

How Can Interfaith Dialogue Support and Protect Places of Worship?

Protone Symposium on “Security in Prayer: Creating Safe Spaces for Faith and Prayer as Part of Living Religious Freedom”

*Hotel Aquino, Tagungszentrum Katholische Akademie
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Paul Weller, Cert Ed, MA, MPhil, PhD, DLitt

Emeritus Professor, University of Derby;

*Non-Stipendiary Research Fellow in Religion and Society, Regent’s Park College,
University of Oxford;*

Visiting Professor, Research Institute for Peace, Trust and Social Justice, Coventry University

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**INTERFAITH
HARMONY
WEEK**

1-7 February 2024



WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK

*Love of God
and Love of the Neighbour*



*Love of the Good
and Love of the Neighbour*

The Official UN Observance in the 1st Week of February

Originally proposed by King Abdullah II of Jordan at the UN in 2010.

United Nations General Assembly (resolution A/RES/65/5) adopted it.

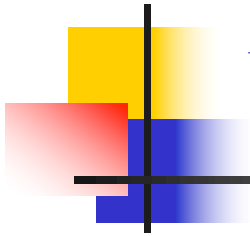
Governments, institutions and civil society called on to observe it by:

“Recognizing the imperative need for dialogue among different faiths and religions to enhance mutual understanding, harmony and cooperation among people, the General Assembly encourages all States to spread the message of interfaith harmony and goodwill in the world’s churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and other places of worship during that week, on a voluntary basis and according to their own religious traditions or convictions.”

<https://www.un.org/en/observances/interfaith-harmony-week>

*“Insiders or Outsiders? Religion(s), State(s) and Society:
Propositions for Europe”*

*Inaugural Lecture, Professor of Inter-Religious Relations,
8th November 2000*



Proposition 1

“European self-understandings which exclude people of other than Christian religious traditions, either by design or by default are, historically speaking, fundamentally distorted. Politically and religiously such self-understandings are dangerous and need to be challenged.”

“An alternative way forward is to work for the development of a European self-understanding in which:

- *the Muslim call to prayer is perceived to be as much a part of sound of Europe as that of Christian church bells;*
- *the Neasden Mandir of the Swaminarayan movement of Hinduism is accepted as being as of much cultural, architectural and tourist significance as the great cathedrals of England”*

Conference Title (1)

“Security in Prayer: Creating Safe Spaces for Faith and Prayer as Part of Living Religious Freedom”

For people of faith, the conference title has a *double sense* that reflects an *inherent tension* when dealing with the matter of security and places of worship, which tension is important to understand for effective partnership working between places of worship, authorities and security agencies:

- For believers, the “*security in prayer*” of the title relates in an ultimate sense to the fundamental confidence in the divine that believers affirm beyond any temporal aspects of their own personal lives and deaths.
- At the same time, for the religious freedom of the title to be *actualised beyond the individual* (for example in prayer) safe conditions are needed in which it can be practised together with other like-minded individuals.
- And in principle, an actualisation of the title’s “*living religious freedom*” (as something that is more than formalistic) should, negatively speaking, at the very least mean *not having to meet in secret* to be able to pray.

Conference Title (2)

“Security in Prayer: Creating Safe Spaces for Faith and Prayer as Part of Living Religious Freedom”

Generally speaking, one could also say that places of worship have both an *inward* and an *outward* meaning:

For most communities of faith, the *inward meaning* is of a place where individuals, families and wider communities of faith can feel “*at home*” within a particular religious tradition, or even a specific part of it.

For the wider society in which a place of worship of a particular religious traditions stands, its *outward meaning* is that those who use the place of worship have a belonging within the public sphere of the society.

For communities of faith of recent diaspora origins, *mediating between these inward and outward meanings* is the fact of having sufficiently invested (financially and emotionally) to have put down roots somewhere.



Can
Inter-Faith Dialogue
Protect and Support Places of Worship?
And, if So, How?

“Places of worship are ... highly significant buildings in terms of what they signify religiously by pointing to the sources and goals of their religious traditions; what they signify about the established presence and geographical belonging of their traditions of faith to the national and local society; and their role as actual or potential community resources within local neighbourhoods.”

P. Weller (1995), “The Changing Patterns of Worship Space Provision in Britain”, in the Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom, Places of Worship: The Practicalities and Politics of Sacred Space in Multi-Faith Britain, Inter Faith Network for the UK, London, 1995, pp. 4-16.

