Muslim-Christian Relations in the Midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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In the spring of 2020, the world shut down. Due to concerns over the continual and unchecked spread of the novel coronavirus COVID-19, countries restricted the movements of their citizens, and international or regional travel was halted or curtailed. In Italy, the entire population of 60 million people were ordered into a lockdown. In Spain, 47 million were kept in their apartments and homes except to go to the market to retrieve necessary food or medical supplies. Other countries, such as the United States, instituted social distancing measures and began testing for the virus but were slow to institute contact tracing, and never ordered a nation-wide lockdown, leaving decisions to state governors. Hospital systems were overrun as patients exhibiting symptoms or who had tested positive lined the hallways because there was no longer room to provide everyone adequate care. The president of Brazil, one of the hardest hit nations, refused to support any response to the national health care crisis or create a national plan. In India, those who died were quickly removed, stacked in portable morgues, buried in mass grave sites, or burned in pyres without family to see, witness, or care for the remains of their loved ones.

While to date have been higher death tolls in other pandemics in memory, including the HIV/AIDS virus, the world has not seen a virus spread this quickly since the 1918 influenza, which affected half the world’s population at that time. It remains to be seen how this pandemic will affect the ongoing psyche and mental health of humanity. While COVID-19 has truly been a world-wide event, it has affected different countries and populations in different ways.

1 Jason Horowitz, “Italy Announces Restrictions Over Entire Country in Attempt to Halt Coronavirus,” New York Times, March 20, 2021 accessed June 26, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/09/world/europe/italy-lockdown-coronavirus.html.

2 Pamela Rolfe and Loveday Davis, “Spain goes on nationwide lockdown as coronavirus cases surge,” Washington Post, March 14, 2020, accessed June 26, 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/coronavirus-spain-nationwide-lockdown/2020/03/14/3bec8690-6619-11ea-8a8e-5c5336b32760_story.html.

3 Rebecca L. Haffajee, Michelle M. Mello, “Thinking Globally, Acting Locally - The U.S. Response to Covid-19,” New England Journal of Medicine 2020 May 28; 382(22): e75, accessed July 19, 2021.

4 “Covid: Brazil hits 500,000 deaths amid ‘critical’ situation,” BBC News, June 21, 2021, accessed June 26, 2021. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-57541794.

5 NPR, “India’s Pandemic Death Toll Estimated At About 4 Million: 10 Times The Official Count,” (July 20, 2021), accessed August 28, 2021, https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2021/07/20/1018438334/indias-pandemic-death-toll-estimated-at-about-4-million-10-times-the-official-co.
The disruption of life around the world unmasked and revealed in certain areas the latent interracial, interethnic, and interreligious tensions and disparities that had come to be the status quo.

On May 25, 2020 in the United States, the world witnessed with horror the murder of George Floyd by a police officer through the cell phone recording of a passer-by. This callous act of police brutality sparked protests across the United States and galvanized many to speak and act toward racial justice. The hard work of African American activists and their allies culminated one year later in the official recognition by the U.S. government of Juneteenth as a national holiday. While many in the African American community celebrated this commemoration of the final notification of the freedom of enslaved peoples in the disestablished Confederate States of America in 1865, most of the country has largely ignored this event. The tragic event of George Floyd’s death ultimately created a new national conversation about racial injustice and compelled the recognition that the institution of chattel slavery is not forgotten or over for African Americans and the country as a whole. “Reparations” and “systemic racism” were on the table for discussion. The outcome of these public debates remains to be seen.

In the summer of 2020, Dr. Kameelah Rashad and Dr. Shawn Bedaiko commenced the Black Covid Research Project to assess the effects of COVID-19 on Black communities in America. The survey was administered to 845 Black Muslims and Christians across the country to assess what had already been called “a pandemic within a pandemic.” The project provided an important view into the intersectionality of Black Muslim and Christian existence and identity in 21st century America. The respondents self-identified as Black: African American, African, Caribbean, Afro-Latinx, Afro-Arab, or multi-ethnic mix of these categories. In addition, those surveyed described themselves within a particular religious tradition or no-tradition. Thirty-seven percent (37%) self-identified as Muslims and forty percent (40%) as Christian. The remainder indicated that they are Jewish, Buddhist, African Traditional Religionist, or no religious tradition. The survey confirmed what other literature has put forward, that Black Americans suffer from a pandemic within a pandemic, Systemic racism supports the unequal distribution and access of health care, so that Black Americans suffer higher mortality rates than any other racial or ethnic group in the United States.

