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Changing Water into Wine: A Thomist Model for Theological Engagement with Non-Christian Thought and its Relevance for Contemporary Christian Encounter with Asian Religions and Cultures
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Benedict XVI and Interreligious Dialogue: The Case of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations
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EDITOR'S PREFACE

The first four major essays were written for the LST international forum on "Theological Views on Religions and Cultures" held in July 2011 and co-sponsored by Heythrop College, University of London. Each shows the wide-ranging and deeply-complex issues involved in interfaith and intercultural encounters. Both in history and in today's world, Christianity's encounters with other faith traditions and cultures have produced either mutual understanding and enrichment or conflict and violence without any victors, hence the sacred imperative to all to ensure partnership for effective and inclusive service of all peoples and profound reverence for the Holy One.

Martin Ganeri's essay retrieves Thomistic approaches to non-Christian religions, and discovers the unexpected image of water changed into wine as a way of creative engagement between Christianity and these religions that "steer[s] between sheer opposition and sheer replacement." Both Rocco Viviano and Anthony O'Mahony have chosen to write about Christian-Muslim relations—a topic made even more contentious by reactions to the address of Pope Benedict XVI at Regensburg, Germany. Viviano's study notes the absence of a systematic treatise from the Pope, and thus undertakes a close reading of his comments and ideas on Islam and its relation to Christianity in various papal writings and interviews. It shows the Pope's profound understanding of the complex place of Islam in the history of religion as well as his open invitation for Islam to articulate its own theology of interreligious

dialogue. O'Mahony's essay discusses important aspects of the evolution of Catholic thought on Islam from the Second Vatican Council onwards, and locates them in the changing global religious and political context today. Gianni Criveller revisits the well-known encounter of the early modern Jesuit mission with Chinese religions and cultures. His essay focuses on Mateo Ricci—how he changed from wearing Buddhist monk's robes into a Confucian scholar's, how he distinguished direct and indirect preaching, and how his views compared to those of his Jesuit companions and other missionaries.

The last two essays are critical studies on specific topics. Zhai Linyi's analyzes some aspects of Confucius' and Laozi's views in the light of Paul Ricoeur's study of the symbolism of evil and its eventual articulation in the doctrine of original sin. Anthony Nguyen Sieu's exegetical study focuses on John 20:17: "Do not hold on to me." It reviews different interpretations of this crucial text on the Risen Lord's appearance to Mary Magdalene, and provides insights on the close link between the Resurrection and Ascension as well as on the role of Mary as "apostola apostolarum."

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CHANGING WATER INTO WINE

A Thomist Model for Theological Engagement with Non-Christian Thought and its Relevance for Contemporary Christian Encounter with Asian Religions and Cultures

Martin Ganeri, O.P.

In the view of the Vietnamese Catholic theologian Peter Phan, the future of Asian Christianity lies more in bearing witness to the Kingdom of God than in expanding the Church's membership through converts. Based on statements and documents from the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, Phan further argues that this bearing witness to the Kingdom of God should take the form of a threefold dialogue: a dialogue with Asian poverty, a dialogue with Asian cultures, and a dialogue with Asian religions.[1]

In this article I would like to look at how the Scholastic or Thomistic approach to theology might help us with promoting this threefold dialogue. In particular, I would like to consider one model Thomas Aquinas gives us for understanding how Christian theology might engage with the thought of Asian religions, and how members of Asian religions might engage with Christianity. This model for a theological dialogue with other religions, I want to argue, also supports the other dialogues with Asian cultures and Asian poverty.

[1]Peter Phan, ed., *Christianities in Asia* (Wiley-Blackwell: 2011), 255–259.

The Thomist tradition of Christian theology has certainly been, and remains even today, one of the major forms in which theology has been done in the Catholic Church. Yet, it might well seem a very odd thing to look to Aquinas for models for a contemporary dialogue with Asian religions and cultures. As the title of one his greatest works—the *Summa Contra Gentiles*—suggests, was not Aquinas rather more *against* than *for* the Gentiles? His views of other religious traditions such as Islam were more condemnatory than friendly—hardly the kind of open dialogue we might hope for today.

On the other hand, Aquinas' work itself is remarkable for the extent to which he does engage with and use Greek, Jewish and Muslim philosophy as he seeks to explore and construct Christian theology. In his works, Aquinas often takes pains to argue that a) Christian theology can engage with non-Christian thought without fear of being diluted or corrupted by doing so, and b) that there are positive gains to be had from doing so. Moreover, over the course of centuries, there has been a sustained and important interaction between Thomist Christian theologians and Asian religions in pursuit of better ways of proclaiming the Kingdom of God in Asia and in the hope of developing Asian forms of Christian theology and inculturated Asian Christian communities.

For his part, Aquinas uses a number of striking scriptural images to discuss how Christian theology can engage with non-Christian thought. The one I want to consider in this article is a Johannine image of transforming water into wine. As we will see, this image as applied by Aquinas is not one in which Christianity is simply opposed to other religions or even simply replaces them or even simply leaves them alone as they are, but rather is one in which there is both continuity and a creative transformation of one tradition into the other. This process of continuity and transformation is what we can actually see at work in the history of later Christian encounter with Asian religions, both in terms of a theology of religions and in terms of theological engagement. Moreover, this same process is at work in the encounter that members of Asian religions themselves have had with Christianity. As such, the image Aquinas has and the model it expresses should be very useful

for understanding and developing contemporary and future encounters between Christianity and Asian religions.

Now, in effect, what I am doing here is to resume and further extend the kind of approach that Raimon Panikkar takes in the first edition of his seminal work, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, in which he considers what it means for Christianity and Hinduism to encounter each other. Panikkar explicitly likens what he does in this book to Aquinas' own encounter with non-Christian philosophy. For Panikkar, as for Aquinas, the encounter is one of continuity and transformation. For his part, Panikkar uses an equally powerful Biblical image of death and resurrection to describe the process.[2]

In this article I will first outline what Thomas says and how this relates to his own work. I will then consider how Thomist theologians have continued his approach when it comes to engagement with Asian religions, taking the particular example of Catholic encounter with the Hindu Vedanta in India in the 20th century. Lastly, I will look at how members of Asian religions have also used the same approach in their engagement with Christianity, taking the example of Mahatma Gandhi's use of Christian teaching to inform his concept of non-violence. In the course of this approach, I hope to show that Aquinas' model actually does express something that is important in each of the three dialogues identified by Phan: the idea of a) dialogue with poverty as liberational challenge; b) of dialogue with culture as incarnational transformation; and c) of dialogue with religions as creative exchange. In other words, it is important that dialogue involves transformation as well as continuity.

[2]Raimon Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (DLT: 1964). In this article, we are following the approach to the theological relation between Christianity and Hinduism found in the first edition of this book. In the second edition of this work (1981), Panikkar has developed a somewhat different view of the relationship between Christianity and Hinduism, one fundamentally incompatible with the thought of Aquinas.

Aquinas on the Relationship of Theology and Philosophy

Aquinas develops the image of water into wine most fully when he considers how Christian theology relates to philosophy in his commentary on Boethius' *De Trinitate*.[3] For Aquinas, Christian theology is properly *sacra doctrina*, sacred teaching, meaning the revealed truths of faith and, by extension, the reflection on this revelation that Christian thinkers undertake. On the other hand, philosophy means the works of non-Christian thinkers, be this ancient Greek and Roman or medieval Jewish and Islamic thought, and the truths discovered by the exercise of natural human reason within them.[4]

Now, one abiding objection to Christian theology engaging with non-Christian thought is the idea that this introduces something foreign into Christian theology and that it dilutes Christian faith. Aquinas introduces the scriptural image of water and wine in the form of just such an objection to Christian theology while making use of philosophical arguments and authorities:

> Besides, secular wisdom is frequently represented in Scripture by water, but divine wisdom through wine. But, in Isaiah Chapter 1, innkeepers are censured for mixing water with wine. Therefore, teachers are to be censured who mix philosophical doctrines with theology (*sacra doctrina*) (BDT, 1.2.3. obj. 5)[5]

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[3] *Super De Trinitate* 1.2.3. The image of water and wine is used for the same theme, but in different ways, by other Scholastics. So, for example, Bonaventure uses the image when he warns of the dangers of the use of philosophy in the exposition of Scripture: "Indeed, not so much of the water of philosophy should be mixed with the wine of Sacred Scripture that it turn from wine into water" (*Collations on the Six Days*, in Bonaventure 1960–1970, V, 291).

[4] The same basic scheme is developed in other works, e.g. S.T. 1, 8; S.C.G. 1.2–8.

[5] "*Praeterea, saecularis sapientia frequenter in Scriptura per aquam significatur, sapientia vero divina per vinum. Sed Is. 1 vituperabuntur caupones aquam vino miscentes.*

In response to this objection Aquinas argues that what happens when Christian theology makes use of philosophy is not so much the dilution of the one by the other, but the transformation of the water of philosophy into the wine of an enriched Christian theology:

> It can, however, also be said that when one of two things passes over into the domain (*dominium*) of another, it is not reckoned to be a mixture, except when the nature of both is changed. Whence, those who use philosophical doctrines in theology (*sacra doctrina*) by bringing them into the service of faith, do not mix water with wine, but change water into wine (BDT 1.2.3. ad. 5).[6]

For Aquinas the relationship between Christian theology and philosophy is similar to that between the operation of divine grace and human nature: grace perfects nature; it does not do away with it. There is both continuity and transformation. In like manner, faith is not opposed to reason but perfects it.

Aquinas further specifies three ways in which theology relates to philosophy. The first is when we demonstrate by natural reason some of the things we know by the light of faith. Here there is simple continuity, since it is the same truths that are being known. So, for instance, we can know by natural reason that God exists, along with some features about what God must be like, and we can know that the world is created. Theology transforms the water of philosophy into wine in the sense that it shows the way that reason can go and confirms the findings of reason as true. The second way is when theology makes use of what Aquinas calls "likenesses," meaning those truths about the world and about ourselves which are discovered by reason, and which are like the truths known through faith. For instance, Christian theology has found in the

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Ergo vituperandi sunt doctores qui sacrae doctrinae philosophica documenta admiscent" (BDT. 1.2. ad. 5).

[6]"*Et tamen potest dici quod quando alterum duorum transit in dominium alterius, non reputatur mixtio, sed quando utrumque a sua natura alteratur. Unde illi, qui utuntur philosophicis documentis in sacra doctrina redigendo in obsequium fidei, non miscent aquam vino, sed aquam convertunt in vinum*" (BDT 1.2.3. ad. 5).

human mind a likeness to the Trinity. Thus, the way knowledge and love are present within the human mind is a likeness for the presence of the Son, as the Word of God, and the Spirit, as the Love of God, within the Trinity.[7] Theology takes these likenesses and transforms them to help us understand the things of faith. Here then there is continuity and transformation. Lastly, theology refutes errors in natural reasoning when philosophy is seen to advance something contrary to faith. It corrects error, showing the way reason can go wrong. Here, we might say, there is discontinuity and transformation.[8]

In each case we see here the water of philosophy being changed into the wine of theology; there is discontinuity, continuity and transformation. The most striking case is the second one, where what we already know by natural reason is put to work to explain

[7]As with Augustine, "[w]e found a similar trinity in man, namely the mind, and the knowledge it knows itself with, and the love it loves itself with" (*De Trinitate* XV.10, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P. [Brooklyn, New York: New City Press, 1991], 402–403).

[8]Aquinas sums up these three ways as follows: Thus therefore we can use philosophy in sacred teaching in three ways. First, to demonstrate those things which are preambles of faith, which it is necessary to know in faith, as those things which are proven by natural reasons about God, such as that God exists, that God be one and other such things proven either about God or about creatures in philosophy, which faith supposes. Second, to make known through certain likenesses those things which are of faith just as Augustine in the book about the Trinity uses many likenesses taken from philosophical doctrines to make manifest the Trinity. Third, to resist those things that are said against the faith whether by showing them to be false or by showing them to be not necessary ("*Sic ergo in sacra doctrina philosophia possumus tripliciter uti. Primo ad demonstrandum ea quae sunt praeambula fidei, quae necesse est in fide scire, ut ea quae naturalibus rationibus de Deo probantur, ut Deum esse, Deum esse unum et alia huiusmodi vel de Deo vel de creaturis in philosophia probata, quae fides supponit. Secundo ad notificandum per aliquas similitudines ea quae sunt fidei, sicut Augustinus in libro de Trinitate utitur multis similitudinibus ex doctrinis philosophicis sumptis ad manifestandum Trinitatem. Tertio ad resistendum his quae contra fidem dicuntur sive ostendendo ea esse falsa sive ostendendo ea non esse necessaria*" [BDT 1.2.3 *responsio*]).

revelation and in the process used in ways that we would never have used before. This is, in fact, what Aquinas does with all the sources he draws upon—be it the Greek philosophy of Aristotle or the Arabic philosophy of Avicenna. Aquinas radically transforms the concepts and schemes he finds in these sources in explaining God, or the world or human nature and life as Christian faith understands them. He does not make Christian faith fit Aristotle or Avicenna; he makes their ideas fit what Christian faith wants to say. At the same time, their ideas and schemes do serve as the material out of which an enriched expression of Christian faith emerges. The water of Aristotle or of Avicenna becomes the wine of Christian theology, but the water of their philosophy still remains and without it we could not have the resultant theology we have.[9] If there is radical transformation, there is also continuity.

