

RELIGIOUS PEACE

A Precious Treasure



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Studies in Inter-Religious Relations in Plural Societies (SRP) Programme
Editors: Salim Mohamed Nasir and M Nirmala

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STUDIES



Studies in Inter-Religious Relations in Plural Societies (SRP) Programme
S Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University
Block S4, Level B4, Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798
Tel: (65) 6592 1680 Email: wwwrsis@ntu.edu.sg Website: www.rsis.edu.sg

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A PRECIOUS TREASURE

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RELIGIOUS PEACE,
A PRECIOUS TREASURE



Meeting with Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

(MCI photo by Terence Tan)

Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong met Sheikh Dr Ali Gomaa and Most Rev Dr Mouneer Hanna Anis at the Istana on 6 June 2014. After this meeting, PM Lee wrote this message on his Facebook page:

“Racial and religious harmony is Singapore’s precious treasure.

I was reminded of this today when I met two visitors from Egypt: Sheikh Dr Ali Gomaa, former Grand Mufti of Egypt, and Dr Mouneer Hanna Anis, the Anglican Archbishop (his full title is Archbishop of the Episcopal/Anglican Diocese of Egypt with North Africa and the Horn of Africa). They are here for the Inter-Religious Relations in Plural Societies programme at S Rajaratnam School of International Studies, NTU.

We talked about maintaining harmony in a multi-racial and multi-religious society. Singapore has worked hard at this, as has Egypt. Just from my little time with them, I could see that Sheikh Dr Ali Gomaa and Archbishop Dr Mouneer are good friends, working closely together to promote peace and harmony between Muslims and Christians there. They are a good example of how different faiths can work together for the common good.”