This statistical reality has uncovered what has been hidden to dominant white culture but plainly evident to Black Americans for centuries. American systemic racism and white nationalism have a cumulative impact on all areas of life and COVID-19 has similarly become intermeshed with those inequities, creating further stress, anxiety, fear, and depression.

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6 Annie Karni and Luke Broadwater, “Biden Signs Law Making Juneteenth a Federal Holiday,” *New York Times*, June 17, 2021, accessed July 19, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/17/us/politics/juneteenth-holiday-biden.html.

7 Kameelah Mu’min Rashad, Shawn Bedaiko, and Abdul-Malik Merchant, “Impact of Covid-19 on Black Communities: Findings from a national survey,” (2021), accessed August 24, 2021, https://www.muslimness.com/black covid survey.

8 APM Research Lab, “The Color of Coronavirus: COVID-19 deaths by race and ethnicity in the U.S.,” (March 5, 2020), accessed August 24, 2021, https://www.apmresearchlab.org/covid/deaths-by-race
addition, Black Muslims feel the effects of two types of cultural bias. First, they suffer from the phenomenon of “intersectional invisibility.” That is, there have been assumptions that all Black Americans are Christian, and that all Muslims are Arab or South Asian. Thus, Black Muslim identity has been suppressed in the public eye, leading to additional racial trauma, a “social toxicity” that infects and diminishes success in the family, school, and work place. Second, Black Muslim Americans, whether they are African American, African, or Afro-Caribbean, experience an additional collective trauma, whether seen or unseen. They suffer from the anti-Muslim bigotry and violence directed against Muslim communities.

Rashad and Bedaiko’s survey indicates that in the face of two pandemics, many Muslim and Christian Black Americans find solace in their faith and in their racial identity – being Black. Individual respondents note the importance of believing in God/Allah as the supreme protector who provides support and strength to overcome social, political, economic, emotional, and physical stressors. In addition, respondents overwhelmingly found solidarity in the Black experience, whether Christian or Muslim. Rashad and Bedaiko’s interviews with Black Muslims and Christians reveal the common spiritual needs of patients and their families who look to God for comfort and sustenance in a society and at a time in which the disparity of health care resources for the Black community writ large has been unmasked. There is, of course, a long tradition of African American spiritual resistance to oppression and racism, going back to the institution of slavery. The spirituals, the call and response in sermons, the ecstatic prayers, all performed in community, have provided meaning and given voice to the experience. Now there is another layer of prejudice with which to deal, as the data of inequitable infections, death rates, and distribution of vaccines have laid bare the reality of systemic racism in America.

In other parts of the world, latent or existing tensions between various ethnic and religious communities were also uncovered by COVID-19. The ubiquitous sectarian challenges in Lebanon, for example, hindered any national health care efforts, and the dysfunctional and corrupt ruling elites there were not likely to solve the ongoing pandemic of sectarianism, putting all of the nation’s citizens at risk. The explosion at the Beirut Port in August 2020 was a devastating sign and reminder that there could be no national solution to a health care crisis caused by COVID-19 while sectarian leaders continue to function as oligarchs. In Israel and Palestine, the pandemic underlined not only the ongoing political conflict over occupation and human rights, but also highlighted how the current status quo continues to support inequities of access to land and water, a disparity that extends to health care at this critical juncture. In the West Bank and Gaza strip, vaccines were unavailable to Palestinians while Israel proceeded with astonishing speed to vaccinate their citizenry.

9 Valerie Purdie-Greenaway and Richard Eibach, “Intersectional Invisibility: The Distinctive Advantages and Disadvantages of Multiple Subordinate-Group Identities, Sex Roles 59 (2008): 377-391.
10 Rashad, as cited in Jim Garabino, “The Challenge of Parenting in a Socially Toxic Environment,” Helping Families Change Conference 2013, https://helpingfamilieschange.org/garbarino-takes-on-social-toxicity/, accessed August 26, 2021.
11 Reality Check, “Covid-19: Palestinians lag behind in vaccine efforts as infections rise,” BBC News, March 20, 2021, accessed June 26, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/55800921.
Worldwide, the pandemic has made horribly obvious what was already known, that there is a global inequity of resources and access to adequate health care. While countries like the United States purchased hundreds of millions of doses early on for its citizens, other countries had little ability to finance a supply for their citizens. The WHO argued for an international rollout of the vaccines, but this appeal fell on deaf ears. Many countries looked to India to provide cheaper vaccines that were available – that is, until India itself was ravaged by the virus, paralyzing the country.12

