



# bridges

Building relationships between Christians and Muslims

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## From the Editor: You can make a difference

Each of us can make a difference. Each of us has a contribution to make. The task is different for each person. It is ours alone to make. No one else can do it for us. That contribution may or may not result in fame or fortune, but it will make a difference ... and without it, society will be irreparably impoverished.

Fr Maurice Borrmans MA is unknown in interfaith circles in Australia, yet he is rightly hailed as one of the greatest exponents of Christian-Muslim relations of this century (News, p. 3). He spent his life in relative obscurity, studying, researching, teaching, editing, writing books and articles and speaking at interfaith conferences around the Mediterranean. He was my teacher at the *Pontifical Institute for the Study of Arabic and Islamics* (PISAI) in Rome.

Asma Jahangir is also unknown in interfaith circles in Australia, yet had a profound impact on interfaith relations in Pakistan (News, p. 3). She was a Muslim woman lawyer who championed democracy and human rights. She stood up for women, for minorities and for the poor. She risked her life defending those falsely accused of blasphemy. I had the privilege of meeting her when I was working in Pakistan.

He was a Christian. She was a Muslim. He was a scholar. She was an activist. Both are unknown to

**“God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught.....**

**Therefore, I will trust Him..... If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me. Still, He knows what He is about.”**

**Bl. John Henry Newman**

the wider public, but both had an enormous impact on interfaith relations in their respective fields of endeavour. I salute their courage and dedication. May the merciful God reward them for lives well spent serving others, working for justice, fostering reconciliation and promoting peace.

Few of us in our lives and careers will have the accomplishments or acclaim of Fr Maurice Borrmans or Asma Jahangir, but we can each do our part as best we can; and that is all that God asks of us. It matters not whether the task be large or small, or even whether we succeed or not. All that matters is that we try. God will use our ever-inadequate efforts to bring divine healing, mercy, reconciliation, justice, peace, joy and life to our world.

In God’s providence, you can make a world of difference for a different world. So step up! Reach out! Build relations across the religious, cultural, ethnic and social divides. Be part of shaping a new, united and harmonious world!

*Patrick McInerney*  
Editor



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<https://www.facebook.com/ChristianMuslimRelations/>

## News From the Centre



### New Staff

**Ryan Epondulan** joined the *Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations* at the start of this year as the *Youth and Networking Coordinator*. Ryan's primary responsibility is promoting interfaith relations among youth, especially Christians and Muslims. One of his major tasks will be coordinating **Youth PoWR** (see news item below).

Ryan says, "I look forward to walking with others on this journey as it is vital for building inclusion and harmony in our multi-religious, multicultural society." Ryan has recently graduated from the *University of Sydney* with an Education and Arts degree. He is heavily involved in volunteering for his local Catholic Parish, the *Diocese of Parramatta* and the *Catholic Asian Student Society*.

### Mosque Visits

To get to know the Muslim communities in our neighbourhood, **Fr Patrick McInerney** and **Ryan Epondulan** have been visiting local mosques. We go for Friday prayer, introduce ourselves, sit at the back and observe the Muslim prayer, joining in silent Christian prayer in our hearts, all of us together worshipping the one God. So far we have visited the *Afghani Hazrat Usman Mosque* and the *Ghausia Mosque* in Blacktown, the *Rooty Hill Mosque* and the *Quakers Hill Mosque*. In each place of worship, we have been made to feel very welcome. Coming together to pray is a good way of building spiritual solidarity.



(L-R) Member of the Congregation, Sheikh Youssef Hassan, Fr Patrick McInerney and Ryan Epondulan.

### Youth PoWR 2018

**Fr Patrick McInerney** and **Ryan Epondulan** are laying the groundwork for this year's *Youth PoWR* (Parliament of the World's Religions), which brings young people from different religions together to have a voice and a vote in shaping our multicultural and multi-religious society. Peak state and national religious organisations have nominated youth representatives to the Coordinating Committee. It is hoped that during the year volunteers will host youth interfaith visits to their houses of worship. If you want to be involved, get in touch! **Ryan** looks forward to working with the team to make *Youth PoWR* bigger and better than ever. Like <https://www.facebook.com/YouthPoWR> to get regular updates!



