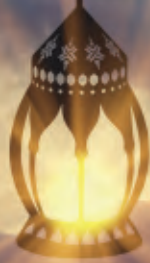
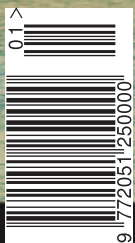


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The Impact of Christian-Muslim Relations on World Peace

Conference organised by the Canadian Mennonite

Speech by Dr. Mohammad Ali Shomali

The relation between Christianity and Islam is a relation within a family. Some people may say that we should have dialogue as we don't want to fight, but this is very little and kind of offensive. Christians and Muslims don't need reason to have dialogue. It is in fact the most natural thing we can do, first as human beings and secondly as people who have so much to share, people who are part of the same Abrahamic family. Spending time together to talk and share ideas is the most natural action for us. If we do not have this relationship then it would be surprising.

The relationship between Muslims and Christians has been portrayed with tension, confrontation or at least with competition. Some people think we are competing in the same market, converting people to our own religion. This is not a right mentality. We are all believers in God, and to believe in one God, the God who is merciful, not only for believers but for all humanity and this makes us very close to each other. We underestimate the great theology and heritage that we share. Just to understand the importance of this dialogue, imagine you are talking to an atheist who does not



Muslim

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believe in God, how difficult it would be to talk to him when you do not know or understand what his view points are about life, and how difficult it would be to convince this person that there is a God, and He is the Creator, the God to whom we should be grateful and responsible, and talk about the Hereafter. To have conversations with an atheist might take months and at the end he may or may not accept our views. But when we are faced with a person from another faith who believes in God and is submissive to God, someone who has devoted his life to God, unfortunately we take it for granted. Why? Because we have little theological differences. I think it is actually a part of our

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understanding and cognitive faculties that we are leading the way, that we are more sensitive to these differences.

It is through our differences that we come to know each other. It takes a lot of effort to see humanity underneath the differences. If we don’t train ourselves, we only see the differences and this can be very divisive. Sometimes, husband of wife, after many years living together say they have nothing in common. How could this be possible especially that they have lived together for such a long time? Because their differences have occupied their minds that they are no longer able to see anything in common.

We don’t want to reach to the point that we say we can’t find anything in common. Depends on how much importance and significance we give to the common areas, or differences we can adjust in our relation with the people. For me personally, the most important aspect is if the person is submissive to God. Therefore if I interact with a Christian who is submissive to God it would be better for me than interacting with a Muslim who is not. If God is the most important element and centre to our lives, then we should be happy to be with the people who believe in the same God.

We have groups of people who have no experience of the Love for God. These people are lonely and they do suffer a lot. We should feel responsible towards them. If we [Muslims and Christians] share with them the beauty of the faith and love for God, it would have much more impact than if we talk to them separately. If we [the faithful] together invite non-believers to the faith we would see a better result. Unfortunately what happens today is that religious people fight with each other, and some people are just too happy to point out to this and convince others that to stop all these tensions among religions it would be better that the entire world rid itself



of religions.

Another issue is those who have faith but not in a right way. Those who take it upon themselves to have monopoly upon God, for themselves, their countrymen, or their religion. They possess God and try to bring Him down to their own level and this does not make sense. If they love God, they should be happy to see others to do the same. Otherwise, the God of humanity becomes the God of a religion, a nation or a tribe. This is not God, but it is ego of those projecting their god as God. We have to be possessed by God and we should ascend to His level. This is the way we could see the world His way. This does not mean that we should all be the same; we do not have to see everything with the same eye. An artist may do 1000 pieces of work, they might not all be the same but if you appreciate him as an artist then you would like all his work. Believers love everyone, as they see the signature of God in everyone.

We should be in such a level of consciousness and love for God to reach this level, and this cannot be achieved without a degree of humbleness. We have a narration that says; “whoever is humble God will alleviate him and whoever tries to be arrogant God will push him down”.

In Islamic tradition, Abraham^(a) is considered as *Khalif*, friend of God. A story is mentioned in the traditions of when Abraham^(a) was chosen as the ‘friend’ of God. One day when Abraham^(a) entered his house, he found a man in it. He asked who he was and who allowed him to enter Abraham^(a)’s house. The man said: “The lord of this house allowed me to enter.” Abraham^(a) immediately realised he is an angel. The angel had brought him the good news that God has chosen him as His friend. But Abraham^(a) did not find himself worthy of this benevolence and asked the angel: “Who is the one whom my Lord has chosen as His friend, so I can serve him till I die.” He was so submissive to God that it did not matter to him who the person was, as long as it was ordained by God. He was happy to serve him. This is opposite to Satan, according to Islam; Satan served God for 6000 years. He had, apparently, no problem with God, but Satan had a problem with another person being nearer to God than him. He was not able to show humbleness, but Abraham^(a) did. I think we religious people need that humbleness to let God enter into our hearts so He would push us to the direction He sees fit.

We have tried to use any occasion we could find to let our congregation to join programmes with Churches. I personally have used these tribunes to spread dialogue between Muslims and Christians. I have talked on many occasions on the story of Abraham^(a), I have talked about this in the holiest places we have such as Qom. So what we say here to Christians we say to our

own people and I am sure our Christian friends do the same.

What I appreciate about some of our Christian friends, like Mennonites, Hemish,..is that they take their religion seriously. I love to see churches full. We do not like to see worship places empty as this means people are keeping away from faith. I have said this before. My challenge is not Muslims who become Christians, or even trying to convert Christians to Islam; my challenge today is keeping faith in families in society all together.

For most of history Christians and Muslims did not help each other, they did not work together. They spread but on their own. There is no future for us unless we work together. The world is too connected and too little, challenges are coming right in the middle of our houses. We have to put up a common front, common values. I am very much convinced that there would be great relations between Christians and Muslims.

We would have two challenges; those who do not want any faith, and those who are extremists. But underneath, these two totally opposite sides are connected. We have to wake up and face our problems together.

As Imam Ali^(a) said: *“people are either like you in faith, or similar to you in humanity”*. And this should be our strategy. ●



<https://youtu.be/nwanj71pM7E>

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World Peace and Christian-Muslim Relations

Organised by Waterloo Lutheran Seminary



Dr Mohammad Ali Shomali, also gave a lecture, entitled ‘The Impact of Christian-Muslim Relations on World Peace’ in Waterloo. This conference was co-sponsored by the Waterloo Lutheran Seminary and the Islamic Humanitarian Service.

Mohammad Ali Shomali [the director of the Islamic Centre of England, and founding director of the International Institute for Islamic Studies based in Qom, Iran] alongside the Mennonite Central Committee, has co-ordinated many Mennonite-Muslim dialogues; cross-cultural student exchanges; and teaching exchanges by Muslim and Christian scholars between seminaries in Iran and North America.

