
Saint Peter's belief (Acts 10, 34) that God shows no partiality but accepts the good faith of all who follow the guidance of conscience might be called the underlying theme of this book. In accord with this same conviction the Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church (Ad Gentes), n. 16, aims to prepare candidates for the priesthood, especially among the younger Churches, by imbuing them with the ecumenical spirit and readying them for fraternal dialogue with non-Christians. In Islamic countries there is need for tact in dealing with subjects where feelings easily tend to be strongly expressed and easily hurt, for example, on the Muslim side suspicion that the Christians plan to convert Muslims to their faith, on the Christian side the fear of political subjugation and spiritual domination by Muslims. The authors appeal to the fact that Christians and Muslims do in practice often overcome these difficulties and work and pray together.

Chapter Four, "Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Foundations and Forms," shows that dialogue is not only possible but feasible and already practiced with success. Fears and suspicions are shown to be groundless and, in fact, dialogue among world religions is now seen as essential if peoples are to survive as civilized human beings.

The authors of these essays are aware that the pattern of dialogue has changed considerably from that of the earlier years of the twentieth century. Muslim populations are no longer isolated in distant Eastern
areas; many of the large oil-producing countries are Muslim and now play an important role in the world economy. Their place among nations has also gained prestige from the success of their Islamic ideology and their fundamentalist movements. These facts require a change of attitude on the Christian side and have put new burdens on those involved in dialogue or in any form of apostolate among Muslims.

The history of the Christian encounter with Muslims shows that attempts to convince by debate are least successful and that the living testimonies borne by men like St. Francis of Assisi or Fr. Charles de Foucauld do far more good in the end. It is true that the polemical approach adopted by G. C. Pfander in the mid-1800’s aroused much interest among Muslims. Pfander was courteous and well informed. He effectively used the internal logic of Islam to criticize certain basic tenets of Islamic belief. They responded by banning the reading of his work by Muslims until today.

Chapter Seven, “Jesus, a Sign for Christians and Muslims,” raises an interesting question. Can dialogue on what the Qur’ān says of Jesus lead to a better understanding of what its Judaeo-Christian terminology really intended to say about him? Muhammad himself and all prophets mentioned in the Qur’ān (14. 11/13) say, “We are only mortals (bashar) like yourselves,” but this word “mortal” is never found on the lips of Jesus. Similar terminology recalls early Judaeo-Christian speculation which reechoes elsewhere in the Qur’ān and might imply an angelic or at least a super-human nature.

Anyone interested in Muslim-Christian dialogue will profit from reading this book.

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This book is arranged in three sections: (I) Preparation, (II) Bread, (III) Journeys. In general terms, as the author notes, the first section intends to be “a personal reflection for those called to mission”; part two examines “the cultural riches we should encounter”; the final section aims at a synthesis centered around the “inculturation of the Gospel” (xx).