### NSW Premier's Australia Day Reception

**Ryan Epondulan** was a guest at the *Premier's Western Sydney Australia Day Community Reception* in Blacktown. Hosted by the Premier, Gladys Berejiklian, the event was attended by government ministers, recipients of the 2018 Australian of the Year awards and residents from local religious and cultural backgrounds. Performances included a song by Jacinta Tobin on the plight of the Stolen Generation. Tobin stressed the need for new beginnings for indigenous people, through community healing. Attendees were challenged to practice the values of love and peace within their own local and diverse communities. For details see: <https://goo.gl/EzpTkr>

### Thank you and Goodbye

**Jane Favotto** resigned from the Centre at the end of 2017. We thank her for her professional contributions and wish her all the best.

Thank you!!

## News From the World



Photo: Mahmood Hossain Opu/Al Jazeera

### World's Second-Largest Muslim Gathering

More than two million Muslims from over 130 countries attended the annual *Biswa Ijtema* (World Congregation) in Bangladesh. After the Hajj, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, this is the world's largest gathering of Muslims.

The 3-day festival was first held in 1967. Since 2011, to accommodate the crowd, it has been held in two phases. The gathering is organised by the *Tablighi Jamaat*, a Sunni Muslim missionary movement. Attendees listen to scholars explaining verses from the Quran, renew their commitment to Islamic values and demonstrate Muslim unity and solidarity.

For full text see: <https://goo.gl/XqTirT>

### Young Muslims Help Restore Church

Dozens of young Iraqi Muslims helped restore the Chaldean Catholic Church in the Talkif district north of Mosul, the Middle East's second largest church. Restoration included removing rubble, erasing the effects of past fires and reconstructing the church bell. In 2014, the Daesh terrorist group had overrun the district, forcing tens of thousands, mostly Christians, to flee the area. Musallam Fadel al-Hayali, a local activist, said, "This (church restoration) is an invitation to our Christian neighbours who fled the city earlier to return to their homes and practice their faith in peace and security."

For full text see: <https://goo.gl/mES2M4>



### The Golden Rule Poster in Urdu

The Golden Rule Poster has been officially launched in Pakistan in Urdu, one of the official languages of that country. The launches were initiated by Shahid Akhtar, a Canadian interfaith activist of Pakistani descent. The Urdu texts are available on the *Scarboro Missions* website at <https://goo.gl/GkA1g3>. The *Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations* is the proud publisher of the Australian version of **The Golden Rule Poster**. See: <https://goo.gl/svnhYD>

### Asma Jahangir (1952 – 2018)

Asma Jahangir was a Pakistani Muslim lawyer and fearless advocate for the disenfranchised, for women, for minorities. She was outspoken in her defence of the supremacy of law, democracy and human rights. She paid the penalty, suffering house arrest and imprisonment. Her integrity was recognised and she was the first woman president of the Supreme Court Bar Association and received popular acclaim along with many national and international awards. She died in Lahore on 11 February 2018.



For obituary and media reports see: <https://goo.gl/NnxJEK>  
<https://goo.gl/YWwVXo> <https://goo.gl/6yoT2T> <https://goo.gl/67CLL3>  
<https://goo.gl/wCJZVY> <https://goo.gl/rSZxet>

إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ *Inna li-llahi wa inna ilaihi raji'un* - We belong to God and to Him we shall return

### Maurice Borrmans MA (1925-2017)



Fr Maurice Borrmans was a member of the Missionaries of Africa and an ardent promoter of Christian-Muslim relations. Having received his PhD from Paris-Sorbonne, he lived for 20 years in Algeria and Tunisia. He taught at the *Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies* (PISAI) in Rome from 1964 – 2004. Fr Patrick McInerney was one of his students. He was editor of *Islamochristiana*, author of many books and countless articles and took part in many Christian-Muslim colloquia. He died in France on 26 December 2017 at the age of 92. Though barely known in Australia, he was one of the greatest academic figures in Christian-Muslim Dialogue of the past century. May he rest in peace.

# Blessing of the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations

The *Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations* (CCCMR) was officially blessed by Bishop Vincent Long OFM Conv, Bishop of Parramatta, on 28 February 2018. The Centre is located in the *Institute for Mission* on the corner of Marion Street and Flushcombe Road, Blacktown.

The occasion was both ecumenical and interfaith, attended by Catholic representatives from diocesan agencies (education, youth, mission, parish and school), the Uniting Church, Coptic Orthodox, Muslims and a Jewish Rabbi.

