Religious Expression in Multicultural Australia: Interfaith Dialogue, Cooperation & Relationships

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Key Focus Areas

1. Interfaith dialogue – an Islamic perspective
   - With reference to principal of beliefs
   - How does Islam view and seek to engage with other faith traditions

3. Seeking unity in diversity – how can this be achieved?
   - Connect to world peace and inner peace
   - Case-study Affinity Intercultural Foundation
Why Dialogue?

• Intellectual Curiosity
• To better understand own faith
• See it as a necessity for there to be peace
• A natural outcome of globalisation
Expected Outcome of Dialogue

“Interfaith dialogue seeks to realise religion’s basic oneness and unity, and the universality of belief. Religion embraces all beliefs and races in brotherhood, and exalts love, respect, tolerance, forgiveness, mercy, human rights, peace, brotherhood, and freedom via its Prophets.” - Fethullah Gulen
The Quran and Interfaith Dialogue
5 Key Basic Human Rights

1. Freedom of faith
2. Personal property
3. Freedom of speech and mind
4. Freedom to reproduction and have a family
5. Protection of life
A Muslims Definition of Interfaith Dialogue

Interfaith dialogue is the practice of engaging people of other faiths at human level for the purpose of understanding the other in his or her frame of reference. This understanding should evolve to respect and acceptance and produce the fruit of cooperation to promote universal human values.
Globalisation

- As the world becomes a global village, religious diversity is felt and experienced.
- The increased flow of people worldwide through migration and travel has increased Muslim interaction with people of other faiths.
- The advancement in communication technology has increased our exposure and awareness of different religions.
- Therefore, in a globalised world, interfaith dialogue becomes more important than ever before.
Interfaith Dialogue Removes Barriers

- Although physical barriers are being removed, emotional, psychological and mental barriers are still present.
- Removal of these barriers necessitates better understanding of the ‘other’.
- This understanding is best achieved through interfaith dialogue.
3 Factors Contributing to Peace

1. **Education**
   - Facilitates knowing the other
   - Facilitates accepting differences
   - Learning about conflict resolution

2. **Social Justice**
   - Lack of human rights will eventually cause a reaction

3. **Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue**
   - Mutual knowledge of each other
   - Can further improve relations
   - Can act as a preventative measure towards conflict
   - Prevents cultural polarisation
Diversity of Humankind

• “Few religious authorities have been as clear about the reality of diversity as is the Qur’an.”
  
  (Wiggins, 2006, p. 90)

  – “To each among you have we prescribed a law and an open way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah. It is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute.”

  (Qur’an, Al Maidah, 5:48) (Tr. Y.Ali)
Islamic Case for Dialogue

• The following verse is seen as a case for interfaith dialogue:

  “O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).”

(Qur’an, Al-Hujuraat, 49:13) (Tr. Y. Ali)
Call for Dialogue

• “Fourteen centuries ago, Islam made the greatest call for co-operation the world has ever seen.” (Imam Fethullah Gulen)

  – Say: "O People of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you: That we worship none but Allah; that we associate no partners with him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than Allah." If then they turn back, say ye: "Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to Allah's Will). (3:64)

• Many Muslims see the above verse as an exact description of inter-religious dialogue and so see this verse as an instruction for Muslims to be involved in interfaith dialogue.
Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and Interfaith Dialogue
Prophet Muhammad as a Role Model

• It is important to have insight into the life of Prophet Muhammad pbuh to see how he dealt with and communicated with non-Muslims.

• Prophet Muhammad pbuh had numerous interactions with Christians.

• His first interaction with Christians took place when he was travelling to Syria with his uncle Abu Talib.

• Later Prophet Muhammad had meetings with many prominent Christians and Christian groups such as the Najran Christians and Negus, the Abyssinian king.
Negus, the Abyssinian King

- At the outset, eleven Muslims immigrated to Abyssinia. Later, about 83 adult Muslims, women and men, joined them.
- Abyssinia was the Prophet’s pbuh choice; he felt that Christians were closer to Muslims than the Meccan pagans.
- A letter from the Prophet to the King: “I have sent my cousin Ja’far to you, accompanied by a small number of Muslims; if he comes to you, receive them in hospitality...”
Negus, the Abyssinian King

• A question was addressed to the Muslims:
  – “What do you say concerning Jesus?”

• Answer:
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l0rTWJ1h07w

• Negus, the Abyssinian King;
  – “I swear, the difference between what we believe about Jesus, the Son of Mary, and what you have said is not greater than the width of this twig.”
Najran Delegation and Dialogue

- “When the Najran delegation reached Madina, they debated with the Prophet in an investigatory dialogue for two or three days in the mosque of Madinah.

- Prophet Muhammad allowed them to pray in the mosque (Masjid al-Nabawi) where the Muslims prayed.

- The whole incident was the first occurrence of peaceful dialogue between Christians and Muslims; it was the first time that Christians prayed in a mosque. (Acar, Fountain Magazine, 2005)
Najran Delegation and Dialogue

• Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) provided the Najran delegation with a place to stay in Madina, in a secure place close to his mosque.

• He even ordered that the Muslims pitch their tent for them.

