

MUSLIM PERCEPTION OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

by
Terence Farias, S.J.

I. Introduction

The Church as a community of believers, according to the command it has received, tries continually to make present to the world the mystery of God's love manifested in Jesus Christ and invites all men to a new life in accepting this love in faith. Therefore not only what it tries to be is important to the Church but also what others perceive it to be. Do others see it as the sign it is and is trying to be more and more?

Muslims form the majority of the population in some countries of Asia and a significant minority in many others. How do the Muslims perceive Christians? It was to try to answer this question that we undertook this modest study. Though it was confined to India, yet to some extent it could throw light on the Muslim mind regarding the image of the Christians even outside India.

In preparing this position paper the study was conducted in two steps. First, 150 questionnaires, with open-ended questions were mailed to select Muslims in seven States in India (Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Gujerat, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Rajasthan), both in the North and South. The questions were aimed at eliciting the image the Muslims have of the Catholic community of India as a community of faith. Respondents were asked not only their individual opinion, but also the image Muslims in general have regarding the Christians of the Roman Catholic Church.

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In the second step, the dominant points that emerged from the responses to the questionnaire were taken up in intensive interviews with some knowledgeable Muslims for further elaboration and clarification. These interviews clarified certain elements which otherwise would have remained unintelligible or ambiguous. Here below, we give the picture that emerged from these two steps.

First, we shall present the Muslim perception of Christians in general; then, of their leadership (bishops, priests and nuns). In presenting a particular aspect of this perception we shall also reproduce some relevant statements of our respondents which would make it more intelligible and precise. Only the broad and general features of the Muslim perception will be given. In the next part we shall briefly point out the different factors which may have influenced the shaping of this image. And finally with the help of these two parts, we shall draw out some pastoral guidelines.

II. The Muslim Perception of the Christian Community

The picture Muslims in India have of Christians is an ambiguous one. On the one hand, there are elements in it which the Muslim admires and appreciates, on the other, there are certain things which he dislikes and by which is repelled and scandalized.

1. The Strongpoints of Christians

(a) The vast majority of our respondents said that they admired Christians for their sense of service, love, kindness and compassion. The service to the poor and the downtrodden was specially mentioned.

“I admire the Catholics for their sense of service, devotion and love for humanity. They are saviors of the downtrodden.”

“They are fired by a real missionary zeal and are doing a real good work for humanity. Should I mention Mother Teresa’s example?”

“The very word Christian is associated with love, goodness, kindness and gentleness.”

“In one word (I admire) their ‘Catholicity’ and all it stands for, their human and humane approach to all human problems, especially those concerning the ‘underdogs’ of the world. ‘Service

to humanity is the road to God" seems to be their practical motto. This motto they share with the believers of other semite religions. But none other than they has so much succeeded in translating this principle of faith into a daily practice."

"The Christian community spread around the world can be admired for its teachings of love and peace. The great patience which is to be noticed in its adherents is remarkable indeed and tends others, even enemies, to admire it."

"I appreciate among the Christians the concept of charity and compassion."

"Christianity is based on love. It preaches to love everyone and to be kind to all needy and the poor. Well, many can say that almost every religion says the same. But in practice I find only the Christian missionaries working for various poor disabled and needy people."

(b) Many connected the love and service of the Christians to the institutions they run — hospitals and schools in particular.

"They are doing great service by establishing good schools, hospitals, institutions for mentally retarded and the handicapped."

"Their institutions are doing good service to humanity. Specially in the field of education and medicine. They have indeed played a very great part in civilizing the scheduled castes and tribes and the backward classes by giving them education. As a retired Deputy Director of Education of Gujerat State, I appreciate the great discipline and character in Catholic institutions."

"Their educational institutions and other institutions and centers of social service bear ample testimony to their sense of service."

"The only thing which Muslims admire is the system of education established by the convent schools."

"I admire most the services of the Christians in the field of education, establishment of orphanages, poor houses. Their manner of working for the poor is worthy of praise."

(c) A good number of our respondents said that they found Christians to be kind and peaceful people, non-quarrelsome and non-communal.

“Christians are peace-loving people. They are not fanatical in their approach to inter-community relations. Being a small minority group in North India they don't assert themselves. Due to this lack of assertion they have never been a party to inter-group conflict.”