Thomist Encounter with Asian Religions

I would like now to consider the history of Thomist encounter with Asian religions in the light of the model that Aquinas gives. Can this be described as the story of the transformation of the water of Asian philosophy into the wine of Christian theology? The example I want to take is that of Catholic Christian encounter with the Brahmanical Hindu tradition of religious philosophy called the Vedanta. This encounter became very important in the 20th century and so it is a good historical case to take. However, the problematic nature of this engagement with Vedanta is also clear, since Vedanta represents the elite culture of Brahmanical Hindus associated with the social and

[9]Other examples include the way Aquinas uses and transforms Aristotelian virtue ethics or causality in the light of the order of Christian language of infused natural and supernatural virtues or sacramental causality. For good discussions of the water into wine image in Aquinas and its relation to his work, see Victor Preller, O.G.S., "Water into Wine," in Jeffrey Stout & Robert MacSwain, eds., *Grammar and Grace: Reformulations of Aquinas and Wittgenstein* (London: SCM, 2004), 253–269 and Mark Jordan, *Rewritten Theology: Aquinas After His Readers* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 154–169.

economic oppression of other sections of Indian society, especially those now known as the Dalits. In taking it as an example, however, I am not endorsing this particular engagement as such; rather, I am once again simply interested in the process of engagement itself. For the conclusion, I want to return to what the Thomist model might also contribute toward resolving some of the problems found therein.

Of course, the encounter between Christian Scholastic theology and Brahmanical Indian philosophy, including the Vedanta, goes back to the 16th century and the advent of the Portuguese in India. The early Jesuit missionaries such as Robert de Nobili (1577–1656) were themselves all formed in Scholastic theology, and insofar as they showed any openness to Indian thought, they viewed it in the same way Aquinas viewed Greek and other non-Christian thought—as the product of natural human reasoning—and they sought to engage with it in ways that reflected Aquinas' own understanding of how Christian theology relates to natural philosophy. Thus, de Nobili argued that Christianity in India should take on Indian forms and looked for natural truths in Indian thought that might then be used to express Christian faith.

However, it is in the 20th century that we really find a sustained encounter with Brahmanical Hindu thought, not least in the works of the so-called "Calcutta School" of Jesuits such as Pierre Johanns (1885–1955), Pierre Fallon (1912–1985) and Richard de Smet (1916–1998). They undertook serious study of the Hindu traditions—what a Catholic theology of Hinduism might be and what use might be made of Hindu thought for the expression of Christian faith. Their own Christian theology was the neo-Scholastic Thomism of the end of the 19th and early 20th century which dominated Catholic thought at the time, while the Hindu tradition they engaged most with was the Vedanta, especially non-dual Advaita Vedanta, with its great teacher Shankara. During this same period, this tradition was being promoted by both Western and Indian scholars as the high point or essence of Hinduism as a whole, and so it was natural (for Catholic theologians during this time) that the encounter would be one between Christian Thomism and the Hindu Vedanta—and especially Advaita Vedanta.

To appreciate and appraise their endeavour, it may be useful to give an outline of the standard reading of Advaita. As commonly understood, Advaita—as radical non-dualism—is held to maintain that the soul (*atman*) is strictly identical with the ultimate reality, Brahman. Moreover, Brahman alone is ultimately real (*paramartha-sat*) and empirical reality, be it the material world, or of finite souls, is only apparently or practically real (*vyavaharika-sat*). Within this Vedantic tradition Brahman is said both to be partless and immutable, but also to be the substantive, as well as the efficient cause, of the world, transforming itself into the empirical world. To reconcile these two conflicting ideas Advaita maintains that the world is only the illusory transformation (*vivarta*) of Brahman into the world. The personal creative Lord (*Ishvara*), the God of theism, is regarded as part of that illusory manifestation and real only on the level of apparent or practical reality. Ultimately, Brahman remains immutable and impersonal in nature, without any distinct attributes (*nirguna*). When the liberating realisation of the non-duality or identity of the soul and Brahman comes about, then the liberated soul comes to know that only Brahman exits and that the world is illusory in nature.

Not surprisingly, most Christian theologians in India concluded that Advaita by itself was incompatible with the Christian account, Thomist or otherwise. Thus, rather than engage with Advaita Vedanta alone, Fr. Pierre Johanns attempted to create a synthesis of elements taken from different Vedantic schools. From Advaita he took the idea of Brahman as immutable, distinctionless and transcendent being, while from the theist Vedanta of Ramanuja he took the idea of a personal God and the reality of the world as different from, but dependent on, God.[10] In terms of Aquinas' image, we might depict what Johanns was doing as turning the water of the different Vedantic schools into the wine of the Thomist account of God and creation.

[10]Johanns' Thomist engagement with Vedanta was developed in a series of articles written for the journal *Light of the East* between 1922 and 1934, and subsequently gathered together and translated into English as *To Christ Through the Vedanta* Vols. 1–2 (Bangalore: 1996).

Some Thomists, however, argued instead that we can interpret Advaita itself in such a way that it becomes compatible with the Thomist account. The most systematic and enduring attempts were those of Fr. Richard de Smet and his student, Sr. Sara Grant.[11] To support their position, they argued that we need to distinguish what Shankara, the early and principal teacher of the Advaitic system, teaches from the doctrines of later Advaita, which they accepted was the standard Advaita we have just considered.[12]

De Smet[13] argued that in Shankara's account the distinction between the ultimately real and practically real should be taken as one between self-subsistent being and contingent being. Likewise, Shankara's affirmation of the identity of the soul with Brahman is to be understood as indicating that the soul has no independent existence.[14] Statements that seem to deny the real production of the world really only deny that Brahman undergoes change in the production of the world. Moreover, rather than relegating *Ishvara* to a lower level of reality, Shankara in fact often uses the term *Ishvara* and Brahman interchangeably. When he does deny that *Ishvara* is Brahman and talks

[11]The life and work of de Smet is portrayed in Bradley Malkovsky, *New Perspectives on Advaita Vedanta* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 1–17.

[12]Sr. Sarah Grant, R.S.C.J. (*Sankaracarya's Concept of Relation* [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999]; *Towards an Alternative Theology: Confessions of a Non-dualist Christian* [Indian: Notre Dame, 2002]) further articulated de Smet's Thomistic reading of Shankara. Some western Indologists, such as Paul Hacker, have also wanted to distinguish between genuine and spurious works of Shankara and between Shankara and later Advaita. See Wilhelm Halbfass, ed., *Philology and Confrontation: Paul Hacker on Traditional and Modern Vedanta* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995). De Smet knew Hacker's work, though he wanted to go further towards a realist reading of Shankara.

[13]Richard de Smet & Joseph Neuner, eds., *Religious Hinduism*, 3rd ed. (Allahabad: St. Paul Publications, 1996), 80–96. Also see Richard de Smet, "Sankara and Aquinas on Creation," in *Indian Philosophical Annual* 6 (1970): 112–118.

[14]de Smet and Neuner, *Religious Hinduism*, 90–92.

of *Ishvara* as belonging to the practical level of reality, this again serves only to deny that Brahman in itself has really distinct attributes or is really related to the world as creator and lord, in the sense of undergoing change.[15] Shankara's account can thus be said to be compatible with the Thomist account of God and creation. De Smet was keen to assert that the central concept of non-dualism in Shankara is not the same as monism for it affirms dependence, not identity, of being.[16]

De Smet's reading of Shankara remains something that very few Hindu or non-Hindu scholars of Advaita (for whom the great Advaitic teacher is to be interpreted within the terms of later Advaita teaching) would accept. De Smet's account of Shankara is based on strict textual scholarship, distinguishing between those works attributed to Shankara (which he considers properly to be ascribed to Shankara) and those which he considers to be the work of the later tradition. Whether we accept the standard interpretation of Shankara or that of de Smet depends, then, both on whether we agree with the division between authentic and inauthentic works and whether we accept the interpretation given to those works taken to be authentic.

However, it remains the case that de Smet develops this reading of the Advaita Vedanta of Shankara to enable Shankara's thought to become of service to the expression of Christian faith. What we have here is also a form of the turning of the water of non-Christian philosophy into the wine of Christian theology. Shankara and Advaita are read anew in the encounter with Thomist theology, read in terms of the truths found in Thomist Christianity. If one agrees that this is the right objective interpretation of Shankara, it is a discovery of common ground. If one follows the standard Advaitic reading of Shankara, it is

[15]In the Thomist account, the world is said to be really related to God as created being, but God only notionally related to the world, as creator, since a real relation would indicate that God undergoes change in creating (ST 13, 7; 45, 3). The parallel between Shankara's account and the Thomist account of mixed relations is explored in some detail by Grant, *Sankaracarya's Concept of Relation*.

[16]de Smet and Neuner, *Religious Hinduism*, 95.

one of creative transformation. For de Smet's own part, the difference between Shankara and Aquinas is basically one of expression, not of content. Shankara affirms contingency by a more negative approach, valorising finite being negatively against absolute being, whereas Aquinas has a more positive approach, using the language of participation.[17]

De Smet and Grant, however, also came to talk of the Advaitic account as enriching the Thomist account and Christian theology in general. De Smet remarked that Shankara's account had taught him personally to be aware of "God's non-dual presence within."[18] Even more emphatically, Grant argued that Shankara's non-dual language and experience, as well as the Vedantic emphasis on the immanence of Brahman, challenge tendencies in western Christian theological discourse towards a dualism between God and the world in which God is depicted as outside and remote from the world.[19] Her suggestions were in turn taken up by the American Thomist David Burrell in an exploration of the way Aquinas uses non-Christian accounts as intellectual resources for developing his doctrine of creation. For his part, Burrell considers primarily the way Aquinas uses Islamic and Jewish philosophy as conceptual resources in the manner of turning water into wine. Accepting Grant's account of the complementarity between Shankara's non-dualism and the Thomist account of creation, Burrell has also suggested that non-dual language is not to be feared as pantheistic and can be useful in expressing the unique and inseparable relationship of creation, helping us to "think both creator and creature together."[20] Here then we see yet another way in which the water of philosophy is turned into the wine of theology, not in merely coming

[17]Malkovsky, *New Perspectives on Advaita Vedanta*, 15–16.

[18]Malkovsky, *New Perspectives on Advaita Vedanta*, 11–12.

[19]Grant, *Towards an Alternative Theology*, 54–56.

[20]D.B. Burrell, "Act of Creation with its Theological Consequences," in T. Weinandy, D. Keating, & J. Yocum, eds., *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical Introduction* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 27–44.

to say the same thing, but in enriching the expression of that theology, in transforming earlier theology and giving further ways of expressing faith—a richer kind of wine we might say.

It is now that we can go back to Panikkar and the *Unknown Christ of Hinduism*. In the third part of the book Panikkar develops what he calls a Christological *bhasya,* or commentary, on a Hindu Vedantic text. Panikkar, as a Christian theologian, identifies the *Ishvara*, the creative Lord, in Vedanta with Christ and thus reads Vedanta in the light of Christian faith in the Trinity. This, Panikkar argues, helps resolve a genuine difficulty within Vedanta about how to relate the Absolute (Brahman) to the world. Here again we see both continuity and transformation. Panikkar is not doing away with the Vedanta, but neither is he leaving it unchanged. Clearly, neither Christ nor the Trinity are part of the Vedantic tradition; rather, we have a Christian reading of the text. Panikkar himself states that he is giving the *sensus plenior*, the fuller sense, of the text, and as I noted at the beginning of this study, he likens what he is doing to what Aquinas does with Greek thought.[21]

Christianity and the Transformation of Asian Religions within Themselves

Aquinas' image of the transformation of water into wine and his understanding of what is involved in the engagement of Christian theology with philosophy is also useful when considering the encounter with, and use made of, Christian ideas by other religions. This is of course not something that Aquinas himself pays much attention to, but his model can quite happily be extended to this other context.

[21]Panikkar, *Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, 126–138. For an appreciative appraisal of the theological significance of what Panikkar does here, see Gavin D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions* (Wiley-Blackwell: 2009), 40–45.

