

“Recent popes have called upon Catholics to get to know, understand, and respect Islam. All this in order to be better Catholics and partners in the future. Abbot Timothy received a commission from the Abbot President of all Benedictines to bring together people who were already in dialogue and friendship. This book amplifies his journey and the providential spiritual and cultural baggage he brought with him. It is a fascinating trip.

“The book is based on his doctoral thesis about a new way of transcending the apparent chasm between those seeking God by contrasting paths. He proposes a community founded for a dialogue of spiritualities—Muslim and Christian. He kindly breaks his proposal out into thirty-six chapters, with clear titles, and thus the reader can pick and choose between the practical steps and the deeper contemplative traditions in each tradition.

“The challenges to a peaceful future in our world are obvious. Abbot Timothy has essayed an imaginative step forward, based on his own experience and extensive contacts with unobtrusive dialogue groups in both hemispheres.”

—Fr. Finbarr Dowling, OSB
Pastor
Marthasville, Missouri

MONASTIC INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE SERIES

No Peace without Prayer

*Encouraging Muslims and Christians
to Pray Together*

A Benedictine Approach

Timothy Wright, OSB



LITURGICAL PRESS
Collegeville, Minnesota

www.litpress.org

Cover design by Ann Blattner.

Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version Bible* © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

Excerpts from the Qur'an are taken from *The Qur'an*, translated by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem © 2004 (Oxford University Press). Used with permission.

© 2013 by Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by print, microfilm, microfiche, mechanical recording, photocopying, translation, or by any other means, known or yet unknown, for any purpose except brief quotations in reviews, without the previous written permission of Liturgical Press, Saint John's Abbey, PO Box 7500, Collegeville, Minnesota 56321-7500. Printed in the United States of America.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Library of Congress Control Number: 2013937791

ISBN: 978-0-8146-3822-4

ISBN: 978-0-8146-3847-7 (ebook)

To my parents who died within an hour and a half of each other in 1968.

To my novice master, Fr. Bruno Donovan, OSB,
who one Rule Class came out with this limerick:

There was a young novice called Wright
Who argued from morning to night
Rebuked one day
He was heard to say
Even if wrong I'm (w)right!

They say I am like my mother in that respect, but I adored my father.

To my two long-suffering elder brothers
Stephen Wright, OSB, at Ampleforth Abbey, UK, and
Ralph Wright, OSB, at St. Louis Abbey, USA,
and our youngest brother Miles, who died in 2012.

And to my Brethren at Ampleforth,
whose patience and good humor I have pushed to the limit.
And to the many others, in all parts of the world,
who have supported me in this work.

Contents

Acknowledgments xi

PART 1 The Path to Dialogue: Why Walk It?

Chapter 1: Introduction 3

Chapter 2: The Author's Journey 9

*Chapter 3: A Brief Outline of Muslim and
Benedictine Spiritualities* 17

Chapter 4: The Healing of Negative Memories 29

PART 2 Finding a Way through Disputed Issues: Will They Do It?

*Chapter 5: Christians and Muslims in a Dialogue
of Spirituality* 37

*Chapter 6: What the Second Vatican Council Said:
Interpreting *Nostra Aetate** 43

Chapter 7: Issues of Yesterday and Today 47

PART 3 Defining the Dialogue of Spirituality: Can They Do It?

Chapter 8: Memory: The Heart of a Dialogue of Spirituality 75

*Chapter 9: "Remember God": Living in the Presence of God,
Muslims and Christians* 85

Chapter 10: Techniques for “Remembering God”:
Muslim and Christian 89

Chapter 11: The Holiness of the Word:
Muslim and Christian 101

Chapter 12: Engaging with the Word of God:
Muslim and Christian 109

*Chapter 13: Engaging with the Word as Revelation and
Guidance: Muslim and Christian 115*

PART 4 The Higher Forms of Spiritual Experience Compared: How Far Can They Get?

Chapter 14: Comparing the Mystical Life:
Muslim and Christian 123

*Chapter 15: Comparing Two Mystics: Rābi’a al-’Adawiya
Al-Qaysiyya and Paul Giustiniani, OSB 131*

*Chapter 16: Thomas Merton and Sufism:
His Dialogue with Abdul Aziz 139*

PART 5 God’s Revelation and the Human Response: Examples for Inspired Scriptures

Is This the Encouragement to Do It Now? 148

*Chapter 17: Affirming the Positive Echoes in
the Understanding of God as Creator 149*

*Chapter 18: Adam: The First Human and the One Responsible
for the First Sin 155*

*Chapter 19: Affirming the Positive Echoes in the Understanding
of God in Whom We Trust 169*

