Landas 24:2 (2010) 61–99

SOME REFLECTIONS ON MODERN CATHOLIC THOUGHT ON ISLAM AND CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY CONTEXTS

Anthony O'Mahony

"I have been on my guard
not to condemn the unfamiliar.
For it is easy to miss.
At the turn of a civilization"[1]

"The observation that Christianity is the sustaining differentiation at the heart of the modern world is a hard saying."[2]

A caveat: I am not a theologian based in Asia or one who has long experience of Asia[3]; however, my reflections are based upon a long encounter with Christianity in the Middle East[4]

[1]From the poem *The Sleeping Lord* by David Jones (1895–1974), an Anglo-Welsh Christian poet and artist.

[2]David Walsh, *The Third Millenium: Reflections on Faith and Reason* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1999), 151.

[3]Peter Riddell, "Malaysian Christians and Islamization," and Rocco Viviano, "Responses of the Catholic Church to Islam in the Philippines from the Second Vatican Council to the Present-Day," in A. O'Mahony & M. Kirwan, S.J., eds., *World Christianity: Politics, Theology, Dialogues* (London: Melisende, 2004), 226–256, 372–415.

[4]Paolo Dall'Oglio, S.J., "Églises plurielles pour un Moyen-Orient pluriel," *Mélanges de Science Religieuse* 68:1 (2011): 31–46; Paolo Dall'Oglio, S.J., "La

https://publications.lst.edu/

and associated engagement with Islam in that context, but I understand my account to also include a significant European perspective.[5]

It is important to note, as has been observed by many modern Christian thinkers, that the crossing of frontiers and the birth of the new are a sheer necessity for a new historical period or particular context.[6] The reality or the search for authentic renewal from within tradition outgrows the bounds and frames in which it was set up and forces the crossing of frontiers and the breaking of the frame. A re-mapping of the territory and a re-drawing of the frontiers following tradition is an ever-emerging source of theological creativity, rooted identity, and wise compassion. As Joseph A. Komonchak has observed, the biblical command '"Always be ready to make a defence to anyone who asks for a reason for the hope that is in you, and make it with modesty and respect' [1 Peter 3: 15–16], since the middle ages, this

refondation du monastère syriaque de saint Moïse l'Abyssin à Nebek, Syrie, et la Badaliya massignonienne," in Louis Massignon, *Badaliya Au nom de l'autre*, 1947–1962, eds. Maurice Borrmans & Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2011), 372–374; Emma Loosely & Paolo Dall'Oglio, "La communaté d'Ad-Khalil: une vie monastique au service du dialogue islamo-chrétien," *Proche Orient Chrétien* (Jersualem) 54 (2004): 117–128. Dall'Oglio, an Italian Jesuit who worked in Syria for three decades, articulated a distinct Catholic theological approach to Islam in the context of Christianity in the Middle East. One of the central questions in his thought—how and to what degree Christianity might in fact be inculturated in an Islamic context—is addressed in his *Amoureux de l'Islam, croyant en Jésus* (Paris: Editions de l'Atelier, 2009).

[5]Christian W. Troll, S.J., in his recent paper, carefully charts the ground of Catholic Thought on Islam in "Catholicism and Islam," in Gavin D'Costa, ed., *The Catholic Church and World Religions: Theological and Phenomenological Account* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 71–105. See also Martin Ganeri, O.P., "Catholic Magisterium and World Religions," in A. O'Mahony, Wulstan Peterburs O.S.B. & Mohammad Ali Shomali, eds., *Catholics and Shi'a Dialogue: Ethics in Today's Society* (London: Melisende, 2008), 26–43.

[6]Felix Wilfred, "The Art of Negotiating the Frontiers," *Concilium: Frontier Violations: The Beginnings of New Identities* 2 (1999): vii–xiii.

https://publications.iat.edu/

biblical text has been considered to state the fundamental charge given to the theologian. One could say that four fundamental features of theology thus appear: it is an articulation of the ground of one's hope; it arises as a response to questions about the way Christians live their lives; the norm for that hope and practice in Jesus Christ; and reasons may be given for that hopeful practice, whether those addressed are fellow Christians or others. Taking the text of First Peter as a fundamental challenge, theology may be conceived thus as a mediation of the Christian gospel within a cultural context. Addressing two not entirely distinct audiences, those who have already accepted the gospel and those who have not, theology faces two tasks, one primarily *ecclesial* and the other primarily *cultural*. How these tasks are conceived and interrelated is a basic question for the conception of theology. For most of the Catholic tradition both dimensions and roles of theology have been visible."[7]

However, crossing, of course, is not simply an external event. It is also a spiritual experience. This "journey as an enriching spiritual endeavour" has been taken up by the American Catholic theologian David Burrell, who writes:

> We are, invited, in our time, on a voyage of discovery stripped of colonizing pretensions: an invitation to explore the other on the way to discovering ourselves. The world into which we have been thrust asks nothing less of us; those of us intent on discovering our individual vocations cannot proceed except as partners in such a variegated community. And as that journey enters the domain of faith, our community must needs assume interfaith dimension. [*sic*] What once were boundaries have become frontiers, which beckon to be broached, as we seek to understand where we stand by expanding our minds and hearts to embrace the other. Put in this fashion, our inner journey can neither be syncretic nor procrustean: assimilating or appropriating. What is rather called for is mutuality of understanding

[7]Joseph A. Komonchak, "Defending Our Hope: On the Fundamental Tasks of Theology," in Leo J. O'Donovan & T. Howland Sanks, eds., *Faithful Witness: Foundations of Theology for Today's Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 14–26.

https://publications.lst.edu/

> and of appreciation, a critical perception which is already incipiently self-critical. Rather than reach for commonality, we are invited to expand our horizons in the face of diversity. The goal is not an expanded scheme, but an enriched inquirer: discovery of one's own faith in encountering the faith of another.[8]

A vital component of our contemporary situation is the growth of a certain awareness among the world's religious communities of the Other. The engagement between the religions has been characterized by two points of orientation: one of fear and one of hope, both elements poised between conflict on the one hand, and a deepening realization of the necessity and possibility of dialogue on the other. The re-discovery of the "virtue of compassion" as practice in theological engagement might be one of the principal themes in this encounter about which Anthony H. Johns, the Australian Islamicist, who seeks to work out the Christian tradition, has noted, "'How can one re-discover what has never yet been fully realized … such a compassion, in its fullness, is at best, something only dreamt of; or like the lost chord, is heard but once, and then vanishes into silence. Yet the memory of its haunting beauty has such power that it compels all who have ever heard it, to search to recover it, without ceasing.' One might say that the history of ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue will be the history of growth and development of this awareness and of actions inspired by it, and of changes brought about in this direct in relation to this creative virtue of engagement. However, this does not allow for some sought of neutral position *vis-à-vis* ones own religious identity and the Other. Those who adopt a theoretical, privileged position outside any specific faith community, and elaborate a general structure of religious 'truth' that can provide a space for every religious tradition, but which nobody believes in, will not satisfy."[9]

---

[8]David Burrell writes in the preface to Roger Arnaldez, *Three Messengers for One God,* trans. Gerald W. Schlabach with Mary L. Gude & David B. Burrell (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), vii.

[9]Anthony H. Johns, "The Need to Rediscover Compassion in Australasia," *Islamochristiana* (Rome) 26 (2000): 133–167.

https://publications.iat.edu/

The Christian encounter with Islam emerged in the Middle East, today often referred to as West Asia;[10] however, this religious and political heritage has, to my mind, not been incorporated into contemporary Catholic theological thought.[11] I would also like to suggest the matrix of the Jewish-Muslim encounter—I consider Judaism as the primary other for Islam, and as having a special role in Christian engagement with Islam due to the importance of Judaism for Christianity.[12] Today approximately 60 per cent of Muslims live in Asia; the nations of South Asia (Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan),

---

This sentiment has been widely discussed in theological circles. See Georges Cottier, "Jésus, l'Eglise, le salut des non-chrétiens et la place des religions," *Studia Missionalia* 50 (2001): 159–177; Charles Morerod, "La relation entre les religions selon John Hick," *Nova et Vetra* 75 (2000): 35–62; Geneviève Comeau, "La christologie à la rencontre de la thélogie des religions," *Études* 3931 (2000): 57–69; Terence W. Tilley, "Christianity and the World Religions—A Recent Vatican Document," *Theological Studies* 60 (1999): 318–337.

[10]A. O'Mahony, "West Asia," in Todd M. Johnson & Kenneth R. Ross, eds., *Atlas of Global Christianity* (Edinburgh University Press: 2010).

[11]See for example the thought of Micahel Sabbah, Emeritus Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem: "Chrétiens et musulmans pour une société palestinienne nouvelle," *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 54:1–2 (2004): 71–76, and Leonard Marsh, "The Theological Thought of Michel Sabbah in the Context of the Challenges to Christian Presence in the Holy Land," in Anthony O'Mahony & John Flannery, eds., *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East: Studies for the Synod for the Middle East* (London: Melisende, 2010), 253–262.

