INTERRELIGIOUS DOCUMENTS: I. GUIDELINES FOR DIALOGUE BETWEEN
CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS. A New Edition Prepared by Maurice
Borrmans. Translated from the French by R. Marston Speight. New

Approaching interreligious dialogue in the way set out in this fine set of
guidelines would lessen the tension that now grips Christian-Muslim
relations in Southeast Asia. Everything favors this kind of dialogue.
Conditions in today’s world make joint humanitarian efforts an urgent
need. Rampant materialism threatens all religions. Ecumenical work, in
making Christian groups aware of their joint responsibility, also opens
minds and hearts to other world religions. Ideally, dialogue gives both
sides a better grasp of their own beliefs and of the path God has shown
to them. Changing cultural norms create a climate which allows Christi-
ans and Muslims to meet in full equality.

To foster the dialogue recommended by the Second Vatican Council
a small volume, Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Mus-
lims, appeared in 1970. A new edition based on subsequent Christian-
Muslim meetings, came out eleven years later. The present book is an
updating and translation of the 1981 Orientations pour un dialogue entre
chrétiens et musulmans.

Dialogue begins only when the interpretation of one’s own beliefs
coincides with the interpretation of those same beliefs by someone of
another faith in mutual good will. Anyone intent on such dialogue will
find in this book a summary of both creeds that each partner can recog-
nize as faithful.

Pope John Paul II said in his meeting with young Muslims at Casa-
blanca in 1985, “We must recognize with joy the religious values we
have in common.” This is true. Yet many of the terms in which these
values are expressed differ among Christians and Muslims. Most funda-
mental among these differences is the view each holds on the person
and work of Jesus of Nazareth. This book is especially intended for Christian readers interested in dialogue. For them an important need is an understanding of the opinions Muslims hold in good faith about Christian beliefs and practices. Many of these opinions will surprise the reader, but the pages containing them (pp. 77-83) are among the most important in the whole book.

Dialogue of course is a risky venture. Each of the two religions considers itself to be universal. Muslims like to recall one of their Traditions, "No one is truly a believer who does not love for others that which he loves for himself." Should Muslims be forbidden the desire to see their Christian friends become Muslims? Should Christians not have the right to wish that their Muslim neighbors accept the Christian Faith? Neither should be denied that hope however God wishes to fulfill it.

Some today feel that religious dialogue of any kind has exhausted its possibilities. But in reality organized dialogue is still in its beginnings. It should not be expected to have achieved all its aims in one or two decades. An appendix warns readers against introducing too many subjects on the same occasion. Many believe that actual dialogue would accomplish more if Christian and Muslim public opinion were first sensitized by large conferences on a few simple and concrete topics, like needed areas of human cooperation. More difficult subjects like potential religious convergence would better be kept for small, permanently constituted groups of friends well known to one another.

The statement (p. 17) that Arab Muslims are twenty per cent of the Islamic world is questionable. Native speakers of Arabic among them might be closer to seven per cent and not all of these would be of Arab stock. Also the connection made between "mother" and "community" (pp. 17 and 59) is not admissible. (H. Gibb and J. Kramers, Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam [Ithaca, N.Y., 1974], s.v. Umma: "umma is not to be derived from the Arabic root ‘mm.’" See also Arthur Jefferey, The Foreign Vocabulary of the Quran [Baroda, 1938] 69, s.v. Umma.)

Thomas J. O'Shaughnessy, S.J.


No feast in our Christian calendar is so closely related to the natural elements of the cosmos as Easter. Its date each year is determined by the confluence of several cosmic or time elements such as spring, equinox,