

# An Interreligious Experience Full of Meaning

Nicole Bernier, CND

For the past few years, the Association of Women Religious for the Rights of Women has set an objective to develop solidarity with both Muslim women and Indigenous women.<sup>1</sup> To that end, we organize meetings with one or the other of these women to listen to their experiences in order to better know them and build bridges with them. We want to learn what they find important in their culture and religion.

This article reports on a meeting with a Muslim woman, Samia Amor, a lawyer and lecturer at the University of Montréal. Samia came from Algeria 23 years ago to escape the war in her country. This meeting day was held in Montreal two weeks after the attack at the Quebec City Mosque in 2017.

Let us hear Samia tell us about her faith and her life of prayer.

## Faith

*Faith is a gift from God. Religious plurality, the diversity of people, languages and cultures are part of the divine plan that invites us to converse together. For God is like a multi-faceted crystal and each of the religions present a different facet. Encountering one another will allow all facets to be seen.*

Her faith varies according to her state of mind, but it is always there; its constancy helps to overcome the difficulties of everyday life and gives her courage. For her, faith is the only constant.

## Prayer

For Samia, it is important to find the meaning of prayer. Her day is nourished by five prayer times that are appointments with God, opportunities to reconnect with Him and to wonder about how to live with the other. To get closer to God, it is necessary to get closer to others. Sometimes she needs to adjust to everyday situations, such as postponing a prayer time if she is busy in a class or at a conference and praying in a public place like the metro (subway). The important thing is answering the call to the appointment and resuming contact with God.

Listening freely to Samia allowed the participants to learn to celebrate our similarities and to break down our prejudices. Let us listen again to her talking about interreligious dialogue.

## Interreligious Dialogue

*This process is a means at our disposal to discover mutually one another, a chance to come to know better one another and a way to join forces to live better together. We are all human beings living a faith in the same God. Faith brings us closer, but at times irritants causing prejudices, which in turn often divide us, also sometimes stifle it. It seems important to identify those irritants, to find a common ground that rallies us and to find common actions in which we feel that we are together. Let us go back to the message of*

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<sup>1</sup> The Association des religieuses pour les droits des femmes (ARDF).

*our faith(s) that is focused more on the essential than on the ritual. In our approaches to reconciliation, let us avoid using filters that change our perceptions and keep this objective: to mutually discover one another.*

According to the Second Vatican Council, one of the Church's missions is to be in dialogue with the world and with the major religions in order to promote mutual understanding, social peace and cooperation in service to the common good. These kinds of conversations can bring those who engage in them to focus on the most authentic values of their own tradition, such as humility, gratitude, serenity, concern for the neighbour in need and the desire for social justice.

Interreligious dialogue sparks a revitalization in all the traditions involved. That is why Christians believe that when a dialogue is experienced with a free and listening heart, the Holy Spirit is present because it acts throughout the whole of human history. In Catholic practice, we are seeing the emergence of the idea that the plurality of religions is a gift of God that allows us to rejoice and be grateful.

The understanding of plurality of religions as a gift is imperative for today. I can still hear, resonating in my ears, the words that were uttered several times by the son of the teacher who was killed in Quebec City: "If I could have had coffee with Alexandre Bissonnette, this tragedy would not have happened."

#### A Ritual of Communion

In the course of this day with Samia, we wanted to experience a ritual of listening and communion with the victims of the attack in Quebec City, in which six Muslims at prayer were killed. A visual prepared for that purpose showed the photo of the six victims, each accompanied by a candle to signify the light that might shine forth from that event.

Samia took advantage of this opportunity to express her grief, she who had always seen Quebec as a haven of peace, a land of welcome in which she felt safe after leaving a country at war. The participants were invited to express in a few words their feelings about this event: shock, shame, solidarity, urgency to know each other better, opportunity for a new beginning. This ritual ended with the song *Je vous laisse ma paix* ("Peace I bequeath to you," Jn 14:27).

This day proved very rich: It provided us with a meaningful experience of openhearted listening, letting us be transformed in order to live together in harmony. It also gave us the desire to continue this interreligious conversation whenever and wherever the opportunity might present itself.