“I admire their non-communal approach to the other communities.”

“I have found Christians very soft and kind. One thing I admire most in them is that they do not poke their noses in other peoples' matters.”

(d) Some respondents, especially women, expressed their appreciation for the monogamous marriage of the Christians, and for the fact that women in that community enjoy rights and freedom with men.

“The institution of monogamy among the Christians is something to be admired.”

“The (Christian) community does not impose on the women any severe code of laws or the observance of '*purdha*.' This enables them to lighten the burden and share the joys of life with men. They are treated like full human beings. In fact this makes them superior to the women of other communities.”

“In this (Christian) community even the female sex has each and every right that the male sex possesses.”

(e) The other things which the Muslims find as admirable among the Christians is their dedication to work and zeal for social work, their organization for self-help and the adaptability of their faith to the modern conditions. A very few mentioned that the Christians share the concept of the unity of God with the Muslims. So also a very few expressed appreciation for the manner in which services are conducted in the churches — inspiring, expressive, and solemn. One found that “bell ringing in the churches at five o'clock in the morning is good as most of the people nearby can get up for their regular duties.”

2. The Shortcomings of Christians

What the Muslim respondents point out as the shortcomings, deficiencies and defects of the Christian community could be classified as structural, moral and theological.

(a) Regarding the structure of the Catholic community what strikes the Muslim is that it is divided into two main groups: the clergy and the laity. The clergy come in between the laity and God. So the Catholic has no direct access to God. The clergy makes itself respected by the laity and has a place of distinction and honor in the community. It is educated, learned and interested in religion. On the other hand, the laity is ignorant, not so moral and has not much attachment to religion. Some of our respondents gave instances when the laity criticized the clergy and they, the Muslims, had to defend it.

“The Catholic community is divided into two groups — the laity and the priests. The former is much inferior to the latter, in the matters of religious knowledge as well as in secular education. I visited some common Christians and found that many of them were very critical of the priests on account of their total neglect of the poor Christians.”

“I have noticed that except the Fathers and Sisters, Christians don't have unity. I have seen many of your own community speaking entirely against Fathers and Sisters and I had to take your side for I did not believe what they said.”

“On the whole Christians do not know anything about their religion the Church is one that diverts the attention of her followers from God. Muslim *ulema* preach that instead of God Christian priests make themselves adored by their people.”

“On the whole Christians do not know anything about their religion. Service at Church for most of them is a mere formality. Thus an ordinary Christian thinks that religion is the responsibility of only nuns and priests.”

“Why are all moral restrictions imposed on priests and nuns and not on general public.”

(b) Regarding the moral deficiencies of the Catholic community the one most often mentioned by the vast majority of the respondents is

moral laxity in matters of sex. The terms used to describe this are: "moral laxity," "moral laxity amounting to promiscuity," "degenerate community," "too liberal," "immodest," "nudity," "loose character," "easy way of life," etc. As proofs of this defect they point out the immodest dress of Christian women, too free mixing of sexes, dances and parties, high incidence of alcoholism, and eating pork. Closely connected with this point is the fact that in general Muslims connect and even identify Christianity with the West. In doing sex the word "West" stands for a too liberal attitude towards sexual morality.

"They are very liberal in their speech and behavior. Christian girls are not so conservative or well-behaved as Hindu or Muslims. The rate of alcoholism is high. They are people who have the most parties, with a lot, maybe too much, to do with the other sex. They are good fun to be with but that is all."

"There is too much freedom for young girls, and sometimes an emotional Christian girl takes too much advantage of her liberty."

"Christian youngsters only enjoy, as they believe in eating, drinking and making merry. And so many times they have to face poverty and other difficulties and trouble."

"Wine and pork which are strictly prohibited in Islam are freely used among Christians."

"The defect of the Christian community is that there is no *purdha* system in it."

"Muslims think that the Christians usually drink wine. Muslims think that there is more permissiveness among the Christians."

"The free mixing of boys and girls often puts the girls in an awkward situation."

"Drinking, dancing, music, gambling, free mixing of sexes, etc., which are bad values, are very common in the Christian community as compared to Muslim community, thereby creating an unhealthy society. Women's dress is exposive (i.e., great amount of nudity is there as compared to Muslim women). This again is a bad thing."