The Effect of the Lock-Down on the Practice of Religion

The global pandemic has affected every aspect of human society. The lockdowns and social distancing measures put in place by governments and communities affected economies, as restaurants, theaters, and other public areas became off limits. Business supply chains were suddenly interrupted because factory workers could no longer safely travel to work, and the movement of goods was slowed by the drastic curtailment of air and sea travel. Supply chains were even further disrupted by the blockage of the Suez Canal for six days in March 2020 by a run-aground cargo vessel.13

Schools were closed and children sent home to learn remotely, through whatever resources their teachers could provide and whatever opportunities to access online learning students had or did not have in their homes. While resource-rich communities were able to provide online education, even if it was haphazardly developed or delivered, millions of children around the globe who had no access or poor internet infrastructure fell even further behind. For many in the early days of the pandemic, hastily constructed packets of worksheets became the only method of providing some form of instruction, if even that.

Religious communities, too, stopped gathering together in person for worship and outreach activities. In what has been a world-changing experience, adherents of all religious faiths were ordered by their governments to shut down their public meetings, and were warned by their health-care officials that continuing to perform their most sacred duties of corporate worship and prayer would cause irreparable harm to those believers who sought to collectively pray for and appeal for healing in the world. In an unprecedented year, the public Easter celebrations in Rome and Jerusalem and international travel to Mecca for the Hajj were all canceled. Christians from liturgical traditions were no longer able to participate in the most sacred sacrament of their faith, the Eucharist. The important expression of gathering to sing praises was deemed dangerous, as it would magnify the spread of the virus. Muslim worshippers, normally standing shoulder to shoulder for Jumah prayer, were kept from their musallas and forced to pray alone. And, during the Holy Month of Ramadan, Muslim communities were not able to gather but had to break the fast only with family, or with others

12 Alexander Smith, “Covid-19: How India’s crisis is inflaming global vaccine inequality,” NBC News, April 30, 2021, accessed June 26, 2021, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/covid-19-how-india-s-crisis-inflaming-global-vaccine-inequality-n1265968.
13 BBC News, “Egypt’s Suez Canal blocked by huge container ship,” March 24, 2020, accessed June 26, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-56505413.
synchronously online. Probably most injurious to the communal psyche, however, religious communities were no longer able to gather together to mark the important moments of life through ritual – the births, the weddings, and the funerals. This disruption has had a profound impact on the embodied performance of religion, and on spiritual life, an effect which has yet to be fully understood.14

The dramatic and shocking halt to these public spiritual activities created a crisis for religious observance, regardless of one’s tradition, theology, or actual practices. Believers of all religions were united by their sudden inability to gather in community and practice the life-giving aspects of religion that provide support, guidance, and meaning to life in public. This sudden withdrawal of spiritual resources required religious communities around the world to alter their time-honored method of embodied worship, and if possible, to gather virtually, whether through conference phone calls, recorded and distributed digital videos on YouTube or other platforms, or live-streamed and Zoomed worship services and activities. In addition to worship or prayer, other aspects of communal life were transformed. Food pantries, homeless shelters, children and youth programs, and a variety of other social and justice activities were stopped or severely curtailed when people realized that the direct contact with others was another opportunity for infection. Yet, many communities figured out how to continue providing services to those in need, an important aspect of living out their beliefs. In some instances, however, religious communities disavowed and disobeyed the orders to halt public gatherings for worship. There were those who refused to comply with the public safety orders out of contempt for their governments’ overreach in telling them how to practice their God-given right to the freedom of worship. Others continued to gather and worship in public because there was simply a lack of information about or belief in the seriousness of the contagion at hand.

As these religious and spiritual activities were challenged, we wondered how the global pandemic of COVID-19 would affect not only the ongoing practice of religion but also relations between religious communities. While religious believers struggled to find novel ways to continue practicing their own faith, what about those who were engaged in interreligious work and relationships, specifically Muslims and Christians?