In the modern period especially, members of Asian religions have engaged with Christianity and not all of this encounter has been a matter simply of combating Christian missionary and colonial activities. Hindus and Buddhists have also adopted and made use of Christian ideas in order to develop forms of Hinduism and Buddhism that can serve what they want Hinduism and Buddhism to say and achieve in the modern world.

One obvious example of this is what is often referred to as the Hindu Renaissance, that is to say the work of leading Hindus such as Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1833), Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) and Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) in the period from the end of the 18th century to the second half of the 20th century, in which a reformed type of Hinduism emerged very much influenced by Western and Christian ideas.[22]

For example, a central idea in Mahatma Gandhi's teaching is that of non-violence, *ahimsa*. Non-violence is for Gandhi the means by which we get to the Truth, which he identifies as the divine. Non-violence is thus the dynamic of *satyagraha* (or Truth-force), another central idea in Gandhi's teaching. Gandhi's emphasis on non-violence accords with his fundamental understanding that religion is primarily a form of ethics rather than a system of doctrine. For Gandhi, the concept of non-violence defines how human beings should act in religious, social and political life.

Gandhi's concept of non-violence is certainly rooted in Indian religious tradition. It is there in Hinduism; it is there especially in Jainism and Gandhi was much influenced by Jain ideas, not least as a result of his positive encounter with the Jain poet Raychandbhai. However, the primary reason why non-violence became so important a concept for Gandhi was because of his encounter with Christianity. Gandhi was

[22]See, for instance, M.M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christianity of the Indian Renaissance* (Madras: CLS, 1970); Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1988); Arvind Sharma, ed., *Neo-Hindu Views of Christianity* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988).

profoundly impressed by Tolstoy's promotion of passive non-resistance, which for Tolstoy was the central teaching of the New Testament, especially the Sermon on the Mount. Independently of Tolstoy, Gandhi found the New Testament the source of much that was true and valuable for him as a Hindu. What emerged was a concept of non-violence that was informed by Tolstoy's reading of the New Testament, which was then used by Gandhi to re-interpret the traditional Indian concept of *ahimsa*. The water of the traditional idea of *ahimsa* is transformed into the wine of Gandhi's concept of non-violence.

We can see this when we consider how the concept of non-violence is actually developed by Gandhi. Traditionally in Indian religions, the primary emphasis in the idea of *ahimsa* is on the negative aspect: the not killing, not harming of other forms of life. A secondary emphasis is on a positive aspect: the promotion of kindness towards other forms of life. In Gandhi's understanding of non-violence, on the other hand, while avoiding violence is certainly a key idea, there is a much greater stress on the positive element of concern for the welfare of others, and it is here that the Christian influence is present. Gandhi equates *ahimsa* with the "law of Love," in effect the central law of Christian ethics—love of neighbour, including one's enemies. In typical Hindu fashion, Gandhi extends the scope of this law of Love to cover not just human beings but all creatures.

The Christian influence on Gandhi's presentation of *ahimsa* comes across in the following comment:

> Ahimsa means "love" in the Pauline sense, and yet something more than the "love" defined by Paul, although I know St. Paul's beautiful definition is good enough for all practical purposes. Ahimsa includes the whole of creation and not only human … Ahimsa is not merely a negative state of harmlessness, but it is a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil doer.[23]

[23] *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* VI (Navajivan Publishing House: 1969), 264. St. Paul's definition is: "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is

What Gandhi develops and promotes is an enriched notion of *ahimsa* and it is enriched because of his engagement with, and use of, Christian teaching. In Gandhi's doctrine of non-violence, the water of the traditional Indian idea of *ahimsa* is changed into the wine of the law of love. We might call this the transformation of water of Indian religion into the wine of Christian ethics, but we might also talk of the transformation of the water of Christian religion into the wine of Hindu ethics, since what we end up with is a reformed Hinduism.

Aquinas' idea of continuity and transformation, of water into wine, also accords with Gandhi's own views on the engagement between religions. Gandhi was against people converting from one religion to another, but he did argue that those in one religion should accept everything that is valuable from the other and transform it into the terms of one's own. For Gandhi, this too is an aspect of *ahimsa*, manifest in a respect for other faiths that the seeker of Truth must have.

In Gandhi's account we can, in fact, see all three of the relationships Aquinas identifies between theology and philosophy: first, there is the continuity whereby the truth of *ahimsa* is affirmed as known by traditional Indian religious reflection; second, there is the continuity and transformation of the idea of *ahimsa*—taken to be an imperfect likeness of the fuller concept of *ahimsa* as the law of love that Gandhi promotes; and third, in Gandhi's thought non-violence opposes and refutes any form of violence (*himsa*), be it actual violence in political or social life, or a giving in to bodily desires.

Another example is that of socially engaged Buddhism, the sort of Buddhism promoted by the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh (1926–), the Thai monk Buddhadasa (1906–1993) and the Dalai Lama (1935–). Engaged Buddhism has developed a new emphasis on human social and political emancipation in this world, which represents a transformation of more traditional Buddhist ethics, away from the

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not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13: 4–7 [RSV]).

goal of liberation from mundane conditions altogether. While the impact of Christian ideas on Engaged Buddhism is much less explicit than with the Hindu Renaissance, nonetheless contact with the West and with Christianity has played a significant role in bringing this transformation about and in influencing the terms in which Engaged Buddhism has been promoted by its leaders.[24]

Christopher Queen characterizes Engaged Buddhism as a case of "cultural interpenetration" between the American-European Christian and the Asian Buddhist cultures in the modern period. He identifies the earliest phase of Engaged Buddhism as found in the "Protestant Buddhism" of Col. Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907) and Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933), whose Buddhism was both informed by Liberal Protestant Christianity, as well a protest against many aspects of Christian teaching and Christian mission, and being indeed a protest against the contemporary practice of Buddhism itself. Queen also points to Ambedkar and his development of a form of Buddhism almost entirely centred on social emancipation as very much reflecting Western and Christian forms. Likewise, it is a mark of the work of later Engaged Buddhist leaders such as Nhat Hanh, Buddhadasa and the Dalai Lama that they have all known and engaged positively with Christian teaching, as well as with leading modern Christians, so that the language and concepts of Christian ethical teaching informs their presentation of Buddhism in a similar way to that found in Gandhi. Thus, while it is possible that Engaged Buddhism could have developed without contact with Christianity, nonetheless as a matter of fact,

[24]For discussions of Christian influence on Engaged Buddhism, see Christopher Queen, "Introduction: The Shapes and Sources of Engaged Buddhism," in Christopher S. Queen & Sallie B. King, eds., *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996), 1–44. For a study of the difference between the ethics of Engaged Buddhism and traditional Buddhism, see James E. Dietrick, "Engaged Buddhist Ethics: Mistaking the Boat for the Shore," in Christopher Queen, Charles Preish & Damien Keown, eds., *Action Dharma: New Studies in Engaged Buddhism* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 252–269.

Engaged Buddhism in its present form has come about as the result of the cultural interpenetration of which Queen speaks.

Again, however, the end result is a Buddhism that is felt by the promoters of Engaged Buddhism to be continuous with traditional Buddhism and to be the authentic voice of Buddhism in the modern world. If it is water into wine, it is also the water of earlier teaching within Buddhism changed into the wine of a Buddhism needed for the modern world. We also see in Engaged Buddhism the kind of creative interaction between Christianity and Buddhism in Asia in support of the emancipation of the poor as promoted by the pioneer of Asian liberation theology, the Sri Lankan Jesuit Aloysius Pieris. According to Pieris, for Christianity to be *of* Asia rather than simply *in* Asia, it must embrace both the religiosity and the poverty of Asia "to be baptised in the Jordan of Asian religion and on the Calvary of Asian poverty." Christianity and Buddhism should both be committed to the liberation of the poor and should discover aspects within their own traditions that support this. At the same time, Christianity in Asia has a positive contribution to make. In part, Christian liberative theology serves prophetically to reveal or bring out Buddhism's own liberative dimensions and potentialities so that, as Pieris puts it, "theology in Asia is the Christian apocalypse of the non-Christian experiences of liberation."[25] In part, however, Christianity contributes the unique axiom of God's preferential option for the poor, something "revealed only in the Bible, specific only to the Christian faith and totally absent in all non-Semitic religions … that this same God has made a defence pact—a covenant—with the poor against the agents of mammon, so that the struggle for the poor for their liberation coincides with God's salvific action."[26]

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[25]Aloysius Pieris, S.J., *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1988), 41. For Pieris' influential vision of Asian liberation theology, the nature of an authentic Asian Church and Christian-Buddhist encounter, see, for instance, this work and his seminal work, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988).

[26]Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 120.

Conclusion: Against or For the Gentiles?

In conclusion, then, I think Aquinas' image of water changed into wine and the understanding he has about what is involved in Christian theology engaging with philosophy is helpful as a model for us in developing a creative engagement between Christianity and Asian religions—in the dialogue with these religions. What it provides is a model that allows us to steer between sheer opposition and sheer replacement. In accommodating both continuity and transformation, it is a model that is adequate to what Christians, Hindus and Buddhists have themselves felt important. Aquinas' model is one that is *for the Gentiles*, rather than simply *against* them. Yet it is a robust approach, one that recognises the need for challenge and change on the part of all those involved.

Finally, how does it help us with the other members of threefold dialogue put forward by the FABC and Peter Phan—the dialogue with poverty, with culture?

In terms of a dialogue with culture, the image of water into wine accords well with those views of inculturation that stress an "incarnational" model of what is involved, in which Christian life and the Christian message, as the former Jesuit General, Pedro Arrupe, has put it, "not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a new creation."[27] In other words, it is a model of dialogue with culture where there is transformation, where a deep immersion in the culture leaves neither Christianity nor that culture the same. It is a model of inculturation that is neither the transplantation and imposition of a Western Christianity into the land of Asia, nor the total translation and reduction of Christianity into the existing norms of that culture.[28]

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[27]Pedro Arrupe, S.J., *Acta Romana* 17 (1978): 256–281.

[28]For a further discussion of inculturation in Asia as transformative, see Elizabeth Koepping, "India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma/Myanmar," in Phan, *Christianities in Asia*, 9–44.

The dialogue with culture and the dialogue with poverty are, of course, inseparable. Earlier Thomist attempts to inculturate into elite cultures, such as that of the Brahmanical Hindu tradition of Vedanta, are indeed problematic and suspect if they simply ignore the relationship such elite cultures have to social oppression and patterns of poverty. Here the image of water into wine becomes one of challenge. It speaks of a dialogue of poverty in which any Christian engagement with Asian religions or Asian cultures has to be one that challenges oppressive and exploitative elements in them. It suggests that if there is to be any inculturation into elite cultures, this can only be the case if there is also a transformation of those cultures away from oppressive dimensions and towards emancipation of the poor—a transformation of the water of these cultures into the wine of a culture freed from oppressive elements.

The image of water into wine seems to capture and express contemporary concerns among Asian theologians that there be a liberational dimension in Christian approaches to dialogue of any of the three types—a liberational critique of other religions and cultures—with an emphasis on what is needed for social and political emancipation, such as found for instance in the work of Aloysius Pieris and Dalit theology.[29] An emphasis on human emancipation is also something at the heart of those modern transformations of Hinduism and Buddhism—Renaissance Hinduism and Engaged Buddhism—to which Christianity has contributed its own water for transformation.

Water into wine, then. Transformation and challenge as well as continuity. An old image and an old model indeed. But an image and a model that are, I hope, not lacking in something to offer us today as we think about the future of Christianity in Asia.

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[29]As, for example, in Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*; K. Pathil, ed., *Religious Pluralism: An Indian Christian Perspective* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999); especially in Soosai Arokiasamy, "Theology of Religions from Liberation Perspective," in K. Pathil, ed., *Religious Pluralism: An Indian Christian Perspective* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999), 300–323.

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BENEDICT XVI AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

The Case of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*

Rocco Viviano, S.X.

A systematic presentation of Joseph Ratzinger-Benedict XVI's theology of interreligious dialogue is very much work in progress. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify certain important ideas and lines of thought. The purpose of this article is to present some of these ideas by examining the particular case of Christian relations with the followers of Islam, which is the world's second largest religion in terms of number of adherents. It does so by presenting the thought of Joseph Ratzinger-Benedict XVI on Islam and on Christian-Muslim relations in order to reflect on whether and how such contributes to the progress of present-day engagement of Catholics, and Christians in general, with Islam.

Benedict XVI is both a theologian and Pope, and these two aspects have to be taken into account to appreciate the continuity between his theology (more developed in the pre-pontificate years) and praxis (in his time as Pope). The task is complex as it requires the exploration of different questions: What is Benedict's theology of Islam? What does the theologian say *about* Islam and Muslims? What does he say

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to Islam and *to* Muslims? What underlies his praxis of encounter with Muslims? What do his gestures and actions reveal of his understanding (theology) of Islam and of Christian-Muslim relations?