"Muslims in general think that in social terms Christian women are (generally) of 'loose' character, that Christians are drunkards and that they are more adulterous than other communities."

“Christian women are too liberal. Being liberal is a good thing, but it should be within certain limits.”

“Even according to Christianity, modesty is a necessary virtue.”

“A very true perception of a common, ignorant, illiterate Muslim about a Christian is that he has no idea of the difference between a Christian and an Englishman or an American. It is the same with the literate, specially the *Mullas*.”

“It does not look nice to say that Christians are too advanced and their women too liberal. Specially, they should not be so liberal regarding young girls. Even according to Christianity modesty is essential for women.”

“The Indian masses think that Christians have inherited too liberal attitudes towards sex from the Western missionaries who preached Christianity in India. In my opinion if the British and the other white missionaries, together with Christianity, had also preached modesty, Christianity would have prospered to a great extent.”

Regarding missionary methods Muslims have an idea that Christians are too enthusiastic and aggressive in propagating their faith. This was indicated by a good number of our respondents. Too much propaganda is made through the modern media for this purpose, which may prove to be counter-productive. Even unfair means are made use of to attract people to their faith. As a result converts to Christianity are mere increase of numbers. Their religion consists of mere externals without an inner change.

“Christians work very hard to draw people to their faith, but they fail to communicate the real meaning of religion to the people. Religious knowledge among the Christians is very poor.”

“Many Muslims believe that Christian missionaries make use of money, sex, and promise of a job for conversions.”

“There is too much propaganda and publicity of religion through various media. This makes a good religion ineffective among the educated people.”

“The majority of Christians of India are converted from lower castes of the villages. They convert themselves not for the sake of

religion but for the sake of material gain. For this reason the original values of Christianity are not seen in them. They are not and cannot be loyal to their religion.”

“The most important shortcoming which can be pointed out is that the Christians are always in a mood to preach to others. They are ready to use all the means at their disposal to convert needy people to their own religion.”

“Muslims generally are suspicious of the missionary zeal for conversion of the Christians.”

(c) Theologically, as the Muslims see it, the concept of Trinity of the Christians is incompatible with the concept of unity of God. Some Muslims have the idea that for the Christians Mary is one of the persons of the Trinity which they worship. The notions of the Trinity and the Incarnation smack of Hinduism — the multiplicity of gods. Jesus is only a prophet, but the Christians wrongly worship him as God. These same ideas are corroborated by what Muslims think Christians can learn from them — the worship of one God, the notion of the unity of God and the prophethood of Jesus.

“The whole concern (of the Muslims) is with the problem of Trinity which they consider alien to the spirit of *Tauhid*. Some Christian symbols also evoke hostile reaction as that of the sonship of Christ which is taken by them, though not in a literal sense, still as a form of anthropomorphism.”

The Muslims consider Christians as unbelievers. They think that Christians believe in three gods (Father, Son and Holy Ghost) Most educated Muslims think that Mary, the mother of Jesus, is also one of the three. Christians pray to Mary or Jesus, so the Father of Jesus is thrown into the background.”

“As a matter of fact, I have always felt that Christians are so close to Muslims except in one belief and that is ‘the unity of God’ which is the very first principle of Islam. Hope you will not mind my frankness. The conception that God became man has a resemblance with the conception of Hindus who see their God in different shapes and forms, say *gou mata* (the cow), Vishnu, Shiva, etc.”

“Muslims think that religiously the faith of the Christians is somewhat polytheistic.”

“The concept of the Trinity is misleading for Christians themselves.”

“Christians can learn from Muslims many things. First of all they can learn from Islam to believe in the unity of God and to give up idol worship.”

“Christians are believers in God and His son Jesus. Although Muslims too believe in Jesus they do not agree that he is the son of God, for God is neither born of anybody nor has given birth to anyone. All the prophets are mere messengers of God; so also is Jesus. But Christians argue that all blessings of God come through Jesus and he is the son of God, which in my opinion is not true.”

“From the Muslims Christians can learn to believe in Jesus as the messenger of God and not as son of God.”

