

Inter-Religious Dialogue: Catholic Church and Islam

Bishop Patrick D'Rozario, csc.

Chairman Commission for Ecumenism & Inter-religious Dialogue.

WE are living in a religiously pluralistic world. Today the question of inter-religious dialogue cannot be eluded. The Catholic Church has had an active role in developing inter-religious relations. The recent Popes have guided the Catholic Church in this field by both word and example. Pope John Paul II in his last twenty years of Pontificate has untiringly worked for develop-

ing and furthering the cause of religious dialogue and relations through numerous journeys and audiences, and innumerable messages on different occasions. Who can forget the historic meeting in Assisi, Italy in 1986 when Pope John Paul II invited religious leaders from all traditions to come together to pray for world peace? We recall from our happy memory the great visit of His

Holiness John Paul II to Bangladesh in November 1986. He had described his visit to Bangladesh, as a pilgrimage to the souls of the soil. Such was and is his reverence and respect to the people of other religions. The Catholic Church looks upon Islam with esteem. The Second Vatican Council which was held in early sixties of this century declared its esteem on Islam saying: "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 in-scrutable decrees, just as did Abraham, with whom the Islamic faith is pleased to associate itself. ... They revere Him (Jesus) as prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin mother; ... In addition they await the day of judgment 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 Synod 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." (Nostra Aetate 3) Recently on May 28, 1998 in Vatican City, an Agreement has been signed between the Pope's Council called, the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue and the Permanent Committee of al-Azhar al-Sharif for Dialogue among the Monotheistic Religions. The agreement is built on contacts already existing between al-Azhar and the Pontifical Council. The purpose of the agreement is to set up a Joint Com-

Felicitations to the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II on the National Day of the Holy See (Vatican)

Saint Jude's International School
20, Green Road, Dhanmandi, Dhaka. Tel : 509682

Mr. Augustine Cruze
Principal

Mr. Benjamin Costa Vice Principal
Mr. Michael Gomes Vice Principal

mittee for dialogue with the aim of promoting mutual understanding and respect between Catholics and Muslims. The Committee will meet alternatively in Rome and Cairo and will examine matters of common interest related to respect for religions, justice and peace, human dignity and human rights. After the signing of the agreement the two delegations were received in private audience by Pope John Paul II.

The Catholic Church in Bangladesh under the leadership of the Local Bishops and sometimes jointly with other Churches, has been carrying out inter-religious dialogue with threefold aim: (a) to awaken interest among the Christians in the Inter-religious Dialogue; and (b) to help Christians to know and better understand and respect the followers of Islam and (c) to foster good relations, cooperation and harmony with them and their communities.

In the efforts of the Catholic Church in Inter-religious Dialogue with Islam in Bangladesh the following areas may be underlined: **Dialogue of Life** where the Christians and Muslims live and work together. By personal contacts, visits and friendships, participation in family events; naming ceremonies, weddings, funerals, anniversaries, participation in feasts and festivals, presence at some religious gatherings, etc., dialogue of life is promoted and fostered. The Christians are given formation on the need and importance of inter-faith dialogue and motivation for respect of other faiths.

Dialogue of Action: The Church takes Muslim brothers and sisters as cooperators in the educational and health institutions and in the social and human development projects, where common human and religious values are jointly reflected, shared and put into actions.

Dialogue of Discourse: In some common gatherings of the Christians and Muslims, religious leaders of both the communities are invited to share their own faith-reflection on issues like: injustices, poverty, social and moral evils, religious indifference and fundamentalism, harmony and tolerance, quality education, environment, human and social development, etc.

Dialogue of Spirituality: Some efforts are being made to give spiritual formation of the social and development workers jointly by the religious leaders of both the Christians and Muslims. Readings of the Holy Books, spiritual talks, songs and prayers in inter-religious gatherings are experienced as excellent moments of spirituality of dialogue.

CARITAS FELICITATES THE HOLY FATHER, HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II ON THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS PONTIFICATE.

We sincerely admire His dedication and ceaseless endeavours for attainment of peace and happiness all over the world.

CARITAS INTERVENTION FOR FLOOD VICTIMS

To bring succor to thousands of victims of recent devastating flood across the country Caritas has remained involved in implementing a massive relief and rehabilitation programme. Meanwhile Caritas has completed its four-phase emergency relief distribution works among the 46,300 families under its 7 Regional Offices and in Dhaka City worth Tk.18,251,709 equivalent to US \$396,776 providing ORS, Rice, Pulses, Potatoes, Salt, Dry Food (Pressed rice, molasses), Medicines etc. in 324 unions of 99 thanas, comprising 36 districts.