[12]Douglas Pratt, "Muslim-Jewish Relations: Some Islamic Paradigms," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 21:1 (2010): 11–21. Peter C. Phan has opened some of this area for reflection. See his "Karl Rahner in Dialogue with Judaism and Islam: An Assessment," in Gerard S. Sloyan, ed., *Religions of the Book*, The Annual Publication of the College Theology Society XXXVIII (University Press of America: 1996), 129–150.

See also Robert M. Johnson, "The Jewish-Muslim Encounter in the Holy Land: The Theological and Political Implications for Christianity," in A. O'Mahony, ed., *Christianity and Jerusalem: Studies in Modern Theology and Politics in the Holy Land* (Leominster: Gracewing Press, 2010), 183–215; Peter C. Phan,

https://publications.jct.edu/

Indonesia and Malaysia in South-East Asia, and the Central Asian Republics account for the majority of this number. Christianity as global tradition has changed. Christian encounter with Islam in Asia in modern terms is often an expression of Roman Catholic or Protestant engagement, however, this does not take account of the Orthodox churches' relations with Muslims in central Asia[13] or the emerging Syriac Christian, mainly Eastern Catholic, relations with Muslims in India, in a wider Hindu and "secular" nation-state.

We should also note that Eastern Christianity, through the Church of the East, opened up an engagement with Muslims which still helps to shape the "canon" of Catholic thought on Islam.[14] At the Asian Synod some years ago which discussed the important relations between Christians and Muslims, the Chaldean Bishop of Aleppo, Syria and leading Eastern Catholic theologian Antoine Audo, S.J. set out his vision: "To survive and develop as living churches in the Arab and Muslim world of the Middle East, Christian Arabs or Asians need a spiritual vision of their relation with Islam, seeing themselves as sent by Christ to be witnesses of love," and that evangelization in those lands requires Christians to live "within Islam, that is, to form an integral part of society, of the Arab and Muslim culture without complexes, but at the same time to be witnesses of the evangelical liberty in ways

"Jews and Judaism in Asian Theology: Historical and Theological Perspectives," *Gregorianum* 86:4 (2005): 806–836.

[13]See Basil Cousins, "The Russian Orthodox Church, Tartar Christians and Islam," in Anthony O'Mahony, ed., *Eastern Christianity: Studies in Modern History, Religion and Politics* (London: Melisende, 2004), 338–371; Basil Cousins, "The Orthodox Church, Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations in Russia," in Anthony O'Mahony & Emma Loosley, eds., *Christian Responses to Islam: Muslim-Christian Relations in the Modern World* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).

[14]Sidney H. Griffith, "Arabic Christian Relations with Islam: Retrieving from History, Expanding the Canon," in A. O'Mahony & J. Flannery, eds., *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East: Studies for the Synod for the Middle East* (London: Melisende, 2010), 263–290.

https://publications.lst.edu/

that go beyond this culture, seeking to read the language of the Qur'an as a language of human relations."[15]

Christian theology of mission is retrieving and rearticulating this heritage; for example, Timothy I, ninth-century Patriarch of the Church of the East, dialogued with Islam,[16] and thus also might be understood as reconfiguring the notion of "Church Father" in contemporary contexts.[17] One of the principle tasks, in my opinion, for theological thought today might be said to re-engage this Christian historical encounter with Islam—the role of Middle Eastern Christianity is key to this—in a creative synergy which allows for a sustaining political-

[15]*Declaration at the Asian Synod* (February 2003). See also the studies of Antoine Audo as background to the encounter between Eastern Christian thought and Catholic *ressourcement* (Antoine Audo, S.J., "Eastern Christian Identity: A Catholic Perspective," in Anthony O'Mahony & John Flannery, eds., *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East: Studies for the Synod for the Middle East* [London: Melisende, 2010], 19–36); Antoine Audo, S.J., "Isaac of Ninevah, John of Dalyatha and Eastern Spirituality," *One in Christ: A Catholic Ecumenical Review* 44:20.2 (2010): 29–48; Antoine Audo, S.J., "Storia e prospettive dei cristiani in Iraq," *La Civiltà Cattolica* 3787:2 (2008): 85–93.

See also A. Audo, "The Current Situation of Christianity in the Middle East, especially Syria, after the Synod of the Middle East's Final Declaration (September 2012) and the Papal Visit to Lebanon," in *Christianity in the Middle East: Studies in Modern History, Politics and Theology* (London: Melisende 2012), 1–17.

[16]Frederick W. Norris, "Timothy I of Baghdad, Catholicos of the East Syrian Church, 780–823: Still a Valuable Model," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 30:3 (2006): 133–136. The author makes the point that the "East Syrian Church pursued its missionary task as a minority religion without governmental establishment" (133); however, the Church of the East was found all over Asia, from Iran, Afghanistan, Tibet and northern China, and this ecclesial culture is receiving a wide appreciation in parts of Asia today. See Benoit Vermander, S.J., "The Impact of Nestorianism on Contemporary Chinese Theology," in *Jingjiao: The Church of the East in China and Central Asia,* Collection Serica (2009), 181–194.

[17]Bernard Meunier, "Genèse de la notion de 'Pères de l'Église' aux ive et ve siècles," *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 93:2 (2009): 315–331.

https://publications.jst.edu/

theology to develop in full awareness of Vatican II's account of the global mission of the Church in the context of Asia.[18]

With this background in mind, this contribution seeks to consider aspects, and in no way definitively or comprehensively but "aspects," of the evolution of modern Catholic thought on Islam and Christian-Muslim relations from the Second Vatican Council onwards against a changing global religious and political context. The principal currents of Catholic theology which emerged from theologians and scholars, such as Louis Massignon,[19] are discussed as they influenced the drafting and preparation of the conciliar document *Nostra Aetate*. An account of Catholic theological engagement with Islam, in the context of religious challenge, is described in relation to the contemporary contours of Christian-Muslim encounter.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam: Theological Confrontation

The "Clash of Civilizations"[20] has in recent years been posited as the global framework for relations between the different nations

[18]Fadel Sidarouss, S.J., is a Jesuit of the Coptic Catholic tradition from Egypt. See his "Pour une Théologie Contextuelle dans l'Orient Arabe Contemporain," in *Quo Vadis, Theologia Orientalis*, Actes du Colloque, "Théologie Orientale: contenu et importance" (TOTT), Ain Traz (Avril 2005), Textes et Etudes sur l'Orient Chrétien 6 (Beyrouth: CEDRAC, Université Saint Joseph, 2008), 215–237; Fadel Sidarouss, S.J., "The Renewal of the Coptic Catholic Church: Grappling with Identity and Alterity," in Anthony O'Mahony & John Flannery, eds., *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East: Studies for the Synod for the Middle East* (London: Melisende, 2010), 139–152.

[19]Christian Krokus, "Louis Massignon's Influence on the Teaching of Vatican II on Muslims and Islam," in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 23:3 (2012): 329–345.

[20]Fabio Petito, "In Defence of Dialogue of Civilisations: With a Brief Illustration of the Diverging Agreement between Edward Said and Louis Massignon," *Millennium* 39:3 (2011): 759–779.

https://publications.lst.edu/

and religions of the world.[21] The theme has been taken up to describe the encounter between Islam and Christianity as "The Clash of Theologies."[22] Roger Arnaldez has reminded us:

> Moses, Jesus and Muhammad: three messengers of the one, the only God! And yet: three different messages, three religions standing against one another in their dogmas, sometimes in their spirit and in their conceptions of the One who sent their founder! How do we understand and justify such divergence if the God whom they invoke is the same?[23]

The historical study of the relationship between Muslim and Christian communities, between Islam and Christianity, is still in its beginnings.[24] It cannot be otherwise, since Islamic history itself, as well as the history of those Christian communities that have been in contact with Islam in different times and places, are still being enacted.[25] Christian-Muslim relations are as old as Islam. In the course of thirteen centuries of history, they have been manifested in the most varied and even contradictory ways. There have been hard and painful periods. But there have also been periods of frank and fruitful collaboration and even moments of sincere friendship which have not been overcome in

---

[21]David Camroux, "Le choc Huntington," *Études* 6 (1996): 735–746.

[22]Emilio Platti, "Islam et Occident: 'Choc de théologies'," *Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicain d'Études Orientales du Caire* 24 (2000): 347–379. See also Daniel W. Hardy, "The Church after September 11: A Study of Social Forms," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 3/1 (2003): 5–28.

[23]Arnaldez, *Three Messengers for One God,* 1.

[24]Hugh Goddard, *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000).

