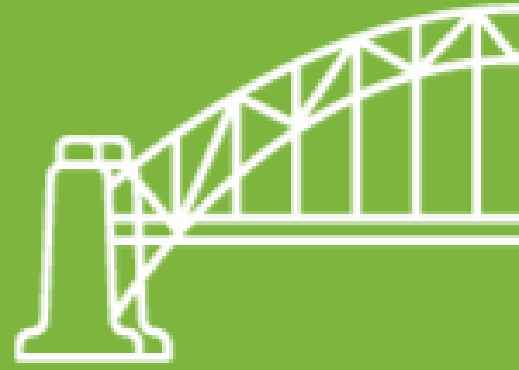


# Bridges

Building relationships between Christians and Muslims



No. 102 March 2024

## Contents

- 1 From the Editor
- 2 Centre News
- 4 World News
- 6 Features
- 11 Coming Events
- 12 Columban Resources
- 12 *Bridges* subscription

Columban Centre for  
Christian-Muslim Relations  
c/o Bishop Bede Heather Centre  
1-5 Marion St  
BLACKTOWN NSW 2148  
E: info.cccmr@columban.org.au  
P: (02) 9672 3616  
www.columban.org.au

 /ChristianMuslimRelations  
/AbrahamConference  
/TheSydneyStatement  
/YouthPoWR  
/WesternSydneyWomens  
InterfaithInitiative

 /YouthPoWR  
/TheSydneyStatement



### LETTER TO MY MUSLIM AND JEWISH SISTERS AND BROTHERS IN AUSTRALIA

Dear Muslim and Jewish sisters and brothers,

Along with Christians around the world, I am currently observing Lent, a time of preparation for commemorating the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ at Easter. At this time, I am painfully aware of the immense suffering and death in the land where Jesus suffered, died, and was raised.

I acknowledge the deep trauma inflicted on the people of southern Israel by Hamas on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October – the savage attacks, brutal murders, cruel rapes, and taking of hostages – and the devastating impact this is having on my Jewish sisters and brothers in Israel and around the world, including here in Australia.

I acknowledge the immense suffering of the Palestinians in Gaza – five months of constant bombing, more than 30,000 killed, many of them children, thousands more injured, 1.9 million displaced, in urgent need of food, water, medical supplies, and shelter – and the anguish this is causing my Muslim brothers and sisters in Palestine and around the world, including here in Australia.

I feel torn by the partisan attitudes, hurtful accusations, and inflammatory

language of individuals, communities, and media outlets, contributing to the rising of antisemitism and islamophobia that are tearing at the fabric of our multi-religious society here in Australia.

I hear your hurt and empathise with your pain. I feel helpless in the face of this immense suffering. My words are inadequate. I am shamed by much of the world's, the churches', and my own silence, complicity, and impotence before such gross inhumanity.

I choose to stand in solidarity with all victims, Israeli and Palestinian, Jew, Muslim, and Christian. I appeal for an immediate end to the war, the return of hostages, the release of prisoners, the lifting of the blockade, and provision of humanitarian aid to those in desperate need. I implore governments to facilitate a just and lasting settlement that respects the legitimate rights of both Israelis and Palestinians. I seek the restoration of civil discourse that promotes truth, respect, and harmony in societies everywhere, including here in Australia. I pray that the God of Abraham – whose universal love, mercy, forgiveness, and salvation we will all soon variously celebrate at Easter, Passover, and *Eid* – may bring peace and friendship to all the children of Abraham.

REV DR PATRICK MCINERNEY,  
DIRECTOR, COLUMBAN CENTRE FOR  
CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

### Prayer Service for Israel-Palestine

On 26 October 2023, Bishop Vincent Long and the Interfaith Commission Diocese of Parramatta hosted a special prayer service for peace in Israel and Palestine at St Patrick's Cathedral, Parramatta. Centre staff assisted in preparing the service and participated in it. The service was organised in a matter of days and opened to the public. Despite the short notice, up to 50 people attended. Together we prayed in solidarity with all the victims of the horrendous violence unfolding in the Middle East – Jewish, Muslim, and Christian – and all who are traumatised by these tragic events.



