

Isma'īl Rājī al-Farūqī

TRIALOGUE OF THE ABRAHAMIC FAITHS

amana publications

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الحمد لله رب العالمين
والصلاة والسلام على خاتم الأنبياء والمرسلين

وفاك رب زدني علما

*In the Name of Allah,
the Compassionate, the Merciful,
Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Universe,
and Peace and Prayers be upon
His Final Prophet and Messenger.*

*"... and say: My Lord!
Cause Me to Grow in Knowledge."*

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**TRIALOGUE OF THE
ABRAHAMIC FAITHS**

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TRIALOGUE
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ABRAHAMIC FAITHS

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Islamic Studies Group of
American Academy of Religion

Edited by
Ismā'īl Rājī al Fārūqī

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INTRODUCTION TO THE THIRD EDITION

As the birthplace of the three Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the Middle East has an importance for modern man that goes far beyond the obvious. If the war in the Gulf highlighted the strategic and economic elements of that importance, it also left the world with the clear understanding that in order to achieve a lasting peace the members of the three Abrahamic faith communities will have to learn to come to terms with one another.

The beginning of any such process must be at the level of faith itself, as faith is the common ground of understanding from which all ethics and values are drawn. It is for this reason, then, that the International Institute of Islamic Thought is pleased to present a new edition of the *Dialogue of the Abrahamic Faiths*. Certainly, it is clear from their papers that the contributors to this volume shared the view that an increased understanding of each of these three faiths would lead to an increase in mutual respect and tolerance; and certainly, it is with this hope in mind that the reader should approach this unique and challenging work.

For the ease of the reader a number of indices have been added to this edition. These include a complete index of Biblical and Qur'anic verses, as well as general and subject index. Care has been taken to ensure the correctness and authenticity of the text.

The International Institute of Islamic Thought welcomes its readers to the third edition of the *Dialogue*, and urges them to open their hearts and their minds to all of their brothers and sisters in faith.

Dr. Ṭāhā Jābir al 'Alwānī
President, International
Institute of Islamic Thought
Ramadan, 1411 / April, 1991

FOREWORD

For its 1979 convention held in New York City, the American Academy of Religion (AAR) organized a very unusual meeting. Its Islāmic Studies Committee entertained the vision of bringing together members of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim academic communities in the United States to dialogue with one another on the subject of their own faiths. This was a novel undertaking unprecedented in AAR history, the Islāmic Studies Committee sought and obtained the assistance of the Inter-Religious Peace Colloquium (later called The Muslim-Jewish-Christian Conference—MJCC), the only western body with any experience in the matter.

In the early Middle Ages, the caliphal courts of Damascus, Baghdad and Cordova witnessed countless meetings of Jews, Christians and Muslims in which the learned adherents debated the three faiths. The reigning culture gave such honor to the three religions and such respect to their principals and institutions that inter-religious debate was the subject of *salon* conversation, a public pastime. Their deliberations gave birth to the discipline of comparative religion (*ʿIlm al Milal wa al Niḥal*) which left us a great legacy. Hardly any of the great scholars who lived in or near these great cities did not find the interest or time to contribute significantly to that legacy of human learning. Since those days, unfortunately, no such encounters have taken place; and the discipline has been dormant until the present century. The works of al Ashʿarī, Ibn Ḥazm, al Baghdādī, al Nawbakhtī, al Shahrastānī, al Bīrūnī, some of the luminaries of the discipline, are studied around the world; but these constitute only the exposed tip of any iceberg of literature on the subject.

In our days, the MJCC was the only attempt made by this generation to bring together Jewish, Christian and Muslim scholars to communicate with one another on matters of religion. Its purpose was rapprochement and mutual understanding between the three Abrahamic faiths. Organized in 1974 through the tireless and noble effort of Msgr. Dr. Joseph Gremillion, former Director of the Vatican's Justice and Peace Commission, and his colleagues, the MJCC held two international conferences—one in Bellagio (Italy) in 1975 and another in Lisbon (Portugal) in 1977. The former dealt

with "Food/Energy and the Major Faiths," the latter, with "World Faiths and the New World Order." The MJCC published the proceedings of the two meetings in books carrying these themes as titles.