Auntie Janice Brown gave the Acknowledgement of Country. Fr Patrick McInerney, Director, welcomed all the guests and gave a brief account of the Centre's 20-year history and activities. Ryan Epondulan explained his role as Youth and Networking Coordinator in promoting interfaith relations among youth, including coordinating *Youth PoWR* (Parliament of the World's Religions). Fr Patrick and Ryan then showcased the interfaith resources of the Centre and invited and offered collaboration with all present in promoting Christian-Muslim relations in Western Sydney into the future.

Assoc Professor Mehmet Ozalp, Director of the *Centre for Islamic Studies and Civilisation*, Charles Sturt University, a long-standing friend of the Centre, gave a response, stressing the need and importance of interreligious dialogue from a Muslim point of view. He shared how this calling to interfaith relations had changed and enriched his life.

In his address, Bishop Vincent affirmed that Christians and Muslims "stand united as citizens of Australia and as brothers and sisters of the human family." Recalling his installation when he pledged to follow in the footsteps of his predecessors, particularly Bishop Kevin Manning, who built bridges between Christian and Muslim communities, Bishop Vincent stressed the importance of crossing over the religious divide and building an inclusive and harmonious society, adding:

I am so pleased that the *Columban Centre for Christian Muslim Relations* is now located in the heart of our Diocese and the heart of Western Sydney. We are the epitome of multicultural, multi-faith and ethnically diverse Australia. The Centre will play a vital role in building bridges in our community, bridges of understanding, inclusion and solidarity instead of walls of prejudice, division and exclusion.

Bishop Vincent also highlighted the example of Jesus as the model of Christian mission:

Jesus constantly went beyond the borders of every kind and affirmed the humanity of



Fr Patrick McInerney, Mehmet Ozalp, Bishop Vincent Long, Ryan Epondulan at the Blessing of the CCCMR.  
Photos: Laura Bellissimo Photography

all. In so doing, he invites us to step beyond our fears, our tribal confines and to expand the boundaries of our love. Our mission as Christians is to make peace, to nurture goodwill and to facilitate unity in the face of economic and social inequality, cultural polarisation and fragmentation. We can be the places that refuse to be tribal, that create spaces of welcome and encounter and address mutual suspicion.

In concluding, Bishop Vincent prayed a prayer of blessing which included the following invocation:

May this Centre be a place where truth is deepened, understanding is enriched, unity is strengthened and diversity is enhanced. But above all, may it be a place where Christians and Muslims join hands in friendship, mutual respect and love, so that they may build bridges of reconciliation, peace and harmony for the wider society.

Bishop Vincent then blessed the staff, offices and guests with holy water. After a vote of thanks, all the guests socialised and enjoyed light refreshments together, proof that the work of the Centre is already bearing fruit.



For full text of Bishop Vincent Long's address see: <https://goo.gl/ZepnoE>  
For Bishop Vincent Long's address at the 3rd Annual Interfaith Peace Dinner at Parramatta Mission on the December 2, 2017 see: <https://goo.gl/SqWd57>

## Pope Francis in Myanmar and Bangladesh

*During his apostolic journey to Myanmar and Bangladesh late last year, Pope Francis spoke about interfaith relations. He also met with Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. Below are excerpts from his address to religious leaders in Dhaka, Bangladesh on 1 December 2017:*

May our meeting this afternoon be a clear sign of the efforts of the leaders and followers of the religions present in this country to live together in mutual respect and goodwill. In Bangladesh, where the right to religious freedom is a founding principle, this commitment stands as a subtle yet firm rebuke to those who would seek to foment division, hatred, and violence in the name of religion.

It is a particularly gratifying sign of our times that believers and all people of goodwill feel increasingly called to cooperate in shaping a culture of encounter, dialogue, and cooperation in the service of our human family. This entails more than mere tolerance. It challenges us to reach out to others in mutual trust and understanding, and so to build a unity that sees diversity not as a threat, but as a potential source of enrichment and growth. It challenges us to cultivate an openness of heart that views others as an avenue, not a barrier.

Allow me to explore with you briefly some essential features of this “openness of heart” that is the condition for a culture of encounter.

First, it is **a door**. It is not an abstract theory but a lived experience. It enables us to embark on a dialogue of life, not a mere exchange of ideas. It calls for goodwill and acceptance, yet it is not to be confused with indifference or reticence in expressing our most deeply held convictions. To engage fruitfully with another means sharing our distinct religious and cultural identity, but always with humility, honesty, and respect.

