

**REPORT ON THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POLITICAL RECONCILIATION
AND INTERRELIGIOUS ENCOUNTER HELD ON 14-18 SEPTEMBER 2026 HELD AT ST.
EDMUNDS COLLEGE; CAMBRIDGE, UNITED KINGDOM**

The International Conference on Political Reconciliation and Interreligious Encounter was held from 14 to 18 September 2026 at St Edmund's College, Cambridge, United Kingdom. The conference brought together academics, and doctoral students from Wasatia graduate school, and working in the relationship between political reconciliation, religion, interreligious dialogue, human dignity, and peacebuilding. The programme combined academic presentations and discussions with visits to religious and academic institutions in Cambridge, providing participants with opportunities for both formal scholarly engagement and informal intellectual exchange.

The conference commenced with a welcome by Dr Vittorio Montemaggi, Director of the Von Hügel Institute for Critical Catholic Inquiry, followed by an introduction to the programme by Professor Ralf Wüstenberg and Dr Zaineh Barakat of Europa-Universität Flensburg. The opening session established the central intellectual concerns of the conference, particularly the relationship between political reconciliation and encounters across religious traditions. It provided an important foundation for subsequent discussions concerning the possibilities and challenges of dialogue in contexts characterized by religious, political, historical, and social differences.

The first academic session focused on Scriptural Reasoning and was led by Professor Lejla Demiri of the University of Tübingen and the University of Cambridge, together with Dr Daniel Weiss, Polonsky Senior Lecturer in Jewish Studies at the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge. Scriptural Reasoning provided an opportunity for participants from different religious traditions to engage in the reading and discussion of sacred texts. The session demonstrated the potential of shared engagement with religious texts as a means of facilitating understanding between communities while recognising and respecting theological differences. Rather than requiring participants to abandon their distinctive religious perspectives, the approach encouraged listening, dialogue, critical reflection, and engagement with alternative interpretations.

An important feature of the conference was the opportunity to move beyond academic discussion and engage directly with religious and academic institutions. Participants visited the Cambridge Central Mosque, where they were welcomed for a guided visit with Dr Timothy Winter, Shaykh Zayed Lecturer in Islamic Studies at the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge. The visit provided an opportunity to learn more about the mosque and its place within the religious and social landscape of Cambridge. It also complemented the conference's emphasis on interreligious encounter by providing participants with a direct experience of an Islamic institution.

The conference continued with a second Scriptural Reasoning session led by PhD Wasatia students namely; Stephen Omondi, Steven Aiello and Mazen Alzaro under the guidance of professors from Cambridge and Flensburg. The session brought together Jewish, Muslim, and Christian perspectives and provided an opportunity for doctoral students to participate actively in interreligious dialogue that was focused on the wage of warfare and Peace. The session also demonstrated that religious differences do not necessarily prevent meaningful intellectual engagement and that structured dialogue can provide opportunities for participants to listen to different perspectives and develop a deeper understanding of one another.

Another significant component of the programme was the visit to Trinity Hall, one of the historic colleges of Cambridge, that was led by Dr Stephen Plant, Dean, Runcie Fellow and Associate Professor at Trinity Hall. The meeting provided an opportunity to learn more about the history and academic environment of Trinity Hall while engaging in broader discussions concerning their theological work, society, and reconciliation. It also demonstrated the role that academic institutions can play in providing spaces for sustained reflection on complex questions relating to religion, politics, ethics, conflict, and human relationships.

The programme subsequently featured a keynote lecture by Dr Vittorio Montemaggi entitled *On Love, Ideology, and Inter-religious Relations in Dante*. The lecture explored the relationship between love, ideology, and interreligious relations through the work of Dante. It provided an opportunity to consider how literature and theological thought can contribute to contemporary discussions about relationships between religious communities. The presentation also broadened the understanding of reconciliation by drawing attention to concepts such as love, human relationships, moral imagination, and the ways in which individuals understand and relate to those who belong to different religious or ideological traditions. The keynote demonstrated that literary and theological sources can provide valuable resources for reflecting on contemporary questions concerning interreligious relations and reconciliation.