The MJCC meetings were the first to be held in modern times. They were genuinely ecumenical in that they were attended by people of vision who looked forward to inter-religious understanding and cooperation as the only alternative to the hostility which has dominated relations between the three faith communities. They were convinced that ignorance and misunderstanding, the twin feeders of inter-religious hostility, ought to be cut off a serious return to dialogue. But no dialogue between the three Abrahamic faiths was in evidence anywhere in the world.

Jewish-Christian dialogue has been making great strides since the end of World War II. It has already established for itself a viable tradition and a rich literature. Christian-Muslim dialogue, on the other hand, is to this day still in its infancy, struggling desperately to survive. For the most part, it has been a Christian initiative, reluctantly entered into by either side. It still has nothing, or nearly nothing, to show for itself. The Christians who enter it do so with a conscience split between the guilts of colonialism and mission, and loyalty to their countries' continuing ascendancy in world power. The Muslims, for their part, were always the invited guests of the Christians, and felt it. Neither did any other Muslims elect them to participate, nor did they appoint themselves to do so. Rather, they were selected by the Church authorities in expectation of collaboration with their hosts.

On one occasion only did the Muslims take the initiative and play host to the dialogue: at the Tripoli (Libya) conference (1974) between the Vatican and some oriental Christian churches, and Muslims from around the world. The Protestant churches, the World Council of Churches, and the Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches merely sent observers. This meeting too failed. Although the Muslims sought and obtained agreement on a number of issues affecting the two communities. The Christian delegation repudiated the agreement at the airport, minutes before its departure, to the consternation of all conference participants. Neither Muslims nor Christians pursued the matter, or followed up the resolutions with programs for their actualization.

The malaise was one and the same: No dialogue can succeed where one party is "host" and the others are "invited guests." Every party must be host and feel itself so. Every party must feel absolutely free to speak its own mind, free of both burdens at once: that of obligation to the other party, as well as that of loyalty to one's organization or government. There can be no "upper hand" and "lower hand" in dialogue; all "hands" must be

equal. Moreover, candid respect of the other faiths by each party is equally a necessity. The Christian-Muslim dialogue has failed precisely because these prerequisites were absent. Last but not least, Muslim-Jewish dialogue is still non-existent. It has absolutely nothing to show for itself; no precedent, not even a hypothetical agenda. The creation of the state of Israel and the continuous hostility this has engendered between Jewry and the Muslim World prevented any religious dialogue from taking place.

The barrenness of this history in modern times puts the achievement of the MJCC in a very special light, a light which becomes all the brighter when we consider the world's dire need for mutual understanding between the three faiths. All the more pity therefore that the MJCC could not muster the public support necessary to survive. Its last public activity was to sponsor the "Trialogue of the Abrahamic Faiths" organized by the AAR Islāmic Studies Group. The meetings were held under their joint sponsorship. The late, Cardinal Sergio Pignedoli, President of the Secretariat for Non-Christians, the Vatican, was invited to deliver the keynote address of the Trialogue.

Nine prominent scholars were chosen from the American academic community (three Jews, three Christians, and three Muslims) to present statements on assigned topics. The three topics agreed upon were: "The Other Faiths," "The Nation-State as Form of Social Organization" and "The Faith-Community as Trans-national Actor for Justice and Peace." This book is a record of the statements read at the meetings, and reworked by their authors thereafter.

This is a first step toward dialogue between the three faiths, a step which requires information about and understanding of the perspectives of the faiths concerned. We believe that the very juxtaposition of the three statements on each of the three topics in one publication is an "act" of comparative religion certain to open avenues for future thought and discussion. And we hope that this publication will be followed by many others which scholars of the three faiths will prepare in dialogue and cooperation with one another.

Ismā'īl R. al Fārūqī
Chairman
Islamic Studies Group
American Academy of Religion

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

The Catholic Church and the Jewish and Muslim faiths: dialogue of the three Abrahamic faiths

The late *Cardinal Sergio Pignedoli*
The Vatican

"You shall be the father of a host of nations" (Gen. 17:4)

It is an honour for me to have been asked to give this address by the American Academy of Religion. I am happy to give it, not only because the invitation comes from sincere "friends of God", but also because I am convinced that the theme on which I have been invited to speak corresponds to a deeply felt need in the world of today: namely, the question of the presence of God and of religious values in the history of individuals and entire peoples.

