mecca- which Muslims believe was built as a place of worship by Abraham).

Islamic Law

Islamic law (*Shari'ah*) is comprised of a system of duties and prohibitions to which all Muslims are bound to adhere if they are serious about practising their religion. It covers all aspects of life, from matters of state governance and foreign relations to issues of religious practice and daily living. The Qur'an is considered the main source of Islamic principles and values. Muslim jurists consult the *hadith* (the written accounts of Prophet Muhammad's life and sayings) both to supplement the Qur'an and to assist with its interpretation. Since *Shariah* law does not make distinctions between matters of religion and matters of state Islamic scholars function both as jurists and as theologians

Jihad

'*Jihad*' literally means: "*to strive or struggle in the way of God*". Today the term '*Jihad*' is misused by extremist Islamists to justify their terrorist activities against civilians. Islamic theology traditionally talks about two types of *Jihad*. 'Greater Jihad' (*al-jihad al-akbar*) refers to the personal struggle to attain religious and moral perfection that involves fighting against the devil and those aspects of the self (such as sinful desires) that hinder one from following in the way of Allah. 'Lesser Jihad' (*al-jihad al-asghar*) refers to military exertion that is taken, by Muslims in self defence against combatants, who are oppressing Muslims, preventing them from freely practising their religion and insulting Islam. Most Islamic scholars agree that the conditions necessary for declaring 'Lesser Jihad' rarely, if ever, occur today.

Muslim Denominations

Sunni (89% of Muslims worldwide)

Sunni Islam makes up 89% of all Muslims. Also called *Ahl as-Sunnah*, Sunni Muslims regard themselves as being faithful to the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), as found in the *Hadith*. Sunnis believe that the first four caliphs (leaders of the Islamic community) were the rightful successors to

Muhammad; since God did not specify any particular leaders to succeed him and those leaders were elected. They believe that anyone who is righteous and just could be a *caliph* but they have to act according to the *Qur'an* and the *Hadith*.

The *Salafi* (also pejoratively called *Wahhabi*) is an ultra-orthodox Sunni Islamic movement which tries to model itself on the first generation of Muslims. It is found mostly in Saudi Arabia, but has a lot of influence worldwide.

For almost 1,000 years and until the collapse of the Ottoman Empire (at the end of World War I) the Ottoman Emperor was considered to be the custodian of the holy sites of Mecca and the *Caliph* of Sunni Islam. During this time a form of Islam tolerant of Christianity and other religions was generally promoted. Since the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia took over the role of custodian of the holy sites of Mecca and (for all practical purposes) the leadership of Sunni Islam conservative *Salafi* Islam has gained much worldwide influence among Sunni Muslims.

Shia (9% of Muslims worldwide)

The largest population of Shias resides in Iran. Shia Islam has several branches, the largest of which is the *Twelvers*, followed by *Zaydis* and *Ismailis*. While the Sunnis believe that a *Caliph* should be elected by the community, Shias believe that Muhammad appointed his son-in-law, *Ali ibn Abi Talib*, as his successor and only certain descendants of Ali can be Imams. As a result, they believe that *Ali ibn Abi Talib* was the first *Imam* (leader), rejecting the legitimacy of the Sunni Muslim caliphs (*Abu Bakr*, *Uthman ibn al-Affan* and *Umar ibn al-Khattab*).

Other smaller, non-mainstream sects that have their roots in Shia Islam include the *Bohra*, the *Druze*, the *Alawites* (to which President Assad of Syria belongs) and the *Alevi*.

The *Ahmadiyya* constitute a distinct branch of Islam with significant numbers in Pakistan, where they often face persecution.

Some Do's and Don'ts When Relating with Muslims

To facilitate interaction, contact and dialogue, there is a need to be sensitive to each other's differing religious requirements and social norms. Some of these are listed here. Hopefully, this information will remove some of the initial fear we may have of causing offence to our Muslim dialogue partner.

1. **SENSITIVITY TO GENDER SEPARATION:** A Muslim woman is not expected to be alone with any male other than her husband or close male relatives. Therefore, in arranging any meeting or activity involving Muslim women it is courteous to let them know in advance who will be present.
2. **SHAKING HANDS:** In general Muslims do not shake hands with people of the opposite sex. If shaking hands does take place, do so with the right hand. It is important that men do not shake the hand of a Muslim woman, unless the latter takes the initiative by holding out her hand.
3. **SHOES:** These should be removed when entering the prayer or carpeted area in a Mosque. Some Muslims also remove their shoes at home. Non- Muslims should follow their lead.
4. **DRESS:** Muslims, male and female, are expected to dress modestly. This forbids tight body hugging or revealing clothes. Men are expected to be covered from elbows to knees, and women

from neck to feet. Muslim women are also expected to wear some form of head covering. In practice, this can vary greatly. Some wear no head covering at all, while others use a variety, such as:

- the *hijab*, a simple headscarf.
- the *niqab*, revealing only the eyes.
- the *burkah*, completely veiling the head and body.

