



Assalaamu alaykum. Wa rahmatullahi wa barakaatuh

Shaykh Irfaan Abrahams
President of the Muslim Judicial Council
president@mjc.org.za

And

The Leadership of the Muslim Judicial Council
sec.general@mjc.org.za

Re: An Open Letter to the MJC in respect of Interfaith Prayer

Respected Shaykh Abrahams,

We have been presented with images of the interfaith prayer held at the St George's Cathedral on 9 August 2023.

It is with utmost disappointment and disgust that we observe that you were part and parcel of the prayer rituals. More particularly, you are seen holding ritual candles, a clearly religious symbol of the Christian faith.

It appears that you do not want to take lesson from the mistakes of the past. On 28 December 2018, members of the MJC attended the wedding of Ebrahim Rasool's daughter, at which distinctly Hindu rituals were carried out. The outcry and furore that followed thereafter (rightfully so) are well known to you. Yet the MJC has not heeded the repeated advices proffered in a brotherly spirit.

More significantly, you attended the cathedral prayer service as a representative of the MJC and furthermore as its president. Your actions reflect the position of your organisation.

As you are fully aware, we at the Jamaitul Ulama KZN have in the past expressed deep concern about the many infractions of the Shari'ah committed by members of the MJC. We had hoped that by discussing our anxiety behind closed doors, it would have been an opportunity for the MJC to reflect on the direction in which it is heading. Accordingly, we met with you and other members of the MJC, as well as of UUCSA, on 28 August 2021. At that meeting we clearly spelled out our distress that the MJC and UUCSA are, step-by-step, leading the Ummah away from the position of the pure teachings of Islam. Instead of acknowledging the lapses of the past, you and others sought to justify the glaringly outrageous stance on many aspects, including but not limited to your fight to have the Masaajid closed during the trying times of the Covid debacle.

We tried to offer one-to-one sincere advice in private, but our concerns were swept under the carpet. The time has now come to address these violations openly in the public. This is further necessitated by the fact that these egregious infringements of the Shari'ah are being perpetrated openly, without any remorse or regret. From the conduct of members of the MJC, the Muslim public is fast gaining the impression that *Tawheed* and *Imaan* are trivial matters, which may be compromised for political expediency.

Take for example your lighting of the candle during the above mentioned prayer service. The lighting of the candle in the church has a distinctly Christian significance, associated with the core beliefs of Christianity. Some of the references that establish this are attached below. Whilst we do not want to be hasty in passing a verdict of Kufr, you should understand that at the very least, your actions stand at the brink of Kufr.

We urge you, and by extension the MJC, to publicly express remorse over the incident, and to commit, in the future, never to repeat such actions which are offensive to Islam and antithetical to Imaan.

And our duty is only to convey.

We make Dua for your guidance, our guidance, and the entire Ummah.

Issued by:

The Executive Committee

23 Muharram 1445

11 August 2023

Candles in Christianity

According to Rev Father Lithemba Busakwe of the Anglican Catholic Church, candles serve as a physical representation of hope and light.

“Lighting a candle symbolises Christ, the Light of the world. Jesus Christ said: “I am the Light of the world; the one who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have light and life” (John 8:12),” he said.

“From baptism, one receives the Light of Christ so that they may live and sustain that flame of faith burning alive in their heart. To symbolise this light of the world, we’ve always used the ancient source of light: the candle.”

“On certain occasions, depending on how many people are present, the number of candles should match the number of persons. In this instance, each candle is set alight by each person. And when extinguishing candles, you use your hands to mystically internalize that light into your body and life. You don't blow them out,” elaborated Busakwe.

Nomfundo Dhlamini, known as Gogo Nomi in the traditional healing space, is a traditional health and faith practitioner. Dhlamini strongly believes in the influence that candles have in shifting the aura and bringing synergy to a space. “As a healer it is to bring in the aura of light in our work spaces, and to ask God and the ancestors to strengthen and light up our ways.”

“Candles are there as a guide to help us set the intention when we send vibrations to the universe through clapping of hands, and *impepho* is used as well. Ultimately, like any other relationship, it’s about being intentional about what you are doing when speaking to your elders,” said Dhlamini.

<https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/good-life/2022-02-07-candles-carry-powerful-and-profound-spiritual-significance/>

Christianity has adorned candles and their light with an even more significant importance.

“And God said: Fiat lux!, Let there be light. And there was light.” (Gen 1,3).

Again, it was Jesus himself who told his disciples: *“I am the true light”* and later: *“You are the light of the world ... your light must shine before men so that they may see your good works and glorify the Father who is in heaven!”* (Matt. 5:16).