MESSAGE

Mr Lee Hsien Loong

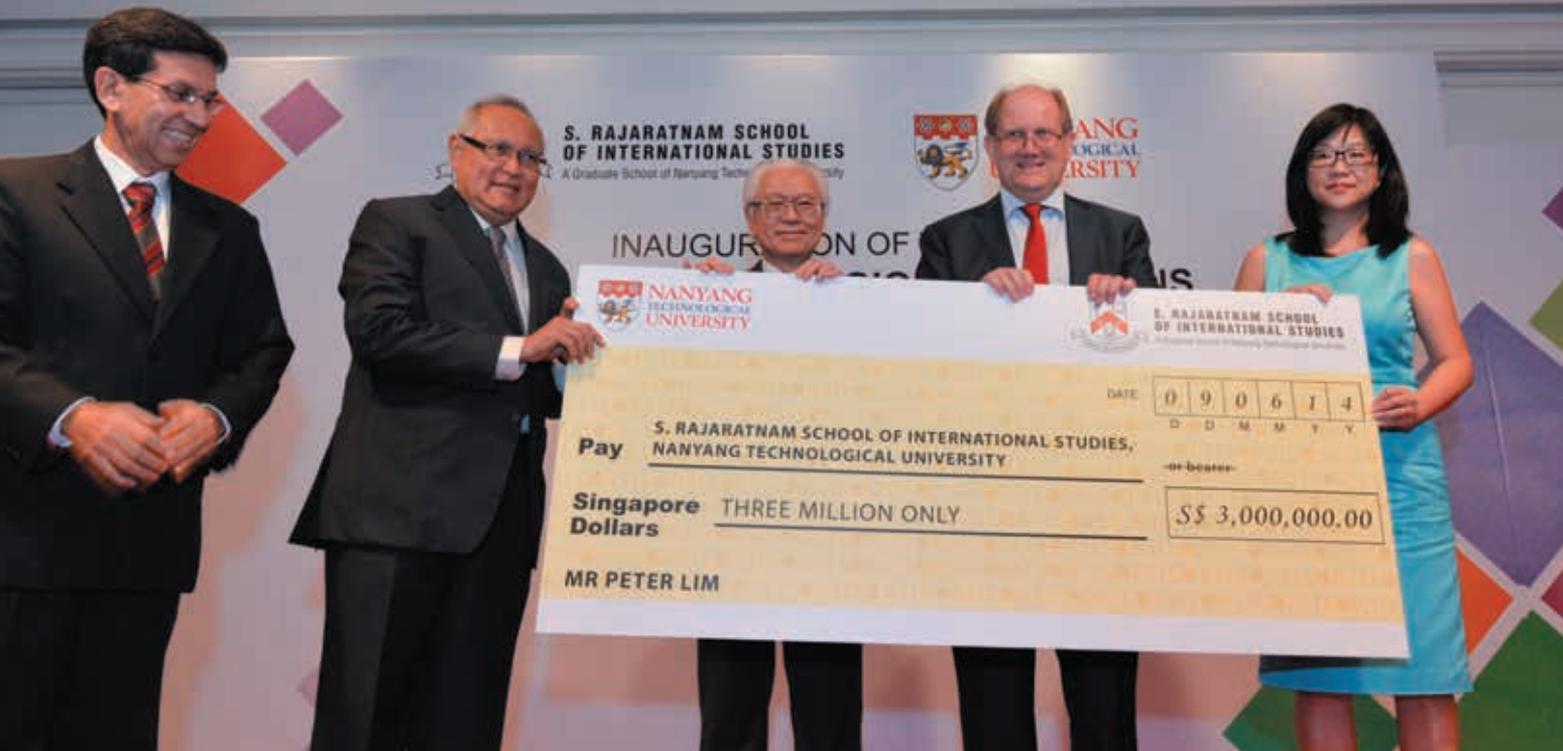
Prime Minister, Singapore

Religion is a source of spiritual strength and moral guidance. It plays a positive role in society, especially in the fields of education, community and social work.

Religion is also a deeply felt, personal matter. Friction and misunderstanding can arise if religious sensitivities are offended, especially in a multi-racial and multi-religious society. That we enjoy religious harmony in Singapore is not a natural state of affairs. It is the fruit of conscious and unremitting hard work, as well as compromise and mutual accommodation by all sides. In Singapore, each religious community understands

the need to give-and-take and makes the effort to appreciate and get along with other religions.

The Studies in Inter-Religious Relations in Plural Societies (SRP) Programme by the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) will contribute to strengthening our religious harmony. SRP will build up knowledge, strengthen ties and provide platforms for different communities to understand and appreciate each other's religions better. I wish the SRP Programme every success in this very important task.



A gift for peace studies.

(Left to Right) Ambassador Mohammad Alami Musa, Head SRP; Ambassador Barry Desker, Former Dean RSIS, Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam, President of Singapore, Professor Bertil Anderson, President NTU and the representative of Mr Peter Lim, Ms Chan Lay Hoon, Director, Kestrel Capital Pte Ltd.

The launch of the Studies in Inter-Religious Relations in Plural Societies (SRP) Programme got off to a good start with funds from the government and private sector. Singapore billionaire Mr Peter Lim donated S\$3 million to kick start the programme. The Singapore government matched the donation, bringing the total to S\$6 million.

FOREWORD

Ambassador Barry Desker

Former Dean, S Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University

Fifty years ago academicians believed that religion would eventually fade out with the surge of modernization. However, today one finds that there has been religious revivalism across all major faiths and that religion has returned to public debates as a burning issue.

In today's globalized world, the world faces large-scale human migration and consequently new identities continue to emerge. Religion provides these identities with moral legitimacy and serves as a rallying call for emerging identities.

Given the role of religion in the modern world, it is imperative that we understand the various dimensions and impact of religion on the structure of power in society, especially when there are competing interests. While religion has historically laid the moral foundations of civilisations, it has also led to conflict; a case in point is the sectarian conflict that erupted in 1999 in Indonesia in which thousands of lives were lost. At the same time religion has also assumed the role of a peace broker through various institutions, such as the World Conference of Religions for Peace and the Inter-Religious Organisation in Singapore.

Singapore is the world's most religiously-diverse society, according to the PEW Research Centre, and therefore it is imperative that we understand the dynamics of inter-religious interactions even though there has been relative peace and harmony since independence. The foundation for this peace and harmony can be traced to the late Mr S Rajaratnam, the first Foreign Minister of Singapore, who penned in the national pledge: "one united people, regardless of race, language or religion."

Through the Studies in Inter-Religious Relations in Plural Societies (SRP) Programme, launched under the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) at Nanyang Technological University, we seek to engage in serious academic research on the role of religion, facets of the religious life, development of institutions and evolving nature of traditions that have an impact and will continue to shape inter-religious relations in plural societies.

The three key objectives of the SRP programme are: the pursuit of excellence and innovation in research on inter-religious relations and understanding; the provision of post-graduate education and training in inter-religious studies; and the establishment of a major forum for the discussion of issues related to co-existence and the management of diversity.