A further major component of the conference was the session on Human Dignity and Reconciliation, which featured a lecture by Professor John Loughlin entitled *Human Dignity and the Limits of Proceduralism: Towards a Constructive Theological Anthropology for Reconciliation in Ireland*. The lecture focused on the relationship between human dignity, theological anthropology, and reconciliation, with particular attention to the Irish context. The presentation raised important questions concerning the extent to which formal or procedural approaches can address the deeper human and relational dimensions of conflict and reconciliation. The Irish experience provided a valuable context for considering the complexity of reconciliation in a society shaped by historical, political, religious, and communal divisions. The discussion reinforced the understanding that reconciliation is often a long-term process rather than an immediate outcome of a particular political or institutional intervention.

The final institutional visit of the programme was to Westfield House in Cambridge. Participants were welcomed by the Principal and had an opportunity to meet faculty members and students. The visit provided an additional opportunity for academic interaction and exchange and enabled participants to learn more about the institution and its academic community. The programme concluded with an English afternoon tea, which created an informal setting for further conversations and networking among participants.

Across the different sessions and activities, several important themes emerged. One of the central themes was the importance of interreligious dialogue in promoting mutual understanding. The Scriptural Reasoning sessions demonstrated that meaningful dialogue can take place even where significant theological differences remain. The approach emphasised listening, respectful engagement, and the willingness to encounter perspectives that may differ from one's own.

Political reconciliation was another central theme of the conference. The discussions demonstrated that reconciliation is a complex and multidimensional process that cannot necessarily be reduced to the absence of conflict or the implementation of formal political arrangements. It may involve rebuilding relationships, acknowledging different

experiences, addressing historical divisions, and creating opportunities for continued dialogue and engagement.

Human dignity also emerged as an important foundation for reconciliation. The discussions emphasised the importance of recognising the value and dignity of individuals and communities, particularly in contexts characterized by historical conflict and division. The conference further highlighted the relationship between religion and peacebuilding. Religious traditions can provide ethical, theological, and communal resources for engaging questions of conflict, coexistence, forgiveness, justice, and reconciliation. At the same time, the discussions demonstrated the importance of approaching religious identity and interreligious relations critically and contextually.

The conference also highlighted the value of academic institutions as spaces for dialogue. The interactions at St Edmund's College, Trinity Hall, Cambridge Central Mosque, and Westfield House demonstrated how academic and religious institutions can facilitate encounters across intellectual, cultural, and religious boundaries. Such spaces can contribute to the development of informed conversations about difficult questions relating to religion, politics, identity, and reconciliation.

Participation in the conference also provided valuable opportunities for academic networking and scholarly exchange. Engagement with academics, doctoral students, and institutional representatives from Cambridge and Europa-Universität Flensburg created opportunities for exchanging ideas and developing academic relationships. The combination of formal presentations, discussions, institutional visits, and informal interactions provided a rich environment for intellectual engagement.

Overall, the International Conference on Political Reconciliation and Interreligious Encounter provided a valuable interdisciplinary platform for examining the relationship between religion, dialogue, human dignity, and reconciliation. The conference demonstrated that reconciliation is a complex and continuing process involving dialogue, recognition, dignity, mutual understanding, relationship-building, and engagement across differences. The Scriptural Reasoning sessions illustrated the potential of structured interreligious dialogue, while the keynote and academic lectures provided theological, literary, and philosophical perspectives on reconciliation. The institutional visits further enriched the programme by connecting theoretical discussions with concrete religious and academic environments.

The conference therefore provided a significant opportunity for intellectual development, academic exchange, and reflection on the possibilities and challenges of reconciliation in societies characterized by religious, political, and historical divisions. It reinforced the importance of interdisciplinary and interreligious approaches in developing a deeper understanding of political reconciliation and peaceful coexistence.

Stephen Omondi