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EDWIN, JOSEPH VICTOR, *A New Spirit in Christian–Muslim Relations in India. Three Jesuit Pioneers, Interfaith Dialogue and Relations*, ISPCK and HMI, Delhi 2021; pp. 316. US\$ 17.00. ISBN 978-9390569267.

J. Victor Edwin's (= JVE's) book presents us three pioneers of Christian–Muslim dialogue, all three from a Western background, all scholars, all born in the 20th century, all experienced in the Indian subcontinent, all Jesuits. They serve as “beautiful models for interfaith relations,” as JVE says, thus almost alluding to the Qur'an (p. 274, Q 33:21); but what is really going on in this book?

On a surface level, we meet three challenging figures, hear about their backgrounds and careers, their experiences and guiding ideas. That is interesting—and at the same time enjoyable to read.

But what is really going on in the book? We are not only meeting “models” in the sense of a series of examples to orient and encourage us, but also: we are encountering three different “models,” that is, three different paradigms, styles, agendas of Christian–Muslim relating.

Asking again, one last time, what is really going on in the book, I think it is fair to say: in the light of these three studies on these three men, JVE is doing theology, he is offering insight, teaching and arguments on key topics in Muslim–Christian dialogue. So the practitioners serve as occasions for theory, too.

Before presenting his fellow Jesuits, however, JVE offers us a short and helpful history of Christian–Muslim encounters. That backdrop allows us to understand his evaluations of the three forerunners. Already in that short history, our author follows the example of Pope Francis in the attitude which the Pontiff himself calls “parrhēsia” (EvGaud 259). I think, the word expresses well what JVE is doing. Parrhēsia means, literally, “to say the whole (truth),” and therefore it is also a word for “courage,” the courage of apostolic witnessing. Why am I reminded of parrhēsia when reading this book? Because JVE tries to say the whole truth; by not avoiding the difficult and possibly dividing themes (more on this, below), and also by speaking self-critically. For example, the 16th century Jesuits at Mughal emperor Akbar’s court are not a source of pride for JVE; they are not a “beautiful model” for him; for they “started off with polemics” (p. 25; sharing Fr. Paul Jackson’s view, p. 26).

The attitude of parrhēsia (“saying it all”) does not, however, lead JVE to flood us with facts and texts without structure. In his book, he works with an exemplary pedagogy: he highlights key points, spots the most striking insights of his figures and he arranges them with clarity.

Let us turn now to the three pioneers and see what we learn about them and from them. The first is Belgian: Fr. Victor Courtois (1907–1960). A striking insight made by Fr. Courtois is the following: he does not want to content himself with tolerance between Christians and Muslims; rather, he calls for “proactive coexistence” (p. 66): esteem, love. Why not go all the way from ‘tolerance towards the other’ to ‘interest in the other’? In fact, the author discovered such an attitude in the Belgian Jesuit: “the openness of Courtois to learn from Muslims and their understanding of Muhammad” (pp. 85f.).

Dr. Edwin’s parrhēsia also pinpoints problematic formulations in his authors and quotes them; but he gives explanations of what at first sight might create pernicious misunderstandings. I found myself convinced by JVE’s explanations. One such difficult line is Fr. Courtois’ hope to live, as he said, with Muslims, as “one family under the leadership of Jesus Son of Mary” (p. 66). JVE points out that in this very formula we have an indication that Fr. Courtois was neither trying nor hoping to make Muslims like ourselves; after all, he used Jesus’ Qur’anic title “Son of Mary.” One might add that he does not say “under the leadership of the Pope” but “of Jesus.” So, what we can learn from this is that conversion is not what Christians want to bring about among Muslims, but conversion is the work of the Spirit of Christ, necessary for all of us, also for Christians: to be at last truly led by Christ.

Now, let us turn to the second pioneer presented by JVE, namely, Fr. Christian W. Troll. Every line of what JVE writes is worth reading; let me just exemplify here, while reviewing the chapter, what I mentioned before as the book’s undercurrent: JVE

presents Christian Troll's views and thus seizes the occasion to tackle fundamental theological puzzles.

In this, JVE includes advice to people who are engaged in Christian–Muslim encounter. So, he reminds us that Fr. Troll reads the Qur'an and the Bible together with non-Christians. When JVE calls this "Scriptural Reasoning" (p. 149), one might observe that this is not Fr. Troll's own terminology; but it is a way of JVE to advertise such projects. Also, when JVE points out that Troll's greatest hope lies in "re-interpreting Islam" (161), we note an ambiguity. First of all, this should not be understood as the claim that people such as Professor Troll themselves were "re-interpreting" Islam. The hope of "re-interpreting" Islam is looking for Muslims, of course, who find new ways of understanding their scripture and history. Still, "re-interpreting" is open to misconceptions. Faithful Muslims want to be faithful to the Qur'an rather than choose their own interpretation. One needs to point out, therefore, that "interpretation" does not mean "change the meaning of what is clearly said in the text." Rather, interpretation does automatically happen in all usages of the Qur'an. Islamist, literalist and non-historical attempts at reading, understanding and implementing the Qur'an interpret just as much as contextualizers, updaters and modernists do. So, those faithful-to-the-Qur'an Muslims who reflect on interpretation do not necessarily re-interpret the Qur'an in the sense of disloyally deviating from its original message or creating their own private Islam.

The last pioneer to be presented is the Australian Jesuit Paul Jackson (1937–2020), whose great discovery and life-long interlocutor (so to speak) was the 14th century mystic, namely, Sharafuddin Maneri. Fr. Jackson famously made accessible and understandable that master by translating his teaching—the "Letters"—into English. JVE finds much congeniality in Jackson and Maneri, and Fr. Jackson quite expressly said that he wanted to listen to Muslims much more than speak to them (p. 295). So it is appropriate that JVE makes the readers listen to Jackson through his great ancient interlocutor Maneri, and vice versa.

I would like to raise one point of discussion. Let me start from an abstract corner: I do not think that the following argument, quoted from Troll (p. 169), holds: "If one admits the creation of the world by God, then one must also admit the incarnation." This argument follows a classical Arab-Christian apologetic line: God is Bestower of Good, so he has to bestow Himself, in His Son. Two objections are in place: one, the argument draws a conclusion from a concept ("Bestower") to what God "has to" do; and secondly, "bestowing" is not even the most obvious understanding of creation. One might, rather, understand creation as God's allowing for beings to exist which are not God. What is then professed about God by acknowledging Him as Creator? The answer is: God loving otherness.

Now from this rather speculative angle to my final question. Regularly, JVE praises those pioneers of dialogue who try to "discover not what divides, but what unites" (pp. 51, 59, 65, 104, 271). Underlying this may be an implication which could be explicated thus: 'if we are not of one conviction, then we are divided; then, our co-existence is in danger, our society might fall apart, the laws that apply in the state where we live might no longer protect me—because I am different.' Why would difference divide? If a state does not grant full rights to all because of different convictions, its legal framework is not in accordance with human rights. If a society does not equally respect

people who do not share the majority view (religion or ideology), it is intolerant! We need to work for constitutions and societies in which we can be citizens in diversity and then hopefully “friends in difference”; in which otherness is seen as inspiring; in which mutual “purification and enrichment” is possible; in which even conflicting beliefs—that is, religions, convictions and also unbelief—come together in ever new debates on how to shape this world and walk together toward the city of humanity (Pope Francis, Cairo, 2017).

JVE’s new book is most inspiring and can be used well as a textbook for theological courses, due to the importance of its content, the liveliness of its method, the precision of its language and the clarity of its presentation.

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