The faith of Abraham, who is rightly considered by our three religions as "the father of our faith", will be the subject of my reflections. I shall remain within the limits of its essential values and not enter into a consideration of the differences of these religions, united as they are in their acceptance of Abrahamic faith and in their considering it to be a source of inspiration and a guide for human life, capable of giving a satisfactory response to the essential problems of man.

I think it is superfluous for me to say that since our purpose is to consider in its substance this faith which so happily unites us, there is no need for me to go back over past history with its tale of mutual misunderstandings, injustices, faults, lack of generosity and so on. It would have no point, since the purpose of our meeting is that it should be one of friendship. Certainly we must study the past and learn from it, but life must above all look to the present and to the future. The Christian mystic Meister Eckhart said: "If a man has turned away from sin and left it behind him, then the good God looks on that man as if he had never sinned ... If He finds him well disposed, God does not consider what he has been: God is a God of the present; as He finds you, so He takes you and accepts you. He does not ask what you have been, but what you are now".

1. Our faith in God

The faith we have inherited from Abraham has as its central pivot a monotheism free from uncertainties or equivocations: we profess one God, a God who is personal, the Creator of the world, provident, active in history but separated from it by an infinite gulf, the judge of men's actions, and who has spoken to men through the prophets. The Sacred Books and the traditions of our three religions admit no shadow of doubt on this fundamental point. This basic unity of faith is of such importance that it allows us to consider our differences with serenity and with a sense of perspective: it does not mean that we minimize these differences and still less that we renounce the points that separate us. But it does mean that we can speak together in an atmosphere of understanding and friendship, because we are all "believers in the same God"!

Without rejecting the word "dialogue", so rich in meaning and in the spirit of brotherhood, I would prefer to use the word "encounter" since it seems to express more vividly the fact that all of us, as individuals and as communities (Jews, Christians and Muslims), are vitally "committed" to giving absolute priority of respect, submission and love to the One God who accompanies us with His providence and who, at the end of time, will judge us "according to the Law of right and wrong which He has written in our heart" (Newman).

Throughout the centuries our three religions of prophetic monotheism have remained unswerving in adherence to their faith, in spite of the dissensions and differences regarding points to which we will refer later. It is sufficient here to recall explicit expressions as given in key texts: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength. These commandments which I give you this day are to be kept in your heart; you shall repeat them to your sons, and speak of them indoors and out of doors, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on the hand and wear them as a phylactery on the forehead; write them up on the doorposts of your houses and your gates" (Deut. 6: 4-9).

Even the Romans, jealous of the imperial authority that they regarded as invested with divine power, had to accept Jewish insistence that to God alone was reserved a name "which had no equal". This name was above any sovereignty, including that of Caesar, and the Roman insignia with the Capitoline gods were not allowed into the holy city of Jerusalem. Every attempt to flout this norm was vigorously resisted; no persecution succeeded in breaking it.

The identical phenomenon was found in Christianity: its fidelity to the One God, with the exclusion of any other divinity, was the fact that revealed to the Roman authorities the true nature of Christianity and its irreconcilability with paganism.

As regards the faith of Islām, we have only to read again that wonderful list of the ninety-nine beautiful names of God (*Asmā' Allāh al ḥusnā*) to be forcibly aware of the unshakeable and jealously guarded Muslim faith in the One God of Abraham.

If what C.S. Lewis asserts is true, namely that "the geography of the spiritual world is different from that of the physical world: in the physical world contact between countries is at the frontiers, in the spiritual world contact is at the centre", then we can say that the Jewish-Christian-Muslim world make contact and meet at the very heart of a common faith. This religious affinity has always met with difficulties and it would be dishonest not to acknowledge this. However, there have always been through the centuries, thanks to the merciful God to whom we lift up our hearts, examples of mutual understanding and even collaboration.

We can think, for example, in the high Middle Ages of the Toledo conversations and of those at Córdoba, where, in the very palace of the Archbishop, Christians, Muslims and Jews met together in discussion. We could think too of the writings of Maimonides, Ibn Rushd and al Fārābī, and of St. Thomas, writings that influenced one another and contributed not a little to the forming of medieval civilization.