As a theologian, Benedict has not written systematically about Islam and, therefore, a reconstruction of his theology of Islam can only be attempted by putting together ideas found in different theological writings on various other subjects. The task involves an exploration of his wide spectrum of writings and a sufficient grasp of his theology, especially his ecclesiology, as well as familiarity with the sources that influence his thought. Neither has Benedict XVI as Pope written any document or delivered any speech specifically on Islam or Christian-Muslim relations. The task therefore will also include an analysis of various kinds of statements, examples of which are his addresses to ambassadors of Muslim Countries, to Muslim representatives during his apostolic journeys, and his messages for the world day of peace. His actions and gestures towards Muslims should also be made the object of reflection in the attempt to identify underlying meanings and theology, although this is is beyond the scope of this paper.

Benedict XVI: A Modern Pope

Benedict XVI belongs to a distinctive form of papacy the roots of which can be traced back to the beginning of the 20th century, and its contours have become increasingly clear until Vatican II, but it has eventually taken shape in the post-Vatican II pontificates. To appreciate Benedict XVI and his approach to interreligious dialogue in depth, it is important to understand the features of the modern papacy and the theological—especially ecclesiological—framework in which it operates.

As I consider Benedict XVI next to Paul VI and John Paul II in order to identify the specific characteristics of the modern papacy, two major aspects emerge.

First, modern popes are aware that the community they lead has global dimensions. They speak and act in the awareness that the

Catholic Church is present everywhere, in virtually all political, social and religious situations, and is bound to engage in dialogue with all particular contexts and with the world (cf. Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam,* 1964; Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes,* 1965).[1] They also understand that their role is significant not just for the Catholic Church but for all Christians, and feel the responsibility to protect and encourage each of them in all kinds of situations.

Second, modern popes have a strong sense of the Church's responsibility for humanity, that the Catholic Church exists for the salvation of the world understood as integral, and feel directly responsible for all humanity and its persons.[2]

This twofold awareness is manifested through a new style of presence of the Church in the socio-political sphere, articulated through various aspects:

a. the importance the Holy See attaches to diplomatic relations with an increasing number of political realities (states, institutions);[3]
b. the popes' personal contact with people through apostolic journeys and the use of mass media;
c. their outreach to other faith communities, both from other Christian denominations and from other religions, through words as well as important symbolic actions;
d. resistance to the anti-religious element of contemporary culture and politics;

[1]Cf. Jean-Pierre Torrell, "Paul VI et l'ecclesiologie de *Lumen Gentium*," in Rodolfo Rossi, ed., *Paolo VI e i Problemi Ecclesiologici al Concilio. Colloquio internazionale di studio* (Roma: Edizioni Studium, 1989), 144–186.

[2]On the influence of personalism on Paul VI, cf. for example Giorgio Campanini, "G.B. Montini e J. Maritain," in Rodolfo Rossi, ed., *Montini Journet Maritain: une famille d'esprit. Jourées d'étude* (Roma: Edizioni Studium, 2000), 225–237.

[3]Cf. Peter G. Kent & John F. Pollard, eds., *Papal Diplomacy in the Modern Age* (West Port: Praeger Publishers, 1994).

e. broader theological perspectives embracing cultures, ideologies and religions;
f. special attention to human dignity and rights (Vatican II, *Dignitatis Humanae,* 1965);
g. awareness of the significance of their role in society and in politics in view of the fulfilment of their mission.

The modern papacy reflects Vatican II theological and pastoral openness to the world, i.e., the reality outside the Church, but also sees itself in continuity with a transformation of the papacy which began with the historical events at the end of the 19th century, when the loss of political power forced the Holy See to understand itself differently and reshape itself.[4] It is a twofold continuity: they are in continuity with Vatican II because the Council stands in fundamental continuity within the development of Catholic Tradition. This is evident in the fact that Paul, John Paul and Benedict constantly refer to Vatican II as well as to the teaching of their 20th century predecessors (the social teaching provides a very clear example).[5]

Since his first message of April 22, 2005, Benedict XVI placed himself squarely in the line of his two modern predecessors and announced the priorities of his pontificate. The unity of the Church would be his primary concern in order to make the Church a more effective and credible servant of humanity; interreligious dialogue was also mentioned. Benedict XVI's engagement with the religions can be understood within the framework of the modern papacy's self-understanding vis-à-vis humanity and the Church's responsibility and mission in the world. It is also important to notice how the theology of Benedict XVI is being reshaped by his responsibility as pope in the modern world.

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[4]It is possible to trace the origins of political theology back to the pontificate of Pius VI vis-à-vis the French revolution and Napoleon.

[5]Another example is the concern of the pre-Vatican II papacy on war and peace (i.e., Benedict XV and Pius XII). Cf. John F. Pollard, *The Unknown Pope: Benedict XV (1914–1922) and the Pursuit of Peace* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999).

Benedict XVI and Islam

a) Islam within the framework of Ratzinger's theology of religions

Ratzinger's initial encounter with Islam takes place on the path of fundamental theological reflection. In his attempt to articulate the Christian faith in order to present it as clearly as possible, Ratzinger at some point focused on the place of Christianity within the development of the religious history of humanity. It was, he says, when teaching philosophy of religion and history of religions that he encountered the reality of world religions. The driving question of his enquiry is therefore whether Christianity has a unique role to play within the broad history of the religious development of humanity, which includes all possible expressions of the *homo religiosus* as they have come to be articulated in the various systems of belief and practice, which are commonly called religions. What, in other words, is the decisive contribution of Christianity to the religious development of humanity and how is it related to the religions?

Because it is on this path that the theologian encounters Islam, it is important to consider his broader theological framework in order to understand his ideas on Islam expressed in fragments here and there.

The above mentioned "driving question" reveals a distinctive characteristic of Benedict XVI, the theologian and pastor—the remarkable similarity of his theological method with the Church Fathers' style of theologizing. The Fathers' central concern was the correct and clear articulation of the faith, aimed at making Christianity understandable to the hearers and enabling them to embrace it. Their attempts to account theologically for the existence of other religious ways emerged basically as a consequence of their "practical" missionary concern. The same is true for Benedict XVI—his focus is the articulation of Christian faith that is faithful to the sources: Revelation and Tradition.

Another important feature of Ratzinger's theological method is that he shows a consistent inclination to identify and engage with

the universal behind the particular—the archetypes—although without losing sight of the particular. This means that vis-à-vis one particular religious tradition, like Islam, Ratzinger's theological reflection 1) will begin with the broader context of the non-Christian religions; 2) will locate the particular religion in that context; and 3) draw conclusions. If the disadvantage is that he does not formulate a theology of Islam, the advantage is that his reflections apply to the broader spectrum of religions as well.

In seeking to understand Benedict XVI's thought on Islam, we begin with the question of what is the place of Islam within the historical development of the religious spirit of humanity. The main source in this regard is a paper that Ratzinger wrote in 1964, which is to date the most comprehensive articulation of his theology of religions. Ratzinger re-presented the paper basically unaltered, although prefaced by a new introduction, in 2004, showing that his basic theology of religions has remained consistent over several decades.[6] The paper dates back to the time when a very lively debate was ongoing within Catholic theology with regard to the religions. Jacques Dupuis has summed up the positions of the debate in *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, and identified two major clusters: on the one hand what he calls fulfillment theories, represented by theologians like Jean Daniélou and Henry de Lubac, and on the other hand those theologies that acknowledge the hidden presence of the mystery of Christ in the religions, most notably represented by Karl Rahner.[7] Ratzinger

[6]Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, "The Unity and Diversity of Religions: The Place of Christianity in the History of Religions," in Herbert Vorgrimler, ed., *Gott in Welt: Festgabe für Karl Rahner zum 60 Geburtstag* (Freiburg: Herder, 1964), 287–305. Published in English in Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 15–44.

[7]Cf. Jacques Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001), 130–157; Jean Daniélou, *The Lord of History: Reflections on the Inner Meaning of History* (London: Longmans, 1958), 107–121 (Chapter 8: "The History of Religions and the History of Salvation"); Jean Daniélou, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," in Jean Daniélou, ed., *Introduction to the*

manifests his disinclination towards Rahner's concept of the Christian grace hiddenly operative in the religions and is closer to Daniélou's approach. For Daniélou and others, the religions do have a positive value in the history of salvation and in God's salvific plan, which consists in their being a preparation for the human spirit to receive the grace that comes with the Judeo-Christian revelation.[8] In this sense they belong to a "prehistory of salvation," to be understood obviously not in chronological sense but in theological terms. Concretely we might say that for Daniélou, although the religion of Islam appears after Christianity, and although it is rooted in the content of the Old Testament, Islam represents a "regression" to a vertical relationship with God, with the loss of the sense of God's action in history, and therefore it is a return to the prehistory of salvation, which is to be fulfilled in Christ.[9]

A methodological premise precedes Ratzinger's argument. He observes that most theologies of religions are "limited," having been constructed on two assumptions that are arbitrary (Ratzinger's later critique includes Race's threefold classification of theologies in

Great Religions (Notre Dame: Fides, 1964), 7–28; Jean Daniélou, *The Advent of Salvation* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1950); Jean Daniélou, *The Holy Pagans of the Old Testament* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1957); Henri de Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery* (Shannon, Ireland: Ecclesia Press, 1969), 68–95 (Chapter 4: "The Pagan Religions and the Fathers of the Church"); Henri de Lubac, "Mysticism and Mystery," in *Theological Fragments* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989); Henri de Lubac, "Preface," in A. Ravier, *La mystique et les mystiques* (Paris: Desclee de Brouwer, 1965); Karl Rahner, "Thoughts on the Possibility of Belief Today," *Theological Investigations* V (Baltimore: Helicon Press/London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 2–22; Karl Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," *Theological Investigations* V (Baltimore: Helicon Press/London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 113–134.

[8]Cf. Daniélou, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions."

[9]Cf. Daniélou, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions."

exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism).[10] First is the assumption that with regard to the reality of religious pluralism, the crucial question for Christian theology is that of the salvation of non-Christians (the soteriological dimension). The second arbitrary assumption is a corollary to the first: because religions are looked at from the perspective of whether and how their adherents are saved or not, then they are treated not in themselves, respecting the particularity of each, but "in bulk," as a homogeneous reality ultimately characterized by the same basic dynamics and properties. A theology of religion that begins and ends with the question of salvation deals not with the real religions but with an abstract generalization, whereby there would be no difference when talking about Sikhism or Islam, for example.[11]

Ratzinger considers this as an arbitrary self-limitation of theology and proposes a different way of proceeding that consists in a "phenomenological investigation" of the spectrum of the known religions in order to identify at least certain basic types of religion ("basic alternatives"), and making these the object of "philosophical and theological reflections and verdicts."[12]

At the end of his lengthy phenomenological investigation of the religious history of humanity, Ratzinger identifies three stages of development. The first is the stage of the natural religions based on the perception of the Transcendent/God in the dynamics of the cosmos and of human life. This stage then develops into the second stage of mythical religions, when the initial experience of the transcendent is

[10]Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, "Variations on the Theme of Faith, Religion and Culture," in Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 80–85. Cf. Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (London: SCM Press, 1983); Alan Race, *Interfaith Encounter: The Twin Tracks of Theology and Dialogue* (London: SCM, 2001).

[11]Cf. Ratzinger, "The Unity and Diversity of Religions," 17; also 53.

[12]Ratzinger, "The Unity and Diversity of Religions," 18.

articulated in mythical stories. The third stage is inaugurated by the going-beyond the mystical religions and is a complex stage as it has occurred in three different possible ways: a) through evolution into mystical religion, b) through the revolution of monotheism and finally c) through reason/enlightenment.[13] The two forms of development that remain under the category of religion are therefore the mystical and the monotheistic and it is here that Ratzinger's argument is most relevant to our focus on Islam. The kind of monotheism he refers to here is in fact the very specific form of monotheism typical of the Judeo-Christian revelation and, by derivation, of Islam, and not just any religion that believes in one God (like the kind that can be found among the Indian religions).[14]

Ratzinger's comparison between the mystical type and the monotheistic type helps to understand in what way Judaism-Christianity-Islam are as a whole to be seen as the "true" development of the religious history of humanity.

In the first place, the monotheistic development happens by revolution and not be evolution. It is occasioned by the intervention of the Transcendent into history, which establishes a personal relationship with the believer. As a result, the life of the believer is transformed and given a new sense of purpose. The initial "cosmic" experience of God through creation and through myth is profoundly reshaped by such intervention. There is continuity but also a radical newness in this kind of monotheism.