• Prophet Muhammad sent them back to their homes protected by his own guards and accompanied by a trusted Companion.
Tolerance and Respect

- "He who believes in God and the Last Day should honour his guest, should not harm his neighbour, should speak good or keep quiet." (Bukhari, Muslim)

- "Whoever hurts a non-Muslim citizen of a Muslim state hurts me, and he who hurts me annoys God." (Bukhari)

- "He who hurts a Non-Muslim citizen of a Muslim state, I am his adversary, and I shall be his adversary on the Day of Judgement." (Bukhari)
Standing Up For A Jewish Funeral

• As stated in the article “Dialogue with people of the book”, al-Qaradawi gives the example of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) standing up for a Jewish funeral procession and states:
  – “Islam respects the humanity of each person, disregarding religion.”

• According to Gulen:
  – “This action demonstrates how highly our Prophet respected every person”.
Quranic statements

- The Qur’an that instructs us to engage in dialogue with People of the Book

  - Say, "O People of the Scripture, come to a word that is equitable between us and you - that we will not worship except Allah and not associate anything with Him and not take one another as lords instead of Allah ." But if they turn away, then say, "Bear witness that we are Muslims [submitting to Him].“ (Qur’an, 3:64)
Quranic statements

- And do not argue with the People of the Scripture except in a way that is best, except for those who commit injustice among them, and say, "We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you. And our God and your God is one; and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him." (Qur’an, 29:46).

- Dialogue does not mean that we totally overlook or ignore differences.

- But everything must be done in a certain order.
Australian Groups

- Affinity Intercultural Foundation
- Australian Intercultural Society
- Bluestar Intercultural Centre
- Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations
- Women’s Interfaith Network
- National Forum of Christians, Jews & Muslims
- APRO (Australian Partnership of Religious Organisations)
A Case Study: Affinity Intercultural Foundation
The Abraham Conference
“Women of Faith” Dinner

- An annual event organised for women of different faiths.
- Speakers from the Abrahamic Faiths with a different theme each year.
- Performances from different faith groups.
Home Encounters

- Home Encounters has been taking place since 2004.
Home Iftars

• During Ramadan, Muslims invite their non-Muslim friends to their homes to have iftar together.
• Sharing these special meals in the home environment strengthens the relationships that have been formed.
Youth Encounters

An all day event where the students have workshops and plenty of interaction.

Coming together of Muslim, Christian and Jewish schools.
Key Muslim Figures and Interfaith Dialogue
Imam Yahya Hendi

• “It is true that ignorance, religious extremism, terrorism, and fears generated from past encounters have widened the gap between us and created a sense of mistrust and rejection. There is another path we can model, the path of love, reconciliation and dialogue which streams from our religious commitment to a God of love.”

(A Call for Dialogue”, The Frederick News – Post Online, Published 3 September 2006)

• Palestinian background.
• Muslim chaplain at Georgetown University.
Seyyed Hossein Nasr

• “[Islamic Civilisation] is suited in every way to carry out civilisational dialogue with various civilisations and to be itself a bridge between East and West, reflecting the light of that blessed olive tree to which the Qur’an refers...”

http://www.islamonline.net/english/Contemporary/2004/08/article01c.shtml#**

• Iranian. Professor at Georgetown University.
Hamza Yusuf Hanson

• Has been actively involved in interfaith dialogue.

• Co-authored a book titled “Common Ground Between Islam and Buddhism.”

• American convert, scholar and co-founder of Zaytuna Institute.
Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri

• “Every year he invites the Christian community to celebrate Christmas and he even declared, addressing the media that his mosque was open for Christians to worship anytime.”
  (Rev. Dr. Majid Abel)

• http://www.tahir-ul-qadri.com/

• Canadian based Pakistani scholar.
Tariq Ramadan

• “The spiritual teaching of Islam makes us open to human universality and by its nature creates bridges with men and women of other faiths, and even with all the humanists, agnostics and atheists who are concerned about human values, ethics and respect for the universe.” (Ramadan, 2004, p. 124)
Fethullah Gulen

• Written extensively on interfaith dialogue.
• Actively involved in interfaith dialogue initiatives.
• “Peace Through Education and Dialogue” Documentary.
A Common Word

- Based on Qur’anic chapter and verse: Al-Imran, 3:64.
- An initiative by **138 Muslim scholars, clerics and intellectuals** from many different countries, denominations and schools of thought.
- A document written by H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad of Jordan and checked by several scholars.
- The document is about “Love of God” and “Love of Neighbour,” and it is an invitation to join hands with Christians on such a basis, for the sake of God and for the sake of world peace and harmony.

Seeking unity in diversity – how can this be achieved?

• Perspective is critical
  – How we perceive our selves and in relation to how we perceive ‘other’
  – Acute awareness of one’s human essence and its natural affinity necessitates unity
  – If the universe and nature is in such concord and stunning harmony, how is it that we can’t be
  – It is natural to be in concord
  – What facilitates unity is understanding
Seeking unity in diversity – how can this be achieved?

• Understanding is fostered through dialogue
• Dialogue and an earnest seeking to know the other from their frame of reference engenders trust based on that familiarity
• Trust fosters harmonious relationships
• Social harmony is a state – which needs to be nurtured
• This therefore then fosters collaboration
• This SoR Conference is an annual demonstration of this reality
Thank You