For a time during the Middle Ages, Arabic was the language most commonly used among Jewish writers. A significant example is "The Introduction to the Duties of the Heart" by Bahya ibn Paquda; it was written in Arabic, translated into Hebrew, and, a later time, was also to come to the attention of Christians. It is in this work that we find a quotation, evidently taken from the Gospel of Matthew, 5: 33-37, and with reference to Jesus: "A wise man said to his disciples: the Law permits us to swear the truth in the name of the Lord, but I say to you never swear either for the truth or for falsehood. Let what you say be simply 'yes' or 'no'". Raymond Lull understood in depth the common platform of the three religions and the good that could derive from it: we see this in "The Book of the Pagan and the Three Wise Men" (1277). Nicholas of Cusa in his work "De pace fidei" wrote of the harmony of the three great religions and of its possible influence for the peace of the world. It should be noted that he wrote this work immediately after the fall of Constantinople, a time when others were thinking of launching a crusade to recapture it!

It is probably true that these "happy instances" were not typical but rather singular and isolated events, while over many years and even centuries there were reciprocal misunderstandings and suspicions, conflicts and persecutions, in which it is difficult, or better, impossible to determine the responsibilities of the different sides. It is my sincere and humble opinion that the best road to follow is that of sharing sorrow for what has happened in the past and of choosing resolutely, all

of us, to open ourselves not only to dialogue and encounter, but to mutual love. We must look ahead, and at what better point to begin than by affirming our faith together in the One True God, and to walk together with Him, as your Academy of Religion has chosen to do. Allow me for a moment to express my warmest thanks to you all, and especially to those of you who are officers of this Academy.

The Sacred Books themselves exhort us to set out resolutely on the open roads of encounter; they speak to each of us who consider the corner-stone of our religious encounter to be Abrahamic faith in the One God. Let us reflect again, with joy, on some of the most positive and encouraging of these texts.

Israel rejoices in the title "the People of God", segullah, and it is in no way my intention to diminish this honor given to it by the Eternal God. At the same time the prophets did not cease to urge them not only to respect those "timentes Deum, the worshippers of God", to whom the New Testament refers (e.g. Acts 16), but to remind them that they are called to fulfil the mission of Abraham of whom God said: "I have appointed you to be father of many nations"(Gen. 17:4)(Rom. 4:17). It is perhaps in the prophecies of Isaiah that this theme is carried furthest: "When that day comes Israel shall rank with Egypt and Assyria, those three, and shall be a blessing in the centre of the world. So the Lord of Hosts will bless them: A blessing be upon Egypt my people, upon Assyria the work of my hands, and upon Israel my possession"(Is. 19: 24-25). And, in his glorious vision of the future, he continues with joyful certainty: "Enlarge the limits of your home, spread wide the curtains of your tent; let out its ropes to the full ..." (Is. 54:2). The book of the prophet Jonah, vividly and with gentle irony, presents the Eternal God as desiring the salvation of all peoples, even those at enmity with Israel, and portrays Him as using an Israelite as the instrument to express this, putting Himself in dispute with the Israelite in order to combat Israel's temptation to isolationism.

The robust monotheism of Islām is well-known. It leads the Muslims to reject Christian belief in the Trinity, in the Incarnation of the Word of God, and in salvation through the mediation of Christ. They do not accept the complete Bible, judging there to be falsifications and distortions in it. yet they consider Christians as faithful monotheists according to the faith of Abraham, and use expressions in their regard which I should like to quote here: "Invite (all) to the Way of your lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for your Lord knows best who have strayed from His path and who receive guidance" (Qur'ān, Sūrah XVI: 125). Again: "Those who believe (in the Qur'ān), and those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Christians and the Sabians, and who believe in God and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their

reward with their lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve” (Qur’ān, Sūrah II: 62).

Almost as a logical consequence of these assertions, the Qur’an also has these others: “If God had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He has given you: to strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to God; it is He that will show you the truth of matters in which you dispute” (Qur’ān, Sūrah V:51); “... For us (is the responsibility for) our deeds, and for you for your deeds. There is no contention between us and you. God will bring us together, and to Him is (our— final goal)” (Qur’ān, Sūrah XLII:15); “To each is a goal to which God turns him; then strive together (as in a race) towards all that is good, Wheresoever you are, God will bring you together. For God has power over all things” (Qur’ān, Sūrah II:148).

There may be those who object that some of these verses are abrogated by a particular type of exegesis. I would reply to them, if it were necessary, that there is a wider exegesis that is no less orthodox and that according to this exegesis the abrogation theory only applies to verses of a normative nature considered in strict relationship to precise factual events. [Editor’s note at the end].