The second characteristic of monotheism is that the goal of ultimate unity with God is made possible by God's initiative. The main actor as well as the centre of the relationship is therefore God and not the person, and knowledge of God is not obtained by the person via paths of purification but offered by God. In the

[13]Cf. Ratzinger, "The Unity and Diversity of Religions," 27–28.

[14]Cf. Ratzinger, "The Unity and Diversity of Religions," 34–35.

monotheistic revolution the person is of course not simply passive, but becomes active as he/she responds to God's initiative.[15]

Thirdly and most importantly, the goal of religion is—like for the mystical religions—union with God, but it happens in such a way that the interpersonal relationship and the particular identities are conserved: God and person become one but their unity is that of an irreducible "I and thou" relationship.[16]

Finally, the God that enters history makes people actors in the history of salvation as they are: that is why the Bible has no need to hide the dark side of the patriarchs and prophets and the limitations of Jesus' disciples.[17] It means that salvation is always God's gift and accessible to all, not just to the few who have attained some superior level of knowledge or purification. While in the mystic religion there is a first-hand religion that belongs to the initiated, and a second-hand religion which is for the many (so that the latter can access the divine exclusively through the experience of the former), in the monotheistic development "only God deals at first-hand" and all "without exception are dealing at second hand," including those who are appointed leaders of the people.[18]

It is possible to detect the influence of de Lubac underlying Ratzinger's implicit assumption that the monotheistic development is more "advanced" than the way of mysticism because it is more in tune with God's authentic nature (according to Christian Revelation).[19] Alongside Christianity and Judaism, Islam belongs to the monotheistic

[15]Cf. Ratzinger, "The Unity and Diversity of Religions," 36.

[16]Cf. Ratzinger, "The Unity and Diversity of Religions," 45–47. Cf. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Edinburgh: Clark, 1959, c1958).

[17]Cf. Ratzinger, "The Unity and Diversity of Religions," 40–41.

[18]Cf. Ratzinger, "The Unity and Diversity of Religions," 43–45.

[19]Cf. Henri de Lubac, "Preface," in A. Ravier, ed., *La mystique et les mystiques* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1965), 7–39; de Lubac, "Mysticism and Mystery,"

development of religion and therefore, albeit with the necessary distinctions and reservations, the relationship between Christianity and Islam is, for example, qualitatively different from the relationship between Christianity and Buddhism or that between Islam and any of the currents of Hinduism. It is a special relationship from the historical as well as the theological point of view.

When Ratzinger speaks about Judaism and Islam, therefore, he does so with the assumption that there is a fundamental relationship among them and Christianity that is "essential" because they belong to the same basic type of religion. Any distinction, difference, and comparison is to be understood against this background. As a distinctive form within the monotheistic turn, Islam possesses all the above characteristics.

Indeed, Ratzinger acknowledges the positive value of all the religious history of humanity on account of the common humanity of all: "we are all part of a single history that is in many different fashions on the way towards God." However, in this history Christianity holds a unique place, and close to Christianity one necessarily encounters Judaism first, and Islam.[20]

b) Islam in Ratzinger's writings

Probably Ratzinger's most substantial treatment of Islam is to be found in his 1996 interview with Peter Seewald.[21]

Ratzinger's first observation is that it is difficult to identify Islam as a uniform reality on account of its lack of a central authority recognized by all Muslims. "No one can speak for Islam as a whole" because Islam exists in many varieties (besides the schism between

35–69 (French original: *Théologies d'Occasion* [Paris: Desclée, 1984]). See also Henri de Lubac, *Aspects of Buddhism* (London, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1953).

[20]Cf. Ratzinger, "The Unity and Diversity of Religions," 44.

[21]Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth: The Church at the End of the Millennium: An Interview With Peter Seewald* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 244–246.

Sunni and Shi'a) which refer to different mutually independent religious authorities.[22] As a consequence, "dialogue with Islam" is an abstraction and in effect it is only possible to engage in dialogue with certain specific Muslim groups or individuals.

Secondly, in order to understand better the complexity of Islam, it is necessary to acknowledge the existence of a "noble" Islam but also of a kind of "extremist, terrorist Islam" which cannot be identified with Islam as a whole.[23] Pope Benedict has often emphasized that it is the noble Islam that the Church considers as a potential partner in the dialogue.

A third point is that in Islam the interrelationship between society, politics and religion is completely different from Christianity. At its heart, Islam "does not have the separation between the political and the religious sphere that Christianity has had from the beginning." In effect, the Qur'an is a "total religious law" which defines all political and social life: "Sharia shapes society from beginning to end."[24] This implies that Muslims can only fit temporarily in a system that is not totally Islamic because Islam is in essence oriented towards the establishment of such a system. Its absolute claim is ultimately incompatible with the idea of a plural society in which all religious expressions have the same normative value. The provision of *dhimma* is a clear illustration: Islam accepts a multireligious society which includes only the religions mentioned in the Qur'an (Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastranism), and only as long as the overarching framework in which other faiths are tolerated and often respected is Islamic. Benedict observes that if Islam accepted as definitive a situation different from this, it would be an "alienation from itself."[25] According to Benedict

[22]Cf. Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth*, 244.

[23]Cf. Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth*, 244.

[24]Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth*, 244.

[25]Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth*, 244.

then, Islam "is not simply a denomination that can be included in the free realm of a pluralistic society."[26] When this fact is overlooked, Islam is defined by projecting on it the Christian model of the interaction between religion and politics and is not recognised as it is.[27]

Fourth, in the recent past, Islam has been experiencing a worldwide consolidation, which for Ratzinger is due to two factors. The first is external, namely the financial power that the Arab countries have attained which makes possible the establishment of mosques and Muslim cultural institutes everywhere, with a significant increase in propaganda. The second factor is that Islam is experiencing a new self-consciousness which has been growing with the decline of the influence of Christianity in civilizations with Christian foundations that began in the 1960s. This has coincided with a great moral crisis of the Western world—which is seen as the Christian World—in which Muslims have clearly seen a crisis, almost the failure, of Christianity as a religion. According to Ratzinger, "this is the feeling today of the Muslim world: the Western Countries are no longer capable of preaching a message of morality but have only know-how to offer the world. The Christian religion has abdicated; it really no longer exists as a religion; the Christians no longer have a morality or faith."[28] Islam manifests its "inner power" in the conviction that it is the religion that holds its ground and has a message to offer to the world (Benedict has spoken of "a new intensity about wanting to live Islam [that] has awakened"), and Christianity must naturally come to terms with this inner power.[29]

[26]Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth*, 244.

[27]Cf. Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth*, 245.

[28]Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth*, 245.

[29]Cf. Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth*, 246.

In a more recent interview with the same author, Pope Benedict XVI has offered some additional notes on Islam.[30] These new fragments of reflection came three years after Benedict's controversial Regensburg lecture, a crucial event in his relationship with Islam, and touch on aspects closely related to the lecture.[31]

Benedict remarks that with the controversy that followed his Regensburg address, it emerged clearly that "Islam needs to clarify two questions in regard to public dialogue, that is the question concerning its relation to violence and its relation to reason."[32] In this regard, it was remarkable that "now there was within Islam itself a realization of the duty and the need to clarify these questions, which has since led to an internal reflection among Muslim scholars, a reflection that has in turn become a theme of dialogue with the Church."[33] This realization has found concrete expression in the document *A Common Word* which Benedict considers of great importance because it is an interpretation of Islam by Muslim authorities seeking a certain consensus among themselves "that immediately placed it in dialogue with Christianity."[34]

Christians and Muslims ultimately have two things in common: first, "both defend major religious values—i.e. faith in God and obedience to God"; second, they face the same challenge of modernity and both "need to situate ourselves correctly" in it. In this regard, "at issue are questions such as: What is tolerance? How are truth and

[30]Cf. Benedict XVI, *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church and the Signs of the Times: A Conversation with Peter Seewald* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2010), 97–101.

[31]Cf. Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections," University of Regensburg (September 12, 2006), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html (accessed June 2011).

[32]Benedict XVI, *Light of the World*, 98.

[33]Benedict XVI, *Light of the World*, 98.

[34]Benedict XVI, *Light of the World*, 98–99.

tolerance related? The question of whether tolerance includes the right to change religions also emerges. It is hard for the Islamic partners to accept this. Their argument is that once someone has come to the truth, he can no longer turn back."[35]

Benedict XVI believes that the really important contrast shaping the present historical situation is not between Christianity and Islam but that between radical secularism and the question of God "in its various forms." Christianity and Islam find themselves on the same side, facing the same challenge.[36] Nevertheless, the reality is that relationships between Christians and Muslims in the world range from "tolerant and good coexistence" to "intolerance and aggression." There is a lot of work for Christians and Muslims to do and for Benedict this consists in living out "the grandeur of our faith and to embody it in a vital way, while … trying to understand the heritage of others. The important thing is to discover what we have in common and, wherever possible, to perform a common service in this world."[37]

Because Islam is diverse, situations vary. In places where Islam has "monocultural dominance, where its traditions and its cultural and political identity are uncontested," it tends to understand itself as a corrective to the Western world, "as the defender … of religion against atheism and secularism."[38] In situations like this, "the sense for truth then can narrow down to the point of becoming intolerance, thus making the coexistence with Christians very difficult."[39] But this is of course only part of the larger picture, and it is important for the Church to "remain in close contact with all the currents within Islam that are open to and capable of dialogue so as to give a change

[35]Benedict XVI, *Light of the World*, 99.

[36]Cf. Benedict XVI, *Light of the World*, 100.

[37]Benedict XVI, *Light of the World*, 100.

[38]Benedict XVI, *Light of the World*, 101.

[39]Benedict XVI, *Light of the World*, 101.

of mentality a chance to happen," even in cases in which Muslims associate their claim to truth with violence.[40]

According to Samir Kahil Samir,[41] Benedict XVI has "profoundly understood the ambiguity in which contemporary Islam is being debated and its struggle to find a place in modern society. At the same time he is proposing a way for Islam to work towards coexistence globally and with the religions … based on rationality and on a vision of man and human nature which comes before any ideology or religion."[42] The stark difference between Islamic and Christian understanding of the relationship between religion and society derives from the nature of Islamic revelation: because the Qur'an is dictated to Muhammad, "not inspired, then there is very little room for interpretation."[43]

In a brief interview on July 24, 2005, Benedict XVI stated that "Islam suffers from ambiguity vis-à-vis violence"; justifying it in some cases, however, "we must always strive to find the better elements."[44] Benedict is aware that many Muslims reject the use of violence justified

[40]Cf. Benedict XVI, *Light of the World*, 101.

[41]Fr. Samir Khalil Samir, S.J., is an Islamic scholar and founder of the CEDRAC (Centre de documentation et de recherches arabes chrétiennes) which was established in 1986; in 1996 it became part of the Université Saint-Joseph, Beirut-Ashrafieh, Lebanon.

[42]Samir Khalil Samir, "When Civilizations Meet: How Joseph Ratzinger Sees Islam," *Asia News* (April 26, 2006). Cf. Samir Khalil Samir, "Violence et non-violence dans le Coran et l'Islam," *Proche-Orient Chretien* 55 (2005): 359–394. See also the work of Michel Cuypers, especially "Is a Non-Violent Interpretation of the Qur'an Possible?," 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), 317–329.

[43]Samir Khalil Samir, "When Civilizations Meet: How Joseph Ratzinger Sees Islam."

[44]Interview after the Sunday Angelus, Val d'Aosta (July 24 2005). During the Angelus on that day, Benedict deplored recent terrorist attacks in various

by religion (cf. Cologne 2005). For Christians and these Muslims, terrorism is a shared concern and together they have a common duty to eliminate its causes, a difficult but not impossible task which consists in "eliminating from the hearts any trace of rancour; resisting every form of intolerance and opposing every manifestation of violence."[45]

The Regensburg lecture produced contrasting outcomes.[46] On one hand, it triggered anger and violent reactions on the part of Muslims in various parts of the world; on the other, it provided the opportunity to begin a serious engagement between the Catholic Church and a section of the World Islamic community that is yielding positive results.[47] The controversy was sparked by Benedict's quotation of a statement by the Emperor Manuel Paleologus III about the violent nature of the message of Muhammad. In their immediate reactions, not a few missed the point that the lecture was not on Islam but on the role of reason and the necessity for modern reason to allow itself to be purified by faith in order to fulfill its true purpose, i.e., the

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countries, including the London bombing of July 7, 2005; journalists asked him about Islam soon after.

[45]Benedict XVI, *Address at the Meeting with Representatives of some Muslim Communities*, Cologne (August 20, 2005).

[46]Cf. Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University."