In practice the Catholic worship with its many statues and pictures amounts to idolatry. The veneration given to the saints is so much that even God Himself could be envious of it. On the whole, Catholics give an impression that they take their religion lightly. Only once a week they go to Church, while Muslims pray five times a day. Of the values they can learn from Muslims, taking their religion more seriously is one. For example, from the observance of *Ramadan* by the Muslims they can learn to take their Lent more seriously.

“The use of statues, images, candlesticks and rosaries, etc., often takes such a form that cannot be called but sheer nonsense and idolatry. Saints are venerated in such a way that even God may feel envious of them.”

“From the Muslims Christians can learn their simple worship and undistracted devotion to one God.”

“Christians are not religious in the proper sense, i.e., ‘inwardly.’ Sometimes they do not show knowledge of their own tenets.”

“They take their religion rather lightly, e.g., the religiosity of the priests and nuns is far higher than the general public. It looks as though the common man thinks that it is not necessary to take his religion seriously or follow it strictly. It is enough if one attends the church on Sundays. The other religious duties are for the priests and nuns.”

“In general, Muslims have the idea that Christianity is but incomplete Islam. Islam is the perfection of both Judeism and Christianity, and the ultimate and the most perfect religion of mankind. The Christians have gone astray from the ‘real Christianity’ that was revealed and it is the Muslims who know the real Christianity.”

“The origin of Christianity is from the religion of Abraham, and Islam is the revival of that same religion of Abraham. From this point of view, to have idols of Jesus and Mary is against Christianity. Idol worship has nothing to do with Christianity. With the installing of idols in the churches, Christianity is going very close to idol worship.”

“The general idea of Muslims regarding Christians is that Christians were Muslims in the past and that the system of Christianity is changed now.”

“Jesus and the Bible is a milestone in the path of religion of God. The completion of this religion is Islam and Quran.”

“The orthodox Muslims believe that the Christians have corrupted their scriptures and even today they are not following their faith. The main point is that Muslims have their own Christianity without Christ as son of God, but with the Christ as the Prophet of mankind.”

The other negative elements expressed by our respondents are that in India Christianity is being Hinduized and thus is losing its identity. Christians are allies of the West and they are disliked because “USA which is a Christian power is helping Israel.” God’s revelation is unchangeable but Christianity goes on changing. Instead of changing himself, the Christian changes his religion to suit his life.

3. The People in the Church

(a) The ordinary Muslim does not seem to know much about the Church leadership (bishops, priests and sisters). However, those who have had the opportunity to come in contact with these had something to say about them. On the whole our respondents were impressed by their dedication and the sacrifices they make for their religion. However, praise and admiration for sisters was expressed much more frequently than for the priests or bishops.

“Church leadership and organization are held in high esteem by the Muslims. Sisters are a symbol of sacrifice.”

“The Church leadership has dedication and sense of service towards the community and human beings.”

“They (priests) try to live a life of dedication and service. Some of them have inculcated kindness and lack of self-interest.”

“Talking about the sisters, well they are a group of loving and devoted females. They are doing a great service by devoting their lives for the sake of the nation and I respect them for that.”

“I admire a particular sect of the Christians, i.e., the nuns. The tremendous work they have done in the field of education, medicine and social work. I admire them for having shed the social garb and pleasures to help the poor and the destitute. They have opened schools and colleges, hospitals and houses for retarded children.”

“Fathers and sisters are hardworking and resolute, and kind persons. Among them there are persons who have impressed me like anything. In my opinion it will not be an exaggeration to say that after Muslims, fathers and sisters make great sacrifices for religion.”

(b) Several of our respondents said that they admired the formation which the Christian priests receive. Some contrasted it with the what they thought inadequate formation of their own religious leaders.

“Muslims notice the difference between the Christian clergy and their own *maulavies* and *ulema*. Their *maulavies*, even after long training, know nothing about the ever-changing world. Every Muslim is seeing now with his physical eyes what a great service the Church is rendering to mankind through her bishops, priests and nuns.”

“The leadership of the Christians and their religion has always been in the hands of well-educated people, but Muslims have largely been handicapped in this respect, as their religious leadership has mostly remained in the hands of people who know nothing or practically very little beyond the nose of their own religion.”

(c) A few expressed admiration for the international order of the Church and for the office and person of the Pope.

“The Muslims greatly admire the international order of the Church of the Christians and lament that they themselves do not have any such thing. They feel that this international organization gives Christians many advantages, which Muslims cannot hope to have, as no one among the Muslim rulers of the world seems to be enthusiastic about creating a similar international organization for the Muslims of the world.”