5. GREETINGS: “*As-Salamu Alaikum*” (Peace be upon you) is the normal greeting that Muslims use with each other. While a tiny minority reserve its use for Muslims only, the vast majority of Muslims are happy and will not be offended if a non-Muslim greets them in this way. The response to this greeting is “*Wa-alaikum as-Salam*” (And Peace be upon you too).
6. RELIGIOUS DIETARY LAWS: Muslims do not eat pork (this includes ham, bacon and anything made from it like sausages, and many pizza toppings). Meat such as beef, lamb and chicken must be Halal (permitted) – i.e. slaughtered in accordance with Islamic law. Fish is permitted and vegetarian food is always acceptable. Most Muslims will eat prawns and similar seafood, but a minority will not. Food such as pastry will not be halal if it is made with lard or animal sourced ingredients. Alcohol is strictly forbidden for most. (*For more information see: www.islamhalal.com and www.utoronto.ca/~facilities/documents/GuidetoHalalFoods.pdf*)
7. PLACES TO MEET: For many Muslims meeting in a place where alcohol is served is not permitted. If the occasion is a formal interfaith meeting or discussion, a public or communal location would be advisable. When a relationship of trust is established, then meetings could, by mutual agreement, be rotated between Mosque and Church meeting spaces. With regard to times for meetings, avoid Friday as this is the day for communal prayer in Muslim communities. Account also needs to be taken of Muslim Feast Days.
8. SOCIALISING: Muslims have strict views about dress, alcohol, dietary laws and the unsupervised mixing of genders. It is unlikely that Muslims would attend social events where alcohol or pork is served, or where teenagers, male and female, mix freely. These facts need to be taken into account if an interfaith event or social occasion is being organised.
9. VISITING A MOSQUE: When visiting a mosque, whether as a group or as an individual, it is best to arrange the visit in advance with the Imam in charge. In the mosque women are expected to wear a scarf or some head covering and to wear loose, non-revealing clothing that cover the arms and legs. Everyone is required to remove their shoes before entering the main prayer room of the mosque. A mosque will have separate prayer areas for men and women. A non-Muslim present in a Mosque during the *Salat* Prayer (i.e. the formal prayer that Muslims perform five times each day) should stand respectfully behind or to one side while the prayer is going on.

“The Vision of the Prelature of St. Mary’s, Marawi” (1982):

“To be loved by God and to be able to love God in return – this is a human experience as real as it is mysterious. The divine and human exchange is actually the essence of our faith. We human beings become more fully human when we relate the love of God in true communion with another. This is Dialogue.

Every gift received from God is good. Every good gift must somehow be communicated. Belief in the divine mercy and compassion must be shared. This sharing is Dialogue.

In today's situation of conflict, sharing the experience of God's love through dialogue becomes all the more imperative. Where deep chasms and high walls exist, the Divine Goodness can hardly begin to be proclaimed, much less heard and understood. Dialogue is a way of building bridges and breaking down walls.

In a situation of prejudice, dialogue means an abiding and genuine search for goodness, beauty and truth. This search is based on the conviction that no one person has a monopoly of these. For are not goodness, beauty and truth emanating from one and the same source, God? Who or what can monopolize God? Thus each of us must be open to the fact that we can be enriched by the goodness, beauty and truth found in the 'other'. Each of us must be ready to discover the face of God in the 'other's' faith.

In an atmosphere of animosity dialogue means powerlessness and vulnerability. From a position of power one can only negotiate about terms. From a position of weakness one can truly communicate one's trust in the other. Trust is most real when there looms the possibility of betrayal. To dialogue means to open one's heart. This is a position of vulnerability. This is a high risk that must be taken by anyone who wants to enter into genuine dialogue.

To be wounded in the act of loving, to understand in a climate of misunderstanding, to trust in an atmosphere of suspicion – these are not light burdens to bear. Dialogue therefore demands a deep spirituality which enables us to hang on to our faith in God's love even when everything seems to fall apart. This spirituality is such that what is believed in the heart comes alive in one's style of life.

This same dialogue demands a deep respect for the faith of others, for the way they understand it and also for the manner in which they express it. The faith of the other should not be judged from the perspective and categories of our own faith. This dialogue also demands serious study of the faith and religion of others as well as our own.

Dialogue is an offering because it is always extended, not only in the pleasantness of appreciation but also in, and even beyond, the pain of rejection. Besides being an offering it is also a challenge. It requires us to put our faith into practice by striving to rise above our prejudices, even those that stem from real pain. It challenges us to scrutinize the pain-filled past yet hope still to start a new chain of happy memories for tomorrow.

Dialogue is, above all, a communion of people in total surrender to God, who persist in the hope that all can have a change of heart and participate in the building of God's kingdom, whose completion God alone can bring about.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP REFLECTION:

Having read both "The Vision of the Prelature of St. Mary's, Marawi" and Rebecca's reflection:

1. *What touched you most? Why?*
2. *What did you find most difficult/challenging? Why?*
3. *What new insights/learnings did you gain?*
4. *How might you begin to articulate your own spirituality of dialogue?*
5. *How might you attempt to put it into practice in your daily life?*

‘Immersion Experience’ **Living With a Muslim Family**

By Paul Glynn SSC

It is 3:30am: time to get up and prepare our breakfast before the sun rises at 4:15. Once we hear the Call to Prayer from the local mosques, we know we won't be able to eat a single bite or let a drop of water pass our lips until the sun sets and we have heard the welcome sound of the evening call, '*Allahu Akbar*' (God is Great), once again from the mosques. This will remind us that it is time to break our fast after a long, hot day of hunger and, worse still, thirst.

This is our daily routine for the 30 days of the Holy Month of Ramadan, not only here in Mindanao, but throughout the whole Muslim world. As I sit, at the end of another hot day, I wait expectantly for the *bilal* at the mosque to cry out: '*Allahu Akbar*,' a reminder that it is now all right to relieve our parched throats with a cup of cold water. It is then I often ask myself what I, an Irish Catholic priest, am doing living with Filipino Muslims and sharing with them the hardships and joys of the Ramadan fast.