[47]The Open Letter to Benedict XVI by a group of thirty-eight scholars, the first attempt to engage the Pontiff in a serious critique, was followed by the document "A Common Word," initially signed by 138 Muslim scholars and leaders worldwide and addressed to Pope Benedict XVI and all Christian leaders, and which led to various responses, including the establishment of the Catholic-Muslim Forum under the auspices of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. Cf. Allamah Abd Allah bin Mahfuz bin Bayyah, et. al., "Open Letter to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI" (October 12, 2006), *Islamica Magazine* 18 (2006); Sultan Muhammadu Sa'ad Ababakar, et. al., *A Common Word Between Us and You* (October 13, 2007), http://www.acommonword.com (accessed June 2011). Cf. "Catholic-Muslim Forum to Further Dialogue," *Zenit* (March 5, 2008), http://www.zenit.org/article-21979?l=english (accessed June 2011).

service to humanity. In this context, Islam was mentioned as part of a larger discussion, as an example of what happens to faith that is not balanced by reason. Benedict did in fact acknowledge that Christianity as well has often fallen into the same error. His point was that true religion cannot justify violence because violence is against reason and, because God is reasonable, therefore violence cannot be God's will. The point is that Christianity and Islam make incompatible truth claims about the nature of God which Christian-Muslim dialogue must address in its inception in order to be authentic.[48] The lecture poses a crucial theological challenge for Islam, namely whether God is to be understood as pure will or as reasonable.[49] The question is crucial because when God is understood as pure will, on account of his being above all else ("absolutely transcendent"), including reason, then it is easy to justify unreasonable actions (violence) on the basis of obedience to God's will. This concept of God is very different from the Christian concept of God, and if this is the God of Islam, then Christians and Muslims do not worship the same God.[50] Such a notion of God has obvious moral consequences, as it can legitimate the idea that suicide bombers are not practicing violence but virtue because they are acting—as it is claimed—with the intention of doing God's will.[51] In examining its own truth claim, Islam must address the question: "Is this violence an aberration that is inconsistent with genuine Islam (as it would be an aberration inconsistent with genuine Christianity)? Or is it justifiable on the basis of Islam's image of God as absolutely

[48]Cf. Joseph Fessio, "Is Dialogue With Islam Possible? Some Reflections on Pope Benedict XVI's Address at the University of Regensburg" (September 18, 2006), http://www.ignatiusinsight.com/features2006/jfessio_reflections_sept06.asp (accessed June 2011).

[49]Cf. James V. Schall, *The Regensburg Lecture* (South Bend, Indiana: St Augustine Press, 2007).

[50]Cf. Schall, *The Regensburg Lecture*, 45–46.

[51]Cf. Schall, *The Regensburg Lecture*, 48–49.

transcending all human categories, even that of rationality?"[52] For Benedict XVI, a more urgent conversation has to occur within Islam before more and deeper Christian-Muslim engagement can take place. Contemporary Islam has to reflect on itself in the context of the present world and articulate its authentic teaching unambiguously so that the manipulation of the religion to justify violence may be prevented, and Islam may be seen as a force in the service of the genuine development of humanity.[53] In the context of a much broader reflection on the relationship between reason and religion, Benedict's point about Islam is an open question about how Islam understands its own claim to truth.[54] This is the perspective from which Benedict wishes to engage in serious dialogue with other believers and with Muslims in particular. He is for a dialogue that goes to the heart of the faith and seeks to understand the Truth.

c) Benedict XVI and Christian-Muslim relations

An overview of statements by Benedict XVI as Pope can help to identify the major traits of his understanding Christian-Muslim dialogue. These elements emerge always within reflections occasioned by specific circumstances almost always given in the presence of Muslims and addressed to them in the context of actual encounters. Benedict strongly believes that authentic interreligious dialogue is the "fruit of the very core of faith," because faith in God, who has created humanity and loves each person and wants love to be the dominant

[52]Joseph Fessio, "Is Dialogue With Islam Possible?"

[53]Mark Brumley, "Benedict Takes the Next Step with Islam" (September 21, 2006), http://www.ignatiusinsight.com/features2006/mbrumley_b16islam_sept06.asp (accessed June 2011).

[54]Cf. Schall, *The Regensburg Lecture*, 51–52.

force in the world, implies the encounter among the believers, which is therefore a "requirement of faith itself."[55]

Benedict XVI did not say much about interreligious dialogue in his first papal address, limiting himself only to assure the followers of other faiths of his commitment to it, in continuity with John Paul II.[56] However, five days after his election, Pope Benedict had a special meeting with the representatives of other Christian Churches and communities and of other religions. In that context, in which incidentally he explicitly expressed his gratitude for the presence of Muslims in particular, he gave his first "definition" of interreligious dialogue. He stated his commitment to interreligious dialogue understood as "building bridges of friendship" with other believers aimed at "seeking the true good for every person and society as a whole."[57] Peace is an essential dimension of the true good, and is at the same time God's gift as well as a duty for all people and especially for those who call themselves believers. For this reason, Benedict XVI believes that all "efforts to come together and foster dialogue are a valuable contribution to building peace of solid foundations."[58] This first definition of interreligious dialogue has remained the motif behind Benedict's subsequent encounters and exchanges with the followers of other religions.

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[55]Cf. Benedict XVI, *Interview during the Flight from the Holy Land to Rome*, Pilgrimage to the Holy Land (May 8–15, 2009; interview dated May 15, 2009).

[56]Cf. Benedict XVI, *First Message at the End of the Eucharistic Concelebration with the Members of the College of Cardinals*, Vatican City (April 20, 2005).

[57]Benedict XVI, *Address to the Delegates of Other Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of Other Religious Traditions*, Vatican City (April 25, 2005). Cf. Benedict XVI, *Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace* (January 1, 2011), where he states that interreligious dialogue is "an important means of cooperating with all religious communities for the common good."

[58]Benedict XVI, *Address* (April 25 2005).

Benedict's mention of the "true good" already contained the theme of the truth and interreligious dialogue which he has developed extensively since. For him, an essential aspect of authentic dialogue is the "common pursuit of truth," which implies the respect of identities and excludes both syncretistic and relativistic tendencies.[59]

These are general observations which apply to all Catholic interreligious engagement, including that with Muslims. However, with regard to Christian-Muslim dialogue in particular, Benedict's thought is characterized by certain specific points.

1) The theological-anthropological foundations of Christian-Muslim relations

The first basis for Christian-Muslim dialogue is theological, and consists in two fundamental tenets shared by Christians and Muslims. First, the belief that humanity has in God the Creator its common origin and destiny.[60] Second, the fact that both Christians and Muslims "trace their ancestry to Abraham," although they do so "according to their respective traditions.[61]

Historically, Islam was born in a context marked by the presence of Judaism and the various forms of Christianity, and "these circumstances are reflected in the Koranic tradition," so that the three religions have much in common, especially on two points: their origins and the faith in the one God. This is for Benedict a sufficiently

[59]Cf. Benedict XVI, *Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace*, 138.

[60]Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions* (Nostra Aetate), No. 1 (October 28, 1965).

[61]Benedict XVI, *Address at the Meeting with the President of the Religious Affairs Directorate*, Apostolic Journey to Turkey (Ankara: November 28–December 1, 2006; address dated November 28, 2006).

strong foundation for genuine Christian-Muslim dialogue and for Christian-Jewish-Muslim dialogue as well.[62]

The theological foundation of Christian-Muslim dialogue is to be found in the common source of the respective faiths, which is (for Jews, Christians and Muslims alike) "God's irruptive call … heard in the midst of man's ordinary daily existence."[63] Because they begin with the irruption of the Eternal into history, the religious experiences of Jews, Christians and Muslims share a common dynamic, whereby "attuned to the voice of God, like Abraham, we respond to his call and set out seeking the fulfilment of his promises, striving to obey his will, forging a path in our particular culture."[64] There is therefore a "fundamental unity" between Christians and Muslims (and Jews) which is based on a shared experience of God's self-revelation, although this is understood and articulated in different ways.[65]

The common faith of Christians and Muslims in the one God constitutes a certain essential "unity," visible in their "mutual respect and solidarity," and is fully realized when authentic mutual dialogue and engagement take place.[66] Despite their different theologies, Christians and Muslims "worship and must worship" the one God who created and is concerned for every single human being. "Mutual respect and solidarity" between Christians and Muslims is the visible sign that "we consider ourselves members of … the one family that

[62]Benedict XVI, *Interview during the Flight to the Holy Land*, Pilgrimage to the Holy Land (May 8–15, 2009; interview dated May 8, 2009).

[63]Benedict XVI, *Address at the Meeting with Organizations for Interreligious Dialogue*, Auditorium of Notre Dame Center, Jerusalem (Pilgrimage to the Holy Land [May 8–15, 2009; address dated May 11, 2009]).

[64]Benedict XVI, *Address at the Meeting with Organizations for Interreligious Dialogue*.

[65]Benedict XVI, *Address at the Meeting with Organizations for Interreligious Dialogue*.

[66]Benedict XVI, *Address to the Participants in the Seminar Organized by the "Catholic-Muslim Forum,"* Vatican City (November 6, 2008).

God has loved and gathered together from the creation of the world to the end of human history."[67]

2) The theological-anthropological foundation of Christian-Muslim relations

From belief in the Creator God, a specific theological anthropology follows whose central mark is the dignity of human persons on account of the sacred character of human life, which is a tenet of the faith of both Christians and Muslims.[68] Christians and Muslims believe in the unity among people grounded in the "perfect oneness and universality" of God who created all men and women in his image and likeness and created them in order to draw them into his divine life and be one in him. This means that division and conflict among people contradict human nature and God's will, even more so do division and conflict among believers.[69]

Recognition of the centrality of the human person constitutes the anthropological foundation of the dialogue between Christians and Muslims. This makes mutual understanding possible and constitutes an antidote and a solution to conflict.[70] Conflict is often generated not

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[67]Benedict XVI, *Address to the Participants in the Seminar Organized by the "Catholic-Muslim Forum."*

[68]Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address at the Meeting with Representatives of some Muslim Communities.* Cf. also Benedict XVI, *Address at the Meeting with the President of the Religious Affairs Directorate*, where Benedict explains that the basis of mutual respect, esteem, and cooperation in the service of peace for all (which is "the desire of all true believers") is that Christians and Muslims, in their respective religions, "point to the truth of the sacred character and dignity of the person."

[69]Benedict XVI, *Address Delivered during the Courtesy Visit to the President of the State of Israel*, Presidential Palace, Jerusalem (Pilgrimage to the Holy Land [May 8–15, 2009; address dated May 11, 2009]).

[70]Pope Benedict XVI, *Address at the Meeting with Representatives of some Muslim Communities.*

only by misunderstanding but also and above all by the ideological manipulation of religion. This is the case of the kind terrorism that justifies violence in the name of God, "as if fighting and killing the enemy could be pleasing to him."[71] In the present context, these forms of terrorism claim to be Islamic. According to Benedict, this kind of Islam is not the "noble Islam" which treasures all human life as sacred, but a distorted version that contradicts the foundation of the faith of Islam and of Christianity as well. It is therefore "a perverse and cruel choice" because it "shows contempt for the sacred right to life and undermines the very foundation of all civil coexistence."[72]

On the contrary, putting the person in the centre "neutralizes the disruptive power of ideologies," and becomes the common foundation for joint opposition to all violence and religious intolerance. To be true believers, Muslims and Christians must submit to the will of the Creator, and this implies that human life must be respected in all its rights and particularly its religious freedom. It is by recognizing the centrality of the human person and by working for the respect of all human life that "Christians and Muslims manifest their obedience to the Creator, who wishes all people to live in the dignity that he bestowed on them."[73] In the general audience of August 24, 2005 in Rome, when summarizing his message to the Muslim representatives in Cologne, Benedict expressed his "hope that fanaticism and violence will be uprooted" and that Christians and Muslims "will always be able

[71]Pope Benedict XVI, *Address at the Meeting with Representatives of some Muslim Communities*.

[72]Pope Benedict XVI, *Address at the Meeting with Representatives of some Muslim Communities*.

[73]Benedict XVI, *Address to the Ambassadors of Countries with a Muslim Majority and to the Representatives of Muslim Communities in Italy*, Castel Gandolfo (September 25, 2006).

to work together to defend human [rights and] dignity and protect the fundamental rights of men and women."[74]

As a necessary implication of the shared foundations of their respective faiths, it is the responsibility of Christians and Muslims to oppose all forms of intolerance and manifestations of violence. Religious leaders have the even greater responsibility to ensure that the respective faithful understand this.[75] By defining the theological-anthropological foundation of Christian-Muslim dialogue, Benedict has also identified the criterion to discern true Christianity and true Islam from their possible distortions.