[25]The Eastern Churches had early contact with the Muslim faith and the theological reflection which emerged during this period is still essentially the "canon" of Christian perspectives on Islam. See Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton University Press, 2007); Sidney H. Griffith, "The Eastern Christians and the Muslims: The Past as Prelude to the Present," *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* 7/2 (2005): 225–241.

https://publications.iat.edu/

conflict. We can find descriptive elements of this relationship in the account given by the Jesuit Paul Nwyia (1925–1980) who grew up in northern Iraq, in a mixed Christian-Muslim village. Reflecting on his childhood, he remembered his first contacts with Muslims:

> Searching far back in my memory, I rediscovered my first impression of my contacts with Muslims. Those contacts were frequent, for many Muslim religious leaders used to visit my family. But despite the real friendship on which these relations were based, I had a strong feeling that, in the eyes of these Muslim friends, we were and remained *strangers*: people who because of their religion were fundamentally different. What awakened this feeling in me was the superior attitude which these friends adopted, an attitude that only their religion could justify. They regarded themselves as followers of the true religion and manifested this conviction with such self-satisfaction and such contempt for others that they were the living image of those whom the Gospel describes as men with pharisaical traits. Many of them were very brave and their attitude towards us was often only unconsciously superior, but we always remained strangers in relation to them. This fact did not bother them; on the contrary, it made them feel that they were all the more faithful to their religion.[26]

Even as a child, Nwyia was sensitive to the tensions between Christianity and Islam.[27] Not only is Islam different from Christianity, it sees itself as positively abrogating Christianity. Muhammad is the "seal of prophets"; the revelation accorded to him supersedes all that came before.[28]

---

[26]Paul Nwyia, "Pour mieux connaître l'Islam," *Lumen Vitae* 30 (1975): 159–171.

[27]This response to Islam is found in a wide range of Christian thought. "It is not a question whether Islam is judged with greater or lesser sympathy, but whether it is judged correctly or incorrectly," said Dr. Hendrik Kraemer, the Dutch Reformed comparative religionist, in a report on Indonesian missions written between the wars but republished in 1958. See Norman Daniel, "Some Recent Developments in the Attitude of Christians towards Islam," in Arthur H. Armstrong & Edith J.B. Fry, eds., *Re-Discovering Eastern Christendom* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1963), 154–166, here at 155.

[28]Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "The Abrogation of Judaism and Christianity in Islam: A Christian Perspective," *Concilium* 4 (1994): 116–123.

https://publications.lst.edu/

As Hugh Goddard has reminded us, the relationship between Christians and Muslims over the centuries is a long and tortuous one. Geographically, the origins of the two communities are not so far apart—Bethlehem and Jerusalem are only some 800 miles from Mecca and Medina—but as the two communities have grown and become universal rather than local influences, the relationship between them has sometimes been one of enmity, sometimes one of rivalry and competition, sometimes one of mutual influence, sometimes one of cooperation and collaboration.[29] Different regions of the world in different centuries have therefore witnessed a whole range of encounters between Christians and Muslims.

Since the earliest period of its history, the Islamic tradition has been conscious of the religious diversity of humanity and considered it an issue of importance. Muslim tradition maintains that diversity of religions has been the hallmark of human society for a very long time, but it had not been its primordial condition.[30]

Yohannan Friedman has reminded us that "[w]e can learn from this that according to the Islamic tradition Islam is not only the historical religion and institutional framework, which was brought into existence by the Muslim prophet Muhammad in the seventh century, but also the primordial religion of mankind, revealed to Adam at the time of

[29]Hugh Goddard has set out six dimensions of Christian-Muslim Relations: the Theological Dimension, the Philosophical Dimension, the Historical Dimension, the Social Dimension, the Political Dimension, and the Cultural Dimension, in "Christian-Muslim Relations: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 3/2 (2003): 1–14.

[30]Jean Aucagne, "L'Islam par rapport à l'unicité et à la division du peuple de Dieu," in Jean-Michel Garriques, ed., *Approaches chrétiennes du Mystère d'Israël* (Limoges: Criterion, 1987), 170–209. See also Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 13.

https://publications.iat.edu/

his creation."[31] For Muslims, Islam is not simply God's final revelation but also God's first.[32]

Christianity nevertheless has a significant, if at times negative, role in Muslim self-understanding. Muslim writers have always been quick to claim that Islam's abrogation of Christianity mirrors the Christian relationship with Judaism.[33] A Christian might respond that this is not correct, since Christianity does not understand itself as abrogating Judaism.[34] The Christian tradition, according to McAuliffe, continues to acknowledge Judaism as a source of its identity; it at least claims to be constantly revisiting Judaism, and it continues to use—in its own fashion—the Hebrew Scriptures. Islam, by contrast, sees itself as the restoration of what Judaism and Christianity would have been, had they not become corrupted (*Tahrif*), especially with regard to their Scriptures.[35] This doctrine has supported an overall concept of Islam as

[31]Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam*, 14.

[32]Guy Monnot, "L'idée de religion et son évolution dans le Coran," in Ugo Bianchi, ed., *The Notion of Religion in Comparative Research* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1994), 97–102.

[33]For a Jewish scholar's view of the relationship between Judaism and Islam, see Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, "Some Differences between Judaism and Islam as Two Religions of Law," *Religion* 14 (1984): 175–191; Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, "Jerusalem and Mecca," in Lee I. Levine, ed., *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 287–299.

[34]McAuliffe, "The Abrogation of Judaism and Christianity in Islam," 119.

[35]Frederick Mathewson Denny, "Corruption," in Jane Dammen McAuliffe, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2001), 439–440. On the relationship between the Bible and the Qur'an, see Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "Is there a connection between the Bible and the Qur'an?", *Theology Digest* 49/4 (2002): 303–317; and Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "The Qur'anic Context of Muslim Biblical Scholarship," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7 (1996): 141–158.

https://publications.lst.edu/

abrogating both Judaism and Christianity.[36] The concept of corruption, especially scriptural, is key to Muslim self-understanding and to the Islamic traditions' relations with the religious Other.[37]

The quranic presentation of Christianity can be subdivided into three themes: Jesus and Mary, Scripture, and Christians. Christian practices, for example monasticism, and Christian doctrines, for example the Trinity, are also categories in the Muslim sacred text. On reading the quranic text, what constitutes a quranic reference to Christians as a social (religious-communal) group ranges from the unequivocal to the ambiguous.[38]

"Christian response to the assertion of abrogation (*naskh*) has been a straightforward rejection of the Islamic understanding of Christianity. Christian apologists have repeatedly insisted that the quranic and post-quranic assessment of Christian doctrine is flawed. The quranic account of Jesus' crucifixion and death; the doctrine of the incarnation; and the Christian understanding of God as Trinity do not match with mainstream Christian self-understanding."[39] As

---

[36]Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[37]The concept of misdeeds and corruption has a strong presence in modern Islamist thought. The equation between the misbehaviour of ancient Jews, particularly in Medina, and the Islamist description of the modern misbehaviour of "Zionist Jews" in Palestine, Israel and Jerusalem has became an important paradigm for some. See Ronald L. Nettler, "Early Islam, Modern Islam and Judaism: The *Isra'iliyyat* in Modern Islamic Thought," in Ronald L. Nettler & Suha Taji-Farouki, eds., *Muslim-Jewish Encounters: Intellectual Traditions and Modern Politics* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 1998), 1–14.

[38]David Marshall, "Christianity in the Qur'an," in Lloyd Ridgeon & Richmond Curzon, eds., *Islamic Interpretations of Christianity* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 3–29.

[39]McAuliffe, "The Abrogation of Judaism and Christianity in Islam," 120. The Christian doctrine of one God in three persons is directly mentioned three times in the Qur'an. Muslim disregard for the Trinity is linked to the questioning

https://publications.lst.edu/

Goddard has reminded us, "[t]he facts remain, however, that although some modern Christians, and indeed medieval Christians, too have suggested that the Quran is denying heretical Christian beliefs rather than mainline ones, Muslims have almost without exception taken the Quran to be denying mainstream Christian ideas too."[40] In his study *The Muslim Jesus*, Tarif Khalidi has written, "Jesus is a controversial prophet. He is the only prophet in the Qur'an who is deliberately made to distance himself from the doctrines that his community is said to hold of him."[41]

Christian accounts of Islam vary, but they nevertheless generally draw attention to how Islam is expressive of a kind of natural law, given with the creation. Louis Massignon, for example, who is considered by some the greatest modern influence on the Christian-Muslim encounter, writes as follows:

> The goal of quranic revelation is not to unveil and justify previously unknown supernatural gifts but, by calling back intelligent beings in the name of God, to make them rediscover the temporal and eternal laws—natural religion, primitive law, the simple worship that God has

---

of Christian belief in the humanity and divinity of Christ. Christians from an early age have questioned the description of the doctrine in Muslim sources and what is meant there. See David Thomas, "Trinity," in Jane Dammen McAuliffe, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2006), 368–372. See also Michael Ipgrave, *Trinity and Interfaith Dialogue: Plenitude and Plurality* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003).

[40]Hugh Goddard, *Muslim Perceptions of Christianity* (London: Grey Seal, 1996), 16. Kate Zebiri has developed this idea: "Most Western scholars regard the Qur'anic material on Christianity as reflecting or responding to the heterodox forms and divided state of Christianity in contemporary Arabia and the surrounding areas" (*Muslims and Christians Face to Face* [Oxford: Oneworld, 1997], 16).

