DEPARTMENT OF SHIA THEOLOGY, A.M.U.,

International Seminar on
‘Islam, Co-existence of Religions
and their Essential Unity

A BRIEF REPORT
An International Seminar on ‘Islam, Co-existence of Religions and their Essential Unity’ was held in the Faculty of Theology on 8th and 9th March 2010 organized by the Department of Shia Theology.

As Faculty of Theology does not have a proper Auditorium, the Inauguration function was held in a beautiful Pandal with a capacity of over 300 persons.
The Inaugural Function was attended by a large number of luminaries, scholars, eminent University teachers ..... And students.....
A galaxy of scholars and teachers from all Faculties of the University attended the Function and attentively listened the speeches:
The Vice Chancellor Prof. P.K. Abdul Azis was scheduled to preside the Seminar. But due to the opening of the Centre of A.M.U.in Kerala, he had to leave. In his absence, Mr Shahid Mahdi, former Vice Chancellor of Jamia Milliya, presided over the Inaugural Function.

The Inaugural Function was graced by following luminaries and religious scholars of repute:

- Mr Shahid Mahdi, former Vice Chancellor of Jamia Milliya
- Ayatullah Gholam Raza Mahdavi, a distinguished Iranian Religious Scholar and representative of the great Qom Seminary, International Al-Mostafa University.
- Swami Yatindranand Giri Maharaj, a top religious personality of the Hindu Dharam, Mahamandaleshwar of Junagarh Akhara.
- Maulana Syed Kalbe Jawad, renowned Religious personality
- Prof. Abdul Haq Ansari, ex-amir of Jama’ate Islami, Hind
- Prof. Abdur Rahim Qidwai, well known Quranic scholar
The Function started with recitations from the Holy Qur’an:

Then Bouquets were presented by the students:
Prof. Ali Mohammad Naqvi, Chairman of the Department of Shia Theology and the Director of the Seminar welcomed the guests and said: our Vice Chancellor is not present but he has inspired academic activities in the Campus and encouraged and supported us in organizing this Seminar.

Prof. Naqvi said in his Welcome Address that:

The idea and Ideal of Co-existence of Religions and attempt to find out essential Unity of religions is not only a necessity of our time but a perennial truth and Reality. It is an urgency and a necessity because there are over two billion Christians, one and half billion Muslims and one billion Hindus on the globe. If they are arraigned against each other, mankind can not have peace and progress. Prof. Naqvi referred to Huntington’s Theory of clash of civilizations and added: it may not be true, but there is no doubt that religion is a very potent and powerful factor which may foster love and understanding among nations and if misinterpreted and misused, may result in discord and conflict. By gone are the ages when tribes used to fight with arrows and swords. Today nations are armed with weapons of mass destruction. Therefore, any conflict on whatsoever ground, may threaten the very existence of man on this planet.

He referred to Environmental crisis also and pointed out that followers of all religions have to face this crises side by side instead of fighting among themselves. But Prof. Ali Mohammad Naqvi emphasized that: the idea of co-existence of religions and their Essential Unity is not today’s necessity only but a Reality. He said: according to Islam perennial Truth has been one and same, revealed to all nations. With the passage of time differences have occurred.
He argued that the basic structure of all religions is the same and there are striking similarities. He said: the structure of religion is like a “tree”, it has roots, a trunk and many branches. Root is the concept of God and Man. All religions share that there is a transcendental Absolute Being Who is our Creator and Sustainer. Even Buddhism which may not speak about Him in so many words, speaks about the essence of Buddha, which is almost an Absolute metaphysical Reality.

Likewise, all religions believe that man has a divine spark, a soul and spirit which do not die with physical death. These are the common roots of all religions. Then, there is the ‘trunk’. That is the belief that Divine Grace and Mercy of God for man has resulted in Divine Guidance, the *deen*, the *dharma* or *canon* law which have to be followed and man has to worship and obey God. This again is common among all religions. From this belief spring many branches. Like the modes of worship and rituals, rites, system of ethical value and spirituality. In all these there are striking similarities among religions.

Swami Yatindrananda Giri Maharaj, *mahamadaleshwara* of Junagarh Akhara and a top Hindu religious leader said: there are many manifestations but *dharma* and religion is the same. He said that: he feels belittled if he is called a leader of Hindu *dharma*. He feels he belongs to all religions.
Swami Yatindranandaji said: Islam also believes that religious guides and prophets have appeared in all lands, and India is a country venerated and loved by Muslim saints down the ages.
Prof. Abdul Haq Ansari, ex-amir of Jama’ate Islami and a senior Muslim thinker, delivered the Keynote Address. He emphasized that religions have two elements: Those which are similar to each other and also those in which they differ. There are fundamental differences also and these also should not be glossed over. What is needed is that we should understand the differences and try to find out the common grounds.

Prof. Abdur Rahim Qidwai emphasized the importance of such Programmes as this and congratulated Prof. Ali Mohammad Naqvi and Department of Shia Theology for organizing this historic Seminar.