“The personality of the Pope is much attractive if we see it in the light of administration (besides religion). The whole community is under one head and his representatives spread all over the globe and see the all ins and outs of the community.”

4. The Religious Impact of People in the Church

(a) However, the vast majority of our respondents said that their admiration for the priests and nuns was because of their efficiency, organizational skills, thirst for knowledge and not so much for their religiosity. Their lives had little or no religious impact on the lives of the people. Those who followed them did so because of some material gain.

“Though fathers and sisters are respected, and honored, they don't have any religious impact. The conversions they make are mere increase of numbers to Christianity.”

“As a matter of fact it is seriously felt that in real sense saintly life is not lead by sisters and fathers.”

“But sisters are doing nothing for the propagation of Christianity. Most of them are just serving as school teachers. They are not even introducing religion to their pupils. Probably for the fear of the so-called ‘secular’ government of the country.”

(b) A very large number of our respondents expressed disapproval of the celibate state of the priests and nuns. This is an unnatural state of life. Celibacy is seen as a part of renunciation and dedication for the purpose of organizational efficiency and not so much as a sign of man's intimate union with God. They think it is cruel to force sisters to remain celibate. Some expressed their disbelief that priests and nuns lead chaste lives. Others said that this practice should be discontinued.

“The Muslims wonder why the dogma of celibacy is so rigidly adhered to by the Christian priests which they consider to be unnatural.”

“The sisters do not get married, but for Muslims unless the girls are married, they do not have any place in Heaven.”

“To remain unmarried is unnatural, and leads to sin.”

“Muslims do not like the way sisters live. They think that to keep a woman from marrying is cruelty. If some woman prefers to serve humanity in a married state, that is better. If a Muslim comes to know that a particular woman is a spinster, then he tries to seduce her.”

(c) Quite a few of the respondents said that the image they have of the Christian priest is of a person living in comfort and luxury. People respected him because of his high standard of living. He takes his priestly life more as a profession rather than a vocation. The ease and luxury in which he lives is incompatible with his spiritual status. Regarding the sisters the respondents did not say that they lived in luxury, but that they were money-minded. Their schools cater to the richer classes of the society. This is incompatible with their ideal of service.

“Usually Muslims think that priests and bishops lead comfortable lives because they don't have to earn money.”

“Christian priests often take their job as ‘profession’ to earn money, rather than a religious function.”

“The priests and sisters have dedication to serve. The general feeling is that it is because of the financial resources and that the lives led by them are princely.”

“The other aspect that is also baffling is the life the priests lead with all comforts and luxuries of food, residence and modern amenities. But when men are out to capture other men to their faith, that should be through simplicity rather than by assurances of providing all complexities of life.”

“Some priests and nuns who run schools keep on taking money from students for admission and other occasions.”

“Unlike a *mulla*, the priest is better paid and has better living conditions. He commands respect because he maintains a certain standard of living. Moreover he is well-educated man.”

“Whatever is collected in the school goes to the Christian missionaries and that is not fair. There is a common proverb in our schools (even other communities say it) that: ‘Bees go after honey and sisters run for money.’ Already the fees of the mission schools are high and on the top of it all every time parents are bothered for donations.”

(d) A few referred to a certain decline of moral standard among the clergy.

“They (the priests) are not so respected as they used to be before because people are wondering whether they still lead a chaste life as before.”

(e) A few said that the motive of the service rendered by the sisters and priests is not clear. Hence suspicion arises in the minds of the people. Others attribute this service to the desire of converting or to some political motive. A few suggested that the priests and sisters should make their motives in rendering service known to the general public so that all suspicions may be laid to rest.

III. Factors Influencing Muslim Opinion of the Catholic Community

Our respondents were asked to indicate the three most important sources of knowledge from which they got their information regarding Christians and Christianity.

The most important source indicated was personal contacts; second, Muslim literature; third, secular press; and fourth, the *ulema* and other Muslim preachers.

The second and fourth sources taken together (that is, the Muslim literature and the *ulema* and other Muslim preachers) would outweigh even the first one, that is, personal contacts with Christians. This would indicate that most Muslims get their knowledge about Christianity (in India) from Muslim sources, that is, from Muslim literature and Muslim preachers.

