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## A HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE MOST IMPORTANT JESUIT VOICES IN CHRISTIAN MUSLIM DIALOGUE IN THE SUB CONTINENT SINCE 1940

### **Abstract**

Jesuits Victor Courtois, Christian W Troll and Paul Jackson have triggered a new departure in Christian-Muslim relations in India. This departure came about when they disengaged themselves from the polemics and debates of the past and reached/reach out to Muslims loving and respecting them and their religious convictions and gaining a deep knowledge of the intellectual and spiritual riches of Indian Muslims. These Jesuits' lives are marked with a new spirit of Christian-Muslim relations when they ventured to build bridges between Christians and Muslims without ever losing their identity as Christians. The significance of their life and work emerges from the high level of integration they have attained in living as witnesses amidst Muslims. It is no exaggeration to say that their life was/is challenged and shaped by both their faith and the Islamic faith. The vistas they opened up for Christian-Muslim relations in India are in coherence with the teachings of the Church.

Courtois recognized first, that the Indian Church is failing in her responsibility by neglecting the vast number of Muslims of India. He strongly felt that Christians should reach out to 'Muslims NOT as adversaries but as brothers [and sisters]'. Secondly, the Church in her relationship with Islam can share the riches of her faith and receive from the rich wisdom and spirituality of Islam in order to grow together. Thus the overarching concern of Courtois was to introduce positive methodology in Church's relations with Muslims. In order to achieve this, first, Courtois upturned the sense of superiority that marked the Christian approach towards Muslims and introduced a sense of equality that prevails among the children of a family with God as their Father. Thus the 'family motif' is at the heart of his work. This motif expressed his respect for the religious conviction of the other. Members of one family do not reject one another for divergent views. He envisioned a joint family in which Muslims and Christians would live as brothers and sisters with God as their Father.

He highlighted the common features of their faith and emphasized that these common features bring them closer together and to the heart of Jesus. Thus Courtois' work signifies a major watershed in the attitude of the Catholic Church in India towards the adherents of Islam. Courtois emphasised that deep knowledge of Islam and sincere love for Muslims should be the two indispensable qualities for Christian to witness to their faith among Muslims.

Troll discerned diligently the ways of God in the life of the Church and in the lives of Muslims, their cultures, and their faith. Discernment is an important tool for any serious engagement with people of other religions. Troll uses this tool very conscientiously in his erudite academic pursuits as well as in personal interactions with Muslim believers. Secondly, he developed longstanding friendships with many Muslims. Thirdly, he held differences at the normative/doctrinal level should be carefully recognized and affirmed. Fourthly, he is always aware of being sent by the Church for the ministry of dialogue with Muslims. Troll builds his dialogical efforts firmly on the anthropological and theological foundations that Catholic theology, especially the Vatican II and post-Councilar documents which provide for religious conversation with people of other religious persuasions and especially with Muslims.

Jackson's dialogical journey could be mapped in the following way: as a young man, Jackson wanted to *write something meaningful* for the other. One could term this as his original inspiration. It is fascinating to find God fulfils this *original inspiration* of Jackson in ways that Jackson did not expect. God *called* him for a mission in the fold of the Society of Jesus. God *surprised* him with a missionary vocation, then *inspired* him to accept a special call to enter into the world of Islam, then *astonished* him with the deep spirituality of Sufi saint Maneri, then *guided* him to make the hidden treasure of Muslim Sufi spirituality available to a wider world, *endeared* him to many Muslims in their homes and religious institutions, *led* him to continue to contribute for the mutual understanding between Christians and Muslims. Put simply, God is at work! Jackson with his whole heart and mind participates in the mission of God. This mission, Jackson as a Jesuit understands in the light of the mission of Christ. Finally it should be said that Victor Courtois, Christian W Troll and Paul Jackson have shown the way to build bridges between the followers of these two religions and to live in harmony and peace and contribute to a harmonious nation.