[41]Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 12.

https://publications.lst.edu/

> prescribed for all time—that Adam, Abraham and the prophets have always practised in the same way.[42]

Jacques Jomier, another great Christian Islamicist, complements this account:

> Islam is a natural religion in which the religious instinct which is present in the heart of each person is protected by a way of life, with obligations and [religious] observations imposed in the name of One who is, for the Muslim, the [source of the] Qur'an revelation. It is a patriarchal religion, spiritually pre-dating the biblical promise made by God to Abraham, but which conserves the episodes of the life of the Patriarch involving his struggle against his fathers' idols and his voluntary submission to God, even his sacrifice of his own son. Islam re-presents Abraham (Father of the Prophets) as its great ancestor.[43]

As Charles Malik, a thinker in the Eastern Christian tradition, has reflected, "the historic break caused by Islam did not influence in the slightest the internal development of Christianity: one can study that development today as a completely autonomous whole, as though Islam did not exist. Christianity is wholly intelligible without any reference to Islam. By contrast, Islam is not so intelligible unless reference is made to Christianity. Historically and theologically, however, Christianity inevitably challenges and disturbs Islam; and Islam inevitably challenges and disturbs Christianity. Neither religion can ignore the other, happy in its own conviction and simplicity."[44]

---

[42]Louis Massignon, *Examen du "Présent de l'Homme Lettré" par Abdallah ibn Torjoman* (Rome: Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies of Rome, 1992), following the French translation published in *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* XII (1886), with a preface by Daniel Massignon, introduction by Père Henri Cazelles and observations by Père Albert (MJ) Lagrange (Collection "Studi arabo-islamic del PISAI," No. 5 [Rome: PISAI, 1992]).

[43]Jacques Jomier, "Le Coran et la Liturgie dans l'Islam," *La Maison-Dieu* 190 (1992): 121–127, here at 121.

[44]Charles Malik, "Introduction," in C. Malik, ed., *God and Man in Contemporary Islamic Thought* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1972), 90. Charles Malik, Greek Orthodox of the Patriarchate of Antioch, is Professor of Philosophy at

https://publications.iat.edu/

According to Malik, "the Christian is disturbed and challenged by the Islamic refutation of Christianity: that the Trinity is *shirk* (polytheistic blasphemy); that the crucifixion was only an apparition; that the stories about Christ and his mother in the Qur'an are the authentic ones, rather than those in the four Gospels. Similarly, a Muslim must be disturbed by what Christianity at least implies about Islam: that Christianity has not in fact been abrogated by Islam; that God became flesh in Jesus of Nazareth without ceasing to be God; that this same Jesus actually died and rose from the dead on the third day; that the Church, as a distinct historic body, makes absolute claims about itself. Moreover, this mutuality of disturbance is not confined to the order of theory: it expresses itself in the growth of distinct historic communities, with conflicting norms, laws and mores."[45]

For Malik, "the central question is whether the Word of God is literally a word, or rather a living person. On this issue, Christianity and Islam diverge, and all the other differences relate to this one. Whatever affinities between Christianity and Islam there may be, arising from their common links with Abraham, this question about the nature of revelation remains." Thus according to Malik, "any dialogue which avoids it remains sentimental and superficial. The Qur'an has the highest respect for Christ and his mother, and speaks of him as a Word of God; nevertheless, the authoritative Muslim doctrine is that *the* Word of God is the Qur'an itself. The Muslim claim that Islam constitutes 'the essence of truth and religion' implies a sharp judgment on other religions. It is

---

the American University of Beirut, Lebanon's Minister and Ambassador to the United States (1945–55), Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights at the United Nations, and three times President of the Security Council and President of the General Assembly.

See also Habib C. Malik, ed., *The Challenge of Human Rights: Charles Malik and the Universal Declaration* (Oxford Centre for Lebanese Studies, 2000); K. Cragg, "Charles Malik and the Meaning of Lebanon: In Medias Res," *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 63:3–4 (2011): 221–232.

[45]Malik, "Introduction," 92.

https://publications.lst.edu/

saying, for instance, that Christianity's true essence is found in Islam, 'But if that is so, then normal Christians ought to find themselves wholly at home in Islam. This is manifestly not the case.'"[46] Thus, according to Malik, any dialogue which avoids it remains sentimental and superficial. The Qur'an has the highest respect for Christ and his mother, and speaks of him as a Word of God; nevertheless, the authoritative Muslim doctrine is that *the* Word of God is the Qur'an itself. The Muslim claim that Islam constitutes "the essence of truth and religion" implies a sharp judgment on other religions. It is saying, for instance, that Christianity's true essence is found in Islam, "[b]ut if that is so, then normal Christians ought to find themselves wholly at home in Islam. This is manifestly not the case."[47]

Paul Nwyia may have sensed the conflict between Islam and Christianity even as a child. But he was also aware, even then, that a Christian could not rest content with this situation. The passage quoted at the beginning continues as follows:

> One could easily have been tempted to react like them, to regard them as "strangers," to transform the difference into indifference, or to meet their contempt with even deeper scorn. But this is precisely what my faith forbade me to do. To react thus would have meant doing away with the difference and, by that very fact, disowning my Christian identity. Hence I came to ask myself: "How can I turn these strangers into the *neighbours* of which the Gospel speaks? How can I resist the temptation to react as they do, so that my way of seeing them may be different from the way they look upon me?" I understood that to achieve this I would have to discover, beyond the image they projected of themselves, certain things in them or in their religion which could help me regard them as neighbours whom one must love.

This quest for understanding and for the love of neighbour led Nwyia to study and reflect on Islam throughout his life until his tragic death in

[46]Malik, "Introduction," 92.

[47]Malik, "Introduction," 91–92.

https://publications.lst.edu/

1980.[48] Trained in France by Louis Massignon, Nwyia became a widely renowned and celebrated scholar in the field of Islamic mysticism. His contributions included an edition of letters on spiritual direction by Ibn 'Abbad of Ronda, who was chiefly responsible for putting forward an understanding of Sufism as a spirituality available to all who put their trust in God. He also wrote on Islamic mysticism and Christianity, with special reference to the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola, and on the monastic character of early Muslim spiritual life.[49]

Nwyia reflected on the different ways in which Islam characterized the religious other, and what these revealed about Muslim self-understanding. For Nwyia, Islam's relations with other faiths are shaped by the tension between two antagonistic principles: mutabilities and immutability, between the diverse, changing forms in which religious commitment is lived on the one hand, and the unchangingness of "Allah" on the other. According to Nwyia, this tension has been operative since Islam began; it reflects the complex attitude of Muhammad towards the religious other: polytheists, Jews

[48]Nywia's theme here, "Love of Neighbour," is an important element in the Muslim document *"A Common Word Between Us and You": An Open Letter and Call from Muslim Religious Leaders to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI and Other Major Christian Leaders* (October 13, 2007). See Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University—Memories and Reflections," The Regensburg Address (September 2006), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html (accessed May 7, 2013).

For the wider context, see the studies by Barbara Wood & Andrew Unsworth, "Pope Benedict XVI, Interreligious Dialogue and Islam," in A. O'Mahony, Wulstan Peterburs, O.S.B. & Mohammad Ali Shomali, eds., *Catholics and Shi'a Dialogue: Ethics in Today's Society* (London: Melisende, 2008), 44–68, and Peter Gallagher, S.J., "What Dialogue with Islam adds to Christianity: Reflections on the Thought of Benedict XVI," *Downside Review* 126:444 (2008): 219–227.

[49]Among his numerous academic studies, see Paul Nwyia, "Ibn 'Abbad de Ronda et Jean de la Croix: à propos d'une hypothèse d'Asin Palacios," *Al-Andalus* 22 (1957): 113–130; Paul Nwyia, *Ibn-'Abbad de Ronda (1332–1390): un mystique prédicateur à la Qarawiyin de Fès* (Beirut: Imprimerie catholique, 1961); Paul Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique: nouvel essai sur le lexique technique des mystiques musulmans* (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1970).

https://publications.lst.edu/

and Christians. Islam is faced with a crucial dilemma of how to find "the synthesis between historical and spiritual truth."[50]

Within the Qur'an, there are also discussions of how Muslims should relate to Christianity. According to the Anglican Islamicist Kenneth Cragg, these vary in tone from unequivocal rejection to ambivalent co-existence. We find both warnings to Muslims not to make friends with Christians, as well as more positive calls for interreligious understanding. According to Kenneth Cragg the dictum in the Qur'an placed on Muhammad's lips, "to you your religion and to me mine" (109:6), can be interpreted in both these ways. It might suggest a gentle tolerance, honouring the diversities of culture and experience. Alternatively, it could be taken as expressing an exasperated weariness with how the differences in belief and ritual can never be resolved.[51]

Christianity's encounter with Judaism following the Shoah raises questions touching very deeply on the core identity of the Christian. Similar questions arise from its encounter with Islam, particularly as regards mission.[52] The Jesuits Henri Sanson and Christian Troll have suggested that Christians should reflect on their missionary vocation towards Muslims "in the mirror of Islam." The identification of presence and witness in dialogue and proclamation has been strong in post-Second World War Catholic thought on mission, mediated through Thomas Aquinas and in modern times through Charles de Foucauld and Jacques Maritain.[53] This means that we should take into account at every step the fact that our Muslim partners are convinced in faith that they have a missionary vocation towards us, that they too are called, individually and collectively, to witness to the Truth.

---

[50]Paul Nwyia, "Mutabilités et immutabilité en Islam," *Recherches de sciences religieuses* 63 (1975): 197–213.

[51]Kenneth Cragg, "Islam and Other Faiths," *Studia Missionalia* 42 (1993): 257–270, here at 257.

[52]Johnson, "The Jewish-Muslim Encounter in the Holy Land: The Theological and Political Implications for Christianity," 187–215.