Now Caritas is implementing a post-flood rehabilitation programme of Tk.84,590,562 equivalent to US \$ 1,838,925 as follows:

- i) **Construction of Low Cost Houses - 3,500 Houses: Taka.43,750,000**
There has been wide-spread destruction of dwelling houses, specially of the poor families due to prolonged flood. So Caritas has plan to build 3,500 units of low cost houses for the poor and female-headed flood affected families.
- ii) **Cash for Works(Re-construction of rural embankments, dams, roads, culverts, bridges, etc.): Taka.8,400,000**
The plan is mainly for creating employment opportunities by way of repairing of roads, embankments, dams, excavation of ponds and irrigation canals, construction of culverts, bridges, raising of school grounds/market places, etc., for about 140,000 mandays. The works will be carried out in 33 districts under 7 Caritas Regional Offices. The works will improve the vitally necessary infrastructures in the habitations of flood affected victims which were destroyed by the current flood.
- iii) **Crop Recovery Programme : Taka.2,667,000**
For agricultural rehabilitation Caritas will distribute of Wheat, Potato, Ground Nut, Muster Oil and other Seeds as per local demand and practice depending on felt need and appropriate for the beneficiaries and physical environment among the 7,000 families of 33 districts covering 7 Caritas Regions at 70% subsidized purchase price to help them to return to their normal economic life.
- iv) **Professional Rehabilitation: Taka.7,875,000**
Like crop recovery programme, Caritas made provision for distribution of Draft Animals, Rickshaw Vans, Fingerlings, etc. among the 2100 families to rehabilitate the people to support and recover their losses in their profession. The criteria which will be followed is given below: the marginalized poor and landless; severely affected by the flood; those who will not receive support from other sources; those who will not receive loan from Caritas or any other sources; and those who are at risk will be preferred.
- v) **Construction of Flood Shelter: Taka.12,600,000**
In order to mitigate the sufferings and to take immediate shelter, when surrounding areas are inundated during flood, Caritas will construct 21 shelters in the high land areas in flood prone areas, so that people can take shelter in similar situation during flood in future. By this programme 31,500 people will be benefited. Preference will be given to those areas where most of the people live below the poverty line. It may be mentioned that in the past Caritas Bangladesh constructed 38 such Shelters/raised grounds in School premises which are used as class rooms during normal times. These are proving an immense benefit to the people during this flood.

Because of the colossal loss and great need for rehabilitation works and the favourable responses from donors, Caritas may expand its programme to US \$ 3 million (Tk.15 crore).

WE SOLICIT THE HOLY FATHER'S BLESSINGS

CARITAS BANGLADESH

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FEATURES

Polluting Tuk-Tuks to be Banned

SURROUNDED by rusty three-wheeled auto rickshaws belching out thick stacks of black smoke, the white Safa (clean) tempo looks like a crane in a flock of crows. Clean tempos run on batteries, emitting no smoke, no chemical pollutants and no noise, the three worst enemies of the Kathmandu valley. This puts them at the heart of a government plan to reduce pollution in Kathmandu and at the centre of a controversy over control of the city's lucrative transportation market. Millions of people in the cities of South and Southeast Asia hire three-wheeled auto rickshaws — also known as tempos and tuk-tuks — for transport. About 4,000 of the mini-taxis operate in the Kathmandu valley, where public transport is poor. Only 72 are clean. Some 1,500 are Vikram diesel-powered tempos and the rest are Bajaj petrol-powered machines. Owners and drivers of Vikram and Bajaj tempos are so eager to protect their virtual monopoly they have tried to prevent clean tempos from operating on their routes. "Once I was beaten up and many times they punctured my tyres," said one driver. The operators have forged a common front against the clean tempo and other government efforts to get them off the road. "If worst comes to worst we will block all the roads and call for a strike," said one Vikram operator. They have plenty to fear. In July, the government announced that all polluting Vikram tempos in the Kathmandu valley will be removed from the streets within two years. Vikram tempos are already banned in most Indian cities, where they are made. Clean tempos are fast becoming the preference of many Kathmandu commuters, even though the fare is 30 per cent more.

The government of Nepal is invoking pollution tests, special subsidies to non-polluting vehicles and a promise to prohibit three-wheeled diesel-burning tempos, all in an effort to clean up the air in Kathmandu. Gemini News Service reports that the plan is being greeted with reluctance by the people who run the city's auto-rickshaws. Prakash Khanal writes from Kathmandu



"Given a choice I will always use a clean tempo," said Saroja Singh, one of thousands of workers in Kathmandu who struggle daily to get a seat in public transport. The idea of a clean tempo was introduced six years ago by Global Resource Institute, a non-government organisation, set up by an American couple living in Kathmandu. In September 1993 the Institute started an experiment with \$500,000 from the US government, converting a Vikram tempo into an electric one. By August 1995 seven electric were on Kathmandu streets for a six-month roadworthiness trial. The electric vehicle project has come a long way. Four companies — Nepal Electric Vehicle Industry (NEVI), Electric Vehicle Company (EVCO), Green Electric Vehicle Company, and Bagmati Electric Vehicle Company — have been set up in the private sector. To encourage production of clean tempos, the government has cut the import duty on components such as chassis and batteries to one per cent and levies no value added tax (VAT). Similarly the price of electricity for these companies has been set at a lower-than-market rate. Clean tempos need a battery change every 65 km, and NEVI and EVCO wants Rs. 200 to charge two sets of batteries. The success of clean tempos in Kathmandu has led businessmen to look further afield. They have imported 100 Thai tuk-tuks operating on liquid petroleum cooking gas. But there is a serious snag.