I have found living with a Muslim family to be an effective in breaking down the barriers of prejudice and misunderstanding that have long divided so many Muslim and Christian communities here in Mindanao. This tradition -as practised before me by Columbans such as the late Fr Rufus Halley, the late Msgr. Desmond Hartford and Fr Terry Twohig - of leaving the comfort of the parish house to live with Muslim families in Muslim communities was inspired by the late Bishop Bienvenido Tuddud, the first bishop of the Prelature of Marawi. Bishop Tuddud, in the face of persistent misunderstandings, violence and bloodshed between Christians and Muslims back in the 1970s, sensed that the Catholic Church must do more to be a credible witness to the peace of Jesus Christ in this war-torn situation. In response to this concern of Bishop Tuddud, Pope Paul VI appointed Bishop Tuddud to Lanao de Sur, which is 95 percent Muslim. The bishop said he wanted to 'offer a hand of friendship' to his Muslim neighbours and so become a 'reconciling presence' between the two communities.

As the old saying points out, '*prejudice is the fruit of ignorance*'. Bishop Tuddud had the insight to see that for us Christians to overcome our fear, distrust and hatred of Muslims, we must experience first-hand how Muslims live their lives and practice their Islamic faith, living with them and sharing important moments of their lives, such as the annual Ramadan fast. That is why I find myself here, today, living in this Muslim household.

500 Years of Misunderstanding

The deep animosity so common between Christians and Muslims here in the Philippines was first sown by Spanish colonizers, whose hatred of all things Islamic stemmed from their 800-year struggle to expel the *Moros* (Moors) of Africa from their own shores. When the Spaniards arrived in the Philippine islands, Spanish officials mistakenly took the indigenous Muslim tribes to be Moors and embarked upon a hostile policy of undermining the strong Islamic influences they encountered here. These Spaniards tended to view Islam as the enemy of the Church. Thus the seeds of mistrust and animosity between Muslims and Christians were imported and sown over 500 years ago. Once engrained, as one would expect, they are not easily uprooted.

This mistrust between the two faiths is so often and so easily manipulated for the personal gain of the corrupt and powerful few. It is now generally accepted that the bitter Muslim-Christian conflict of the 1970s and '80s was deliberately orchestrated by Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos and his cronies. They armed Christian civilians on the one hand and Muslim civilians on the other, creating a sufficient climate of suspicion so that conflict would be inevitable. This gave President Marcos the 'state of emergency' he needed to declare Martial Law. The bombings of public places are not always the work of Islamic extremists. Often, they are the work of rogue elements within the military who orchestrate such events to keep Mindanao in a state of war; a war from which some continue to gain financially.

Breaking down Barriers

One of my jobs is to help train theology students in the local seminary in the field of Interreligious Dialogue and Muslim-Christian Relations, I also teach English to five *imams* (Islamic prayer leaders). This has certainly created a deep trust and friendship between us. Class usually begins at 6pm but we break at 7.10 pm so that I can pray my Evening Prayer while they perform their Salah (صلاة) in the same room. It is a wonderful spiritual experience for me to be able to share the same prayer space with devout Muslims deep in prayer while I pray the Evening Prayer of the Church. I could say that this prayerful sharing of sacred space each Wednesday night encapsulates my missionary spirituality.

Each time we Catholics celebrate the Eucharist, we use prayers like '*Glory to God in the Highest and on Earth peace to all people of good will*' or '*Peace I leave you; my peace I give you*' and this strengthens my resolve to continue the work I am doing. In fact, not to strive for peace and reconciliation would be rather sacrilegious. When Christ offers us "*peace*" he expects us to do something about it!

My own experience in the Philippines has shown me that a good Muslim is a Muslim who prays regularly, sincerely, humbly and from the heart. Sincere prayerfulness really does transform people. In theory, I always appreciated the importance of a preserving a regular schedule of prayer in my daily life but having lived for so long with the regularity of the Muslim Call to Prayer from the minaret, I have acquired a much greater appreciation of what it means to sanctify the day through observing the 'Hours' of the Daily Office. When I spend time in silent contemplation I feel in solidarity –in communion- with my Muslim friends who are at prayer. I deeply sense that we are praying to the One and the Same God and that the God's transformative grace carries works in all of us.

I regularly go to schools, churches and local communities in areas with a Christian majority and share my experiences of living in Muslim communities. Normally, I invite Muslim friends of mine -usually an *aleem* (Islamic theologian) or other religious leader- to share his or her faith with the Christian audiences, who are then invited to ask questions about the Islamic faith and cultural traditions of Filipino Muslims. These are great opportunities for people to learn about the Islamic faith and replace their negative biases and preconceptions of Muslims with correct information about their religion and cultural practices. It gives me great satisfaction to be part of a program that turns ignorance into understanding and prejudice into acceptance and tolerance. These are the very virtues Jesus so passionately preached and practiced here on earth.

Seeing God in the 'Other'

Living among my Muslim friends is a continual reminder why God called me to be a missionary. Our missionary vocation is an invitation from God to be part of an exciting adventure, discovering the presence of God, not just in the Church and in the Bible, but also in the most unlikely people in the most unlikely places. For me, this missionary call has brought me to live among people with a language, faith and way of life so different from my native Ireland. I find the sheer dedication and commitment shown by many of my friends during the Ramadan fast awe-inspiring. I am reminded of the all-embracing presence of God during the morning Call to Prayer, followed by the sound of running water as the faithful wash their hands, feet and face in preparation for dawn prayers at the mosque.

I am forever grateful to God for inviting me to be a missionary and for giving me the privilege to experience the Holy Spirit at work among so many diverse peoples and places in ways I never dreamt possible.