[53]François Daguet, "Présence du Christ aux non-chrétiens: Jacques Maritain, héritier de Thomas d'Aquin et de Charles de Foucauld," *Revue Thomiste* 106:1–2 (2006): 205–241. See also Hugues Didier, "Louis Massignon and Charles de Foucauld," *Aram: Society for Syro-Mesopotamian Studies* 20 (2008): 337–353.

https://publications.jct.edu/

Only in this light can we discern with any sensitivity what a Christian missionary vocation towards Islam might amount to, and how it might appropriately be lived out.[54]

Christian Theological Perspectives on Islam: The Second Vatican Council

One of the most important elements of Christian reflection on Islam has been a response to this need by the authority or "magisterium" of many of the major Christian churches. The Roman Catholic Church was the first to undertake this process; this lead has been followed by other Christian churches.[55] We have recently seen the Muslim community seek to respond to endeavours by the Second Vatican Council, John Paul II and Benedict XVI to engage with Islam by setting out its own response, in the form of a Muslim "Nostra Aetate": "*A Common Word Between Us and You": An Open Letter and Call from Muslim Religious Leaders to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI and Other Major Christian Leaders, 13 October 2007.*[56]

[54]Henri Sanson, *Dialogue intérieur avec l'Islam* (Paris: Centurion, 1990); Christian W. Troll, "Witness Meets Witness: The Church's Mission in the Context of the Worldwide Encounter of Christian and Muslim Believers Today," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 62/3 (March 1998): 152–171, reprinted in *Encounters* 4/1 (March 1998): 15–34.

[55]A. Unsworth, "The Vatican, Islam and Muslim-Christian Relations," in A. O'Mahony & Emma Loosley, eds., *Christian Responses to Islam: Muslim-Christian Relations in the Modern World* (Manchester University Press, 2008), 54–65.

[56]Andrew Unsworth, "John Paul II, Islam and the Christian-Muslim Encounter," in A. O'Mahony, W. Peterburs & M. Shomali, eds., *A Catholic-Shi'a Engagement* (London: Melisende, 2006), 253–302; Barbara Wood & A. Unsworth, "Pope Benedict XVI, Interreligious Dialogue and Islam," *One in Christ: A Catholic Ecumenical Review* 41/4 (2006): 89–108.

https://publications.lst.edu/

On October 20, 1965, the Second Vatican Council (October 1962–December 1965),[57] after many long discussions and emendations of the original text, promulgated a declaration on the relations of the Church with non-Christian religions. A part of the declaration was dedicated to Islam, marking the first time in history that the Roman Catholic Magisterium had formulated an official position on aspects of Muslim belief.[58] The texts of Vatican II concerning Islam consist of a single sentence in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium,* and a full paragraph in the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate.* Several fundamental theological principles are said, according to Michael Fitzgerald, to be underlying the Church's approach to other religions: the universality of God's salvific will and the sacramental nature of the Church, and a third principle, lying between these two and connecting them, namely the necessary mediation of Jesus Christ.[59]

During the second session of the Council, when the project of a text about Judaism was presented, the Catholic Eastern patriarchs and bishops living in Muslim countries asked for "balance," in other words, that justice should be done not only to the reality of Judaism but also to Islam.[60] Here the origins of *Nostra Aetate* are complex and

[57]The Second Vatican Council was one of the most significant events in the history of the modern Roman Catholic Church which after centuries gathered all its bishops together from across the world to discuss and implement reforms and chart new directions for the Church. The Second Vatican Council, especially the document *Nostra Aetate,* has been of great influence on other Christian denominations.

[58]For the commentary on the text concerning Islam, cf. R. Caspar, "La religion musulmane," *Vatican II—Les relations de l'Église avec les religions non-chrétiennes* (Paris: Cerf, Collection Unam Sanctam, 1966), 201–236.

[59]Michael Fitzgerald, *Interfaith Dialogue: A Catholic View* (New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 109–121.

[60]See the reflections by David Neuhaus, S.J., on Catholic-Jewish relations: "Jewish Israeli Attitudes towards Christianity and Christians in Contemporary

https://publications.iat.edu/

still an open historical question. John XXIII died on June 3, 1963 and was succeeded by the Archbishop of Milan, Giovanni Battista Montini, as Paul VI. The new pope had for a long time expressed an interest in ameliorating relations between Catholics and Jews, and so in 1960 he gave the task of preparing an initial document on Judaism to Augustin Cardinal Bea, a German Jesuit who had been at one time the rector of the Pontifical Biblical Institute and also the confessor of Pope Pius XII, and so a commission under the Secretariat for Unity was set up specifically to deal with this sensitive subject.

Other Council members likewise brought up the point that if the question of the Church's relationship to Judaism was taken up then its relationship with other non-Christian religions should necessarily be discussed as well. It was clear that a definite impasse was arising between those who believed that the Jewish religion should have a unique position in a document all by itself and those who regarded a treatment of Judaism in an official conciliar document as inopportune and detrimental to the apostolate and presence of the Church in the Muslim world.[61] Between the founding of the commission to draft a document in 1960 and its completion as a separate conciliar decree in 1964, there was a constant struggle not just over the details of the

---

Israel," in A. O'Mahony & M. Kirwan, S.J., eds., *World Christianity: Politics, Theology, Dialogues* (London: Melisende Press, 2004), 347–369; David Neuhaus, S.J., "Catholic-Jewish Relations in the State of Israel: Theological Perspectives," in A. O'Mahony & J. Flannery, eds., *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East* (London: Melisende, 2010), 237–252; David Neuhaus, S.J., "Achievements and Challenges in Jewish-Christian Dialogue: Forty Years after *Nostra Aetate*," *The Downside Review* 439 (2007): 111–130.

[61]Recognizing the sensitivity of this issue, Cardinal Bea, in his presentation of the text of *Nostra Aetate* to the general congregation on September 25, 1964, made a specific disclaimer that the sections of the document on Judaism were entirely of a religious and not a political nature. See F. Anderson, ed., *Council Daybook: Vatican II, Session 3* (Washington: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1965), 62–63. See also Thomas Stransky, "The Genesis of *Nostra Aetate*," *America* 193:12 (October 24, 2005).

https://publications.iat.edu/

document but also over its very existence. When it finally appeared and was approved in November 1964, it included not only material on the Church's relationship with Judaism but also, albeit much shorter, sections on the Church's relationship to Islam and two other major world religions, Buddhism and Hinduism.[62]

However, it would be too negative an evaluation to suggest that *Nostra Aetate* emerged solely in relation to a controversy over a document on the Catholic Church's relationship with Judaism. The theology which informed and grounded the conciliar document had been developing in the mind of Catholic thinkers for some decades, especially in such groups as the *Cercle Saint Jean-Bapiste* and in the thought of Louis Massignon, Jean Daniélou, S.J., and Jules Monchanin.[63]

As suggested, the Council's concern with Islam arose to some extent incidentally, out of a desire for a declaration concerning the Jewish people. There was no intention of providing a full discussion of Islamic beliefs and practices as is widely acknowledged in the academic literature, nor for that matter, of those of any other religion. Thus it has often been commented that the Second Vatican Council spoke about Muslims but not about Islam. This is true insofar as the Council did not intend to give a full description of Islam, entering into a comprehensive theological assessment of the tradition: the Council left that open for future consideration by the Church.

---

[62]See the following studies (all in *New Blackfriars* 88:1016 [July 2007]: 367–432): John McDade, "Catholic Christianity and Judaism since Vatican II"; A. O'Mahony, "Catholic Theological Perspectives on Islam at the Second Vatican Council"; Michael Barnes, "Expanding Catholicity: The Dialogue with Buddhism"; Martin Ganeri, "Catholic Encounter with Hindus in the Twentieth Century."

[63]See the important studies by Françoise Jacquin, "L'abbé Monchanin et l'Islam," *Islamochristiana* (Rome) 23 (1997): 27–42; Françoise Jacquin, "Louis Massignon et l'abbé Monchanin," *La vie spirituelle* 694 (1991): 175–183; Françoise Jacquin, *Histoire du Cercle Saint Jean-Bapiste. L'enseignement du père Daniélou* (Paris: Éditions Beauchesne, 1987).

https://publications.iat.edu/

Muslim belief as presented in *Lumen Gentium*

The demand for the inclusion of Islam in the conciliar documents issued in two relatively short but important and decisive texts. Although they are primarily concerned with Catholics' practical attitude towards Muslims, they imply elements of a fresh Christian theological view of Islam. Number 16 of the "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," *Lumen Gentium*, declares:

> But the plan of salvation also embraces those who acknowledge the Creator, and among these the Muslims are first; they profess to hold the faith of Abraham and along with us they worship the one merciful God who will judge humanity on the last day.[64]

The study of the proceedings of the Council makes it clear that it did not want to state an objective link between Islam, Ishmael and the biblical revelation. The reference to Abraham, as Troll correctly suggests, is put on the subjective level: "they profess …."[65]

Some decades before the Council there were influential currents in Catholic thought which attempted to reconcile Islam and Abraham in Christian theology; thus Louis Massignon (1883–1962), the Islamicist who, having recovered his own Christian faith through contact with Islam, devoted his life to presenting the faith of Islam to the West. He

[64]Norman Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* II (London/Washington: Sheed/Georgetown, 1990), 861. Some Islamic opinions object to the statement of *Lumen Gentium*—"with us they worship the one merciful God"—as there are Muslims who attack the Christian claim to monotheism. The origins of this might be a reference to a Trinity consisting of God, Jesus and Mary in the Qur'an (Q 5:116). Christians may reply that the Qur'an is denying a false Trinity, but they will still be considered by some Muslims to be *mushrikûn* (associators), *Kâfirûn* (unbelievers). This critique has roots in early Islam, where the question of the unity or diversity of the polytheistic world is discussed; see Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam*, 76–80.