Openness of heart is also like **a ladder** that reaches up to the Absolute. By recalling this transcendent dimension of our activity, we realize the need for our hearts to be purified, so that we can see all things in their truest perspective. As with each step our vision becomes clearer, we receive the strength to persevere in the effort to understand and value others and their point of view. In this way, we will find the wisdom and strength needed to extend the hand of friendship to all.

Openness of heart is likewise **a path** that leads to the pursuit of goodness, justice, and solidarity. It leads to seeking the good of our neighbours. In his letter to the Christians in Rome, Saint Paul



*Pope Francis meets Rohingya Muslim refugee during interfaith meeting, Credit, ANDREW MEDICHINI THE ASSOCIATED PRESS*

urged his hearers: “Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good” (*Rom 12:21*). This is a sentiment that all of us can echo. Religious concern for the welfare of our neighbour, streaming from an open heart, flows outward like a vast river, to quench the dry and parched wastelands of hatred, corruption, poverty, and violence that so damage human lives, tear families apart and disfigure the gift of creation.

A spirit of openness, acceptance, and cooperation between believers does not simply contribute to a culture of harmony and peace; it is its beating heart. How much our world needs this heart to beat strongly, to counter the virus of political corruption, destructive religious ideologies, and the temptation to turn a blind eye to the needs of the poor, refugees, persecuted minorities, and those who are most vulnerable. How much, too, is such openness needed in order to reach out to the many people in our world, especially the young, who at times feel alone and bewildered as they search for meaning in life!

*For full text see:*  
<https://goo.gl/enQPbi>

*For commentaries on this and related speeches see:*  
<https://goo.gl/AtaZSx>,  
<https://goo.gl/ieTEH8>,  
<https://goo.gl/GYzrH>,  
<https://goo.gl/cwRmf8>,  
<https://goo.gl/ZG9hmU>



## Final Declaration of the Catholic-Muslim Forum on Integral Human Development

The Catholic-Muslim Forum was established in 2008 by the *Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue* (PCID) and the signatories of “A Common Word”, the 2007 open letter to Pope Benedict XVI and other Christian Leaders. The Forum’s 4th seminar was held in Berkeley, California, from 6-8 November 2017 on the theme, “*Integral Human Development: Growing in Dignity. Catholic and Muslim Perspectives.*” Below is the text of the Final Declaration:

After listening to the presentation of the papers by Muslim and Catholic Scholars, the participants noted with satisfaction significant convergences between their respective traditions. Such convergences constitute a motive of hope not only for Christians and Muslims but for all, favouring a meaningful collaboration for the promotion of integral human development.

After sharing viewpoints, ideas and concerns, the participants agreed on the following:

- 1) Christianity and Islam both assert that God created humanity, placing it at the very summit of creation, for use with gratitude and wisdom with respect for the laws of nature as stewards for the earth and her resources gifted by Almighty God for all generations.
- 2) God bestowed on every human being inalienable dignity from which fundamental human rights are derived, as well as the obligation of governments to protect them.
- 3) We assert the equal dignity and value of all persons irrespective of their race, gender, religion, or social status, and we categorically condemn any attempts to stereotype any people or attribute collective guilt to them for the actions of individuals among them.
- 4) Freedom of conscience and of religion resides at the peak of the edifice of human rights. Therefore, our collective duty demands that we respect, preserve, and promote such rights.
- 5) God, our Creator, wills the integral growth of every human being for the full flourishing of God’s gifts: body, soul, intellect, and spirit.
- 6) Christianity and Islam have moral, intellectual, and spiritual resources that can contribute to the integral human development of both individuals and communities. Persons of goodwill committed to the common good are the natural allies of believers desirous of the holistic development of persons, communities and humanity and the conservation of the environment that sustains us.
- 7) As believers, we are called to do all we can to address all that hinders the integral development of humanity, including any erroneous interpretations or understandings of our respective sacred texts and traditions.
- 8) We believe that insecurity, conflicts, and the proliferation of armaments constitute grave obstacles to the realization of God’s will for humanity, its wellbeing and growth in peace and security. This is why we consider it our moral obligation to denounce wars and the arms trade that facilitate them, and instead use humanity’s resources for our personal and collective flourishing.
- 9) Together, as believers, we assert that those in need of development must be enabled to fulfil their destiny, allowing them to take their rightful place as full members of the human family according to God’s will.