The programme will be supported by three pillars that will help SRP undertake path-breaking scholarship - research that seeks to understand the nature of inter-religious conflicts; teaching graduate level courses on world religions and how they function in contemporary societies amidst diversity; and community engagement that will enable our scholars to interact with the society so as to gain a better understanding of the actual practise of inter-religious relations.

At SRP, we hope to develop a new generation of leaders and thinkers in the field of inter-religious studies and contribute towards greater understanding of religion and its manifestations and engagements within the modern world.



The official launch of the Studies in Inter-Religious Relations in Plural Societies (SRP) Programme.

President Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam unveiling the plaque to inaugurate the Studies in Inter-Religious Relations in Plural Societies (SRP) Programme on 9 June 2014 at Marina Mandarin Singapore.



“

SRP endeavours to deepen the study of inter-religious relations, formulate models for the positive role of religion in peace-building, and produce knowledge to strengthen social ties between communities.

”

Ambassador Mohammad Alami Musa,

*Head, Studies in Inter-Religious Relations in Plural Societies (SRP) Programme,
S Rajaratnam School of International Studies*

Religion contains resources within its traditions that allows its followers to perceive the religious ‘other’ in a positive light and thereby allows us to build positive relations with other religious traditions. This reflects an ‘inclusivist’ approach to religion. There are also many who believe that the religious path that they tread on is the only truth, and that other religions have nothing good to offer. These ‘exclusivists’ too depend on the interpretations of their respective religious scriptures to support and legitimize negative attitudes towards the religious ‘other’.

It is with this backdrop that we seek to discuss the ‘Theological and Cultural Foundations for Positive Inter-Religious Relations’. In fact, the watershed moment that brought the subject of inter-religious relations to the forefront was in 1893, in Chicago, when the Parliament of World Religions met for the first time. There was resolve to give push to inter-religious relations and the impetus in this drive was a shift that happened in Christianity, the world’s largest missionary religion. This resulted in the re-thinking about the concept of the religious ‘other’. Other religions responded positively and this started a whole array of inter-religious engagements, collaborative endeavours and dialogue.

These early efforts at inter-religious relations were driven by the motivation to find commonalities amongst religions and to attempt to harmonize their differences in order to bring about peace. To

quote Frederick Hiller in his opening address at a conference of historians of religion in 1958, “one of the most important task of the science of religion is to bring to light this unity of all religions. A new era will dawn upon mankind when the religions will rise to true tolerance and cooperation on behalf of mankind.” However, there has been a counter-narrative where many scholars believe that the uncovering of the unity of religions is not an essential condition to achieve tolerance and cooperation between religions. In the past few decades, scholars have emphasized the virtues of differences, as they earlier did about the virtues of sameness.

Today we have the opportunity to deliberate on how the interpretation and understanding of scriptures, texts and traditions can provide the theological and cultural foundations for positive inter-religious relations and also investigate those interpretations and understandings that are not conducive to good relations.

The Studies in Inter-religious Relations in Plural Societies (SRP) Programme seeks to facilitate such deliberations and aims to study various models of how religious communities develop their teachings to meet the contemporary challenges of living in plural societies. Its endeavour is to deepen the study of inter-religious relations, formulate models for the positive role of religion in peace-building, and produce knowledge to strengthen social ties between communities.

ABOUT SRP

The Studies in Inter-Religious Relations in Plural Societies (SRP) Programme was established at the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) in September 2013. It is the latest programme offered by RSIS. It was inaugurated on 9 June 2014 by Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam, President of the Republic of Singapore.

The SRP aims to study various models of how religious communities develop their teachings to meet the contemporary challenges of living in plural societies. It will also deepen the study of inter-religious relations, formulate models for the positive role of religions in peace-building and produce knowledge to strengthen social ties between communities. The Programme seeks to be at the forefront in the development of scholarship and applied knowledge on the roles of religion and inter-religious relations in plural societies today.

Objectives of the SRP

The SRP will meet the growing need around the world for greater inter-religious understanding. Its approach is interdisciplinary and its specific objectives are:

- To pursue excellence and innovation in research in the study of inter-religious relations and understanding.
- To offer postgraduate education and professional training related to inter-religious relations and understanding.
- To act as a leading forum for scholars, policymakers, leaders of private and public sector institutions, and national and international experts to come together to explore issues related to co-existence in plural societies, inter-religious understanding, and social cohesion.

Components of the SRP

The Programme comprises research, teaching and community engagement.