### Abraham Conference Prayer Service for Peace

For the third time in its 20-year history, the annual Abraham Conference scheduled for 22 October 2023, which the Centre helps organise as a committee member, was affected by conflict in the Middle East. Holding academic discussions without referencing the conflict would only highlight the “irrelevance” of interfaith, but the trauma was too raw, too deep, and too soon to be a topic of academic discussion. We opted to postpone the Conference and to hold a Prayer Service for Peace instead. It was held on 30 November at St Stephen's Uniting Church Hall, in the city opposite the NSW Parliament. More than 100 people representing the Abrahamic faiths attended. It was a short, simple, solemn service. We implored the

God of Abraham to bring peace among the children of Abraham. Representatives from the three Abrahamic faiths – Jewish, Christian, and Muslim – together lit a peace candle (pictured). There were scripture readings and prayers from the three religions, each followed by a moment of silence. To conclude, all attendees were invited to light a tealight candle for peace. The service was a powerful gesture of unity among the Abrahamic religions, and counter to the divisive protests in Sydney streets.

### Abraham Conference AGM

On 3 December 2023, the AGM of the Abraham Conference Organising Committee was held at the Columban house in Strathfield. After ‘business’ meetings in an office every month for the past 10 months, it was good to meet in a home where we could be more ‘social’. After more than 15 years of involvement in the Committee, including consolidating its structures and then chairing it for two years, **Fr Patrick** stood down from the Committee.

**Kim Chong** stepped up and will represent CCCMR. Fr Patrick will continue to be an ardent supporter in the background. Ahmet Polat from Affinity Intercultural Foundation concluded two years as Chair. Manas Ghosh from the Uniting Church was elected as new Chair, and Kim Chong as Secretary. Kati Haworth continues as Treasurer. We trust that in 2024 this new Executive will lead the Abraham Conference Organising Committee through the present stormy waters to more peace-filled interfaith relations in the Middle East and in Australia.



## ACU Parliamentary Breakfast

On 16 November 2023, **Fr Patrick** was among 200 guests at the 7<sup>th</sup> ACU Interfaith Parliamentary Breakfast, held for the first time in the Great Hall of the Federal Parliament. Keynote speakers were the Hon Chris Bowen, representing Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, and Shadow Defence Minister Andrew Hastie, representing Opposition Leader Peter Dutton. Partisanship towards Israel was evident in speeches, which perhaps explains a drop in the number and rank of Muslim representation. It was great to meet faith leaders from various communities – some of us seasoned interfaith advocates are long-time friends! *For media report, see [bit.ly/3GMww3H](http://bit.ly/3GMww3H).*



## Abrahamic Interfaith Panel at ACU

On 17 October 2023, Dr Emmanuel Nathan, National Head of the School of Theology at ACU's Faculty of Theology and Philosophy, went ahead with an Abrahamic Roundtable with his students. Ahmet Polat of [Affinity Intercultural Foundation](http://Affinity Intercultural Foundation), Rabbi Zalman Kastel of [Together for Humanity](http://Together for Humanity), and **Fr Patrick** were the guest speakers (pictured). The students appreciated their honest engagement in these troubled times. Dr Nathan said, "Their presence with us at this difficult time, their willingness to still come, to share, to listen, to not shy away from what's affecting the world 'over there' and our communities 'here' – it was so humbling and quietly powerful." *For student responses, see [Interfaith Dialogue Builds Bridges](http://Interfaith Dialogue Builds Bridges).*



## Solidarity with Muslims and Jews

The present Israel-Hamas war has been horrendously destructive with a huge loss of lives and property. The displacement of more than two-million people is unfolding into a humanitarian crisis. It has deeply impacted interfaith community relations in the Middle East and around the world, including Sydney and Melbourne. Both Jews and Muslims are traumatised by the killings of their family, relatives, friends, and co-religionists. We have tried to show solidarity and sympathy to both Jews and Muslims without taking sides. **Fr Patrick** assisted Bishop Vincent Long and the Interfaith Commission of the Diocese of Parramatta in preparing a [joint Statement](http://joint Statement) on the Israeli-Hamas Conflict calling for an end to the violence and a just and lasting peace settlement. Fr Patrick organised with Bishop Vincent to make solidarity visits to the Parramatta Mosque and to the Parramatta Synagogue where they met with the Imam and the Rabbi and their respective committees (pictured above). Our visits were much appreciated.