[65]Christian Troll, "Changing Catholic Views of Islam," in Jacques Waardenburg, ed., *Islam and Christianity: Mutual Perceptions since the Mid-20th Century* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 23–27.

https://publications.iat.edu/

was no theologian and never systematized his thought but presented it in flashes of an intuitive nature.[66] His position has been summarized thus:

> Islam, according to Massignon, is the heir of Hagar and Ishmael, the "excluded," driven into the desert but enjoying a special blessing (Gen. 16:11–20; 21:17–20; 25:12–18). Muhammad receives this blessing of Ishmael "at the providential and symbolic hour": exiled from his homeland, Mecca, like Abraham from Ur and Ishmael driven into the desert, he claims the inheritance of Abraham against Israel (the Jewish people) unfaithful to their Covenant and against the Christians unfaithful to Jesus.[67]

Islam's role is thus, as it were, to goad Jews and Christians to return to the correct understanding of their own religions. It could be considered almost as an "Abrahamic schism, prior to the Ten Commandments, the foundation of Judaism and to Pentecost, the foundation of Christianity."[68]

According to Louis Massignon's "theological" vision, "Muhammad possessed the faith of Abraham, though he did not experience mystic union, for the night when he was transported from Mecca to Jerusalem and thence to heaven he stopped short of the 'Lotus of the Limit' (Q 17:1; 53: 9–17). By abstaining from crossing the threshold and not daring to intercede for all sinners, he excluded himself from understanding the inner workings of the divine life: hence the quranic denials of the Incarnation and Christ's death on the cross. Muslim faith, although authentic, needs to be completed by Christian charity; nevertheless, in Massignon's view, it is evident from the lives of Muslim saints that the Holy Spirit is at work bringing about this completion from within

---

[66]A. O'Mahony, "Our Common Fidelity to Abraham is What Divides: Christianity and Islam in the Life and Thought of Louis Massignon," in A. O'Mahony & Peter Bowe, eds., *Catholics in Interreligious Dialogue: Monasticism, Theology and Spirituality* (Leominister: Gracewing, 2006), 151–190.

[67]Robert Caspar, *A Historical Introduction to Islamic Theology* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica, 1998), 97. See also Sidney H. Griffith, "Sharing the Faith of Abraham: The 'Credo' of Louis Massignon," *Islam and Muslim-Christian Relations* 8/2 (1997): 193–210.

[68]Caspar, *A Historical Introduction to Islamic Theology,* 98.

https://publications.iat.edu/

Islam. This is nowhere more apparent than in the case of al-Hallâj."[69] Massignon maintains that al-Hallâj's death, in ecstatic participation in the Christ, summons Islam to admit the truth of the crucifixion. The rift between the three faiths—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—will not finally be healed until Christ returns and, as Muslims themselves believe, Jerusalem once more becomes the direction of prayer (in early Islam, the *qiblah* was towards Jerusalem). In the meantime, the Qur'an may be regarded as a truncated Arab Bible, the scriptural rule of the "Abrahamic schism," and given the conditional authority conceded to the decisions of the anti-popes.[70]

Massignon, who died shortly before the opening of the Second Vatican Council, certainly helped to bring about a new vision of Islam in Catholic circles, though his own stressed position was not adopted by the conciliar texts.

The figure of Abraham is a controversial figure in the encounter for Christianity and Islam.[71] Some two hundred and forty-five verses in twenty-five sûras of the Qur'an make reference to Abraham (Ibrâhîm), the "progenitor of the nation of Israel." Among the biblical figures,

[69]N. Robinson, "Massignon, Vatican II and Islam as an Abrahamic Religion," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 2:2 (1991): 181–203.

al-Hallâj was executed in Baghdad in 922, having scandalized the authorities by claiming to have achieved union with God and uttering the words "anâ al-haqq [I am the Truth]." He went to the gibbet willingly, declaring God's love to the last. Massignon set out to prove beyond reasonable doubt not only that al-Hallâj was innocent of heresy, but also that his miracles and mystical experiences were as well-documented as those of any Christian saint—see his classic work, of which the second edition was translated into English by Herbert Mason: *The Passion of al-Hallâj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam* (4 vols.), Bollingen Series XCVIII (Princeton University Press, 1982).

[70]Robinson, "Massignon, Vatican II and Islam as an Abrahamic Religion," 182–205.

[71]Y. Moubarac, "Abraham en Islam," in "Abraham, père des croyants," *Cahiers Sioniens* 5/2 (1951): 104–120.

https://publications.iat.edu/

only Moses[72] receives more attention in the Qur'an. Abraham and Moses are the sole prophets explicitly identified as bearers of scriptures (Q 53:36–7; 87:18–9). According to Reuven Firestone, although the Islamic Abraham shares many characteristics with the figure in the Bible and later Jewish exegetical literature, the Qur'an especially emphasizes his role as a precursor of Muhammad and the establisher of the pilgrimage rites in Mecca.[73]

For Jews, Abraham's special covenantal relationship with God established him as "the authenticator and founder of Judaism." According to Firestone, "It was natural that when Christianity established itself as related but independent of Judaism, Christians would associate with the figure of Abraham (Rom. 4:9–25; 9:7–9; Gal. 4:21–31).[74] Similarly, Abraham's role in the Qur'an includes a related but more polemical aspect as he appears as neither a Jew nor a Christian but as a *Hanif Muslim* (Q 3:65–70). Like the New Testament citations, the Qur'an stipulates that the divine covenant established with Abraham does not automatically include all his progeny (Q 2:124; 4:54–5; 37:113; 57:26). In as much as the religion of Muhammad is the religion of Abraham (Q 22:78), those Jews who reject Muhammad and the religion he brings are, in fact, rejecting their own religion. The Jews

[72]Y. Moubarac, "Moïses dans le Coran" in "Moïses, l'homme de l'alliance," *Cahiers Sioniens* 8/2–3–4 (1954): 373–393.

[73]One series of Abraham references in the Qur'an finds no parallel in either the Bible or later Jewish traditions. These associate Abraham, and often Ishmael, with the building of the Ka'aba, with Arabian cultic practice and with terminology of Islamic religious conceptions. I am indebted to the account given by Reuven Firestone, "Abraham," in Jane Dammen McAuliffe, ed., *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* I (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2001), 5–11; Reuven Firestone, "Abraham's Association with the Meccan Sanctuary and the Pilgrimage in the pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Periods," *Le Muséon* 104 (1991): 365–393; and in Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abrahamic-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

[74]Jean Daniélou, "Abraham dans la tradition chrétienne," in "Abraham, père des croyants," *Cahiers Sioniens* 5/2 (1951): 69–87.

https://publications.lst.edu/

further deny the religious sanctity of Mecca, despite Abraham's intimate association with it (Q 3:95–8) as outlined in the Islamic tradition."[75]

Abraham in Islam also has a defining role in the abrogation (*naskh*) of Judaism and Christianity. For Yohanan Friedmann, this is intimately related to the notion that Abraham/Ibrâhîm was a Muslim in a metahistorical sense. At some point, Judaism and Christianity deviated from their pristine condition and became hopelessly corrupt (*Tahrif*), especially in the scriptural transmission. A prophetic mission would have been required to ameliorate this situation; no prophets were sent to accomplish this task between Jesus and Muhammad and, consequently, true religion ceased to exist. Only with the emergence of Islam in the seventh century was the situation transformed.[76]

Thus throughout the centuries since the rise of Islam, Muslim/Christian relations have revolved around this double axis of familiar, biblical appeal and strenuous, religious critique.[77] It was against this background that the Second Vatican Council sought to give an account of Muslim belief as seen in the light of the Islamic tradition.

Both texts of Vatican II link Islamic faith with Abraham. *Lumen Gentium* says that Muslims "profess to hold the faith of Abraham." *Nostra Aetate* states that Muslims submit to God "just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own." It must be admitted that these references to Abraham remain somewhat vague. According to Michael Fitzgerald, Abraham's faith is recognized, but it is not said how he exemplified this faith. Muslims see Abraham

[75]Firestone, "Abraham," 5–11.

[76]Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam*, 16.