It is therefore normal that in churches, candles are placed on the altar, or near the tabernacle, and are the protagonists of rites and celebrations.

Not only that, the church uses candles in almost all the sacraments, from baptism to anointing, as irreplaceable symbolic elements.

Votive candles

[Votive candles](#) lit by the faithful in front of an altar, or a statue of Jesus, of the Madonna, of a Saint, have a precise meaning. This is not simply an offer that the Christian makes to accompany his own prayer, to strengthen them or ask for a grace. The lighted candle symbolizes the Christian himself, his being a child of light, and therefore a child of God. Lighting a candle and offering it is a way to affirm one's will to follow Jesus' example of being "the light of the world". Lighting a votive candle also expresses the desire to entrust one's words and thoughts to the Lord, to Our Lady, to the Saints. It is a request for help, a light that illuminates our life from above, perhaps at a time when we are struggling in the darkness. Finally, the offer we leave when we light the candle is a sacrifice that accompanies our prayer with deeds and makes our intention of Faith tangible.

<https://www.holyart.com/blog/church-supplies/liturgical-candles-important/>

Candles and Christianity

When it comes to Christian theology, Jesus Christ is seen as the light of the world. So when people lit candles, they normally do it with this in mind. Cleansing and purification of impurities are some of the things that are associated with candle lighting. It is believed that candle lighting has the capability of keeping people safe from all the inequities of the earth. It also helps to keep people away from the witchcraft.

A symbol of obedience

The flame that comes from Christian candles denotes obedience. Also, the heat that is emitted with those candles is supposed to signify humility. This is why in Christianity candles are very important. In fact, they are a basic requirement in most ceremonies that are associated with Christianity. It is good to understand that different types of candles have a different meaning. So when you go to buy some Kindles for a special occasion, it is good to understand what you want first before making the final decision. To be precise, candles are extremely important, and all the services require candles. Baptism, marriage, birth, death-everything requires candles. They are small in size but regarding what they can certainly signify giant objects!

<https://www.electricgardenfestival.com/significance-of-candles-in-christian-theology/>

«Even so, let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven» (Mathew 5, 16)

With that in mind, and some out of habit, and others because that is how they were taught by their parents, Christians light candles when entering Temples. Most of them, if you were to ask, will say

that they do it while sending out a prayer to our Lord to rest the souls of their beloved, deceased ones. Or maybe to ask for health and guidance to other earthly matters that trouble their minds. Others will say that it is also a way to offer for the bar of their Church. All of the above show good intentions and a kind heart.

However, the truth is that today, few people know why we actually do it or what the meaning is behind this otherwise simplistic act. And like everything a Christian does, this should also symbolize something, if we want it to have a counterpart, especially within us. So let the lighting of the candle be a conscious move, imbued and guided by the basic principles of our religion.

Two Saints of our Church have spoken in the past about this: Saint Symeon and Saint Nicodemus, from Mount Athos. And what they said was so "earthly" on the one hand and close to the common mind, and at the same time so out of our material world and spiritualistic that one would say someone must have enlightened them.

So starting with the humble candle and trying to read the words of the two Holy Fathers, let us focus right there for just a moment. The material. The candles that we light in the Churches are made of pure beeswax, which is collected by the beloved insects, from fragrant and blooming flowers, to finally produce a solid but malleable material. And so the candle itself is full of symbolism. It symbolizes the purity of the soul for which the Christian fights daily against temptations; it reminds us by its fragrance of the Divine Grace and at the same time stands as a reminder, that our soul is as malleable as this material. We choose daily, whether we will engrave on it the good and the virtuous, or the bad.

Its flame, on the other hand, also carries its meanings and they are beautiful, optimistic, and hopeful. It resembles the innate, burning tendency of the Christian to become one with God, to reach Theosis. And as the candle burns, it produces light, light that dissolves the shadows and gives a sense of hope and consolation to whoever is in the dark and struggles to get out. Just like Christ, who filled us, believers, with His Light and took away the fear once and for all.

And of course, it is a tribute to the Saints and the martyrs of our faith who preceded and still lead by their example. It is known that the Christians of that time lit candles in the graves of those who martyred.

And so lighting the candle is a simple and easy act to perform, but full of meanings and symbolism, which invites us to be present, both body and soul, when we are at it.

God calls us every day to be light in our lives and to shine in front of people. What a Cristian does by lighting a candle is responding to this call, reminding himself of the right path to follow, and making a silent promise, both to Him and to himself, that he will always strive to become what he was destined to be since his creation, and that is Light.

<https://www.ieramoni-agiou-rafail.gr/en/what-is-the-meaning-of-the-lighting-of-the-candle-in-churches-n-11.html>