## Cardinal Encourages Dialogue at Grassroots Level

Speaking at a multi-faith synodal meeting in Manila on 23 January 2024, Cardinal Mario Grech (pictured), General Secretary, Synod on Synodality, implored that interreligious and ecumenical dialogue must involve the 'grassroots', or the local level, to make a genuine difference. Practical dialogue takes place in families, on the streets, at the mall, during sports activities, at the hospital, among others, the cardinal said. "I request you to make this beautiful experience of fraternal encounter accessible to the people of God, initiating the healing process and reconciliation towards peace and harmony," he emphasised. A central figure in Pope Francis' plan to reform the Church, the cardinal stressed that the synodal process also includes "new expressions and approaches of the ecumenical and interreligious dialogue as essences of being a synodal church". During the meeting, leaders of ecumenical and interreligious communities shared each other's faith journeys and experiences of synodality in their own churches and communities. They also discerned the various paths to unity as a response to the call of the pope on synodality. *Condensed and adapted from [bit.ly/3HZphpC](https://bit.ly/3HZphpC).*



## Dialogue and Mission

This year marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of *The Attitude of the Church toward the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission*. Commonly known by the abbreviated title, *Dialogue and Mission*, this document was published by the Secretariat for Non-Christians, later re-named the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and now the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue. It was published on 10 June 1984 to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Secretariate. It answered many of the questions about interreligious dialogue that had arisen since Vatican II. The document is a 'hidden treasure' of insights and deserves to be widely studied and promulgated to Catholics who are still largely unaware of the church's rich teaching on interreligious dialogue. *The publication is available at [bit.ly/49jh7Es](https://bit.ly/49jh7Es).*



## Zayed Award for Human Fraternity

At a ceremony in Abu Dhabi on 5 February 2024, two Islamic organisations actively involved in interreligious dialogue and social inclusion in Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, were awarded the 2024 Zayed Award for Human Fraternity. The prize was established in 2019 to mark the historic meeting in Abu Dhabi on 4 February the same year between His Eminence the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Professor Ahmed al-Tayeb, and His Holiness Pope Francis, during which they co-signed *A Document on Human Fraternity on World Peace and Living Together*. The UN has since declared 4 February "[International Day for Human Fraternity](https://www.un.org/en/observances/international-day-for-human-fraternity)". The Zayed award recognises the contributions of individuals and organisations to the progress of humanity and peaceful coexistence. Representatives of winning organisations, Ulil Abshar-Abdalla and Syafiq A Mughni, spoke of their honour of receiving a prize that Ulil likened to "a Nobel Peace Prize from [the] Muslim world". Nelly Leon Correa, a religious sister widely recognised in Chile for her work with imprisoned women during the past 20 years was also a recipient. *Condensed and adapted from [bit.ly/49vmj7d](https://bit.ly/49vmj7d).*





## Inter Faith Network for the UK

On 7 February 2024, the Board of the Inter Faith Network (IFN) for the UK announced the decision to move towards closure. This decision was reached due to the withdrawal of government funding making it financially unviable. In an age of increasing diversity and complexity in society, especially at the present moment of heightened communal tension due to the conflict in the Middle East, the government's decision seems short-sighted. It is especially disappointing as the IFN has been a major contributor to community harmony in the UK since 1987 through its many events, especially its Inter Faith Week programme, networks, activities, and resources. It is hoped that this rich heritage will continue to be available on the website [interfaith.org.uk](http://interfaith.org.uk). Condensed and adapted from [bit.ly/49FqmVU](http://bit.ly/49FqmVU) and [bit.ly/48mFkZk](http://bit.ly/48mFkZk).



## Non-Muslim Indian Delegation Makes Historic Visit to Medina

In an unprecedented visit on 7 January 2023, Saudi Arabia welcomed a non-Muslim delegation from India to the periphery of the revered Prophet's Mosque – *Al-Masjid an-Nabawi* – in the holy city of Medina, a sacred place normally reserved for Muslims only. The purpose of the delegation, led by the Indian union minister for women and child development and minority affairs, Smriti Zubin Irani, and the minister of state for external and parliamentary affairs,

V Muraleedharan, was to sign the *Bilateral Hajj Agreement 2024* with the Saudi minister of Hajj and Umrah, Tawfiq bin Fawzan Al-Rabiah. This agreement grants a quota of 175,025 Muslim from India to attend this year's Hajj pilgrimage, which can amount to millions of pilgrims from across the globe. "This exceptional gesture by the Saudi side, welcoming a non-Muslim delegation to Medina, underscores the strength of the bilateral relations between India and Saudi Arabia," delegates said. "As both nations continue to forge stronger ties, this historic visit is poised to contribute significantly to understanding and cooperation in the realm of religious and cultural exchanges." Condensed and adapted from [bit.ly/3I2m1cQ](http://bit.ly/3I2m1cQ).



## "More Muslim than You"

The late Pakistani humanitarian Abdul Sattar Edhi was asked, "Why do you help Hindus and Christians and take them in your ambulances." He replied, "Because my ambulances are more Muslim than you."