When we come to Christianity we see that in principle Christian doctrine, as seen especially in the Gospels, is unequivocally open to those having faith in the God of Abraham. In fact, however, there have been, on the part of Christians and the Churches, deplorable instances of intolerance and persecution that were in direct contrast with the doctrine of Christ. As I said regarding Judaism and Islām, even though I feel deep sorrow (indeed, I would say deep shame) for what has happened — and let us pray that it may never happen again — I am convinced that the best way to make amends for the past is to renew our minds and hearts in that spirit of love which is at the very foundation of our faith and to strive in this spirit with all our strength. Men like Pope John XXIII, like Paul VI and John Paul II, scholars like Jules Isaac, Massignon, Cardinal Bea and thousands of others from each of our monotheistic religions, have shown us the road we should walk.

The Second Vatican Council expressed clearly and authoritatively the attitude that we Catholics should have in regard to our Jewish and Muslim brothers and sisters. If I read these texts, taken from the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, I do not think further words will be necessary. Here is what is said on the relation of the Church to the Jewish faith: “As this Council searches into the mystery of the Church, it recalls the spiritual bond linking the people of the New Covenant with Abraham’s stock. (N. 4)

For the Church of Christ acknowledges that, according to the mystery of God’s saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election are already found among the patriarchs, Moses, and the

prophets. She professes that all who believe in Christ, Abraham's sons according to faith (cf. Gal. 3:7), are included in the same patriarch's call, and likewise that the salvation of the Church was mystically foreshadowed by the chosen people's exodus from the land of bondage. (N. 2)

The Church, therefore, cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in his inexpressible mercy deigned to establish the Ancient Covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that good olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild olive branches of the Gentiles (cf. Rom. 11: 17-24). Indeed, the Church believes that by His cross Christ, our Peace, reconciled Jew and Gentile, making them both one in Himself (cf. Eph 2: 14-16).

Also the Church ever keeps in mind the words of the Apostle about his kinsmen, "who have the adoption as sons, and the glory from the covenant and the legislation and the worship and the promises; who have the fathers, and from whom is Christ according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:4-5), the son of the Virgin Mary. The Church recalls too that from the Jewish people sprang the apostles, her foundations, stones and pillars, as well as most of the early disciples who proclaimed Christ to the world.

Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this sacred Council wishes to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit above all of biblical and theological studies, and of brotherly dialogues."

And here is what is said in the same document regarding the relationship of the Catholic Church to the Muslims: "Upon the Muslims, too, the Church looks with esteem. They adore one God, living and enduring, merciful and all-powerful, Maker of heaven and earth and Speaker to men. They strive to submit wholeheartedly even to His inscrutable decrees, just as did Abraham, with whom the Islamic faith is pleased to associate itself. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin mother; at times they call on her, too, with devotion. In addition they await the day of judgement when God will give each man his due after raising him up. Consequently, they prize the moral life, and give worship to God especially through prayer, almsgiving, and fasting.

Although in the course of the centuries many quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Muslims, this most sacred Council urges all to forget the past and to strive sincerely for mutual understanding. On behalf of all mankind, let them make common cause of safeguarding and fostering social justice, moral values, peace and freedom". (N. 3)

2. The enormous spiritual force of the great religions that are united in the faith of Abraham.

If we now come to consider from the point of view of their relations with the world of today the three great religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islām, we can recognize the enormous impact they could have on the world. The modern world, even if it has been enriched with many exterior values (which one would not wish to despise in any way) has nevertheless become spiritually impoverished to a disturbing degree. The Orientals would say: it has become a world "of having" at the expense of the world "of being". One can observe that while the means for securing well-being and an easier, more comfortable and pleasurable existence have increased, human happiness has not automatically increased; indeed, in many cases it has diminished to a preoccupying extent. One of the reasons for this human condition of dissatisfaction (to which we could add the wide area of problems stretching from misery to injustice, to hatred, to denial of liberty), indeed, we would say the fundamental reason from which man's profound unease and dissatisfaction and those other problems follow is that the world of today has, to a great extent, turned away from God and from His Law, and considers that it is sufficient to itself.