Research

The SRP is a research-intensive programme driven by the following considerations:

- (a) To understand the nature of inter-religious conflicts with a view to prevent them; and
- (b) To foster greater understanding and harmony between people of different religious traditions in order to enlarge the common space of plural societies.

Research will be conducted according to rigorous scholarly standards that take into account the social and cultural specificities of communities. The outcomes will be academic, in terms of furthering scholarly knowledge in this field, as well as practical, in its generation of knowledge and building of skills to address the real-life challenges of managing diversity.

SRP's research themes are as follow:

Religious peace-building in plural societies

This theme will study the role of religious traditions, fraternity and organisations for peace-building as well as in conflict and post-conflict situations. It will study religious ideas, arguments and paradigms that are used to legitimise the disruption of social harmony and cohesion. The theme will focus on developing doctrinal content and exploring strategies for responding to ideas that undermine the social fabric of plural societies.

New developments in inter-religious relations from different religious perspectives

This theme will identify recent developments in the thinking of world religions in their conceptualisation of what constitutes the religious 'other'. It will focus on theological positions,

philosophical arguments and ground initiatives that are underpinned by inclusivity within each tradition. Apart from the identification of commonalities between different religious groups and religious teachings that advocate mutual understanding and co-operation, this theme will also explore the positive value of differences between religious traditions.

Tolerance and co-existence in the historical religious traditions

This theme will research into the historical traditions of world religions to elicit an ethos that fosters peace in the contemporary world. Key areas of interest include embracive theological or philosophical positions and historical periods of tolerance or acceptance of the religious 'other'.

Singapore's model of managing social cohesion

This theme will explore how Singapore, as a plural society, manages religious diversity. This includes its initiatives to grow

the common space, its use of legal and policy frameworks to facilitate inter-religious understanding, and the historical and contemporary roles played by religious traditions and institutions to foster community harmony.

Teaching

The SRP is committed to the development and delivery of best practices in the teaching of inter-religious studies. To achieve this, the Programme will offer taught modules at the Masters level. The taught modules will equip students with the knowledge of world religions, how religions function in contemporary societies, and of key issues that arise in inter-religious relations in contemporary plural societies. It will also equip students with the professional know-how for the fostering of inter-religious relations and management of religious diversity in areas such as conflict resolution, peace-building and dialogue.



Community Engagement

Community engagement is an important aspect of the Programme. In pursuing its objectives, the Programme will collaborate with academic institutions involved in relevant or complementary research projects, government agencies, religious institutions and non-governmental organisations.

Community engagement objectives will be achieved by:

- Fostering collaborative partnerships with key community and religious organisations and leaders.
- Promoting knowledge and understanding of inter-religious issues through regular public lectures featuring high-profile speakers from the field.
- Formulating policy papers to assist governments to respond to particular issues, challenges or situations with evidence-based options or solutions.
- Undertaking dialogue in Singapore and the region.
- Identifying best practices in the field and offering advice or consultation to organisations or governments wishing to enhance inter-religious understanding.

Leadership and Staffing

The SRP works in close consultation with leaders of the different religious communities in Singapore.

The SRP is headed by Ambassador Haji Mohammad Alami Musa, President of the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS), and a leading figure in the promotion of inter-faith relations in Singapore and the region.

The Advisor to the Programme is Professor Abdullah Saeed. He is the Sultan of Oman Professor of Arab and Islamic Studies as well as Director of the National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies at the University of Melbourne, Australia.

The Programme has embarked on the building of expertise for teaching and research.

Endowment Gift

RSIS is grateful to Mr. Peter Lim, a well-known Singaporean philanthropist, for his endowment gift of S\$3 million and to the Singapore government for the matching grant of S\$3 million towards the establishment of the Peter Lim Professorship in Peace Studies. The endowment enables the SRP to appoint a professor who can lead the programme in teaching and research in Peace Studies.

PROFILES





Sheikh Dr Ali Gomaa is the Chairman of Misr al Khayr Foundation and former Grand Mufti of Arab Republic of Egypt and one of the most respected religious authorities in the Muslim world. As Grand Mufti, he oversaw the premier institution in the Muslim world for religious legal direction, Dar al-Ifta'. Since his retirement as Grand Mufti in 2013, he has become a leading advocate for moderation, and an outspoken critic of extremist ideologies.