Abdul Sattar Edhi (1928 – 2016) was a Pakistani Muslim humanitarian, philanthropist, and ascetic, who dedicated his life to serving the poor. His Edhi Foundation, funded entirely from private donations, runs the world's largest ambulance service,

homeless shelters, orphanages, food kitchens, clinics, and rehabilitation centres. For his dedicated service to the poor, regardless of caste or creed, he was known as "the Mother Teresa of Pakistan". Life and work: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdul\\_Sattar\\_Edhi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdul_Sattar_Edhi), International Edhi Website: [edhi.org](http://edhi.org), Australian Edhi Website: [edhi.org.au](http://edhi.org.au).

# Abu Dhabi Interfaith Statement on Climate

## Interfaith statement and calls to action on climate presented to COP28

The Global Faith Leaders Summit was held 6-7 November 2023 in Abu Dhabi. It brought together more than 150 representatives from politics, science, and religion – including representatives from the Baha’i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, Sikh, and indigenous traditions – to enhance climate ambitions ahead of COP28 (Conference of Parties – the UN peak decision-making body for the world’s climate change commitments, 28 being the number of meetings held to date).

During the Summit, 28 representatives from more than 19 different religions, faith traditions and denominations signed an [Interfaith Statement](#) which declares that “our faith instils in us a sacred duty to cherish not only our human family but also the fragile ecosystem that cradles us”. The *Statement* will be presented to COP28 and includes 13 ‘calls to action’ and 17 ‘commitments’. It calls for decisive measures to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C.

The *Statement* emphasises the urgency for dialogue and action, highlighting the necessity to address climate change with solidarity, responsibility, and hope. The signatories underscore the importance of science and traditional wisdom, as well as the commitment to human rights.

The declaration calls for a values-based, ethical and sustainable way of life. It urges the promotion of the transition to renewable energy and a paradigm shift towards circular thinking. The *Statement* appeals to governments, businesses, and financial institutions to take transformative actions and create new financial mechanisms for losses and damages, especially for affected regions and vulnerable groups.

COP28 was held in Dubai in late November. Pope Francis was prevented from attending due to ill health, but the [text of his address](#) to the Conference was presented by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin.

COP28 was the first UN climate conference to host its own Faith Pavilion for the participation of religious communities. It was organised by the UN Environment Program (UNEP) and the Muslim Council of Elders, in close collaboration with the COP28 Presidency and faith-based organisations. Its purpose was to promote interfaith dialogue and leverage the influence of religious actors on policymakers and the business sector to ensure more effective climate measures. The Pavilion symbolised the importance of global and multiplex cooperation in addressing climate change and emphasises the role of religion and spirituality in this context.

Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb, inaugurated the Faith Pavilion with video messages and signed the *Interfaith Statement*. Archbishop Peter Loy Chong, Head of the Catholic Church and President of Caritas in Fiji, spoke about the devastating effect of climate change in the Pacific.

Pope Francis concluded his address to COP28 with this urgent, heart-felt appeal: “Let us leave behind our divisions and unite our forces! And with God’s help, let us emerge from the dark night of wars and environmental devastation in order to turn our common future into the dawn of a new and radiant day.”

For details see: [bit.ly/3SMro"lq](https://bit.ly/3SMro) and [bit.ly/49FLuEY](https://bit.ly/49FLuEY). You can read the Abu Dhabi Interfaith Statement for COP28 at [bit.ly/4bIndQf](https://bit.ly/4bIndQf).



Photo: COP28 Presidency, Muslim Council of Elders



# Islam and Human Fraternity Conference

## Universities explore impact and prospects of Document on Human Fraternity

The Fourth International Conference of PLURIEL, the University Platform for Research on Islam, convened on 4 February 2024 in Abu Dhabi. The University Platform organised it in partnership with Trends Research and Advisory and the UAE Ministry of Tolerance and Coexistence to examine the impact and prospects of the [Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together](#).

This conference was held in conjunction with the fifth anniversary of the signing of the *Document on Human Fraternity*, also known as the Abu Dhabi Declaration, by Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, in Abu Dhabi on 4 February 2019. It is commemorated annually as the “[International Day of Human Fraternity](#)”. Among the religious leaders’ objectives for the *Document* is that it become the focus of research and reflection in universities, schools and institutes of formation to ensure peace.

The theme for this year’s conference was ‘Islam and Human Fraternity: The Impact and Prospects of the Abu Dhabi Declaration’. Attended by 86 specialists and researchers in Islam, Christian-Muslim relations, and interfaith dialogue from 40 universities and research institutions from four continents and 27 countries, the conference dealt with core topics related to human fraternity, through research seminars and lectures.

Among the topics explored were the geopolitical challenges of the *Document on Human Fraternity*, the problem of understanding it, its link to minority rights, the theological origins and repercussions of human fraternity, experiences and analyses in different national contexts, and dialogue challenges in the *Document*.