Some of our respondents indicated that the orthodox Muslim *ulema* on the whole have a negative image of Christianity, and they would be an obstacle to Christian — Muslim dialogue.

IV. Discussion

We have presented objectively the salient features of the image Muslims have regarding Christians in India, both in its positive and negative aspects. It is not our intention here to refute or to call into question the objectivity of this image. The pertinent question is not whether this image is true or not, but how did Muslims get it and what has been the contribution of the Christians to its formation.

Doctrinal Reasons

Some of the fundamental doctrines of Islam could have contributed to the formation of this image:

— The stress on the unity of God (Q. 112) and the repudiation of any partnership with Him (Q. 4:171) go against the notion (wrongly understood) of the Holy Trinity of the Christians. The Quran strongly prohibits any images or pictorial representation of God.

— The belief in Muhammad being the “Seal of the Prophets” (Q. 33:40) would imply that Jesus is one of the many prophets and only a prophet.

— The sinlessness of man at birth and his capacity for unlimited moral and spiritual progress would imply a repudiation of the doctrine of original sin and of “monasticism” and celibacy.

— The equality and universal brotherhood of mankind, as taught by the Quran and the Muslims, would reject the indelible character of sacramental priesthood or the spiritual mediation of saints.

— The *purdha* system of Islam would reject dating, free mixing of sexes and any dress that would not cover the whole body.

— Quranic prescription regarding food and drink (Q. 2:173, 219) would consider eating pork or consuming liquor a big sin.

Historical Reasons

History seems to have its part in shaping the image Muslims have of Christians:

— Christianity came to several areas of India and Asia with the colonial powers, sometimes acting as the religious wing of these powers.

— In India Muslim rule was put to an end by the Christian colonial powers.

— Muslim countries of the Middle East have been long under the domination of the Christian colonial powers.

Hence the identification in the Muslim minds of Christianity with the West and their animosity towards it.

Sociological Reasons

There are also sociological factor contributing to this image:

— Not only the Muslims but also the other non-Christians of India consider Christians as lax in sexual morality and addicted to alcoholism. Consider, for example, the picture painted of the Indian Christians in Indian cinema and novels. One of the respondents said that one of the sources of her knowledge about Christianity was the cinema, and she mentioned in particular the movie "Julie."

— By and large, the Christian community in India has been more Western in its customs, norms and values than the other communities, so much so that the Indian mind, and not only the Muslim, identifies Christianity with the West.

— Those Catholics who are in institutions of education, such as schools and colleges and are in a position to observe comparatively the behavior of different religious groups in these institutions, find that in general Christian girls are less modest than the non-Christians.

— It is a fact that the Catholic Church is by and large controlled by the bishops and priests and gives the impression of being dominated by them. Because of this, to an outsider the bishops and priests may seem to be a special class within the Church.

— Muslims come to know of Christianity through Muslim sources. They have very little opportunity of knowing it from Christian sources. Hence their picture of it is bound to be distorted. (This is specially true regarding the beliefs of Christians)

V. Some Pastoral Guidelines

Since the Catholic community is called not only to be but also to appear to the world to be a community of faith, it should be sensitive to the image others⁸ have regarding her, and take it seriously in order to learn and improve her life so that she may more and more be the sign of God's love for the world. It would not be a proper reaction to say "they don't know" and just dismiss the whole affair.

It is encouraging to know that Muslims see us as a loving and serving community. The greatest commandment we have is to love. Therefore, we should rejoice and be thankful to God that others see us practicing this commandment and see in us its effects — in peace, cheerfulness and joy. This point could be communicated to the Christian community so that they may thank God for it and be strengthened in their Christian vocation.

Regarding the negative elements of the image, we are not to be perturbed or disturbed. The theological, historical and sociological background of the Muslims and the sources from which they get their knowledge regarding Christianity explain to a large extent these negative elements. However, certain steps seem to be necessary in order to face the situation.

(a) Regarding the theological misunderstandings that Muslims have about Christianity:

— These should be known by every priest and even layman, especially in those areas where Christians live in contact with Muslims. In this context, Christians should be taught how to present their faith to the Muslims, taking into consideration the prejudices they have regarding the Trinity, Jesus Christ, the Bible, etc. This should form a necessary part of the seminary training.