The 2021 Luce-Hartford Conference on Christian-Muslim Relations

Since 2017, the Duncan Black Macdonald Center at Hartford International University (previously Hartford Seminary) has sponsored a conference on Christian-Muslim relations thanks

14 For example, see “More Americans Than People in Other Advanced Economies Say COVID-19 Has Strengthened Religious Faith,” Pew Research Center, January 27, 2021, accessed June 26, 2021, https://www.pewforum.org/2021/01/27/more-americans-than-people-in-other-advanced-economies-say-covid-19-has-strengthened-religious-faith/. The current EPIC project at the Hartford Institute for Religion Research is researching an aspect of this among Christian congregations and plans to broaden the study to examine other religious communities. See https://www.covidreligionresearch.org/about/overview/, accessed August 31, 2021.
to a generous grant from the Henry Luce Foundation. The Luce-Hartford Conferences are intended to provide an opportunity for religious leaders, practitioners, and academic scholars from religious communities to examine and reflect on a topic, and to offer up practical opportunities for engagement in the public sphere based upon one’s own spiritual, scriptural, and theological resources. The topics of the previous conferences reflected current ethical, moral, and spiritual issues and challenges facing Muslims and Christians as communities. Responding to the Muslim ban of the Trump administration and the tragedies of the Syrian Civil War, the first conference focused on forced migration and the refugee crisis. In 2018, the topic addressed was the environmental crisis. In 2019, the conference considered African American Muslim and Christian relations. The 2020 conference, which commemorated the 19th amendment granting women the right to vote in the United States in 1920, celebrated the scholarship and leadership of women in religious communities and the academy. Like so many other meetings, the Luce-Hartford Conference was forced online that year. And, as other organizations found, while live online formats may have disrupted normal patterns, moving online allowed people who would not normally have attended in person to participate. Suddenly, the in-person conference held on the campus of Hartford International University became a live Zoom webinar and Facebook live event, drawing participants from around the world.15

In the midst of the tumultuous pandemic year of 2020, it was decided to put out a call for papers for the 2021 Luce-Hartford Conference and focus on the pandemics. It was our intention to explore how COVID-19 had affected relations and activities between Muslims and Christians in various contexts that experience ongoing interracial, interethnic, or interreligious social pandemics. How did the ongoing pandemic of racism in the United States affect relations during the health care pandemic of the coronavirus? In other places where there was a history of ongoing Christian-Muslim tensions, how did the pandemic affect those relationships? Did the global health care pandemic provide opportunities for strengthening or stifling interreligious interactions?

The articles collected in this edition of *The Muslim World* are some of those presented at the conference. They represent Muslim and Christian religious leaders and practitioners, as well as several scholars who are engaged in academic research. Some of the articles included a report on the activities undertaken and lessons learned from on-the-ground interfaith dialogue activities. Others, submitted by researchers, reflect a more academic style and intent. Because of this variety, we have tried to maintain as much of the original contributors’ distinctive presentations, while adding citations and references where appropriate and helpful to the readers. In many ways, the popular style of writing and reporting mixed with academic research reflects the general experience of the Luce-Hartford Conferences. From the very beginning, the conference was envisioned as a place where religious leaders and academic scholars within religious communities could share their perspectives with an audience engaged in both the practice of interreligious dialogue and relationships within organizations and religious communities, and the ongoing academic research on Muslim-Christian

15 For further information on the conferences see https://www.hartfordinternational.edu/religion-research/macdonald-center/conferences, accessed June 27, 2021.
relations. This mix of insights from the scholar and practitioner perspectives is, in the end, typical of Hartford International University.

North American Muslim-Christian Relations

The first article in this edition begins where the COVID-19 virus has led us, into hospitals, ICU wards, and morgues. The onset of the virus in the winter of 2020 prompted a crisis in the healthcare system in North America. By the time patients were admitted into the hospitals doctors struggled to keep their patients alive, but many died, due to apparent inexperience with treating this disease. Most hospitals were overwhelmed, and instituted policies that left many patients dying alone. These measures intersected with religious practice and racial identity.

Nazila Isgandarova, who teaches at Emmanuel College of Victoria University in the University of Toronto, leads off this edition with her research into health care services for minoritized Muslim communities. Isgandarova reflects on the dual realities of inhibited religious practice and underserved minority health needs, as exacerbated during the pandemic. Her article, “‘When Someone is Dying, We Prefer…’: COVID-19 and The Challenges to Muslim Health Care Choices” builds upon her previous research. The article documents many of the challenges faced by Muslim families in the United Kingdom and Sri Lanka when responding to mandatory COVID-19 protocols, including the prohibition of loved ones’ staying with the patient and providing spiritual care, and the mandatory cremation of those who have died from complications related to COVID-19. We have witnessed images and heard stories from across the world of those intubated dying alone, of the dead being carried away and stored in trailers, of bodies buried in mass graves or burned on pyres, all against the wishes of family who require and desire to enact religious practices for end-of-life care and the burial requirements of their loved one. Isgandarova outlines some of the advocacy work that has been pursued by Muslim and interfaith coalitions to respond to government orders for mandatory cremations and the rationing of health care resources for certain individuals with disabilities. As a clinician, she offers specific practical recommendations for those providing spiritual care and advising on end-of-life decisions related to COVID-19. Moreover, her research notes that Muslims and Christians share concerns in the spiritual care for the dying and the dead.