Scientific dialogue among different cultures and civilizations to promote human fraternity and achieve world peace was prioritised. The development of a critical and pluralistic approach to evaluate the *Document on Human Fraternity*, and to emphasise the importance of Arab discourse in studies related to human fraternity, were also discussed.

The conference stressed identifying the challenges facing human fraternity, such as the rise of extremist currents. It called for the publication of research



*Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, at the signing of the Document on Human Fraternity.*

papers submitted in three languages, French, Arabic, and English, and for continuous promotion of the principles of the *Document on Human Fraternity*.

The closing remarks of the conference highlighted the importance of the *Document on Human Fraternity* as a global reference for promoting tolerance and coexistence among religions and cultures, and called for its activation through practical programs and initiatives at various levels.

The participants said that the conference ended the isolation between research institutions in the Arab world and the West, by providing a platform for dialogue and exchange of ideas on important issues such as human fraternity and peace.

Pope Francis addressed a message to the conference participants, delivered by Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ, Prefect of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue. Pope Francis congratulated the organisers for the place and the theme chosen, at a time when global fraternity and coexistence face challenges from injustices and wars, which, he reiterated, “are always a defeat for humanity”. His message noted that the primary cause of the evil of war is the lack of knowing and understanding each other, and underscored the need for building mutual trust and changing negative perceptions of the “other who is our brother in humanity” to initiate peace processes acceptable for all.

To read the Pope’s address, visit [bit.ly/48ogV5G](https://bit.ly/48ogV5G).

For reports: [bit.ly/3SFEJfq](https://bit.ly/3SFEJfq), [bit.ly/3UOR5EF](https://bit.ly/3UOR5EF) and [bit.ly/49FRlKk](https://bit.ly/49FRlKk).

# Multicultural NSW Launch CONTINUUM Project

## Australian and NZ survivors of extremism share stories of transformation

On 8 December 2024, Multicultural NSW launched the CONTINUUM Project, a groundbreaking digital storytelling platform inspired by the resilient voices of Australian and New Zealander survivors of extremism.

The CONTINUUM website consists of a collection of stories by eight Australians and New Zealanders with first-hand experiences of the impacts of terrorism and extremism – victims, survivors, families left behind, communities picking up the pieces. They are Louisa Hope, 2014 Sydney siege survivor; Alpha Cheng, the son of Curtis Cheng, who was killed in an ISIS-inspired attack outside NSW Police headquarters in Parramatta in 2015; Gill Hicks, survivor of the 2005 London bombings; siblings Abdi, Khadra and Luul Ibrahim, survivor and relatives of those lost in the terrorist attack on Christchurch mosques in 2019; and Julie and Mark Wallace, parents of Sara Zelenak, who was murdered in the London Bridge and Borough Markets terror attack in 2017. Each survivor shares their transformative experiences, showcasing how they've championed hope and resilience in their lives and work.

In hearing and recognising the voices of survivors and family member of victims, the CONTINUUM Project is a powerful source of hope for a society free from hate. Stories of survival, resilience and healing can inspire the rest of us to stand up and stand united against hate and for victims of hate. Survivors' stories can also help to heal the social trauma caused by terrorism that can be felt at many levels throughout our society today.

Victims and survivors of terrorism carry a special symbolic weight and power in the public consciousness. Terrorism survivors are not only individual victims of acts of violence. Their experiences come to stand for everything that terrorists and violent extremists want to destroy: our collective way of life, our values, peace, democracy, and society itself. In other words, survivors come to stand for all of us.

This symbolic power is a heavy burden. Not every victim or survivor of terrorism is willing or able to carry that burden, and nor should they ever be expected to.



*Julie and Mark Wallace, CONTINUUM Storytellers and the founders of The Sarz Sanctuary, speak at the launch of the CONTINUUM Project.*

The CONTINUUM Storytellers, individually and as a community of survivors, made the decision to turn their traumatic, transformative experiences into ethical and creative action with the potential to effect real positive social change. They hope that their stories of lives transformed by terror can be transformative for society, too.

The CONTINUUM vision is for everyone who listens to these stories to make an ethical decision in their own lives – to speak up, stand up and stand united for a society free from hate. The platform also provides comprehensive resources for communities, educators, the media, and practitioners, to promote positive change.

This initiative by Multicultural NSW initiative was funded by the Australia-New Zealand Counter-Terrorism Committee (ANZCTC), in partnership with Counterbrace, DrawHistory, Hatchet, Edith Cowan University, NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS), and the CONTINUUM Storytellers.