— There should be a program through the mass media aimed at removing the prejudices Muslims have regarding Christians, e.g., to inform them that Christians too believe in one God, the meaning of statues and pictures for Christians, etc.

— These prejudices of the Muslims should be taken into consideration in the formulation of Christian theology and Christian art and architecture of churches. The Church cannot be a closed society. Our theological language, our art and architecture, our mode of worship,

as far as possible should not scandalize others; rather it should bring them nearer to Christ. Even till today in some diocese the directives after the Vatican II regarding the preservation of the Eucharist in a separate chapel and not having saints' statues bigger in size than the statue of Christ or of the crucifix, etc., do not seem to have been accepted.

— For obvious reasons these theological prejudices of the Muslims should be taken into consideration in dialogue with them, in evangelization and in dealing pastorally with converts from Islam.

(b) Regarding the negative image concerning laxity in morality regarding sexual matters and modesty:

— We should realize that this is a big obstacle in the efforts of evangelization, dialogue and Christian witness.

— Our people could be encouraged to adopt Oriental and Indian culture whenever it is more Christian. Christians too tend to connect their faith with the West and adopt Western manners which sometimes are less Christian, e.g., in North India it is the custom both among the Muslims and the Hindus that when a girl attains the age of puberty, she begins to dress in such a way that she covers her bosom and her legs down to the ankles. Hence *salvar-kamis* is the most popular dress. Accordingly the vast majority of the non-Christian schools adopt this dress as their uniform. But invariably Catholic convent schools adopt the uniform of a blouse and a short skirt for their school. This uniform hurts the feelings of modesty of Muslims and Hindus because in this way neither the bosom of the girl is covered nor are the legs. In Aligarh and in other places in North India where I have made inquiries I have come to know that a number of parents come to the principals of the convent schools to request them to allow their girls in the schools to wear a more modest dress. In 1975 the Association of Muslim Educational societies in India wrote a letter addressed to all the Catholic bishops in India, requesting them to allow Muslim girls in Catholic schools to wear a more modest dress, pointing out that the uniforms imposed in these schools are not modest enough according to Islamic norms. It is difficult to understand why Catholic convent schools do not adopt the more modest local dress of *salvar-kamis* as their uniform and why they impose on the young girls an alien dress which their parents consider not modest enough.

— This negative image which the Muslims have should lead the Church to a self-examination and to adopt more modest norms of behavior in general.

(c) Concerning the image of power, luxury and money of the Church:

— This too is an obstacle for evangelization. Priests and nuns could project an image of being spiritual rather than busy with worldly matters.

— Can priests be mere managers of huge institutions or developmental projects? Is it not proper that we train and introduce laity to this role and keep priests for more spiritual ones?

— The knowledge of this negative image could lead us to a rediscovery of the value of poverty.

We have presented the Muslim perception of the Christian community in India, indicated some possible forces which may have shaped this perception and drawn some pastoral guidelines. Though our study does not cover all the aspects of the Christian life, yet it does touch upon the most important ones. Though the study is confined to India only, yet the results obtained can be generalized to other parts of Asia in so far as both the Muslim and Christian communities of these areas share in the same religious and social characteristics found in India. (The Quran and theology are the same for all Muslims.) However, some variations from area to area are possible, though the basic perception of the Muslims regarding Christians may be the same.

VI. Bibliography

Some literature concerning the traditional Muslim view of Christ and of Christianity, (compiled by Fr. C.W. Troll, S.J.)

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(A quite representative Muslim view of Islam's position on these central areas where there exist not rarely grave misunderstandings on the Christian side. The author is a traditionally trained Muslim theologian with a protracted experience of living in Asia and in Western societies.)

Ansari, F.R., *Islam and Christianity in the Modern World*. Karachi-33: The World Federation of Islamic Mission Centre. B-Block North Nazimabad, 1976.

(A good example of a traditional-minded, contemporary, missionary Muslim outlook on Christianity.)

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(A reliable and very readable booklet on Mary and her Son as a meeting point between Muslim and Christian believers.)

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(The original gospel (Injil) reconstructed by a contemporary Muslim. The way this has been attempted is highly revealing and instructive for the Christian reader.)