Born in Bani Suwayf, Egypt, in 1952, he received a Bachelor's degree from the Faculty of Commerce at Ayn Shams University before transferring to the College of Islamic and Arabic Studies of al-Azhar University, the world's leading Islamic institution of higher learning. He went on to receive a Master's degree and a doctorate in Islamic Juristic Methodology (usul al-fiqh) from the same institution.

Prior to his post as Grand Mufti, Dr Gomaa served as Professor of Jurisprudence at al-Azhar and served as a member of that institution's Legal Ruling Council from 1995 to 1997. In addition to his duties as head of Dar al- Ifta', he is a member of the Council for Islamic Research at al-Azhar University, a member of the Fiqh Council of the Organization of Islamic Conference, a General Advisor to al-Azhar University, and a member of the Islamic Fiqh Centre in India.

Over the years, Dr Gomaa has been involved in many activities aimed at strengthening Islamic beliefs throughout the Muslim world and communicating a more balanced view of Islam in the non-Muslim world. He serves as expert advisor to the Council of Arabic Languages and participated in the preparation of the organisation's Encyclopedia of Jurisprudence Terms. He was active in formulating the curricula of the College of Islamic Law in the Sultanate of Oman, and the School of Islamic and Social Sciences in Washington D.C.



“ In order to be a blessing to others we need to overcome any divisions in any area of life and to transform these divisions into genuine friendship. Religious leaders need to encourage this by setting an example, to be followed by their communities. ”

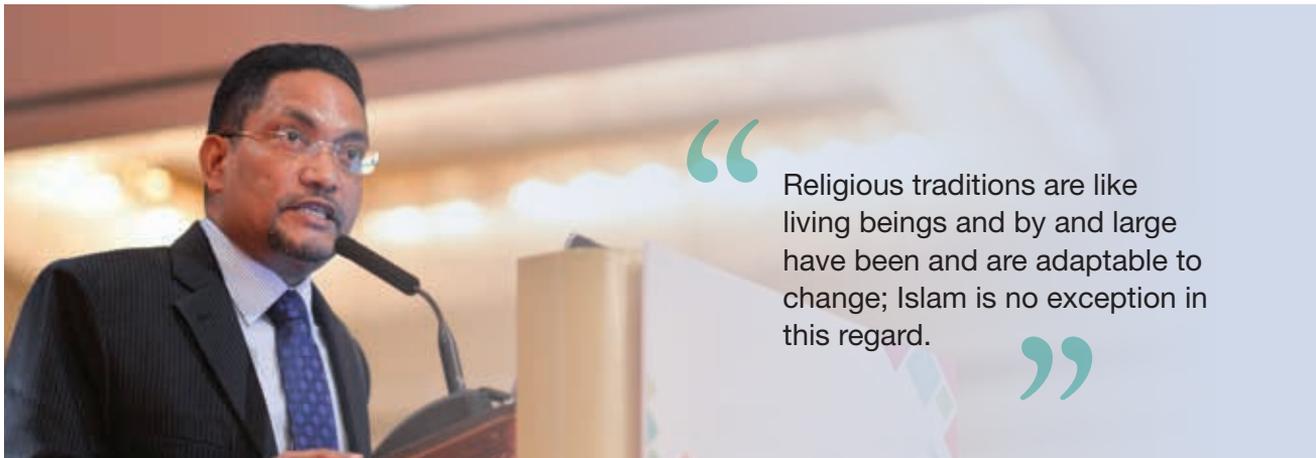
The Most Rev Dr Mouneer Hanna Anis, born on 8 April 1950 in Shebin el Kom, Menoufayia, Egypt, is currently the Bishop of the Episcopal/Anglican Diocese of Egypt with North Africa and the Horn of Africa, as well as the President Bishop of Episcopal/Anglican Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East, a province within the worldwide Anglican Communion.

Dr Mouneer received his Bachelors of Medicine and Surgery at Cairo University, Egypt in 1974. He then worked as a House Officer at Cairo University Hospital from 1975-1976. From 1976-1979, he fulfilled his obligatory national military service and served as a Medical Officer in the Military Medical Unit and Hospital of the Egyptian Army. From 1979-1980, he served as a Resident Doctor at Harpur Memorial Hospital in Menouf and from 1980-2000, he was the Director of Harpur Memorial Hospital in Menouf.