Any Vikram tempo plying on a good route easily fetches Rs 350,000 — far more than the more expensive-to-run taxi. And if the engine wears out, it can be swapped without getting a new vehicle. Pollution tests were introduced two years ago to catch these machines, which are the worst offenders. They are necessary because 115,000 vehicles travel in Kathmandu on only 945 km of road — less than half of it paved, said Supt Bomnod Singh, of the Kathmandu Valley traffic police. Vehicles that pass the test receive a green sticker. Those which fail get a red one and cannot re-take the test for a month. Vehicles without green stickers cannot ply their trade on restricted zones such as the international airport and Singha Darbar, which houses 18 government ministries. Red-sticker vehicles found in these areas are fined Rs 200. Some say tests are more an excuse for corruption than a fight against pollution. "That is just punishing the innocent," complains car trader Ram Shrestha. "Police are using sub-standard equipment to test the pollution. I have had new vehicles fail the test." Shrestha says the government needs to check fuel quality. He claims the diesel fuel supplied by the Nepal Oil Corporation is highly impure and further adulterated by the vendors. Four in five vehicles would fail on-the-spot emission tests. He says: "I buy fuel only in two places in Kathmandu. They're unlikely to mix anything in because they are owned by the army and the police." The writer is a freelance Nepalese journalist who has worked for papers including the Japan Times and The Economist.

Murphy's Law is Here!

The recent floods flouted many of Murphy's findings and added a few queer ones. For example, there is no difference between a 3-wheeler pedal rickshaw and a canoe: both can simultaneously ply on the same road.

MURPHY'S Law (if anything can go wrong, it will) has found a thriving breeding ground in Dhaka, due to the fertility of the Bengalee mind. Let us become Sherlock Holmes (Holmes wouldn't have liked it) and look for the culprits hiding in different guises in the most unlikely places. The ML family has proliferated into a large number of corollaries, hypotheses, constants, postulates, statements, rules, axioms, theorems, exceptions, commentaries, as gathered in a bewildering handbook compiled by Arthur Bloch titled "Murphy's Law and Other Reasons Why Things Go Wrong!". Since our country is not yet included in the volume, it is our patriotic duty to add to the collection, for the next edition of the book. The short cut is the longest distance between two points, provided there are no chargs (sandbank/shoal) in between, and you are not greeted by outstretched palms all along the way. Donation is the quickest ladder to prosperity. The recent floods flouted many of Murphy's findings and added a few queer ones. For example, there is no difference between a 3-wheeler pedal rickshaw and a canoe: both can simultaneously ply on the same road. Our indigenous rickshaw is amphibian, environmental friendly, labour-intensive, and almost independent of the dollar. "If it does not matter, it does not matter". Not so in Dhaka: here if it doesn't matter, it matters very much. Never mind

your own business, and pay particular attention to other's business. It always pays; and no investment is needed. Do not donate to charity, get some donation for yourself — you are eligible — recently we were trying to save our lives looking for floating straws. An optimist is an absent-minded pessimist. Here we are all confirmed and highly sensitive pessimists with hyper-critical faculties. We are also colour-blind, although all of us would like to have colour TV sets, and we see the rainbow in original colours, thanks to our monsoon sunsets, the most beautiful in the world. The higher the expectation, the dizzier you get, due to lack of oxygen. To explain non-scientifically, you might have heard the old Dhaka joke: Customer to egg vendor, "These eggs look so small." "You are right, Sir, you are so tall." The [electrical] fuse protects itself by blowing first. We are short of electric power, but this technique is well known to the successful 'businessmen' here. Also, our big-loan-defaulters are on the celebrity list — get famous on the instalment plan. Which side of the bread do you butter? The majority of our people cannot afford bread and butter, but most know the correct side where to apply adulterated oil. You cannot fall off the roof [at ground level]. This idea needs a lot of publicity in our country — we are having too many high-rise buildings coming up too quickly, and at the same time rise-high netas are

competing. "All great discoveries were made by mistakes". Locally, all great mistakes are never discovered. An office worker rises to the level of his incompetency, and his salary rises in constancy, whether working in his office or at the labour union office. There are usually two types of managers: a) the one who understands what he cannot manage; and b) the one who manages what he cannot understand. We have a third kind: managers without work, assignment, or responsibility. No hanky panky: the salary is guaranteed. Do our development projects remind us of Murphy's Law? The first 90 per cent of the work take 10 per cent of the time; the rest 10 per cent work take 90 per cent of the time. Any objections. To take a loan you must prove you don't need it, that is, you are solvent enough to repay it. Bangladesh is an exception. Quiz : Our famous Grameen Bank violate Murphy's Law? The total evil in any system is constant. The applications are many, but the exercise is left to the readers. Hint: Locally, the total asset in an organisation continues to decline. What is BR? The total intelligence in a society is constant. The population is increasing. — Cole's axiom. Dhaka auxiliary: the application of intelligence is decreasing. "Beware of democracy — no man's life, liberty, and property are safe when the Parliament is in session." (I didn't say that; it is a quote).