For full text see: <https://goo.gl/AZorhX>

For video highlights see: <https://goo.gl/zb6QHR>

## The Washington Declaration, 7 February 2018

The *Alliance of Virtue for the Common Good Conference* held in Washington DC from 5-7 February 2018 brought together more than 400 leaders from the three Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

The “Alliance of Virtue” was a pact to ensure fair trade in 6th century Mecca. The pact included the young Muhammad, who later spoke approvingly of it. In that same spirit of justice and protecting the needy and the vulnerable in our world, the religious leaders endorsed a statement on multi-religious cooperation, an edited excerpt of which follows below:

Though mindful of our differences, we are called by the ethical values we hold in common to embark on a new course informed by old wisdom, a journey that begins with the knowledge that all humans come from a single origin, that each is endowed by our Creator with intrinsic human dignity and related inalienable rights, and that we cannot love and serve God if we fail also to love our neighbours – including the strangers in our midst.

Recognizing that our shared values are more important than our differences, and that we are strongest when we act together, we pledge to combine our best efforts to foster unity where there is discord, aid the impoverished, tend the vulnerable, heal the poor in spirit, and support measures that will ensure respect for the dignity of every human being.

We will be guided in this endeavour by convictions that flow from our deepest theological understandings:

We believe that religious leaders have a special responsibility to ensure that the tenets and teachings of our faiths are not distorted for wrongful purposes and that, on the contrary, they provide a living example of God’s love at work in the world. In light of that responsibility, we reject the polarization that leads to conflict and war. We are determined to deepen our solidarity and thereby ensure that religion is a force for reconciliation and harmony. We pledge to work across confessional divides in support of values that are central to each of our faith traditions, including peace, mercy, forgiveness, compassion, justice, and truth.

(The document then spells out shared theological convictions for respecting the dignity, freedom and rights of every human being.)



Together, we can help the world to understand that differences of doctrine are no bar to cooperative deeds; on the contrary, these differences enable us to address shared challenges from diverse vantage points and through a variety of strategies. In that spirit, we promise to exchange ideas, train and encourage our congregants to engage in joint projects and advocacy, form partnerships with relevant national and international actors, reach out to the leaders of other faith and ethical traditions, and create a model of collaboration that people of all religions can pursue in support of the common good.

In reviving the Alliance of Virtue, we proceed in the belief that, for all the ignorance, enmity, and perplexity that plagues our world, love remains a more powerful force in shaping human behaviour than hate, hope is more resilient than fear, and the desire to build will ultimately prevail over any impulse to destroy. We go forward seeking God’s help to liberate us from the snares of prejudice and narrow-mindedness – to give us ears that we might listen across differences, hands that we might reach beyond boundaries, and minds that are open to the thoughts and needs of our fellow human beings.

For pdf of full text see: <https://goo.gl/BVXz9g>  
For background see: <https://goo.gl/MyRej2>,  
<https://goo.gl/SEm5tz>, <https://goo.gl/j4KD4z>,  
<https://goo.gl/XPVECW>

# What's coming up

- 21 March:** *Harmony Day* - <https://www.harmony.gov.au/>
- 25 March:** *Palm Sunday – Entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem* - (Western Christian)
- 30 March:** *Good Friday – Celebration of the Lord's Passion* - (Western Christian)
- 01 April:** *Easter Sunday – Resurrection of Jesus Christ* - (Western Christian)
- 05 April:** *International Golden Rule Day* - <https://goo.gl/iehWJg>
- 06 April:** *Holy Friday* - (Orthodox Christian)
- 08 April:** *Easter Sunday – Resurrection of Jesus Christ* - (Orthodox Christian)
- 09 April:** *The Annunciation of the Lord to the Blessed Virgin Mary* - (Catholic Christian)
- 13 April:** *al-Isra wal-Mi'raj – Night Journey and Ascent of Prophet Muhammad* - (Muslim)
- 25 April:** ANZAC Day



- 13 May:** *The Ascension of Jesus Christ to Heaven* - (Catholic Christian)
- 15 May:** *16th International Festival of Language* - <http://www.iflc.org.au/>
- 16 May:** *First day of Ramadan* - (Muslim) (tbc)
- 20 May:** *Pentecost – Descent of the Holy Spirit* - (Christian)
- 10 June:** *Laylat al-Qadr (The Night of Destiny) – Descent of the Holy Qur'an* - (Muslim)
- 15 June:** *Eid al-Fitr - The Feast of the Breaking (of the Fast of Ramadan)* - (tbc)



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