In asking if inter-faith dialogue “can” indeed offer anything (or not) to protect and support places of worship I would commend an 18.10.23 presentation by Mustafa Cenap Aydin from Protone’s Italian project partner organisation, Intituto Tevere, on “Places of Worship Between Dialogue and Security”, which is You Tube accessible at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEpCy8EdAbQ>

While most places of worship basically express the practice of only one religious tradition or group, it is important to acknowledge the existence of some that, in their planning and use, are *explicitly dialogical*, for example:

House of One, Berlin

<https://house-of-one.org/>



Haus Der Religionen/Dialogue der Kulturen, Bern

<https://haus-der-religionen.ch/news/>

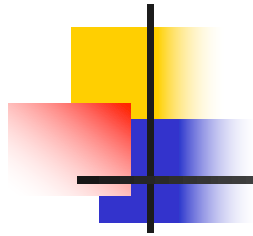


Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby

<https://multifaithcentre.org>



How Can Inter-Faith Dialogue Protect and Support Places of Worship?



Inter-faith dialogue that protects and supports places of worship is dialogue:

- **Of both word and/or deed**
- **In both bi-lateral and/or multi-lateral forms**
- **With both religious and/or civic content**

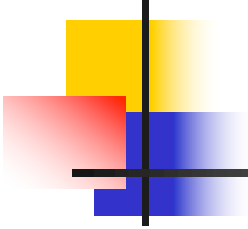
- **Practical exchange of experience in security measures**
For example, Jewish Community Security Trust and other faiths in the UK

- **Inter-faith dialogue practised as part of civic dialogue**
Creating and sustaining a wider positive security wider atmosphere

- **Cultivating relationships through regular mutual festival visiting**
Participant observation as relational groundwork for when a crisis comes

- **Doing public actions of solidarity in times of crisis**
Acts of public symbolism speak prophetically across and beyond groups

What in Particular Does Inter-Faith Dialogue Contribute to Protect and Support Places of Worship?

- 
- Referring to “sacred places” can remind society that not all value is financial
Inter-faith dialogue reminds us *people* are at heart of security issues
 - Agencies/technologies of security are vitally important but be disempowering
Inter-faith dialogue can *empower* communities in partnering with such

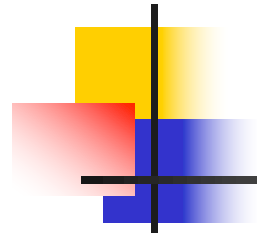
Chat GPT: (07.02.2024)

“How Can Inter Faith Dialogue Protect and Support Places of Worship?”

“In summary, interfaith dialogue can play a crucial role in protecting and supporting places of worship by fostering understanding, building networks of support, advocating for religious freedom, promoting peace and reconciliation, educating communities, and encouraging mutual aid and solidarity. By cultivating respect and cooperation among different religious groups, interfaith dialogue contributes to creating a more inclusive and harmonious society where all places of worship are valued and safeguarded.”

<https://chat.openai.com/c/28eee1bd-4f5b-474c-845c-7efb3ca98434>

Drawing Together Dialogical Resources to Protect and Support Places of Worship



Practical pointers for responding jointly to attacks on places of worship; working for calm in times of tension; and working to build and strengthen good inter faith relations.

Published by Inter Faith Network for the UK (IFN) in partnership with:

Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, UK Government
Home Office, UK Government
Crown Prosecution Service
National Police Chiefs' Council
National Fire Chiefs' Council

https://www.interfaith.org.uk/uploads/Looking_After_One_Another-The_safety_and_security_of_our_faith_communities.pdf