Interreligious Dialogue in Practice (1) **A Practical Guide to Visiting Places of Worship**

Ashram~Gurdwara~Monastery~Mosque~Shrine~Synagogue~Temple, etc

Paul Glynn, SSC

A. Introduction

We cannot really understand a faith tradition without entering into some kind of experience of that tradition. A visit to a place of worship allows for just such an experience.

Inside the place of worship, we experience the tastes, sounds, sights and smells of a faith tradition and its heritage. Here we encounter the tradition's unique culture - its music, its prayer, its beliefs, its practices, its foods, its rituals and its people. One of the benefits of such visits is that not only do we learn more about another faith tradition but we also learn about ourselves and about our own religious tradition.

Because more and more regions of the world are becoming environments of multi-culture and multi-faith, there is now occurring an encounter of religions that is patently new to history. Religious pluralism and interfaith dialogue constitute the future of religion. The growing demand for visits to houses of worship is part of this planet-wide phenomenon of interreligious encounter.

Efforts to prepare the visitors prior to the site visit are essential. Preparation needs to occur on two levels:

- 1) Visitors should receive some general introductory information about the faith tradition they are visiting; i.e. they should first **read a brief introduction to the particular faith tradition**.
- 2) Visitors should receive an orientation to the etiquette of the particular house of worship - this will enable them, as guests, to be sensitive to the cultural and religious sensibilities of the given tradition.

B. Initiating contacts

1. All religious traditions want to have their stories told; particularly when they see that you value their stories and their place in the community of faiths. Therefore, you can feel at ease in requesting a group visit to a house of worship because virtually every religious community is welcoming to visitors.
2. Before booking a group visit, visit the facility to insure that it includes the kind of features, activities and community that you want to emphasize to your visiting group.
3. Become familiar with the locations of proper entrances/exits, worship hall, washrooms, coat racks, shoe shelves and other places in the facility that your group will need. When a visiting group enters

unfamiliar space, its comfort level is raised if it knows that the space is already familiar to you, the organizer.

4. If you would like the visitors to observe a worship service, ritual or ceremony as part of their visit, you should attend such a service in advance to make sure it is appropriate for your time schedule, purposes and audience.
5. Clarify with your host (at the place of worship) to what extent guests are free to participate in rituals, if at all. Such involvement can range from full participation (without restriction) to simple observation only.
6. Avoid requesting group visits on holy days, festivals or "busy" days. For example, Sunday is not the best day for a group visit to a Christian facility, nor Friday to a mosque, nor is Saturday to a synagogue, nor the festival of Diwali to a Hindu temple (unless it you are specifically invited to do so).
7. Request the site visit well in advance of the anticipated visitation date. It may take several days for the place of worship to inform the appropriate faith leaders who will speak to your group.

C. Developing relationships

1. If possible, periodically attend services at the place of worship on occasions other than the time of your group visits. This gesture serves to develop a relationship with the religious leaders and members of the chosen site; it also increases your levels of comfort, knowledge and cooperation with respect to the host community.
2. **It is important that they know why you are visiting. You are doing so in order to develop relationships. You are not just 'tourists'!**

D. Making arrangements

1. **In your first effort to contact the place of worship, speak to the contact person directly - face-to-face**, if at all possible. Text or over-the-phone conversations are risky unless you know personally the individual whom you are contacting. Person-to-person encounters are vital in building interfaith relationships. Once a relationship has been established over a period of time, phone/e-mail arrangements may be more reliable.
2. Give a clear explanation to your host regarding your expectations. For example, during the visit, what would you, as the organizer, like to have happen and what would you like the host to do?

The following four components could be suggested to your host as being a helpful way to spend your time at the place of worship:

- A brief introduction to the faith tradition.
- A tour of the facility with an explanation of what the visitors are viewing (altars, images, objects, etc.) and what roles such altars/images/objects play in the worship setting.
- A personal statement/explanation of how being a member of the host tradition shapes one's worldview. In other words, what does it mean to be Sikh, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, etc. and how does this particular faith orientation affect the way one lives one's life?
- A period for questions from the visitors.

3. Clarify for the host the age/gender/knowledge level of the visitors so the presentation can be tailored to the group's needs.
4. Confirm that the facilities are able to accommodate the size of your group and can meet the requirements of any special needs guests.
5. If time is an issue, be clear on time requirements when booking the visit. As a general rule, approximately one hour is a comfortable length of time for a site visit. To rush the visit may be seen as an insult to the worshippers!
6. Clarify the length of the visit **again** when confirming the booking and **again** upon arrival at the site. Accordingly, the speaker will be clear on the length of her or his talk and thus allow time for a tour of the building and a question period.
7. **Ask about etiquette.** For example, is a head covering required? If so, what is appropriate? Are head coverings provided in sufficient numbers or should guests bring their own? Should shoes be removed? Should arms and legs be covered? If so, at what point in the building? Don't be shy to ask about these and other etiquette issues.
8. Ask if there are specific areas where the guests should sit or if men and women should sit in different areas. This consideration may or may not be an issue with a simple visit, but may be more important if the visit includes a ritual.
9. Ask whether or not it is acceptable to take photographs while in the place of worship.
10. Clarify as to what fees are expected, if any. Some facilities have a set fee. Others have no set fee. And still others are not allowed to accept money. Inquire about how the fee may be paid (e.g. should fees be given to someone or placed in a donation box?)
11. Confirm the visit two or three days before the date, reviewing schedule and expectations with your host.
12. Acquire the name of the person to whom you spoke in making the arrangements as well **as the name of the person who will meet you as host** on the day of the visit.
13. Etiquette and expectations vary from site to site. To avoid an uncomfortable situation, ask rather than assume.