*Chapter 20: Joseph: An Example of the God Who Can
Be Trusted 173*

*Chapter 21: Affirming the Positive Echoes in the Understanding
of God as the One Who Knows All 189*

- Chapter 22:* Noah: Believed in the All-Knowing God and Faced an Impossible Task with Confidence 193
- Chapter 23:* Affirming the Positive Echoes in the Understanding of the God Who Guides 205
- Chapter 24:* Abraham: An Example of One Obedient to the Guidance of God, Even When It Does Not Seem to Make Sense 211
- Chapter 25:* Affirming the Positive Echoes in the Understanding of God as a God of Mercy, Compassion, and Forgiveness 231
- Chapter 26:* Moses: The One Who Led the People away from Slavery and Then Persuaded God to Show Mercy, Compassion, and Forgiveness 237
- Chapter 27:* Affirming the Positive Echoes in the Understanding of God Who Gives Life after Death 255
- Chapter 28:* Jesus Christ: Muslim Prophet Raised to Heaven by God without Dying and Christian God-Made-Man Who Rose from the Dead 261

PART 6 Experience and Support for a Community in a Dialogue of Spirituality: Do They Encourage a Decision to Go Ahead?

- Chapter 29:* The Benedictine Experience in Algeria: The Example of the Trappist Community of Tibhirine 281
- Chapter 30:* Guidance for Those Approaching Dialogue 289
- Chapter 31:* The Role of Scriptural Reasoning in a Dialogue of Spirituality 293
- Chapter 32:* Spiritual Guidance: Muslim and Christian 297
- Chapter 33:* Community Prayer through the Day 301
- Chapter 34:* Insights from the Lived Wisdom of the Rule of Benedict Relevant to a Community in Dialogue 307

**PART 7 Seeking Inspiration and Encouragement: Can
Anyone Inspire?**

*Chapter 35: Christian de Chergé and Islam: Teaching That
Points to the Future* 315

*Chapter 36: No Peace without Prayer: Encouraging Muslims
and Christians to Pray Together* 325

Appendix: How Might We Start? 327

Bibliography 329

Index of Biographies 337

Acknowledgments

Excerpts from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* © Libreria Editrice Vaticana (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), are used with permission.

Excerpts from *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾan* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), CD-ROM version, are used with permission.

Excerpts from *In Quest of God: Maneri's Second Collection of 150 Letters* by Sharafuddin Maneri (Gujarat, KT: Mathew SJ Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2004), are used with permission.

Excerpts from *Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church from the Second Vatican Council to John Paul II*, edited by Francesco Gioia, ©Libreria Editrice Vaticana (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), are used with permission.

Excerpts from *The Monks of Tibhirine: Faith, Love, and Terror in Algeria* by John W. Kiser (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2003), are used with permission.

Excerpts from the Qurʾan are taken from *The Qurʾan*, trans. M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), and are used with permission.

Excerpts from *Sharafuddin Maneri* from The Classics of Western Spirituality Series, translated and introduced by Paul Jackson, SJ, Copyright © 1980 by The Missionary Society of St. Paul the Apostle in the State of New York. Paulist Press, Inc., New York/Mahwah, N.J. Used with permission of Paulist Press. www.paulistpress.com

“Every true prayer is prompted by the Holy Spirit,
who is mysteriously present in every human heart.”

—John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 29

“I have a vocation to unite myself to Christ through the one
who lifts up every prayer and who offers to the Father, mysteriously,
this prayer of Islam along with the prayer of every upright heart.”

—Christian de Chergé, *A Theology of Hope*, 185

Part 1

The Path to Dialogue: Why Walk It?

Chapter 1

Introduction

This book presents a small seed, vulnerable and almost invisible, but once sown could bring about real change. The context is our contemporary world, in which billions of our brothers and sisters struggle to survive due to the competitive violence endemic in our social, economic, political, and religious societies. I elaborate with six points:

1. The voices of the world's religions are discordant. Some speak peace, while supporting violence at least tacitly. This is particularly true of those who commit to the revelation of the One God, whether in Sinai, Bethlehem, or Mecca. Rarely do they unite in protest and with little effect when they do. Their spiritual experiences have limited influence, usually only in particular communities, a situation that spells *competition* rather than *collaboration*. Alongside this, the penetration into regions beyond our planetary system has opened up astonishing dimensions, challenging their belief in a Creating God.
2. The human story in all continents is increasingly the story of rivalry, competition, and violence, partly because of the

4 *The Path to Dialogue: Why Walk It?*

ever-widening gap between the rich few and the poor majority. Exploitation of the latter by the former is so ingrained that the voice of religion is ignored. Some go further and think religion is a cause. Rarely in human history have people of different races or religions settled down to live peacefully. They have lacked the skills to affirm difference, appreciate goodness, and acknowledge the uniqueness of every human life.