In a world where "God is absent" man finds himself fearfully isolated and, as it were, abandoned down a blind alley. Only in God, the God of Abraham, is man able to find his true measure, and to live his existence in time to its fulness, opening himself to the certainty of eternal life. "When I turn away from you," says Juda Halevy in his poem, *Kuzari* "although I live, I am dead; but when I draw near to you, even if dead I am alive". In his book *The Primal Vision*, John Taylor gives this view of the African peoples: "The African myth does not tell of men driven from Paradise, but of God disappearing from the world".

While Judaism, Christianity and Islam are at one in their affirmation that God is "Wholly-Other", they are also agreed that He is the "Wholly-Near". As a powerful Muslim expression puts it, God is closer to man than his own jugular vein. Man is not a lost and practically useless fragment of the cosmos, but a creature of God, made in His image and consequently worthy of respect and love. Man is called to live a moral life, bound to his fellow human beings by the ideal of peace and brotherhood. If man gives way to the temptation of "liberating" himself from God, he ends by becoming the slave of those petty but terrible "gods" called power, wealth, pleasure, etc.; only too often these "gods", these "idols", hide under noble names such as progress, social concern, and even freedom. Yet only as a creature of God does man receive the right to subject the earth, to till it and keep it (le'avdah welesharah)

(Gen. 2:15); the Qur'ān says that creation is subject to man because he is the representative of God (His khalifah).

All of us here feel the awesome but marvelous responsibility of being "friends of God" and we are sure that by being such we are thereby authentic friends of our fellow men. We have neer separated, and even less have we seen an opposition, between the world as such and the religious world. We have never seen them as two separate kingdoms; they both come from God! "The word 'methistemi', in the sense of transference out of one realm into another, is only once used in the New Testament (Col. 1: 13). The typical New Testament word is 'metanoia', which means turning about. The emphasis is entirely on a change of direction, not on a change of position" (John Taylor).

I think it would be useful here to recall the words of Martin Buber: "One does not find God if one remains in the world. One does not find God if one goes out of the world ... Certainly, God is the "Wholly-Other", but He is also the "Wholly-Same", the all present. He is indeed the 'mysterium tremendum' at the sight of whom we are terrified, but He is also the mystery of presence who is closer to me than myself". William Temple once made this seemingly paradoxical observation: "Christianity is the most materialistic of all religions in the world. It does take the terrestrial realities seriously". The author is saying that it takes terrestrial reality seriously because it takes God seriously. I think the same could be said of the Jewish and Muslim faiths.

At this point I should like to make a personal observation that comes to me spontaneously from my work in the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christians. Side by side with the Jews and Muslims, namely the brothers and sisters who share my personal adherence to the faith of Abraham, there exist millions of men and women (I do not hesitate to say hundreds of millions) belonging to non-Abrahamic religions — such as Hindus, Buddhists, Shintoists, Confucianists, etc. — whom I feel to be practically united to me by their belief in divine and religious values. There are others who state that "they have no religion" (as I have often heard young friends of mine say to me, be they from Hong-Kong, Singapore or Los Angeles. But if we push a little further we often find that what they mean is that they do not belong to a Christian Church, or that they are not part of what God called "His people", or that they are not part of the Ummah, or, in other words, that they do not belong to any religion organized as an institution. Yet they are often really and truly "friends of God", and thus in a way form part of our community of religious believers. Maritain said: "Men only become one by their spirit". I would say that around us and together with us there are millions of such men of the spirit. Sometimes they are of such spiritual depth that they give the impression of being "true mystics"; their eyes and hearts are turned towards the Eternal God.

This is a reality that gives us enormous encouragement. Not that it is our intention to form a stronger and more compact "front" to set against the "front" of the non-believers. No. This would be an offence against the God who loves us, all of us, and whom we would wish to see loved by all. We are happy because we see that the family of believers in God is a large one, and we pray to the Most High that all of humanity may come to be part of this family. Only He has the power to achieve it.

3. What should we do, as single believers or as communities of believers, in order that others may come to our faith or come close to it?

All of us here today are well aware that while we share a commitment to the faith of Abraham, there are nevertheless considerable differences in the way our three religions envisage the relation of God with man.