E. Preparing the visiting group

1. Inform visitors about issues of modesty and appropriate dress. Dress should be respectful. Remember, **these are sacred spaces, not tourist attractions**. Short pants and sleeveless shirts are **not acceptable** for either men or women. Short skirts are not acceptable for women. Modesty should be maintained when sitting on the floor (e.g. girls should not wear skirts to sites where guests sit on the floor).
2. T-shirts should be free of advertisements, slogans or images that may be offensive or uncomfortable to others, even if they are not offensive to the wearer (e.g. Muslims are not supposed to wear T shirts with human images inside a place of worship).
3. Remind guests that modesty codes are more defined and formal in some cultures. For example, certain physical gestures such as handshakes or embraces are foreign to people of some cultural and religious backgrounds. In some cultures it is inappropriate for men and women to touch. Accordingly, it is better that guests allow members of the host site to take the initiative in terms of gestures such as handshakes or other forms of touching.
4. To avoid embarrassment, guests should refrain from physical displays of affection or excessive friendliness toward each other (e.g. holding hands, leaning against one another, arms across one another's shoulders, etc.) This guideline applies even for husbands and wives.
5. With the visiting group, review etiquette issues that may be unique to a particular site visit, for example, the prohibition from sitting with one's feet pointing toward the deities in a Hindu temple, member-only communion in some Christian churches, head coverings, shoes on/off, etc). If you are unfamiliar with particular points of etiquette in a given house of worship, clarify these when booking the visit.

6. Smoking is absolutely prohibited at all site visits.
7. Explain to the guests whether or not taking **photographs** allowed and if so how to do so respectfully.
8. Guests are encouraged to ask questions. Any question is acceptable so long as it is asked respectfully.
9. Hosts at some sites may ask guests to participate in specific ways in the culture of the host faith group, for example, by learning how to pronounce specific words or phrases in an unfamiliar language, by engaging in meditation or other exercises, etc.) Alert guests to these possibilities and inform them of the expectation to participate. On the other hand, it should be emphasized that any individual visitor has the right to decline participation in any practice, meditation, ritual or exercise.
10. Occasionally, a meal or snack may be provided by the house of worship. Because wasting the food of a host tradition is impolite please advise guests to take only what they are prepared to eat and make every effort to eat what they take.
11. It is very important that all individuals remain with the larger group as the tour moves through the building. Otherwise, there is a risk of individuals becoming separated from the group and thus delaying the tour.
12. Because sitting on the floor may produce an inclination to lean back or recline, remind guests that in a house of worship such a casual posture may be seen as disrespectful.
13. Ask the visitors to be respectful of and attentive to the host by not talking amongst themselves during the talk or presentation.
14. Ask the visitors not to take photographs (unless permission has already been given).
15. Encourage guests to take a washroom break before departing for the house of worship.
16. Above all, keep in mind that the primary intent of the visit is that the guests enjoy a day of learning and experience.

F. Reflection before the visit

The reason for this visit is:

- a) to learn more about another faith tradition
- b) to learn more about ourselves and about our own religious tradition
- c) to discover something about the mystery and presence of God in the 'Other'
- d) to be open to allowing the experience to both challenge our assumptions about God and about ourselves and about others
- e) to reflect on our missionary call

Therefore it is extremely important that you take time as individuals and as a group to reflect on the following questions before the visit:

• For Spiritual Year Students:

As spiritual year students you are engaged in the process of deepening your relationship with God, coming to know yourself more deeply, and growing in your understanding of Columban life:

In what ways do you think this encounter with another Faith Tradition may challenge, enrich, and inform these components of your spiritual year experience?

- **For everyone taking part in the visit:**

- I. Do I feel any fears, anxieties and tensions? Why?
- II. What excites and encourages me?
- III. How sincerely do I want to engage these people? How sincerely do I want to know about their beliefs and way of life? Do I really care about them and about what they believe?
- IV. Do I have any fears or suspicions about what might or might not happen?
- V. Am I ready to have my own faith challenged and questioned?
- VI. Have I made (even unconsciously) any negative prior judgements or criticisms of these people and/or of their beliefs and practices? Or, deep down, do I really believe my religion and way of life is better than theirs?

G. During the visit

1. Encourage the visitors to enter the site with respect and quiet reverence.
2. Be prepared, as the organizer, to ask questions during the presentation that move the discussion to topics that the group has reviewed previously or may have questions about. Accordingly, if the lecturer wanders off topic, you can gently and non-threateningly guide the discussion back on track by raising a question.
3. Ask permission of the host before taking photos or making audio/video recordings. Ask if there are specific times or places when it is inappropriate to take photos. Sometimes, visitors are allowed to take photos that do not require a flash. Clarify all these issues in advance. **Do not assume that you are permitted to take photos.**
4. Some traditions have a prohibition against eating in the house of worship (apart from sanctioned food as a part of a ritual). Chewing gum, candy, breath mints, even cough drops qualify as food. Visitors should dispose of such items before entering the house of worship.
5. Instruct guests to turn off all cell phones, beepers, alarms and other electronic devices that may sound during the visit.
6. Earphones from iPods and other electronic devices should be removed.
7. Encourage the members of your group to stand or sit close to the host so they can clearly see and hear.
8. As organizer of the visit, you need to keep in mind that the tour is for the group's benefit, not your own. Therefore, position yourself at the back of the group or at some other vantage point where you may unobtrusively monitor behaviour and the program so as to facilitate a pleasant experience for both host and guests.
9. Make sure that the group remains together as a body as it moves throughout the site.