3) Religious freedom: necessary precondition and priority for Christian-Muslim dialogue

Religious freedom is for Benedict XVI the first among the universal human rights because it corresponds to the deepest nature of the human person—"his relation with his Creator."[76] By recognizing and owning the principle of religious freedom, which is an "essential principle of the modern state," Vatican II has "recovered the deepest patrimony of the Church."[77] Commitment to advancing religious freedom in the world is part of the Church's mission. This applies to Islam as well, on account of the shared faith in God. This is an important element of continuity with John Paul II.

In the contemporary world, religious freedom is being violated in two ways. The first is in countries where religious minorities are

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[74]Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, Vatican City (August 24, 2004).

[75]Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address to the Ambassadors of Countries with a Muslim Majority and to the Representatives of Muslim Communities in Italy.*

[76]Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps*, Vatican City (January 10, 2011).

[77]Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address to the Roman Curia Offering His Christmas Greetings*, Vatican City (December 22, 2005).

not permitted to express their faith publicly and are persecuted on its account, as in the case of Christians within certain political domains that define themselves as Islamic. On his arrival in Jordan at the beginning of his pilgrimage to the Holy Land in May 2009, Benedict took the opportunity to reiterate the importance and necessity of religious freedom by acknowledging the freedom of the Catholic community in that country.[78]

Second, religious freedom is also, and more subtly, being violated where religion is marginalized because it is seen as irrelevant or even destabilizing for modern society. This violation of religious freedom is evident in the "banning of religious feasts and symbols under the guise of respect for the members of other religions," and ultimately constitutes an attack not only on the fundamental right of religious freedom of all believers but also on the cultural roots of many nations.[79]

Freedom of religion, "institutionally guaranteed and effectively respected in practice," is the "necessary condition" that enables Christians and Muslims to be true believers, to contribute to the building of society, and is therefore the precondition for their authentic mutual dialogue.[80]

In the path of Christian-Muslim relations, and on the basis of common theological and anthropological foundations, the defence of religious freedom "is a permanent imperative" and the respect for minorities a sign of "true civilization."[81]

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[78]Cf. Benedict XVI, *Welcoming Ceremony Address*, Queen Alia International Airport of Amman (Pilgrimage to the Holy Land [May 8–15, 2009; address dated May 8, 2009]).

[79]Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps*.

[80]Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address at the Meeting with the President of the Religious Affairs Directorate*.

[81]Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address at the Meeting with Representatives of some Muslim Communities*.

4) The common vocation of Christians and Muslims (and Jews)

The shared religious experience of Jews, Christians and Muslims imposes on them a common vocation to proclaim that experience clearly and to witness to the God that is the source of their faiths.[82] Benedict sees Jerusalem, where the three faiths meet each other, as a very important symbol of that common vocation, which consists in three aspects:

1. bear witness to the peaceful coexistence desired by all who worship God,
2. manifest God's plan for the unity of all humanity revealed to Abraham, and
3. reveal the true nature of the human person that is to be a seeker of God.[83]

As far as Christians and Muslims in particular are concerned, Benedict points out some concrete implications of these three aspects, defining what he sees as their common task.

First, in the contemporary world marked by relativism and which too often excludes the "transcendence and universality of reason," men and women of today expect from Christians and Muslims "an eloquent witness to show all people the value of the religious dimension of life."[84] Christians and Muslims together can and must offer today's society "a credible response to … the question of the meaning and purpose of life."[85] Their task is to work together to help society open itself to the transcendent so as to give God its rightful place in the life

[82]Benedict XVI, *Address at the Meeting with Organizations for Interreligious Dialogue.*

[83]Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address Delivered during the Courtesy Visit to the President of the State of Israel.*

[84]Benedict XVI, *Address to the Ambassadors of Countries with a Muslim Majority and to the Representatives of Muslim Communities in Italy.*

[85]Benedict XVI, *Address at the Meeting with the President of the Religious Affairs Directorate.*

of humanity.[86] In so doing, they fulfill their most important service to humanity, that is, to contribute to "the fulfilment of man's noblest aspirations, in search of God and in search of happiness."[87] Together, Christians and Muslims can proclaim that God exists and can be encountered, that he is Creator of all, including us, and that he calls all people to live according to his "design for the world." Benedict insists that our common task is to offer this truth to all so that it may illumine morality and empower reason to go beyond its self-imposed empirical limitations.[88] Concretely, Benedict suggests that we are called to create spaces "where God's voice can be heard anew, where his truth can be discovered within the universality of reason, where every individual, regardless of dwelling, or ethnic group, or political hue, or religious belief, can be respected as a person, as a fellow human being."[89]

This shared mission of witness of faith becomes increasingly urgent in the contemporary context where it is quite a common opinion that religion disrupts society because it is a source of conflict. It is the shared task of Christians and Muslims

> to strive to be known and recognized as worshippers of God faithful to prayer, eager to uphold and live by the Almighty's decrees, merciful and compassionate, consistent in bearing witness to all that is true and good, and ever mindful of the common origin and dignity of all human persons, who remain at the apex of God's creative design for the world and for history.[90]

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[86]Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address at the Meeting with the President of the Religious Affairs Directorate*.

[87]Benedict XVI, *Address to the Diplomatic Corps to the Republic of Turkey*, Apostolic Nunciature of Ankara (Apostolic Journey to Turkey [November 28–December 1, 2006; address dated November 28, 2006]).

[88]Benedict XVI, *Address at the Meeting with Organizations for Interreligious Dialogue*.

[89]Benedict XVI, *Address at the Meeting with Organizations for Interreligious Dialogue*.

[90]Benedict XVI, *Address to Muslim Religious Leaders, Members of the Diplomatic Corps and Rectors of Universities in Jordan,* Mosque al-Hussein bin Talal, Amman (Pilgrimage to the Holy Land [May 8–15, 2009; address dated May 9, 2009]).

Christians and Muslims are faced by a common challenge: to prove that our respective religions—and therefore their mutual dialogue—are credible by showing clearly that Christianity and Islam carry a "message of harmony and mutual understanding" that is incompatible with any form of violence.[91]

By being "true to their principles and beliefs," Christians and Muslims must show the world that the cause of conflict is not religion but the ideological manipulation of religion, which is the true source of religious extremism and terrorism.[92]

Second, Christians and Muslims share the vocation to serve humanity through peace-building, opposition to violence and intolerance, and the promotion of reconciliation and solidarity. They are "to build bridges and find ways of peaceful coexistence," rejecting, on the basis of their common belief in God, "the destructive power of hatred and prejudice, which kills men's souls before killing their bodies."[93] According to Benedict, "fidelity to the one God, the Creator, the Most High leads to recognition that human beings are fundamentally interrelated" on account of the common origin of their existence and their common destiny. Because Christian and Muslim believers are aware that all human persons are "imprinted with the indelible image of the divine," they are called to promote reconciliation and human solidarity.[94]

Third, Christians and Muslims are called to cooperate in the promotion of human dignity. They seek what is just and right and must encourage political leaders to do the same, protecting human

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[91]Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address to the Participants in the Seminar Organized by the "Catholic-Muslim Forum."*

[92]Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address to Muslim Religious Leaders, Members of the Diplomatic Corps and Rectors of Universities in Jordan.*

[93]Cf. Benedict XVI, *Homily*, Mount of Precipice, Nazareth (May 14, 2009).

[94]Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address during the Courtesy Visit to the Gran Mufti*, Mount of the Temple, Jerusalem (Pilgrimage to the Holy Land [May 8–15, 2009; address dated May 12, 2009]).

dignity and human rights, particularly freedom of religion, especially for minorities.[95]

5) The content and the activities of Christian-Muslim dialogue

The purpose of Christian-Muslim dialogue and relationships is in large measure to enable their adherents to fulfill the shared vocation that ensues from their respective faiths. At a practical level, Benedict XVI suggests that Christian-Muslim dialogue and engagement should focus on specific goals and activities.

a. The first aim of Christian-Muslim dialogue is a serious theological exchange aimed at recognizing and developing their spiritual bonds.[96]
b. The second aim is the common search for the truth. Benedict sees a "possibility of unity" in the authentic believer's search for "something beyond," which is also a necessary precondition to interfaith engagement. In the presence of genuine common commitment to search for the truth, differences gradually cease to be insurmountable barriers. The secret of successful Christian-Muslim dialogue (and of all interreligious dialogue) is a personal authentic growth in one's faith.[97] Truth claims are not an obstacle to interfaith engagement because they are constitutive of authentic religious belief. They follow from the fact that "the one who believes is the one who seeks the truth and lives by it." The differences between Jews, Christians and Muslims should not hinder their efforts to witness to the

[95]Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address to Muslim Religious Leaders, Members of the Diplomatic Corps and Rectors of Universities in Jordan*.

[96]Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address at the Meeting with the President of the Religious Affairs Directorate*.

[97]Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address at the Meeting with Organizations for Interreligious Dialogue*.

power of the truth.[98] For the believer, search for the Truth and search for God are one, and the aim of Christian-Muslim dialogue should be a "wholehearted, united search for God."[99] For this reason, Christians and Muslims in dialogue encourage "one another in the ways of God."[100]

c. The goal of Christian-Muslim dialogue is also to cultivate "the vast potential of human reason" "in the context of faith and truth." This is crucial because "when human reason allows itself to be purified by faith," it is not weakened but becomes stronger and able to pursue its purpose, which is to serve humanity. This means that "genuine adherence to religion—far from narrowing our minds—widens the horizons of human understanding," contrasts "the excesses of the unbridled ego" that absolutises the finite and excludes the infinite, "ensures that freedom is exercised hand in hand with truth," and enriches culture with its insights on "what is true, good and beautiful."[101]

d. On the occasion of his courtesy visit to the Gran Mufti of Jerusalem, Benedict has offered both a program as well as elements of a spirituality for Christian-Muslim dialogue. He did so by suggesting ways in which it may advance:

    1. through theological exploration of "how the Oneness of God is inextricably tied to the unity of the human family";

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[98]Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address at the Meeting with Organizations for Interreligious Dialogue*.

[99]Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address Delivered during the Courtesy Visit to the President of the State of Israel.*

[100]Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address at the Meeting with Organizations for Interreligious Dialogue*.

[101]Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address to Muslim Religious Leaders, Members of the Diplomatic Corps and Rectors of Universities in Jordan.*

2. as they engage in dialogue while submitting to his loving plan for creation;
3. through the study of God's law inscribed in the cosmos and in the human heart;
4. reflecting on God's self-revelation;
5. while keeping "their gaze fixed" on God's absolute goodness which is also "reflected in the face of others";
6. "bearing witness to the One God by generously serving one another" in a "spirit of harmony and cooperation."[102]

6) The qualities and virtues of Christian-Muslim dialogue

For Benedict, authentic dialogue between Christians and Muslims must be characterized by certain traits:

a. There must be sincerity in terms of intentions as well as in terms of content.
b. It must be based on "more authentic" mutual knowledge.
c. There is joy in the recognition of common religious values.
d. It requires loyalty in respecting differences.[103]
e. Faith in the one God requires believers "to strive constantly for righteousness, while imitating his forgiveness," which are "intrinsically oriented" towards the peace and harmony of humanity.[104]

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[102]Benedict XVI, *Address during the Courtesy Visit to the Gran Mufti.*

[103]With regard to these four points, cf. Benedict XVI, *Address to the Ambassadors of Countries with a Muslim Majority and to the Representatives of Muslim Communities in Italy;* cf. also his *Address at the Meeting with the President of the Religious Affairs Directorate*, and his *Address to H.E. Mr. Ahmed Hamid Elfaki Hamid, Ambassador of Sudan to the Holy See*, Vatican City (June 1, 2007).

[104]Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address during the Courtesy Visit to the Gran Mufti.*

7) The intercultural dimension of Christian-Muslim dialogue and of interreligious dialogue in general

Benedict seems to introduce a subtle distinction within the notion of Christian-Muslim dialogue, between dialogue of religions and dialogue of cultures.[105] He suggests that the barriers between Jews, Christians and Muslims often arise from cultural difference and not from the level of religion, and that acknowledging this fact can make the task of unity easier.[106] It is therefore necessary that as Christians and Muslims engage in dialogue, they remain constantly aware of the mutual influences of religion and culture which often operate at deeper levels.

Does Benedict XVI Contribute Anything to Christian-Muslim Dialogue?

Benedict XVI does not contribute a systematic theological reflection on Islam, but takes on fully the theological interpretation of Islam offered in *Lumen Gentium* 16 and in *Nostra Aetate*. He finds in Vatican II sufficiently firm foundation for authentic Christian-Muslim engagement. His approach to Islam is guided by the more general principle enunciated in *Nostra Aetate* about the fundamental task and attitude of every Catholic (and Christian) towards other faiths: Benedict seeks indeed to "recognise, preserve and promote" what is true and holy in Islam (*Nostra Aetate* 2) and develops it in dialogue with his particular understanding of the place of Islam in the history of religions and in relation to Christianity.