[77]See the important reflections by Sidney H. Griffith, "Sharing the Faith of Abraham," 193–210, and also by Andrew Unsworth, "Louis Massignon, The Holy See and the Ecclesial Transition from 'Immortale Dei' to 'Nostra Aetate': A Brief History of the Development of Catholic Church Teaching on Muslims and the Religion of Islam from 1883–1965," *Aram: Society for Syro-Mesopotamian Studies* 20 (2008): 299–316.

https://publications.jst.edu/

as a champion of monotheism and attribute to him the rebuilding of the Ka'aba, the shrine in Mecca that has become the direction of Muslims' prayer. Christians insist on Abraham's response to God's call to leave his country for a promised land. By both religions Abraham is given as a model of submission to God's mysterious decrees. There is silence above all on the question of descent from Abraham. Quite apart from the historical question of the descent of the Arabs from Abraham through Ishmael, a question which remains disputed, the silence on this point is quite consistent with the Christian position with regard to Abraham. Physical descent is unimportant; it is faith that counts.[78] As long as there is a readiness to respect the different interpretations, the figure of Abraham provides common ground for the followers of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.[79]

Islam in the conciliar declaration *Nostra Aetate*

The second text of the Council is longer and more substantial. It constitutes paragraph 3 of the "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," *Nostra Aetate,* in which were put together the schemata about Judaism, Islam and the other religions. The declaration begins with the assurance that the Catholic Church regards her Muslim brothers "with esteem." It proceeds to detail the essential elements of Muslim belief, stressing those features that are common to the two religions; Christian Troll observes, for example, that Muslims are conceded to "adore the one God, living and enduring, merciful and all-powerful, Maker of heaven and earth." Further, without actually accepting the revealed character of the Qur'an, the declaration observes

[78]On Abraham, see R. Caspar, "Abraham in Islam and Christianity," *Encounter: Documents for Christian-Muslim Understanding* 92 (1996): 1–17; Jean-Louis Ska, "Abraham dans le Coran ou le prototype du 'musulman'," in *Abraham et ses hôtes: Le patriarche et les Croyants au Dieu unique* (Bruxelles: Éds Lessius, 2001), 61–84.

[79]Michael L. Fitzgerald, "From Heresy to Religion: Islam since Vatican II," *Encounter: Documents for Christian-Muslim Understanding* 29 (2003): 1–13. See also Fitzgerald, *Interfaith Dialogue*, 109–121.

https://publications.iat.edu/

that Muslims recognize that God "has spoken to men," and affirms that Muslims are anxious to submit themselves with all their souls to God's decrees even though the decrees be hidden, just as Abraham, "with whom the Muslim faith is pleased to associate itself," submitted himself to them.[80]

There is a radical divergence, however: Christ. But while such a divergence is acknowledged with respect to the figure of Christ, reference is nonetheless made to the exalted place occupied by Mary in Muslim doctrine: "They also honour Mary, his virgin mother; at times they call on her, too, with devotion." Concerning the last things, or eschatology, "Muslims await the day of judgment when God will give each man his due after raising him up." A brief allusion is made to Muslim morality: "They prize the moral life and give worship to God especially through prayer, almsgiving, and fasting."

The Council document states in full:

> The Church also looks upon Muslims with respect. They worship the one God living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to humanity and to whose decrees, even the hidden ones, they seek to submit themselves whole-heartedly, just as Abraham, to whom the Islamic faith readily relates itself, submitted to God. They venerate Jesus as a prophet, even though they do not acknowledge him as God, and they honour his virgin mother Mary and even sometimes devoutly call upon her. Furthermore they await the day of judgement when God will require all people brought back to life. Hence they have regard for the moral life and worship God especially in prayer, almsgiving and fasting.[81]

[80]Troll, "Changing Catholic Views of Islam," 19–78; Christian Troll, "Catholic Teachings on Interreligious Dialogue: Analysis of Some Recent Official Documents with Special Reference to Christian-Muslim Relations," in Jacques Waardenburg, ed., *Muslim-Christian Perceptions of Dialogue Today: Experiences and Expectations* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 233–276.

[81]Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* II, 861, 969–970.

https://publications.jct.edu/

Two characteristics of this text are evident. First, it highlights the common or related points between Islam and Christianity, noting at the same time the essential difference: the Christian profession of the divinity of Jesus. Second, it opens up the possibility of collaboration between the two religions at the service of the most pressing needs of contemporary humanity.[82]

The opening sentence of the paragraph constitutes a unique statement and an absolutely new beginning insofar as it is an official declaration about Muslim belief issued by the highest teaching authority of the Church.[83] John Paul II[84] took up this theme on August 19, 1986 when, addressing young Moroccans gathered in the Casablanca stadium, he did not hesitate to tell them: "We believe in the same God, the one God, the living God, the God who creates the worlds and brings the worlds to their perfection."[85] This might be considered affirmation of the existence of one and the same creator God. But one also has to add that Christians and Muslims who worship the same God have very different conceptions of God's unity. One could even say that the monotheism which is a common heritage of all children of Abraham has at the same time divided them for centuries.[86]

One would do well to listen to the warning of Roger Arnaldez:

---

[82]Robert Caspar, *Traité de Théologie Musulmanne* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica, 1987), 83–87.

[83]This analysis owes much to Troll, "Changing Catholic Views of Islam," 23–27.

[84]Claude Geffre, "The One God of Islam and Trinitarian Monotheism," *Concilium* (2001) 1: 85–93.

[85]"The Speech of the Holy Father John Paul II to Young Muslims (Casablanca, Morroco, 19 August 1985)," *Encounter: Documents for Christian-Muslim Understanding* 128 (1986): 1–12.

[86]Arnaldez, *Three Messengers for One God*, 3.

https://publications.jct.edu/

> Hence, the problem of the diverse messages stubbornly remains. There is no way of reducing it to a common core so long as we situate ourselves within one of the three religious families [Judaism, Christianity, Islam]. One must be Jewish, Christian, or Muslim, adhering to a faith that excludes the other two. If we want to extract some monotheism-in-itself, a monotheistic theology or morality as such, we must simultaneously depart from the three monotheistic religions and place ourselves outside or above them. To put it most forcefully, we would have to neglect the particularities of their messages, ignore the characteristics of each, and repress the very notion of a Messenger.

Muslims cannot accept Christian monotheism as Trinitarian monotheism, and that is a direct consequence of their rejection of the divine Sonship of Jesus.[87] We should then recall how, by its radical nature, Islamic monotheism differs from Christian monotheism, and note that in Muslim eyes the sin *par excellence*, that of idolatry, is committed not only by pagan polytheists but also by Christians themselves.[88]

Muslims and Christians, whilst they adore together the one God, do not always give him the same "names," nor do they give the same meaning to apparently similar "names"; therefore, the Council mentions explicitly some of these "names," those especially important to Islam, mentioned repeatedly in the Qur'an, and common to both religions. An annotation to the text of the Council refers to the letter of Pope Gregory VII to Al-Nasir, the eleventh-century amir of Mauritania, where the Pope greets the amir as his "brother in Abraham" and as a believer in God, One and Creator.[89]

---

[87]Robert L. Fastiggi, "The Incarnation: Muslim Objections and the Christian Response," *The Thomist* 57 (1993): 457–493.

[88]Robert Caspar, "The Permanent Significance of Islam's Monotheism," *Concilium* 177 (1985): 67–78.

[89]The letter was written in AD 1076. See C. Courtois, "Grégoire VII et l'Afrique du Nord," *Revue Historique* CXCV (1945): 97–122, 193–226.

https://publications.iat.edu/

The Council, as Christian Troll has reminded us to who we are indebted here, refused to add "through the Prophets"[90] to the phrase "who has spoken to humanity"[91] because of the ambiguity of the reference to the prophets, who are not always the same, and do not always have the same "face" nor play the same role,[92] in Islam and Christianity. This reference to the prophets is nonetheless of the greatest importance as to the Christian qualification of the Muslim faith: the

[90]John Flannery, "Christ in Islam and Muhammad: A Christian Evaluation," in A. O'Mahony & John Flannery, eds., *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East* (London: Melisende, 2010), 331–352.

[91]The Qur'an teaches in Islamic tradition that prophets have been sent by God to all peoples giving the same guidance and warning. As a result, all the prophets recognized in the Qur'an are accorded equal status. Muhammad is regarded as the "Seal of the Prophets" because Muslims believe that his teaching has been preserved without corruption. He is given the title *"rasul"* or "the one whom God sends" and this reflects the Muslim belief that the scriptures were given to him as a universal revelation. Every community has received a *"rasul,"* but Muhammad was sent to a people who had not previously received one. Muslims regard a *"rasul"* (prophets such as Noah, Moses or Jesus) as being free from sin. See Jacques Jomier, "The Idea of the Prophet in Islam," *Bulletin: Secretariatus pro non-Christianis* (Rome) 18 (1971): 149–163.

[92]One of the essential differences between Islam and Christianity is their understanding of the revelation from God, and therefore a major difficulty in Christian-Muslim dialogue is the fact that while Muslims accept Jesus as a genuine prophet and messenger of God, Christians do not accord the same status to Muhammad. See Jacques Jomier, "The Problem of Muhammad," in *How to Understand Islam* (London: SCM Press, 1989), 140–148. Maurice Borrmans, in Louis Gardet & Joseph Cuoq, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims* (Rome: Ancona, 1969), states that "Christians are inclined to perceive that Muhammad was a great literary, political and religious genius, and he possesses particular qualities which enabled him to lead multitudes to the worship of the true God. But, at the same time, they find in him evidence of mistakes and important misapprehensions. They also discern in him marks of prophethood" (57–58). See also Robert Caspar, "Muhammad's Prophetic Office and the Inspired Nature of the Qur'an," in *A Historical Introduction to Islamic Theology* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica, 1998), 89–134.

https://publications.iat.edu/

Muslim faith does not relate to a God invented by human reason. Muslim faith relates to the transcendent God who has made himself known by his Word entrusted to humanity, to the prophets—even if this is not the same Word, or the same prophets, as for the Christian faith.