H. Follow-up

1. Once you have left the facility, it is essential that you provide a time and place for the group to reflect on and evaluate the experience. (see I. below)
2. You may want to provide your group with an address or website of the house of worship so that individuals can visit again on their own or learn more about the tradition.
3. At some point following the visit, have a brief conversation with the host to determine how future visits can be made even more mutually beneficial.

4. Express your appreciation to the host. A phone call, a text message or note of thanks (signed by yourself or the entire group) directed to the host is always appreciated and is good preparation for the next visit.

I. Reflection Process after the visit

- **For Spiritual Year:**

Within the three-fold aim of Spiritual Year -growth in relationship with God, knowing yourself more deeply and understanding the Columban way of life and mission-:

- I. In what ways has this Interfaith Encounter challenged and/or enlightened you in these areas?
- II. What were the insights for you personally, in terms of your faith experience, and in terms of how you understand the presence of God in the lives of other people and faith traditions?
- III. Were you enriched by the experience ~ if so, how?

- **For everyone who took part in the visit:**

- I. Did you feel any fears, anxieties and tensions? Why?
- II. What excited you? What encouraged you?
- III. How were you able to relate with people at the place of worship? How did they relate with you?
- IV. Did any of your fears or suspicions come true?
- V. Did anything come as a surprise to you?
- VI. Was your own faith challenged, enriched, deepened or shaken in any way?
- VII. What questions has this encounter raised for you?
- VIII. What did you learn about their beliefs and way of life?
- IX. Is there any aspect of their religion and faith practice that has helped you to appreciate your own faith more? Is there anything in their faith practice that you could practice in your own life?
- X. Did this encounter in any way change your perceptions about these people and about their beliefs and practices?
- XI. Having had this interfaith experience what do you feel called to do now?

Note from author: Some ideas used here are gleaned from the *Scarboro Missions Interfaith Website* with permission.

www.columbanIRD.com

Interreligious Dialogue in Practice (2)

A Practical Guide to Planning an

‘Immersion Experience’

Among People of a Different Faith Tradition

Paul Glynn, SSC

A. Introduction:

Spending time living with and experiencing the lives of people of another faith tradition gives us a rare opportunity to appreciate their religious tradition at a very close level. Many Columbans have spent months and years living among families, village communities and in monasteries and places of worship with people of a different faith. This *‘immersion experience’* has always been a crucial element of our Columban Interreligious Dialogue Ministry. By doing so we are able to correct many of the misconceptions regarding other faiths. This experience usually leads to the building of very deep relationships of friendship and trust with faith communities and is often the key component in building bridges of reconciliation and peace between divided communities.

Through an immersion experience like this we learn a lot about ourselves and are challenged to look, in a very new and different way, at how we understand our own faith and how we practise it.

If you have already visited the place of worship of a particular religious tradition you will have observed their unique understanding of the sacred and their particular style of worship and spirituality. A deeper appreciation of how people of other religions attempt to live their faith on a daily basis is best achieved by taking time to live with an individual, or a family of that religious tradition, or, indeed with a whole religious community (e.g. in a Buddhist Temple or Ashram).

B. Initial Steps:

A decision to live with people of a different faith tradition should not be made lightly and adequate preparation needs to be made. You will need to take plenty of time to plan and prepare by taking the following steps:

- 1) Having visited their place of worship you should spend time reviewing and studying general introductory information about the beliefs and faith practices of the people with whom you plan to live.
- 2) You should also spend time acquainting yourself with some of the basic aspects of that faith community’s culture and language that may be different from your own (e.g. respectful greetings, acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, gestures etc.).
- 3) You should ensure that you have the contact details of the place of worship you recently visited and the person/s who hosted your visit.
- 4) You should pay at least one return visit to that place of worship to build up trust and friendship with the members of that community and to seek the help and assistance of the host and others there in arranging your ‘immersion experience’.

- 5) If you know a Columban (or another missionary) who has already spent time living with people of that faith tradition you should ask them to give you a detailed orientation to the etiquette, particular cultural practices and the *'do's and don'ts'* of their tradition – which will allow you to be sensitive to their cultural and religious sensibilities.
- 6) Otherwise you should politely ask your host and others members at the place of worship to give you whatever orientation you will need.
- 7) Make prior arrangements with a Columban (or other missionary) who has had experience of living with people of another faith tradition, so that she/he will guide you in a process of reflecting on and learning from your immersion experience.

C. Reflection Process before your immersion experience:

- 1) Make sure you take time to honestly reflect on what exactly the purpose of your *immersion experience* is before you make arrangements about your immersion.

Inter-religious Dialogue endeavours to develop and foster between peoples of different religious traditions meaningful relationships that are characterised by:

1. *Sincerity*
2. *Trust, and*
3. *Deep respect.*

Take time to reflect on your own feelings and attitudes towards the people with whom you plan to live and their religious traditions and practices.

- Do I feel any fears, anxieties and tensions?
- What excites and encourages me?
- **“Sincerity”** How sincerely do I want these people to become my friends?
- How sincerely do I want to know about their beliefs and way of life? Do I really care about them and about what they believe? Am I willing to do things the way they would like me to do them? Am I willing to follow their schedule, eat their food and do whatever they do?
- **“Trust”** Do I have any fears or suspicions about what might or might not happen? Am I willing to trust that everything will be alright? Am I willing to trust them? Am I able to trust myself? Am I ready to have my own faith challenged and questioned? Am I prepared to *‘have my world turned upside-down’*?
- **“Deep Respect”** Have I made (even unconsciously) any negative prior judgements or criticisms of these people and/or of their beliefs and practices? Do I genuinely appreciate their beliefs and way of life? Or, deep down, do I really believe my religion and way of life is better than theirs? Do I believe that they are as equally gifted and knowledgeable as I am? Am I really interested in what they believe and how they worship? Will I be able to adapt easily to a situation that is very new and unfamiliar to me? Am I willing to *‘go with the flow’* and take every day as it comes?

