

FEATURE

Vincentian Symposium on Inter-Religious Dialogue with Islam

Introducing our Topic

Inaugural Speech: Basic Principles for Dialogue with Islam

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Dear Rev. Fathers, Sisters, Brothers, Honored Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an indisputable fact that in every part of the world, we live with people of multi-religious faiths. Two prominent religions today in the world are Christianity and Islam. So it is of great significance that we discuss and discern ways of co-existing peacefully, respecting one another and working together for the common welfare of the entire society. It is this conviction that has brought us together here to this workshop.

Another fact that brings us together is the realization that all human beings are children of God. God does not and cannot make any distinction or discrimination between his children. No matter we realize and acknowledge this, or fail to do so, without counting the merits or unworthiness of the human person, God continues to be faithful unconditionally and gratuitously. “For He makes his sun rise both on the wicked and the good, and gives rain to both just and the unjust” (Mt. 5:45b). So God continues to love and care for all the human beings regardless of their race, color, sex, age and creed. That is the reason for our search for co-existence and collaboration in bettering the world.

Three questions are of paramount importance to discuss here:

- How can we co-exist peacefully?
- How can we respect one another giving each one the freedom to be what one is and to profess what one believes?
- How can we work together for the well-being of the society and humanity at large?

Finding answer to these questions may be spelled out as the aim of this workshop. When we start such a study and dialogue there are some basic principles to be kept in mind.

1. One must be rooted in one's faith and convictions. Without having a deeper knowledge of the theology and spirituality of one's own religion and having lived it experientially, it is difficult and can be futile, to learn and respect the tenets of other religions. It is insecurity and lack of convictions in one's own faith that makes some attack people of other faith. When one is sure of one's stand, there is no need to defend it vehemently. So one of the basic requirements for inter-religious dialogue is a profound theological knowledge and deep conviction of one's own faith.
2. Respect is the key word in inter-religious dialogue. One may not agree and accept of all the tenets, teachings, practices and traditions of other religion. But one should be able to respect the freedom, logic and convictions of other persons as they are. We should be able to disagree agreeably. Respect should be for the other person, his/her freedom of conscience. Just as I have my own reasons and convictions of my faith and the right and freedom to profess it, my neighbor also has the same God-given right and freedom. I can neither question it nor consider his/her convictions to be false. When I learn to respect the other, I too will be respected. "Do to others whatever you would that others do to you" (Mt. 7:12). This is the Golden rule of the Holy Scripture.
3. Search for the points that unite and not that divide us. There are many converging points on which all can agree and start working on and leave the divergences with due respect. If all concentrate on the common points of convergence and work towards the common good, much can be done for the humanity at large. It is when we concentrate on the points of divergence and focus on our differences that a lot of negative talk, anger and intolerance occur. So it is my hope that through our participation in this workshop, we can develop principles and practices to discuss points of commonality in our faith traditions, while also acknowledging and respecting the legitimate differences in the spiritual heritage of each of our faiths.

With these words, in the name of the Vincentian family and in the name of the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, I welcome cordially and wish sincerely all the participants of this workshop to have a fruitful and enriching workshop. May this workshop be an experience of deeper convictions, respectable dialogue and compassionate collaboration for the good of the humanity.