Judaism recognizes a covenant between God and his people; unlike the Christians, however, Judaism does not accept Jesus Christ as the Mediator between God and man. Islām, while recognizing Jesus as a prophet, does not accept Him as a Mediator. Indeed, a Muslim holds that he needs no intermediary between himself and God. Every Muslim believer addresses God without an intermediary, as is clearly expressed in the rites or the prayer ritual (Ṣalāh) and in those of the pilgrimage to Makkah.

Islām is, however, a "missionary" religion in which each of the faithful has the duty of proclaiming the message of God (da'wah). The Christian religion is likewise missionary, in which between God and man there exist bonds of filial love. While not excluding an openness to conversion, Judaism would not, I think, normally consider itself missionary in the same sense. But whatever the difference in approach between our religions, I would like to say just one thing on the matter of the proclaiming of the religious message: accepting the right of each of our religions of Abrahamic faith (and naturally, the right also of other religions) to proclaim their message freely, we must do it in such a way that the freedom of the other is always respected. God is a God of freedom and He does not ask for an adherence extorted by violence.

"Let the man who wants to follow me ..." was the formula used by Christ. He refused to invoke fire from heaven as some of his disciples one day asked Him to do; He said to them: "You do not know of what spirit you are". When he has honestly given witness to his faith and reached the frontier of the human conscience, the apostle (be he Christian, Muslim, or whatever) must leave to that conscience the full right of decision, excluding any form of constriction, be it open or hidden. There have been examples of the opposite in the past; it is better to put these behind us and not repeat them. The essential norm and

condition for accepting a religion or not should be based on the human person's freedom of conscience.

My dear friends, there is not time for me to develop this point. I only mention in passing that the Declaration of Religious Freedom, published in 1965 after two years of intense debate and reflection, remains one of the major texts of the Second Vatican Council. It expresses clearly in what way the Church to which I belong is able to respect the freedom of other Churches and religions without thereby diminishing in any way her commitment to the faith of Abraham and the Gospel of Christ. I hardly need to add that in the United States this principle or religious freedom is well understood since the Founding Fathers, when framing the First Amendment in 1791, clearly affirmed the right of the person and of communities to the free exercise of religion in society.

But let me return to our main discourse. We do, I believe, have two clear obligations to men and women who do not share our Abrahamic faith or who have no religious faith at all. And it seems to me that these duties could be accepted and practised not only by those of us who are Christians, but also by our Jewish and Muslim brothers:

a) The first duty is to open the way to a clear and loyal dialogue with all of our fellow men. To open does not, of course, mean to impose! The substance of the book of Martin Buber, "Life in Dialogue", from which I quoted above, is summed up in the phrase: "In the beginning there is relationship". This reminds me of two proverbs on a similar theme. One is the Arab proverb: "Man is the enemy of what he does not know," and the other is an African proverb of the Wolof people which says: "When you begin by dialogue, you reach a solution".

Between our religions there have been too many periods of separation and silence. Our Vatican Secretariats, one for Christian Unity, another for Non-Christians (with two Commissions, one for relations with Judaism, the other for relations with Islam, both of them established on the same day, 22nd October 1974), another Secretariat for Non-Believers, together with the World Council of Churches and so many other International Organizations (among which I limit myself to mentioning the Kennedy Institute, the Interreligious Peace Colloquium that is our host, the Standige Konferenz von Juden, Christen und Muslims in Europa, etc), are all bearing fruit in the exchange of ideas and in friendship. As one of the final statements of the Broumana Colloquium, organized by the World Council of Churches in 1972, put it: "The common search for the will of God is growing."

What will be the fruit of these increased meetings and dialogues? It is difficult to say. What is certain is that they are not without value. As Fr. Michel Lelong has observed in his recent book, "*Deux fidelités, une espérance*," "However serious political conflicts may be, it is

unacceptable that faith in God should aggravate them". Even if the religions themselves provide no solution, they must nevertheless always be elements helping towards true and just peace.

b) The second duty is to do what can be done so that those who are believers in the One God may attract and inspire others, and especially non-believers, to find faith in Him. It can never be repeated sufficiently that it is not a question of making "a solid front of believers against unbelievers". That would, basically, damage the very spirit of religion itself. The dialogues and the encounter of our three religions of Abrahamic faith, and of these with other religions, must be a joining of hearts before becoming a meeting of minds.