3. Advances in the scientific understanding of how our planet works, from its smallest unit to the incredible dimensions of the universe, have both empowered and disempowered human beings. At the same time, the advances in technology have improved the quality of life for many but pushed a significant percentage of the world into a deprivation made all the worse by the omnipresent, “signs” of affluence, which create an unattainable dream for billions of our fellow human beings and provide a launch pad for violence. The human world has come closer together, more crowded and yet more divided.
4. Advances in medical science have enabled those better off to have greater control over their own health, some considerably more than others, affecting birth rates, increasing life expectation, and limiting the spread of disease. They are able to make more informed decisions about their lives. Serious moral issues have been raised without worldwide agreement about their respective values. At the same time, the poorest billion live from day to day with little hope and less security.
5. Nationalism remains an important element in human identity; fewer dictatorships are able to survive without the consent of their people. Democracies are scrutinized to ensure minorities are respected and local needs satisfied. It often results in less concern for what happens to the impoverished neighbor, whose only voice comes from the humiliating images of deprivation.

6. But the greater materialism in the lifestyle of the rich minority has eroded their idealism by which they gave the needs of the destitute a higher priority. One result is more focus on their own family and friends and less concern for those in greatest need. This is fertile ground for “fundamentalist thinking,” which breeds intolerance sometimes manifested in violence.

Taken together, these six points provide a global view—in detail both more complex and more demanding. Technology may unite but cultures separate, people differ in attitudes and personality but are one in their humanity. The deeper the divisions, the greater the risk for the whole. Armed force does not solve problems; it pushes them underground. Exploitation, if not corrected, builds ever greater resentment.

Diversity will remain: religions are an important part of that diversity. They have a tendency to focus on their security in doctrine rather than reach out to each other with the hand of love, cooperation, and mutual affirmation. The world community needs them to start working as partners in the promotion of a spiritual dimension under a threat led by the rich minority. Sadly, many religious people are deeply implicated in the lives of the rich minority.

In this book I present an idea, a seed, infinitesimally small and extremely vulnerable, but from it might grow communities based on greater mutual respect between the world’s two largest religions, Islam and Christianity. The seed has, in fact, already been planted. Christians give unique value to their revealed scriptures as the Word of God. Muslims speak of the Qur’an as God speaking to them.

In the pages that follow I present the case for developing this faith in the Word of God to establish groups of Christians and Muslims dedicated to sharing their respective Divine Word in ways that will enhance the other. This is emphatically not a tussle for converts but a way into greater mutual understanding, under the eye of the God who communicates this Word uniquely to each. This opens up the possibility of creating a new shared

memory of that Word. Such can only be a work of prayer—a prayer that can lead to lasting peace, the gift of the One God.

The key phrase is “partnership of trust,” arising from a shared belief in the One God, creator of the universe, communicating with revelation to the humans who can read and absorb it, while extending mercy to the repentant. As partners, each acknowledges the other’s obligations: first, the right to spread the Word; second, to respect the Word of the other; and third, to open opportunities to develop a sustained dialogue between the Word of God revealed to each, enabling the other to affirm what is consistent and identify what is different. Such dialogue conducted in the presence of the One God is a rich form of prayer. It is not a dialogue for an agreed statement, but a dialogue leading to an ever-deeper understanding of the mystery of God revealed in the inspired Word. This prayer will build mutual respect and be the foundation of a new culture of peace.

This book is an adaptation of a doctoral thesis dedicated to showing the close relationship between the spirituality of the Rule of Benedict and that of Islam. It accounts for the subtitle: *A Benedictine Approach*.

The emphasis on the Word of God opens this presentation to the Christians of every denomination, encouraging them to consider a way to dialogue with their Muslim neighbors. By building trust and respect at the local level, a foundation for a new culture of peace will emerge, showing the wider world that peace is more effective if founded on spirituality.

The case is presented through seven phases, each focusing on a question:

1. Why do it?
2. Will they do it?
3. Can they do it?
4. How far can they get?
5. Is this enough encouragement to do it?
6. How useful is this experience for others?
7. What further inspiration is available?

This quotation is particularly apt:

The task of leadership is to create an alignment of strengths in ways that make a system's weaknesses irrelevant.¹

The strength of Islam and Christianity lie in their commitment to God through prayer. Praying together will bring greater strength; what follows is a justification for this optimism.

¹ Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom, *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry* (San Francisco: Barrett-Koehler, 2003), Kindle location 215.20, from the foreword by David L. Cooperrider.