The Muslim faith is essentially *islâm,* active submission to the Will of God, to "whose decrees, even the hidden ones, they seek to submit themselves whole-heartedly." Thus is noted the "mysterious" aspect which this faith comprises: reasonable without being rational, in line with the Qur'an which demands of the believer the acceptance of the will of God, even if it appears paradoxical to the eyes of reason. It is as type and model of this faith of submission that Abraham finds his true role in the Muslim faith.

Jesus and Mary are among the most venerated persons in the Qur'an. The conciliar text indicates the refusal to see in Jesus more than a great prophet.[93] This will be taken positively by Muslims who glory in this refusal which is born from the desire to respect the transcendence of God. Mary is also respected as the virgin mother of Jesus according to Islam, which has never hesitated on this point.[94]

Muslim eschatology is briefly indicated. The resurrection of the body and the judgement which follows it are one of the essential points of the Muslim and the Christian faith. The modalities and the criteria of this judgement can differ from one theology to the other. It remains that, according to the Qur'an as well as according to the Gospel, everyone will be judged by their actions and that, for the Christian as well as for the Muslim, "the world which comes from God, returns to God," to find there its fulfillment.

"They have regard for the moral life" is the phrase that remained after the Council had discussed a proposed, fuller text: "… for the

[93]D. Marshall, "The Resurrection of Jesus and the Qur'an," in Gavin D'Costa, ed., *Resurrection Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1996), 168–183.

[94]D. Marshall, "Mary in the Qur'an," in David Thomas, ed., with Claire Amos, *A Faithful Presence: Essays for Kenneth Cragg* (London: Melisende, 2003), 155–165.

https://publications.iat.edu/

moral life, individual as well as familial and social." The Council refused to refer explicitly to family and social morality because of the Qur'an's passages on polygamy.

The Muslim faith is described by its three foremost manifestations: ritual prayer, the alms-tax and fasting. Of the profession of faith only its first part, the faith in the One God, was mentioned at the beginning of the text. The pilgrimage could have been mentioned but it is far from being practised by all Muslims, and the Council did not intend in any way to present a complete exposition of Islam.

The document continues:

> Although considerable dissensions and enmities between Christians and Muslims may have arisen in the course of the centuries, this synod urges all parties that, forgetting past things, they train themselves towards sincere mutual understanding and together maintain and promote social justice and moral values as well as peace and freedom for all people.[95]

The second part of the text concerns the present and future perspectives of understanding and collaboration between Christians and Muslims. The past of hatreds and wars must be forgotten, i.e., not ignored but overcome. Mutual understanding—objective and respectful—will require much effort and progress on both sides. But the dialogue itself must be surpassed in order to arrive at collaboration between believers towards one objective: to confront together the challenges of modern thought and civilisation, not only in order to save faith in God.[96]

There can be no doubt that the Council's statements regarding Islam represent a radical novelty in the light of history. However, soon after the closure of the Council, the Dominican scholar of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, George Anawati (1905–1994), in a critical analysis of these statements, pointed out their remarkable silence regarding the figure of Abraham, and Islam's possible historical as well

[95]Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* II, 861, 969–970.

[96]Caspar, *Traité de Théologie Musulmanne*, 87.

https://publications.iat.edu/

as spiritual link with him through Ishmael and, above all, concerning Muhammad, and hence the prophetic character of Islam. In 1967, Anawati stated: "One can say that the Declaration summarizes with a minimum of words Muslim *theodicy* but not what is essential to the Muslim *faith* of which the belief in the mission of Muhammad is one of the most important elements."[97] The silence of the Council concerning the second part of the Muslim profession of faith (*shahâda*) doubtless represents the most sensitive point for the Muslims. The Council chose to deal with it—by silence.

What the Second Vatican Council said on Islam can be summed up in the words of Robert Caspar:

> The Council affirms positively the minimum which is to be accepted, Islam is in the first rank of non-Christian monotheistic religions. If further studies concerning the theology of religions and in particular regarding the theological status of Islam allow one to say more, the Conciliar texts are not opposed.[98]

Agenda for the Future

How do we give context to Christian-Muslim relations today? We experience Christian-Muslim engagement at many levels: theological, political, cultural and global. Today, looking at the world as a whole, Christians and Muslims together make up over half of the global population. Statistics are almost inevitably estimates, however Christians make up 33 per cent (approximately 2.3 billion) and Muslims 18 per cent (1.5 billion).[99]

---

[97]Georges Anawati, "Exkurs zum Konzilstext über die Muslim," *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* II, Das Zwite Vatikanische Konzil (Freiburg: Herder, 1967), 485–487, quoted in Troll, "Changing Catholic Views of Islam," 27.

[98]Caspar, "La religion musulmane," 215.

[99]Goddard, "Christian-Muslim Relations: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," 1–14. See also *Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's*

https://publications.iat.edu/

Christian-Muslim relations increasingly must be set within a context of global religious resurgence.[100] This religious-political context is opening up dynamic encounters which go far beyond the classic historic relationship between Europe and Islam across the Mediterranean or in the Balkans. It also goes substantially beyond the European discussion on the relationship between church and state, and religion and politics in the public square. The state of Christian-Muslim relations has world significance.

Today, Christian-Muslim relations take place in a multiplicity of contexts. The Middle East has a majority Muslim population, however there are significant Christian communities in Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria which have been present some six hundred years before the arrival of Islam. The Middle East is the historic homeland of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Jerusalem is central to Jewish and Christian religious identity and is of importance in Islam. Eastern Christian experience of living with Islam in the Middle East is of great importance for global Christian tradition in widening and giving historical maturity to its religious encounter with Islam.

We also witness a reconfiguration of Christian-Muslim relations in Russia. Western Christian circles show little understanding of the political and religious encounter between the Eastern Orthodox Churches and Islam—whether these Churches be in the majority (as in Russia and some Balkan states) or in the minority (as in the Patriarchates of Antioch,

---

Christian Population (December 2011), http://www.pewforum.org/christian/global-christianity-exec.aspx (accessed May 7, 2013).

[100]Scott M. Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations: The Struggle for the Soul of the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Scott M. Thomas, "Taking Religious and Cultural Pluralism Seriously: The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Society," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 29:3 (2000): 815–841; Scott M. Thomas, "The Way of St. Francis? Catholic Approaches to Christian-Muslim Relations and Interreligious Dialogue," *Downside Review* 126:444 (2008): 157–168.

https://publications.lst.edu/

Constantinople, Alexandria or Jerusalem). The Christian Churches of the West also generally have little knowledge and understanding of the Oriental Churches—Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopian, Syrian—and their contribution to understanding the Islamic tradition which they have experienced historically over many centuries.[101]

For sustaining a more robust historical and theological reflection of the Christian-Muslim encounter, Churches of the West must expand their canon of knowledge, experience and understanding. One of the main features, not often commented upon, of Benedict XVI's reflection on "Faith, Reason and Violence" in the modern world at Regensburg in August 2006 was his emphasis on Eastern Christian experience of Islam and its religious thinking on the nature of Christian-Muslim engagement.

Christian-Muslim Relations also have a global context. Thus in Africa, large numbers of Christians and Muslims are found in the four regions of West, East, Central and South Africa. We should not forget the continent's association with ancient Christianity in Egypt, Nubia (Sudan) and Ethiopia. According to Lamin Sanneh, professor of Christianity at Yale University, it is estimated that in Africa in the year 2025 there will be 600 million Christians and 500 million Muslims.[102] Asia has the largest concentration of Muslims in the world—Indonesia in South East Asia being the largest Muslim nation by population, followed by Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. Christianity is undergoing tremendous growth in Asia, with the Philippines and South Korea having Christian majority populations. China, with approximately 10 percent of its population Christian, which is estimated to grow by 5 to 10 percent each year, is rapidly becoming one of the largest concentrations of Christians in

[101]H. Goddard, "Challenges and Developments: Christian-Muslim Relations in the Middle East," *IJSCC* 3/2 (2003): 15–35.

[102]Lamin Sanneh, "Religion's Return," *The Times Literary Supplement*, London (October 13, 2006). See also Klaus Kock, "Christian-Muslim Relations in the African Context," *IJSCC* 3/2 (2003): 36–57.

https://publications.jct.edu/

the world.[103] In Europe today, there are sizeable Muslim communities, whereas the Americas (North and South) have dominant Christian societies with extremely small Muslim populations.[104] It is certain that how Christians respond to Islam is of global significance. As we have seen, it is an encounter located in history and theological tradition.

[103]Tom Michel, "Implications of the Islamic Revival for Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Asia," *IJSCC* 3/2 (2003): 58–76.

[104]Philip Lewis, "Christians and Muslims in the West: From Isolation to Shared Citizenship?", *IJSCC* 3/2 (2003): 77–100.

https://publications.lst.edu/