*Condensed and adapted from the CONTINUUM platform. Visit CONTINUUM and help foster a world where stories of strength triumph over hatred: [continuumproject.com.au](https://continuumproject.com.au).*



# Franciscan Reflects on Spirituality of Taj Mahal

Reading the Taj Mahal as a holy text speaks of care for the poor and needy

Professor Michael Calabria OFM, a Franciscan priest serving the Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies as Director at St Bonaventure University, NY, has unveiled a spiritual dimension of the Taj Mahal by reading the monument as a 'holy text'. He presented this reading in a webinar organised by the US-based Islamic Studies Association on 8 January 2024.

Fr Michael holds a PhD in Islamic Studies from the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter, UK. He studied the Qur'anic inscriptions on the Taj Mahal (constructed in the 15<sup>th</sup> century under the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan) and published his findings in a book, *The Language of the Taj Mahal – Islam, Prayer and the Religion of Shah Jahan* (IB Tauris, 2021). Fr Michael shared that Shah Jahan chose 14 complete chapters (249 verses) from the Holy Qur'an for calligraphic inscription on the monument.

The Taj Mahal is not only a monument of love but also a spiritual testament of Emperor Shah Jahan's Islamic faith, Fr Michael said to webinar participants. The gate to the garden where the Taj stands, *Darwaza-i-rauza*, is inscribed with verses from the chapter of *al-Fajr* ('the Daybreak'). The name of the chapter reminds the visitor of the start of a new day (or new life) following the long dark night of fear and struggles. The entire Taj Complex is marked by this 'rising and setting' of human lives that come from God and return to God.

Fr Michael said God speaks through the verses of *al-Fajr* to remind us pilgrims of the world that 'care for the poor and needy' is what will make our spirituality authentic. The Taj Mahal teaches that obedience of God entails care for the poor. During Emperor Shah Jahan's reign, millions suffered from famine. He fed the poor with generosity. The inscribed reminder from the Qur'an of our task to care for the poor continues to be relevant today. Despite India's impressive economic growth in recent decades, it fares poorly on UN human development indices. India ranks 107 out of 121 nations in the Global Hunger Index. The gate of the Taj continues to appeal to us to 'not to forget the poor'.

Drawing from both the Bible and the Qur'an to emphasise the relationship between faith and care for the poor, Fr Michael quoted the Bible: "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not



Taj Mahal. Qur'anic inscription of at the gateway of the Taj Mahal.

have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled', without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (James 2:14-17).

Similarly, the Qur'an accuses those who turn their face away from the poor as ungrateful and therefore unworthy of entering Paradise. Those who obey God care for the poor – they are the worthy. Fr Michael quotes from the Qur'an, "Those who obey God have nothing to fear as God assures that he brings the dead back to life (Q 36. 12) and welcomes the worthy ones to 'enter paradise'" (Q 36. 26).

Again, in the Bible, the King in the parable says: "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. [...] Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

Fr Michael's reading of the Taj Mahal beautifully highlights the spiritual and religious significance of the monument, not only for the emperor Shah Jahan, but also for the visitors who dwell in the meaning of life and develop sincere solidarity with the needy. The Taj Mahal, as a holy text, invites the visitor to examine their conscience and remind them "not to forget the poor".

Condensed and adapted from [bit.ly/3wuUY7C](https://bit.ly/3wuUY7C).

# Book Review by Peace Expert Dr Philip Lewis

New book explores psychological dynamics of violence in Middle East

This deeply pondered reflection on one of the most intractable of contemporary conflicts by a moral philosopher could not be more timely. Short and elegantly written, Jonathan Glover's new book (Polity Press 978-1-5095-5978-7) will benefit those with some knowledge of the historic outlines of this conflict.

The present study builds on the foundations of Professor Glover's earlier acclaimed work, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*. There, he emphasised the importance of the psychological dynamics of "distancing", tribalism, and ideology, which together subverted human sympathy for "enemies", opening the doors to many of the atrocities that scarred that century.

The present work explores the disturbing psychology that accompanies and facilitates a deepening cycle of violence that entraps both sides, as hostilities drag on: the urge to respond to wounds or humiliations with a violent backlash; extremist political or religious beliefs that preclude compromise; finally, a people's identity increasingly defined by a narrative of inter-generational conflict, which renders alternatives difficult to imagine.

In the present climate of polarised commentary, it comes as a relief to read that "we do not have to take sides. My sympathy is with both peoples, tragically entwined over the same homeland". When documenting and analysing "the cycle of violence" (Part One), "backlash" (Part Two), "rigid beliefs and identity" (Part Three), he draws on moving accounts and poetry by participants, perpetrators, and victims alike.