The Qur'ān reminds the Muslims that "the closest in friendship are those who are not puffed up with pride" (Sûrah V:82), and "Be courteous when you argue with the people of the Book" (Sûrah XXIX: 46). A famous ḥadīth says: "No one among you will be a true believer as long as he does not desire for his brother what he desires for himself." As far as Christians are concerned, St. Paul warns us: "Let us cease judging one another" (Rom. 14:13), and again: "Leave no claim outstanding against you, except of mutual love" (Rom. 13:8).

I should like to close with a final wish, a final hope. But rather than doing this with my own pedestrian words, let me quote to you from three different sources, each of them touching different aspects of our theme.

Firstly, a rabbinical teaching: "What in all of human speech is the most fundamental phrase? I did not hesitate for a moment before crying out with all my voice: 'Listen, Israel: the Eternal is our God, the Eternal is One'! Is not this the highest phrase of all, the phrase without equal in heaven and on earth? Then I asked myself: but what in this sublime phrase is the most fundamental word? I replied to myself that without any doubt it is the word 'ekhad', meaning one. Finally, I asked myself: And of all the words in human speech, which would be the most eminent among those whose letters, when added together, have the same numerical value as the holy word 'ekhad', whose value is thirteen? I did not have to search for long: at my fingertips, deep in my heart, at the centre of my soul, there was the word 'ahavah': love"

Secondly, a poem by the Senegalese poet and journalist Niaky Barry. It expresses the desire to draw together, at least in the heart, our religions of Abrahamic faith together with the other religions of mankind. I shall quote it in French and then hazard a translation in English:

*"Ah, frère de l'universel — c'est dans le noyau central de ton âme
— que j'érigerai le Sanctuaire du Dieu Ultime — d'où Synagogue,
Temple, Eglise et Mosquée — seront en harmonie — dans les flots
mouvants de ton élan vers l'Infini".*

“Ah, brother of all things — it is in the central reaches of your soul — that I will build the Sactuary of the Everlasting God — where Synagogue, Temple, Church and Mosque — will dwell in harmony — amidst the surging waves of your longing and search for the Infinite”.

Thirdly and lastly, a poem by Edwin Markham. In his desire to unite all in understanding and brotherhood, he has written these words, with which I close:

He drew a circle that shut me out,
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But love and I had the wit to win;
We drew a circle that took him in.

Thank you.

Editor's Note:

No Muslim thinker has claimed that any exegesis can or did “abrogate” any verse of the Qur’ān. The Cardinal must have therefore meant the supplanting of one exegesis with another in somebody’s mind. However, because of the frozenness of Arabic lexicography and syntax since the revelation of the Qur’ān, exegesis can indeed establish its conclusions critically.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book, *Dialogue of the Abrahamic Faiths*, edited by the late Dr. Ismā'il Rāḥī al Fārūqī is certain to be hailed as a historic milestone in Muslim–Christian–Jewish dialogue. Perhaps not since the early Middle Ages when the grand courts of Damascus, Baghdad, and Qurṭubah (Cordova) witnessed numerous dialogues and debates between the adherents of these three Abrahamic faiths, has there been such a successful effort made by religious scholars to communicate with one another on matters of faith and understanding.

This book, readers may note, goes beyond the modern-day ostensible studies in comparative religion, and each of the contributing scholars evinces an appreciation and more-than-cursory knowledge of all three faiths.

The authors take up three major topics: The Other Faiths, The Nation–State as a Form of Social Organization, and The Faith–Community as a Transnational Actor for Justice and Peace. Jewish, Christian, and Muslim contributors offer their respective enlightened views on the subjects discussed.

THE EDITOR

The late Dr. Ismā'il al Fārūqī (1339-1406/1921-1986) is widely recognized as an authority on Islam and comparative religion.



He was Professor of Religion at Temple University, where he founded and chaired the Islamic Studies program. Having studied or taught in the Middle East and Africa, as well as in Canada and the United States, Professor al Fārūqī possessed the wide background of training and experience required for a thorough mastery of his field. His writings include numerous articles and books in both Arabic and English. Among his best known are *Christian Ethics* (1967), *The Great Asian Religions* (1969), *Historical Atlas of the Religions of the World* (1974), *The Life of Muhammad* (1976), *Islam* (1979), *Tawhid: Its Implication for Thought and Life* (1982), and *The Cultural Atlas of Islam* (1986), which he co-authored with his wife Dr. Lamyā' l'bsen al Fārūqī.

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