In 1985, Dr Mouneer furthered his medical studies by training at Hammersmith Hospital in London, UK, and in 1986, he received a Diploma of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene at the London School of Tropical Medicine, UK. In 1993, Dr Mouneer received a Certificate in Hospital Management and Administrations from the School of Public Health at the University of California, USA.

In 1998, Dr Mouneer was ordained a non-stipendiary deacon. In 1999, Dr Mouneer was ordained a priest and served at All Saints Cathedral, Cairo. He became the Administrator of the Diocese of Egypt, and was later elected by the Diocesan Synod to be the third Egyptian Bishop of the Diocese of Egypt with North Africa and the Horn of Africa. He then did practical and theological training at Moore Theological College in Sydney, Australia; the Diocese of Canterbury in Kent, UK; as well as Nashotah House in Wisconsin, USA, before his consecration. In 2000, Dr Mouneer was consecrated the Bishop of the Diocese of Egypt with North Africa and the Horn of Africa. In 2007, he was elected as the President Bishop (Primate/Archbishop) of Jerusalem and the Middle East and re-elected in 2012.

Dr Mouneer believes in the importance of “life dialogue” which is daily engagement between followers of different faiths. He also believes in the role of the Anglican Church as a bridging church between traditional churches (Orthodox and Catholic) and Protestant churches, as well as between Christians and Muslims.



Professor Abdullah Saeed is currently the Sultan of Oman Professor of Arab and Islamic Studies, and the Director of the National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies at the University of Melbourne, Australia. He is an active researcher, focusing on one of the most important issues in Islamic thought: the negotiation of text and context, *ijtihad* and interpretation. He is a strong advocate of reform in Islamic thought and is a sought-after presenter at national and international events. He also participates in training courses on Islamic issues to community leaders and government agencies in Australia and abroad. Of particular interest, given the current climate, is the promotion of inter-religious initiatives. He regularly engages with the Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities at national and international symposia to enhance community understandings of Islam, Islamic thought and Muslim societies.

Professor Saeed has authored and edited numerous works. His recent publications include *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century* (Routledge 2014); *Family Law and Australian Muslim Women* (co-edited, MUP, 2013); *Islam and Human Rights* (edited, Edward Elgar 2012); *Islamic Political*

Thought and Governance (edited, Routledge, 2011); *The Qur'an: an introduction* (Routledge 2008); *Islamic Thought: an introduction* (Routledge 2006); *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach*, (Routledge 2006); *Approaches to the Qur'an in Contemporary Indonesia* (edited, Oxford University Press 2005); *Freedom of Religion, Apostasy and Islam* (co-authored, Ashgate 2004); *Islam in Australia*, (Allen & Unwin 2003); and *Islamic Banking and Interest* (Brill, 1996).

In addition to his strong research focus, Professor Saeed continues to teach Islamic studies at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and supervise postgraduate students. Professor Saeed is currently a member of the UNESCO Commission of the Department of Foreign Affairs of Australia and a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Humanities. For his contribution to the development of Islamic Studies and interfaith activities in Australia, he was awarded the Order of Australia (AM) in 2013. Professor Saeed is also Advisor of the Studies in Inter-Religious Relations in Plural Societies (SRP) Programme at the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University.



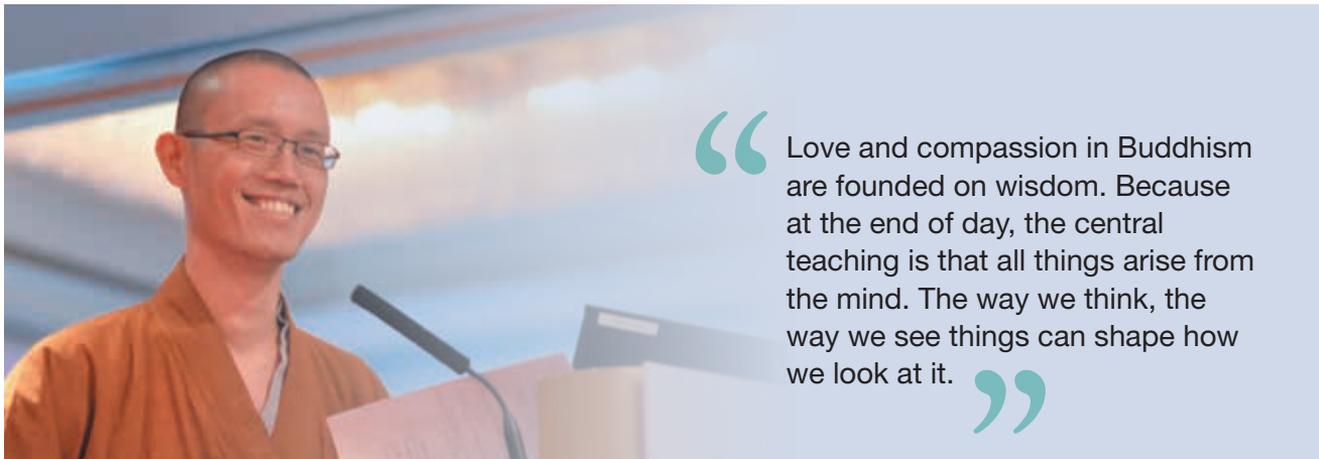
“ If you look at the recruits on the first day of enlistment, everyone is so different. Different race, different religion... But if you probe further, you will find that they all have a common duty – to preserve the peace and defend our nation. ”