Time and again, he points to deep, but unacknowledged, similarities in experiences and memories of both peoples: exile, trauma, fear of annihilation. His four chapters in Part One, in which he documents unflinchingly the dark centre of the conflict, make for harrowing reading.

The author does not presume to offer a road map for peace. More modestly, he quarries lessons from conflicts that were resolved, whether between France and Germany (1807-1945), South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle, or Northern Ireland. He also looks to hopeful signs in the recent past, not least the Oslo Agreement, where a majority on both sides seemed willing to make agonising concessions, a precondition for lasting peace.

He also commends several initiatives that reached across ethnic and religious divides. Few were more important than *Breaking the Silence* (2004), when

Israeli Defense Forces veterans who had served in the occupied West Bank documented the excesses that their side had committed. This made it a little easier to challenge the self-serving narratives that each side develops in a conflict to exonerate itself of blame.

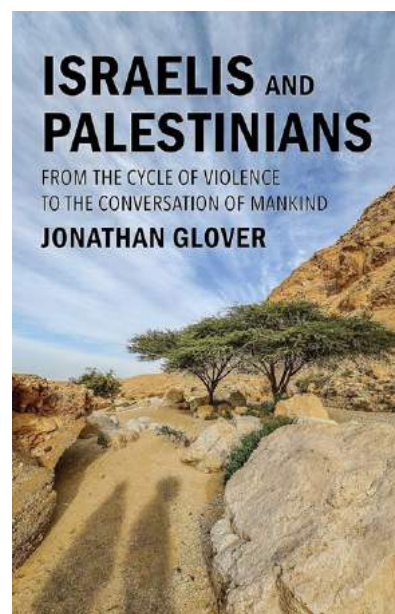
Cumulatively, such developments – whether the solidarity of non-violent peaceniks around the world, including Israelis, seeking to stop the bulldozing of Palestinian homes and olive trees in Budrus in 2003, or experiments in integrated schooling in Israel – were examples of non-coercive engagements that begin to humanise the other, instead of "defensive-aggressive talk" that simply demonises.

By multiplying such conversations across religious and ethnic divisions, trust could slowly and painfully be rebuilt, a precondition for peace. Glover labours under no illusions about the fragility of such developments. He instances the Olive Tree program at London's City University, which, for 12 years, supported Palestinian-Israeli student dialogue about the conflict. The hope of reconciling differences through dialogue remained unfulfilled. The program re-focused on how rival narratives of the conflict could reinforce conflict. Weakening the grip of such narratives on personal and collective identity was far from straightforward, but deemed a worthwhile objective.

In a short book, there are bound to be gaps: I should have liked more evaluation of the extent to which schooling, especially history and religion, as well as Jewish and Muslim religious formation, might contribute to positive assessments of the other. It is also a pity that there is no mention of Arab Christians in Palestine and Israel and the part they play as potential bridge-builders – however precarious their position.

Still, if this is, as Professor Glover suspects, his last book, its distilled wisdom will remain a rich resource for a new generation of peacemakers.

Condensed and adapted from [bit.ly/49hbh6y](https://bit.ly/49hbh6y).



# Coming Events

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>31</b>			

## March 2024

- 11** Ramadan begins (tbc) (Islam)
- 19** Bridge Day, [thesydneystatement.org.au](https://thesydneystatement.org.au)
- 21** International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, [un.org/en/observances/end-racism-day](https://un.org/en/observances/end-racism-day)
- 21** Harmony Day, [harmony.gov.au](https://harmony.gov.au)
- 24** Palm Sunday (Western/Catholic Christian)
- 29** Good Friday (Western/Catholic Christian)
- 30** Easter Saturday (Western/Catholic Christian)
- 31** Easter Sunday – Resurrection of Jesus Christ (Western/Catholic Christian)

## April 2024

- 05** International Golden Rule Day, [bit.ly/48Btomt](https://bit.ly/48Btomt)
- 06** *Laylat al-Qadr* – The Night of Destiny/Power (tbc) (Islam)
- 08** Feast of the Annunciation (Catholic Christian)
- 10** *Eid al-Fitr* – The feast marking the end of Ramadan (tbc) (Islam)
- 22** Earth Day, [earthday.org](https://earthday.org)

## May 2024

- 03** Good Friday (Coptic/Orthodox Christian)
- 05** *Pascha* – Easter (Coptic/Orthodox Christian)
- 09** Feast of the Ascension (Catholic Christian)
- 16** International Day of Living Together in Peace, [un.org/en/observances/living-in-peace-day](https://un.org/en/observances/living-in-peace-day)
- 19** Pentecost (Christian)
- 26** The Most Holy Trinity (Christian)
- 27-03 June** National Reconciliation Week, [reconciliation.org.au](https://reconciliation.org.au)