An Additional Question for Spiritual Year Students:

As a spiritual year student you are engaged in the process of deepening your relationship with God, coming to know yourself more deeply and growing in your understanding of Columban life:

In what ways do I think this Interfaith Immersion Experience may challenge, enrich, and inform these components of my spiritual year experience?

D. Arranging your 'immersion experience:

- 1) N.B: It is very important that you make arrangements for your immersion experience either with your host (at the place of worship) and other members of the community of the place of worship with whom you have built up contact and/or with a Columban (or other missionary) who has had experience themselves of living with people of that faith tradition.
- 2) It is also essential to make sure that if your host (at the place of worship) and other contacts are not religious leaders that they help you to secure full permission from the relevant religious leaders/elders for your immersion.
- 3) Make sure they are very clear about when you plan to stay and for how long it will be.
- 4) Also make sure that you have a clear plan regarding the financial aspects of your immersion. Will you offer to pay for your food and room? Will they feel insulted if you offer to pay? You will need to approach these matters very sensitively and preferably with the advice of a Columban (or someone else) who has lived with people of this faith tradition.
- 5) It is important that they are very clear about why you are planning to live in their community. **You need to make it very clear to them that you are doing so in order to develop good relations between your faith community and theirs'. Remember! You are not just a 'tourist'!**
- 6) Be prepared for the possibility that they may decline your request and don't put them under any pressure to agree.
- 7) Leave the final decision regarding where you will stay with the religious leaders and members of the worship community (or with a Columban who has experience of immersion with the people of that particular faith tradition).

E. Developing the proper attitude and right frame of mind:

- 1) *Prepare yourself to give it your all!*
- 2) You are going there to learn from them. You are not going there to teach them. You are not there to solve their problems.
- 3) You are there to spend your time with your hosts.
- 4) Do not plan any other activities during this immersion time (e.g. visiting other Catholics you know in the area).
- 5) Do not bring books, gadgets or work material if you know it will distract you from giving your full time and energy to the immersion.
- 6) Decide before-hand whether or not you plan to participate in their prayer and worship and **clarify** before-hand whether or not it is acceptable for **them** and for **you** to participate in their prayer and worship.
- 7) Mentally prepare yourself to learn new things and to have your pre-conceptions challenged and your faith 'disturbed'.

F. Packing your bags:

- 1) Remember you are not a tourist! Bring only what is necessary and what is appropriate.
- 2) Before packing your bag do some research and consult with your host contact and/or knowledgeable Columban regarding what clothing is and is not appropriate.
- 3) The clothes you wear should always be respectful. Usually short pants and sleeveless shirts are not acceptable (unless you are clearly told otherwise). T-shirts should be free of advertisements, slogans or religious and other images that may be offensive or uncomfortable to others, even if they are not offensive to you, the wearer. Loose-fitting clothes are most appropriate at all times.
- 4) If you bring a camera, mobile phone, laptop or other gadgets remind yourself not to use these as a distraction from fully immersing in the lives of the people with whom you are living.
- 5) Remind yourself that you can only take photographs if you have asked peoples' permission and they are comfortable with you doing so.
- 6) If you have any special dietary or medical needs pack what you need. Do not expect your hosts to supply these needs.
- 7) You are free to bring a bible or other religious objects. However, be discreet. Be aware that your hosts may not be familiar with such things. They may have a different understanding of what these items mean (sometimes they may even have a negative or 'unlucky' interpretation of such items).
- 8) Find out before-hand whether or not you should prepare a gift or bring food to give to your hosts, either when you arrive or when you are leaving.
- 9) If you need to reimburse your hosts bring the necessary cash with you.

G. Upon Arrival:

- 1) Remind yourself that you are in a different cultural setting. Allow your hosts to initiate the formal greetings. Remember that **gestures** such as handshakes or embraces are foreign to people of some cultural and religious backgrounds. In some cultures it is inappropriate for men and women to touch. Therefore allow members of your host community to take the initiative in terms of gestures such as handshakes or other forms of touching.
- 2) To avoid embarrassment, should refrain from physical displays of affection or excessive friendliness toward each other (e.g. holding hands, leaning against one another, arms across one another's shoulders, etc.).
- 3) If any formal welcome ritual needs to be performed please cooperate attentively and respectfully. If any formal approval, acceptance or blessing is needed from elders/leaders make sure that this takes place.
- 4) Be conscious that distinctions and restrictions between age groups, gender groups etc. may be in practice and adjust and respond accordingly (e.g. where you sit, with whom you converse etc.).
- 5) If there are religious objects/pictures/books etc. remind yourself that certain etiquette issues may be attached to these (for example, the prohibition from sitting with one's feet pointing toward the deities in a Hindu temple, the prohibition from touching the Holy Qur'an or raising your feet in the direction of the Qur'an among some Muslims etc.) If you are unfamiliar with particular points of etiquette in clarify these before-hand.
- 6) Do not smoke or drink unless invited to do so. Make sure you clarify before-hand whether such behaviour is forbidden (e.g. alcohol is forbidden in Islam).
- 7) Do not take **photographs until** and **unless** you have clarified that it is okay to do so. Refrain from getting distracted by your camera.
- 8) Feel free to ask questions. Any question is acceptable so long as it is asked respectfully.
- 9) Avoid any conversation that may be regarded by them as rude or insulting.
- 10) Do not engage in debate regarding your religion. If any of your hosts questions, criticises or even insults your beliefs do not argue with them. Remember that you are a guest in their place. Remember that you

represent your faith tradition and you are there to build good relations. Don't undermine their respect for your faith community by being pedantic or defensive!