Scriptural Resonance Project

<https://www.scriptural-resonance.com/>

Tanakh, Jeremiah 33:3

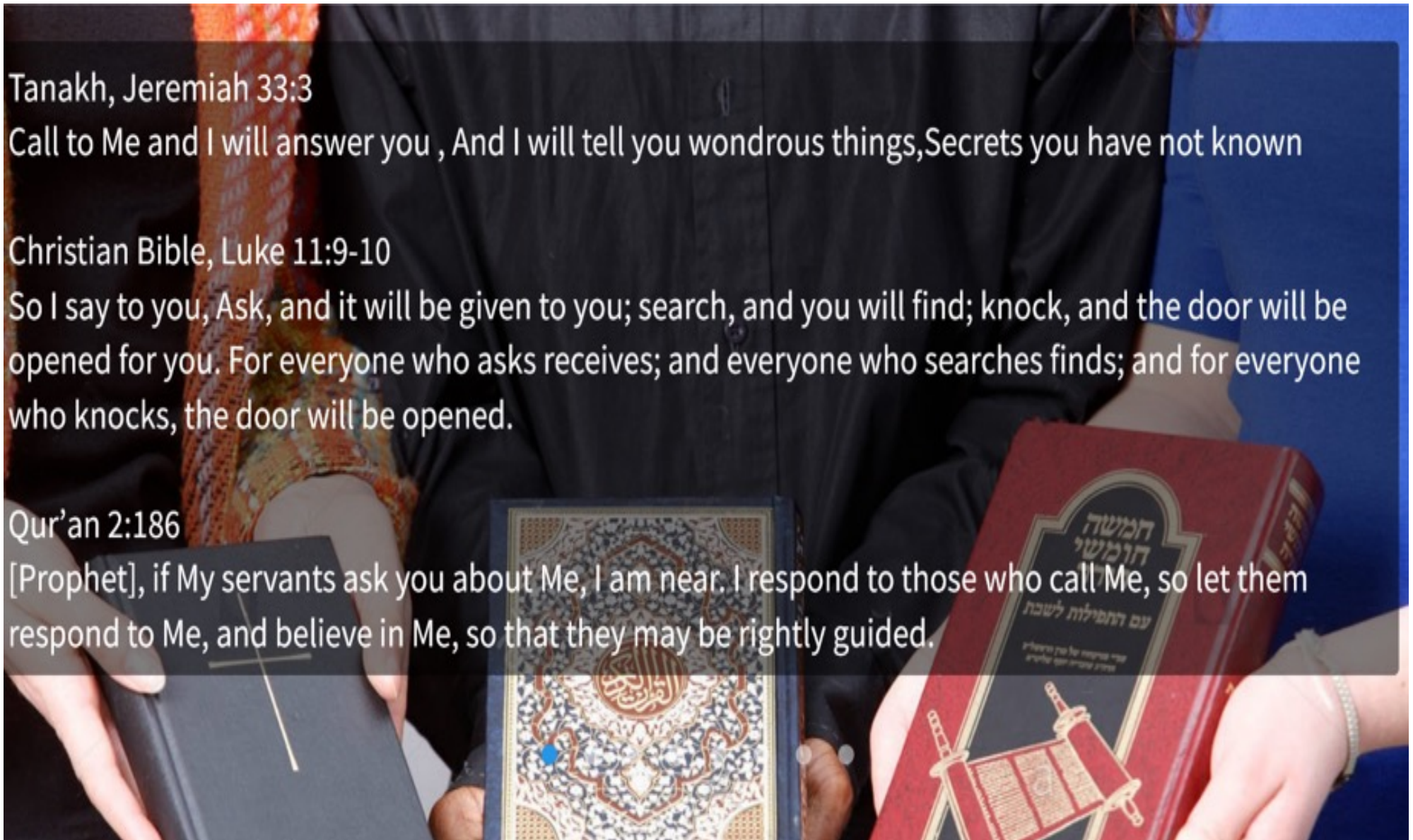
Call to Me and I will answer you , And I will tell you wondrous things,Secrets you have not known

Christian Bible, Luke 11:9-10

So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives; and everyone who searches finds; and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

Qur'an 2:186

[Prophet], if My servants ask you about Me, I am near. I respond to those who call Me, so let them respond to Me, and believe in Me, so that they may be rightly guided.





A Process for Protoné and for Places of Worship in Dialogue: A “We All, Talking Together About Us”

The historian of religion Wilfred Cantwell Smith identified as a process of engaging with the otherness of the other that culminates in a “we all” are talking with each other about “us”:

“The traditional form of Western scholarship in the study of other men’s religion was that of an impersonal presentation of an ‘it’.

The first great innovation in recent times has been the personalisation of the faiths observed, so that one finds a discussion of a ‘they’.

Presently the observer becomes personally involved, so that the situation is one of a ‘we’ talking about a ‘they’.

The next step is dialogue, where ‘we’ talk to ‘you’. If there is listening and mutuality, this may become that ‘we’ talk with ‘you’.

The culmination of this process is when ‘we all’ are talking with each other about ‘us’.”

CENTRE'S "GOLDEN RULE"



Listen to others as you
want them to listen to you