## June 2024

- 05** World Environment Day, [worldenvironmentday.global](https://worldenvironmentday.global)
- 07** *Eid al-Adha* (The Feast of Sacrifice) (tbc) (Islam)





# Bridges

Building relationships between Christians and Muslims

Help us spread the news about the Centre and *Bridges* by sending us the names and addresses of all those who may be interested in subscribing to a hard copy (please complete the form), or invite them to subscribe directly online at [columban.org.au/media-and-publications/newsletters-and-bulletins/bridges/](http://columban.org.au/media-and-publications/newsletters-and-bulletins/bridges/)

## Columban Resources

All prices inc GST, postage & handling within Australia

**SHOP ONLINE**  
[www.thesydneystatement.org.au](http://www.thesydneystatement.org.au)

### The Sydney Statement



**\$8.80 each**  
The Sydney Statement  
A5 Booklet (36 pages)



**\$19.00 each**  
The Sydney Statement  
A1 Poster - 594mm x 841mm



**\$11.50 each**  
The Sydney Statement  
A4 Poster (10 pack) - 210mm x 297mm

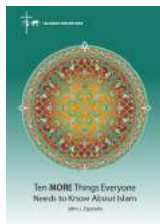
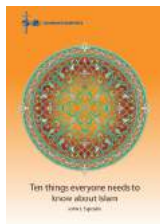
**PRESENTS** details of the values, principles and commitments named in this interfaith charter.

**PROVIDES** discussion topics and activities for schools, homes, offices.

**SUITABLE** for teachers, pastoral workers and all involved in community relations, especially between believers from different religions/faiths.

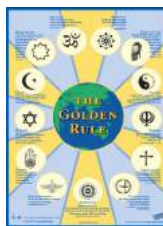
### Booklet set – **\$15.60 each**

1 x *Ten Things Everyone Needs To Know About Islam*  
1 x *Ten MORE Things Everyone Needs To Know About Islam*



Booklets sold individually  
**\$8.80 each**

### The Golden Rule



**\$19.00 each**  
A1 Poster - 594mm x 841mm



**\$28.80 each**  
A4 Posters (25 pack) - 210mm x 297mm



## Bridges Subscription/Columban Resources **Order Form**

**PLEASE FILL IN YOUR DETAILS BELOW:**

ID: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Suburb: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ P/Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

Receipt will be sent by email.

I send my gift by:  Cheque/Money order  Visa  Mastercard  
(Pay St Columbans Mission Society)

Credit card number:

\_\_\_\_\_|\_\_\_\_\_|\_\_\_\_\_|\_\_\_\_\_|\_\_\_\_\_|\_\_\_\_\_|\_\_\_\_\_|\_\_\_\_\_|\_\_\_\_\_|\_\_\_\_\_|

### Bridges subscription (complimentary)

*The Sydney Statement* A5 Booklet (36 pages) (\$8.80 each)

*The Sydney Statement* A1 Poster (\$19.00 each)

*The Sydney Statement* A4 Poster (10 pack) (\$11.50 each)

Set of *Ten Things Everyone Needs To Know About Islam* booklets (\$15.60 each)

*Ten Things Everyone Needs To Know About Islam* (\$8.80 each)

*Ten MORE Things Everyone Needs To Know About Islam* (\$8.80 each)

The Golden Rule (25 pack) (\$28.80 each)

The Golden Rule Poster (\$19.00 each)

**My gift to the CCCMR:**

**TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED**

QTY	
	→ Number of hard copies
<input type="text"/>	\$
<input type="text"/>	\$
<input type="text"/>	\$
<input type="text"/>	\$
<input type="text"/>	\$
<input type="text"/>	\$
<input type="text"/>	\$
<input type="text"/>	\$
<input type="text"/>	\$
<input type="text"/>	\$
<input type="text"/>	\$
<input type="text"/>	\$
<input type="text"/>	\$
<input type="text"/>	\$

Card holder name: \_\_\_\_\_

Expiry date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



[/ChristianMuslimRelations](#)  
[/AbrahamConference](#)  
[/YouthPoWR](#)  
[/TheSydneyStatement](#)  
[/WesternSydneyWomensInterfaithInitiative](#)

Please send orders to: St Columbans Mission Society  
PO Box 752, NIDDRIE VIC 3042 Tel: (03) 9375 9475 Email: [info@columban.org.au](mailto:info@columban.org.au)

March 2024