He said: what is needed today is the quest for commonalities of religions. We have to live in a pluralistic society and in a pluralistic world. There is no escape. We know the differences but we have to emphasize commonalities.
Maulana Kalbe Jawad, renowned religious leader explained the Qur’anic view about peaceful co-existence of followers of different faiths. The Qur’an says that there is no compulsion in the matters of faith. It calls Christians and Jews to come on a common platform of belief in God, in His Oneness and in the prophets of God. That is a pointer that Qur’an advocates that followers of different faiths, in spite of differences, should find out common platform and unite for a common cause.

He also referred to the seerah and sunnah of the Prophet, especially the unique Madina Charter with the Jews being the first charter of Human Rights.
Ayatullah Gholam Raza Mahdavi, a senior Iranian religious scholar referred to the functions of religion from the viewpoint of Religious Sociology.

He referred to the function of religion as a unifying force and as the major factor of social integration. The other function of religion is to safeguard the moral fabric and to instill a spirit of humaneness and fraternity among men. It is here that religion becomes a driving force for peaceful co-existence of communities and nations in a pluralistic world.
Prof. Saud Alam Qasmi, Dean Faculty of Theology in his thoughtful remarks emphasized that we should try to compile an Islamic Doctrine of Co-existence. He stipulated 14 points for this Doctrine which were liked by the audience.
At the end Mr. Shahid Mahdi delivered his Presidential address. He said that: he is an alumni of this University but with this Seminar and going through the Brochure of the Faculty of Theology, he is feeling that the DNA of the Faculty of Theology is completely changed and now instead of being just a Centre of Imams, it has become a vibrant Centre of Research and academic activities.

He also praised the new post-graduate syllabi of Shia and Sunni Theology and remarked: it is heartening to see it includes study of world religions, Human Rights, Environmental Rights and even Sociology of Religion. He was trying to introduce these subjects in Jamia Milliya but the Faculty of Theology of Ali Garh Muslim University has already done so.
Mr Shahid Mahdi also emphasized the importance of the topic and historic nature of this Seminar which is attended by such a large number of members of University fraternity. Mr. Shahid Mahdi suggested that 14 Points stipulated by Prof. Saud Alam Qasmi, Dean of the Faculty should be adopted as the Aligarh Charter of Peaceful Co-existence by this historic Seminar.

At the end of the programme, Prof. S. Farman Husain, former Dean of the Faculty moved vote of Thanks. He also emphasized historic nature of this Seminar organized by the Department of Shia Theology and said this big assembly of scholars, eminent University teachers and students is result of day and night hard work of Prof. Ali Mohammad Naqvi whom he termed the moving spirit behind this Seminar and all Office Staff and of the Department of Shia Theology. He also thanked the Dean of the Faculty, Prof. Saud Alam Qasmi and Department of Sunni Theology for their cooperation.
Dr Touqeer Alam Falahi conducted the proceedings. His observations were masterly and profound.

The Function ended at 1.15 p.m.

and the Guests left......
WORKING SESSIONS:
The working Sessions of the Seminar started in the afternoon and went on till 9. p.m.
36 Papers were presented, 14 of them were presented by the foreign delegates
All the working Sessions were well attended. The Central Hall of the Faculty of Theology proved to be small even during the working Sessions.
Next day on 9th March 2010, there were 8 hours of Paper reading and lively discussion took place.
At the end of the Seminar every one termed it as a huge success and a historic event in the history of the Faculty of Theology. It is a general feeling that now the Faculty of Theology is on move and there is no looking back.

It is intended that the articles will be published in a Volume and released at the next Seminar of the Department of Shia Theology.
In his Valedictory Speech, Prof. Ali Mohammad Naqvi, thanked the Vice Chancellor, Prof. Abdul Azis for his inspiring leadership and support, the university authorities. He thanked the Dean of the Faculty of Theology, Prof. Saud Alam Qasmi and said, he supported him at every step. He also thanked the Chairman, teachers and students of the Department of Sunni Theology.

Prof. Naqvi thanked his Colleagues in the Department of Shia Theology, Prof. Farman Husain, Dr. Mohd. Asghar and Mr. Tayyab Raza and Dr Rani Bano Rizvi. He also thanked the members of the Board of Studies.

He thanked his Office Staff and said: credit goes to the hard work of the staff and students of the Department of Shia Theology. He said: Office Incharge Mr Mohd. Aslam showed managerial skills and worked incessantly.

Mr Anwar, Haider, Zeeshan and Dabir sahib worked very hard.
He dedicated this successful Seminar to the students of Department of Shia Theology who worked vigorously, participated actively and are the future custodian of this tradition of academic activities.

Prof. Naqvi thanked Department of Applied Physics for the Public Address System and P.R.O for efficient coverage. He said our special thanks are due to Prof. Alim Husain Naqvi and Mr Rahat Abrar.