Whitney Bodman and Hurunnessa Fariad contribute two articles that discuss the ongoing work of religious organizations engaging in various kinds of dialogue – formal programs and informal friendships that are “creating space” during COVID-19. Bodman’s observations on Muslim Space in Texas offer an important overview of what is happening among many religious associations in North America, accelerated by the shutdowns of social and religious gatherings related to COVID-19. Gen Z’ers have demonstrated interest in seeking out meaning – ethical and spiritual – not only by establishing religious communities of their traditions, but also through the creation of “third spaces” that are radically inclusive. Bodman’s observations about this particular community and the halting of in-person gatherings may,
in many ways, generate even further opportunities for spiritual inter-faith activities among
digital natives.

Fariad’s reflections provide an important example of ongoing interfaith activity in
North America. Her article opens a window into a focused and intentional dialogue between
Muslims and Christians, who are committed both to their faith and to openness to learning
about the Other. This effort might seem to involve unlikely partners, Christian Evangelicals
and American Muslims. Fariad’s report points to an important historic shift toward new coa-
lations in the impetus for developing positive interfaith relations and programing; that had
previously been driven by mainline Protestant and Catholic initiatives in the 1970s and
1980s. For example, Irfan A. Omar and Kaitlyn C. Daly, in *Interfaith Engagement in
Milwaukee*, highlight the example of Catholic-Muslim relationships that grew out of the ini-
tiatives of the Vatican II Council and became an important foundation for interreligious rela-
tionships in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Omar and Daly’s work demonstrates how previous
initiatives grew from theological reflection on interfaith dialogue and were enacted in a par-
ticular context over a long period of time. Such commitments to interfaith friendship take
time. Faraid’s article reveals that this dedication toward friendship is being replicated in
seemingly unlikely places and among unlikely partners, in this case among American Sunnis
and Evangelicals. The question now is this: where embodied activity and relationships are
disrupted or when these relationships are begun during a health care crisis, will the friend-
ships survive the pandemic? From Fariad’s perspective, these virtual and socially distanced
activities have only inspired clearer commitments to create deeper interfaith friendships and
dialogue.

Reflecting a similar desire to find meaning between religions and ethnic communities, one
of the presentations at the conference came from the community theater group *Silk Road Rising,*
an “interfaith community-centered art-making and arts service organization rooted in Pan-Asian,
North African, and Muslim experiences.” The founders shared their experiences of two perfor-
manences that deal with Christian-Muslim relations, “Mosque Alert” and “Christmas Mubarak.”
These performances were originally developed to be experienced live and were then forced to go
online during the pandemic. The producers reflected at the conference, again, that the original
intention and ideas of embodied performance and interaction were challenged and reshaped for a
different audience and thus brought new opportunities for learning and engagement for people
not physically present. Their work points to the effectiveness in using art as a medium to create
opportunities for interracial, interethnic, and interreligious dialogue.

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16 See, for example, Thomas K. Johnson, “Evangelicals and Muslims: Not Brothers, But Best Friends,” *Christianity Today*, November 17, 2020, accessed July 5, 2021, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/november-web-only/christian-muslim-religious-freedom-wea-nahdlatul-ulama-nu.html. And, “Global Evangelical and Muslim Organizations Launch Major Joint Religious Freedom Project,” accessed July 5, 2021. https://baytarrahmah.org/2020_04_22_global-evangelical-and-muslim-organizations-launch-major-joint-religious-freedom-project/.

17 Irfan A. Omar and Kaitlyn C. Daly, eds., *Interfaith Engagement in Milwaukee: A Brief History of Christian-Muslim Dialogue* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2020).