Master Chung Kwang Tong (Wei Yi) is the Secretary-General of the Taoist Federation Youth Group and council member of the Inter-Religious Organisation, Singapore. He received his degree in liberal studies from the Oklahoma City University, sponsored by the San Qing Gong Temple, and is currently pursuing graduate studies at the Department of Malay Studies, at the National University of Singapore.

Born to Taoist parents, his passion for the religion stems from an interest in Chinese values and culture since his primary school days at Red Swastika School in Singapore. He is a

disciple of the distinguished Hong Kong Taoist Master Leung Tak Wah, and a Taoist priest of the Dragon Gate tradition. He has represented Singapore at various global forums, including inter-faith dialogues held by the Asia-Europe Meeting, a European Commission effort to build Asia-Europe ties.

He is spearheading efforts by the Taoist Federation Youth Group to reach out to the young. He organises community-based activities for youths and makes Taoist philosophy and teachings more accessible through social media.



“ Love and compassion in Buddhism are founded on wisdom. Because at the end of day, the central teaching is that all things arise from the mind. The way we think, the way we see things can shape how we look at it. ”

Venerable Shi Chuan Guan was ordained under Master Miu King (Master Miao Jing) in 2002 (higher ordination in 2003) and began his monastic training in Fa Yun Monastery, New Mexico, United States. He learned the *sutras* and practised meditation under the Mahayana Buddhist tradition while studying the Theravadin Pali Canon.

Since 2006, he has continued his training under Ven. Kwang Sheng in Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery.

His focus is on *Dharma* learning and meditation, and he provides counseling and spiritual services. He reaches out to the Buddhist community via his blog at www.buddhavacana.net, and other social media channels. He received his degree in Computer Engineering from Nanyang Technological University and worked in the IT industry prior to attaining monkhood.



“

Hinduism has a very deep, structured foundation on which conflict resolution and peace-building can take place. So the religious ‘other’ becomes an extension of the human family, an intricate part of the human family, and another manifestation of myself.”

”

Professor Julius Lipner who is of Indo-Czech origin, is Emeritus Professor of Hinduism and the Comparative Study of Religion at the University of Cambridge. He was born and brought up in India, for the most part in West Bengal. After his schooling in India, he obtained a Licentiate in Theology (summa cum laude) in the Pontifical Athenaeum (now Jnana Deepa Vidyapith) in Poona, and then spent two years studying for an M.A. in Indian and Western philosophy at Jadavpur University in Calcutta (Kolkata). Before sitting for his final examinations, he was invited by the well-known philosopher H.D. Lewis to undertake doctoral research (under Lewis’ supervision) on the self with reference to Indian and Western thought, at King’s College, University of London. Professor Lipner obtained his PhD in 1974, and then spent a little over a year as lecturer in Indian religion at the University of Birmingham (UK), before being appointed to Cambridge in 1975, where he still teaches.

Professor Lipner has lectured widely in the UK and abroad, and has been appointed Visiting Scholar and Visiting Professor in a number of universities both nationally and internationally. He has made a number of radio and TV appearances, and is a member of the editorial board of several international journals. His special fields of study are Vedantic thought, 19th century Bengal, and inter-cultural and inter-religious understanding, with special reference to the Hindu and Christian traditions. One of his research projects at present is the theory and practice of Hindu image-worship. Professor Lipner is a Fellow and former Vice-President of Clare Hall, a postgraduate College in the University of Cambridge. In 2008 he became a Fellow of the British Academy.