- 11) If your hosts ask you to participate in specific ways in their culture; for example, by learning how to pronounce specific words or phrases in an unfamiliar language, by engaging in prayer, chanting or other exercises, be generous with your willingness to participate. On the other hand, if you have decided to decline participation in any practice, meditation, ritual, etc. you need to have **rehearsed, before-hand**, how you will explain to them that you are declining the offer, in such a way that they will not feel offended or insulted.
- 12) Your hosts may want to spend time explaining their faith to you, correcting common misconceptions etc. Even if you have heard it all before, listen attentively and politely to their explanations. **Never attempt to give the impression that you are more knowledgeable than they are about their faith even if you sense that they are inaccurate in their explanations.**
- 13) Be prepared to take whatever food or drinks they offer you. Refusing food and drink is often regarded as an insult. Because wasting the food of a host tradition is impolite please take only what you are prepared to eat and make every effort to eat what you take. If you have any dietary or health issues please inform the hosts when you arrive. **Never tell your hosts that you simply do not like any particular food or drink. Always explain that you cannot partake for health reasons.**
- 14) Remember to turn off or put in silent mode cell phones, alarms and other electronic devices that may be a distraction or may even be impolite and refrain from using earphones from iPods and other electronic devices.
- 15) It is very important remain with your hosts at all times and that you clearly inform them ahead of time if you intend to go for a walk, visit other homes, market etc. Failure to do so may cause a lot of anxiety and stress to the hosts or they may feel insulted.
- 16) If you happen to meet people from your own faith tradition or cultural group the **temptation** is often to spend more time with them and less with your hosts (it is easier and less of a challenge to your comfort zone). Remind yourself that you have given up this time to spend your with your hosts. You may also need to explain this to people who might want to invite you elsewhere.
- 17) Always keep in mind that the primary reason for your immersion is to have a worthwhile learning experience.

H. Going Home

- 1) Remember that your hosts have made a unique gesture of welcoming you into their lives and homes. Make sure you express your gratitude to them in an appropriate manner. Offer a gift of appreciation if appropriate.
- 2) Also be prepared to receive any gesture, blessing or gift your hosts may wish to give you.
- 3) Once again, remind yourself that the main purpose of your immersion experience is to build up relations of friendship and trust between your community and theirs'. Therefore make sure to exchange contacts and to be prepared to visit them again and to invite them to visit you (where appropriate).
- 4) Begin to make plans for these visits.

I. Reflection Process following your immersion experience:

As mentioned above, make sure to take some quality time with an experienced Columban (or another experienced missionary) to reflect on your immersion experience.

Keeping in mind that for Interreligious Dialogue to be effective, it needs to be based on ***Sincerity, Trust and Deep Respect***, take time to reflect on the feelings and attitudes, insights and challenges you experienced during your immersion.

- Did you feel any fears, anxieties and tensions?
- What excited you? What encouraged you?
- “***Sincerity***” How were you able to relate with your host family? How did they relate with you?
- “***Trust***” Did any of your fears or suspicions come true? Did anything come as a surprise to you? Was your own faith challenged, enriched, deepened or shaken in any way? What questions has your experience raised for you?
- “***Deep Respect***” What did you learn about their beliefs and way of life? What did you appreciate the most about them and their beliefs? Is there any aspect of their religion and faith practice that has helped you to appreciate your own faith more? Is there anything in their faith practice that you could practice in your own life? Did your immersion experience in any way change your perceptions about these people and about their beliefs and practices?
- Having had this interfaith immersion experience what do you feel called to do now?

Additional Questions for Spiritual Year Students:

As a spiritual year student you are engaged in the process of deepening your relationship with God, coming to know yourself more deeply and growing in your understanding of Columban life:

- I. In what ways has the Interfaith Immersion challenged and/or enlightened you in these areas?
- II. What were the insights for you personally, in terms of your faith experience, and in terms of how you understand the presence of God in the lives of other people and faith traditions? Were you enriched by the experience ~ if so, how?

Note from author: Some ideas used here are gleaned from the *Scarboro Missions Interfaith Website* with their generous support

www.columbanIRD.com

10 THINGS I CAN START DOING RIGHT NOW!

1. Make a personal commitment to dialogue and to preparing myself for dialogue. I do not have to be an expert; but using the internet or resources such as this booklet to inform myself about my neighbour's faith will help.
2. Engage in dialogue – make an effort to communicate and cooperate with neighbours of different faiths.
3. Be the one who takes the first step.
4. Greet neighbours on the occasion of their religious feasts.
5. Show respect for the religious customs and practices of others.
6. Challenge stereotyping or prejudice.
7. Use any opportunity available to interact and mix with members of other faith communities.
8. Encourage and teach children to respect people of other faiths and cultures, and to reject prejudice and bias.
9. Seek to include or welcome members of other faiths in any activity, community service or voluntary work I may be involved in. Invite them to participate.
10. Take part in events, visits, courses and seminars that will increase my understanding of other faiths and of Interreligious Dialogue.