18 See https://www.silkroadrising.org/our-company, accessed July 5, 2021.
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While there are those who work hard to create space for positive relationships between Christians and Muslims, others are working hard to create counter narratives of prejudice and exclusion. “Sectarian narratives,” which have always been there, have also gained a wider platform. Ever since ISIS began using social media as a tool to recruit and propagate its agenda, others have used the same methods. As more individuals, groups, and organizations moved online to share their experiences and voices, there has been a sea change, a proliferation in the plurality of digital voices. Many have recognized the importance and power of using Youtube or other platforms to share their positive messages and stories and so more effectively transmit a sense of hope for humanity and better relations between people. But at the same time, following on the practices of ISIS, others have used it to publish and support sectarian positions. Thus, those who have committed to working across religious and racial lines have had to develop strategies to counter negative messages with positive ones. Yet, it is still far too easy to yield these digital spaces to radicals, fundamentalists, white supremacists, and hatemongers.

Martin Accad and Chaden Hani, in their article detailing a case study in Lebanon, provide an evangelical Christian account of religious and social interfaith activities in response to the ongoing political sectarian struggles that have paralyzed the country. Accad and Hani present a Christian-focused theological reflection on the themes of empathy, trust, and respect. These themes became the basis for interreligious action in their communities. By creating a Friendship Network (shabakat as-sadaqa) among leaders from the various religious communities in Beirut and Tripoli they have sought to address economic and social challenges while engaging in interreligious dialogue. Through the use of scriptural reasoning sessions, religious leaders have been able to foster empathy, trust, and respect across sectarian lines. This transformational process led to practical applications, including the simultaneous distribution of food to low-income areas by leaders of different religious traditions. One brief but very impressive project was the creation of an interfaith prayer video that was disseminated throughout the country. Accad and Hani point out that religious leaders in Lebanon can provide influential examples not only to their respective communities, but also to their political leaders. They are important voices. By gathering these religious leaders into a Friendship Network to read scripture together and act in solidarity with those disenfranchised by the economic crisis and health care pandemic, they hoped to create an atmosphere of positive change to serve the common good.

Hans Harmakaputra and Lufthi Rahman examine the impact of the lockdowns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on Muslim and Christian relations in various locations within Indonesia. They noted that in several places in Indonesia where there has been a history of inter-faith tensions, individual cases indicate the care and intentional activity to nurture positive relations between Muslims and Christians. Like the other authors in these articles, Harmakautra and Rahman argue that the virtual spaces that have been opened up during the health care pandemic provide even more opportunities for cooperation that are not limited geographically. However, the most important finding in their qualitative research is that the virus has created empathy among many, shifting their approach toward interfaith relations from “toleration” of the Other to “solidarity” with the Other. As human beings, the virus cares not if we are Christian or Muslim.
The prohibition of in-person public worship created a new market for the distribution of religious ideas, not only locally but also internationally. As many communities went online to share and provide access to their services and worship, more and more people began not only “attending” their services, but also looking for other forms of worship, either out of curiosity or because they were dissatisfied with their own communal opportunities.

Allen Joseph’s article describes how some Indian Kerala Pentecostals have used Zoom and other social media networks as an avenue to spread fundamentalist and traditional views through transnational networks. As Kerala Indians have migrated to the United States, they, like other immigrant communities, have brought their traditions with them. The Kerala Pentecostals, like other African or South American Pentecostals, have jumped into the internet marketplace of spiritual ideas and have strengthened their own cultural identities. In this case, Joseph demonstrates that these Indian Pentecostal preachers have articulated an ideal minority identity to highlight their own calling as a blessed people while supporting Islamophobic rhetoric in sermons. Now, during the COVID-19 pandemic, this trend has deepened. As Joseph notes, it seems that exclusivists and fundamentalists have become even more adept and effective at using this medium and spreading their version of interreligious relations than have those who espouse positive relations between Muslim and Christians, in particular.

Concluding Thoughts

The articles in this edition of The Muslim World demonstrate that during crises, whether those created by humans or those caused by natural disasters, humanity has the spiritual resources to dig deep and look beyond the disaster, the tragedy, the ugliness, and find support and sustenance in God and their religion to meet the world head on. While some may build barriers of protection, castigating other communities they see as contributing to perceived existential problems, these articles clearly demonstrate that, people of all faiths find hope and have the ability to reach out in love toward a fellow human being, across the racial or religious barriers that many erect – to the ultimate goal of solidarity and common cause. That common cause is grounded in the reality of our collective human lot from the same Creator to whom we make supplication. In the time of pandemics, whether we are Christians or Muslims, we all wear masks, and they serve the same purpose. They are a sign of our common humanity together on this fragile planet.