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[105]Benedict XVI has spoken of interreligious and intercultural dialogue in his *Address at the Meeting with Representatives of some Muslim Communities*, and of dialogue among religions and cultures in his *Address to the Ambassadors of Countries with a Muslim Majority and to the Representatives of Muslim Communities in Italy*.

[106]Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address at the Meeting with Organizations for Interreligious Dialogue*.

Faithful to his own theological methodology, Benedict does not become entangled with the question of the salvation of Muslims because that has also been answered by Vatican II and by the subsequent teaching of the Church: they are saved "in ways known to God" (*Gaudium et Spes* 22), those who live according to the dictates of their conscience and to what is true and holy in their religious traditions.

Benedict, however, is indeed contributing to the progress of Christian-Muslim dialogue in various ways by:

1. taking Islam seriously and trying to understand it in its complexity and reality, and from within, examining the essence of Islam and of its truth claims;
2. encouraging both Christians and Muslims to take interreligious dialogue seriously. Christian-Muslim engagement is not simply a convenient option, and even more so in the context of contemporary tensions, but is an intrinsic demand of believers' shared vocation—which based on their belief in the One God—to serve humanity.
3. exhorting both Christians and Muslims in taking their faith seriously. When Benedict challenges Islam to clarify its own notion of God and its own truth claims, Benedict does nothing different from what he does when challenging Christians to deepen their understanding of the Christian faith and life.
4. telling Muslims that they must take responsibility for the "distorted Islam" of "bad Muslims" and remove all ambiguities so that only the "noble Islam" may emerge in the world.
5. challenging Muslims to take responsibility for humanity as an implication of their faith.

In so doing, Benedict is challenging Islam to articulate its own theology of interreligious dialogue; that is, to find in the Islamic faith the foundations for constructive engagement with Christianity as well as with other believers. This is no little challenge considering the fact that Islam has a clear basic theological understanding of Christianity as a distortion of the true religion which is corrected and completed

by God's revelation to Mohammad. However, the challenge comes with a little help, subtly but most probably not unintentionally, in that Benedict XVI has ultimately identified the possible foundations of an Islamic theology of Christian-Muslim relations, one on which Muslims themselves can build.

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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

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.

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.

> 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]

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[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.

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),

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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,

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.

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.

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.

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

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[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.

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]

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[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.

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.

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.

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

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[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

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

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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.

> 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]

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[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

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

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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.

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.

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).

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.

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[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.

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.

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

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

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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).

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.

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[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).

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

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[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.

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

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[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.

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,

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[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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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:

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[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.

> 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]

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[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.

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'lslamistica, 1998), 89–134.

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.

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.

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]

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[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*

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,

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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.

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.

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.

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A MATTER OF THE GREATEST IMPORTANCE

Early Modern Jesuit China Mission Encountering Religions and Cultures*

Gianni Criveller, P.I.M.E.

On August 15, 1695, Jesuit Belgian missionary Antoine Thomas wrote in Beijing a memorandum *On the need of [ordaining] Chinese priests and on the dispensation [for the celebration] of the [Holy] Sacrifice in Chinese*.[1] It was presented to Pope Innocent XII in 1698 and

[1]"De necessitate sacerdotum sinensium et dispensionis pro sacrificio in lingua sinica" (Rome: Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, *fondo Jesuitico*), 1383, n. 18, f. 332. In margin of *folio* 332, a note in Latin reads as follows: "Beijing August 15 1695. Arrived in Rome through the Portuguese way on December 26, 1697. The handwriting is that of [F]ather Antoine Thomas S. J., Belgian, missioner in China. Sent from Beijing to the Father General on November 9, 1695." Other copies of the manuscript are located in Rome (Jesuit Archives, ARSI Jap. Sin. Vol . 128, f. 103–108; Archives of Propaganda Fide, SCPF, *Miscellanea*, f. 317). See Gianni Criveller, "The "Parable" of Liturgical Inculturation in China from the 17th Century to the Present, with Particular Reference to the Memorial by Antoine Thomas (1695): *De necessitate sacerdotum sinensium, et dispensationis pro sacrificio in sinensi,*" in Ku Weiying & Zhao Xiaoyang, eds., *From Antoine Thomas S.J. to Celso Costantini: Multi-aspect Studies on Christianity in Modern China* (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2011).

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to Clement XI in 1701. Thomas, on behalf his confreres, asked the Pope for two concessions: the promotion of indigenous clergy and the permission for having Chinese as liturgical language. Both submissions went without result and the memoir fell into obscurity.

Thomas argued that China is an entire new world, possibly with more inhabitants than Catholics in the whole world. Even the conversion of neighboring nations depends upon the Chinese. Thomas concludes his inspiring memoir by claiming that "since the beginning of the Church of Christ, there was never a matter of greater importance. We have spared no efforts in promoting such a grave matter."

Indeed, since the very beginning of their mission, the Jesuits spared no efforts at achieving the conversion of China, the "greatest matter since the beginning of the Church." They adopted innovative strategies in responding to the challenges posed by Chinese cultures and religions, and they adopted accommodation as their missionary method.

Dressed as Buddhist Monks

In classic Chinese Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism are called *jiao* 教, i.e., teaching. In the late Ming and early Qing periods, a nationalistic movement called the "Three Teachings," *Sanjiao* 三教 (Matteo Ricci called them sects), aimed at unifying the three in order to save the Chinese nation on the verge of collapse.

When taking up residence in Zhaoqing (September 1583), Michele Ricci and Michele Ruggieri shaved their heads and dressed in Buddhist-style robes. Only under these conditions could the local prefect justify their presence, which was otherwise not admissible under imperial law. In traditional society there was hardly such a thing as casual clothing: everyone's identity had to be identified by his/her dress. The Jesuits did not have a specific religious robe and generally followed local custom in their dress. Wearing Buddhist-like robes was also a sign that theirs was a religious and not a commercial or military mission, as people, knowing about the Portuguese outpost of Macao, might otherwise suspect.

Coincidentally, the prefect's requirement matched directives from the Visitor Alessandro Valignano, who promoted accommodation (called by him *modo soave*, "gentle way") as the new missionary policy for East Asia. Valignano's new strategy as applied to the China mission required, in addition to a thorough knowledge of the written and spoken language, dressing in a manner similar to Buddhist monks and adaptation to the Chinese way of life.

At their Zhaoqing residence, near a famous pagoda, the Italian missionaries hung two dedicatory plaques with the words 僊花寺 (*Xianhua Si*, "Temple of the Immortal's Flower") and 西來淨土 (*Xilai Jingtu*, "Pure Land from the West"); these expressions clearly belong to Buddhist and Taoist terminology. In fact, the local population referred to the missionaries as 和尚 (*heshang*) or 僧 (*seng*)—Buddhist monks. The missionaries introduced themselves as "Buddhist monks from India" (天竺國僧, *Tianzhuguo seng*) or "monks from the Western Pure Land" (西來淨土和尚, *Xilai Jingtu heshang*).

In the eyes of most people, the missionaries might have appeared as true Buddhists, possibly the initiators of a new Buddhist school among the dozen already in existence. It would be a mistake, however, to think that Ricci and Ruggieri acted as Buddhist monks and did not proclaim their Christian faith. The details of the missionary method practiced in the early years in Zhaoqing are known thanks to the "Catechetic Conversations," an untitled Chinese manuscript composed in 1585–1588 and discovered in 1934 by Italian sinologist Pasquale d'Elia. The authors of the text are Ricci and Ruggieri, and it contains a memory aid for Ruggieri and Ricci's conversations with their guests. This is the earliest example of how the Jesuit missionaries worked in China, and it is quite important for understanding the development of their missionary method. The text, still almost unknown, is nine pages long and divided into eighteen sections.

The manuscript may be a working draft of Ruggieri's *The True Record of the Lord of Heaven* (天主實錄, *Tianzhu shilu*), published in Zhaoqing the previous year (1584) and compiled in collaboration with Ricci. From all this, we learn that in the early days, Ricci and Ruggieri were rather traditional in their preaching. Only later did Ricci, who

was a pragmatic man, partially change this initial method, adapting it to the context in which he lived and to new circumstances. In this text, the Lord of Heaven is also called Great Father-Mother (大父母, *Da Fumu*)—we shall come back to this remarkable expression—, as a sovereign to whom children and subjects must pay respect. Obviously, Ricci did not initiate his mission with a predefined strategy decided at his desk. He learned from accidents, mistakes and from opponents. He took advice from Chinese friends and associates and continued a systematic study of Chinese culture and religions.

In 1588, Ruggieri left China for Italy, never to return. He was charged with organizing a legation from the Holy See to Beijing. The legation never materialized, and some suggested that Ruggieri's assignment might have been a maneuver by Valignano to get Ruggieri honorably out of the way due to a supposed disagreement with Ricci's plan to change policy. The facts, however, suggest otherwise—even while in Italy, Ruggieri wrote in defense of the early policy of adaptation to Buddhism that he and Ricci had initiated in China. But there is no evidence of actual disagreement while the two were in China, or that the two could not continue to work together, or that Ricci desired Ruggieri's removal from the China mission, or that he was critical of his companion. In fact, Ricci did not decide on a change in policy until six years after Ruggieri's departure.

Ricci's Change of Policy

What was Ricci's change of policy? It was the passage from the Buddhist-like approach to a Confucian one. Ricci was a man of letters and not a monk or a mystic. He did not act like a Buddhist monk, and he did not feel at ease appearing like one. He felt much more at home as a citizen of what will later be called as the "Republic of Letters." He was a *literatus,* a man belonging to humanism. After years of studying the classics, Ricci was ready for a change, for a new role in society. When in 1595 he dressed like a Confucian scholar, Ricci not only followed the advice of his friends but also acted in accordance with his philosophical and humanistic training. Ricci not only stopped wearing the Buddhist

habit but even adopted a very critical attitude towards Buddhism and Taoism. The conflict became increasingly harsh when Ricci had several disputes with famous Buddhist monks, as we will see below.

The change in dress was a strategic decision that Ricci could not take alone. He needed the approval of his superior, Valignano. Ricci and Valignano met in Macao in early 1593 for a thorough review of missionary activity in China. This was their last meeting. The two missionaries took decisions that would deeply affect the development of the mission in the years to follow. The agenda of their conversations, as described by Ricci himself, was a turning point in the process of accommodation. In late 1594 or early 1595, Valignano allowed Ricci and his companions to grow their beards and hair in preparation for assuming the dress of the literati.

On April 18, 1595, during the journey from Shaozhou to Nanjing, Ricci finally abandoned his Buddhist-like habit and wore the silk robes of the literati. From then on, Ricci's attitude toward Chinese religion is best summarized by the four-character sentence 補儒易佛 (*buru yifo*, "perfect Confucianism and displace Buddhism"). This expression was used by Xu Guangqi (徐光啟) in his 1612 preface to Ricci's 1603 Catechism (*The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*), in which Ricci launched a stern attack on Buddhism, accusing it of being a parody of Christianity.

The Jesuits must have felt that Buddhism was a direct and dangerous competitor. Buddhism, like Christianity, was a foreign religion coming from the West, but already well adapted to the Chinese world. Buddhism had monastic life, celibacy, fasting, Holy Scriptures, meditation temples, devotions, and an organization somehow similar to the Christian one. The Jesuits needed to distance themselves from the Buddhists, especially since the population so often mistook them as one of the many Buddhist sects.

In his Catechism *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (天主實義, *Tianzhu shiyi*, 1603), the most important Catholic book in China's history, Ricci included anti-Buddhist arguments that he had elaborated in heated disputes with Buddhist monks. Ricci met various famous Buddhist monks. The most famous discussion was held in Nanjing (1599)

with the bonze San Hui (三淮), a bonze who professed an idealistic Buddhism. In Beijing, Ricci had discussions with the educated Buddhist scholar Huang Hui (黃輝), who criticized Ricci for not accepting the idea that God and the human mind are but one and the same thing. These discussions led Ricci in composing some of his texts, such as *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* and *Twenty Five Sentences* (*Ershiwu Yan,* 二十五言, 1605). The latter was conceived as a counter to the Buddhist Forty-two Paragraph sutra (*Sishier Zhangjing,* 四十二章經).

Ricci accused Buddhism of borrowing some ideas from Judaism or from Christianity like the doctrine of Heaven and Hell. He felt compelled to explain why Buddhism reached China earlier than Christianity: the ambassadors sent by the Emperor to bring to China the canonical writings "mistakenly took India to be their goal, and returned to China with Buddhist scriptures which were then circulated throughout the nation."[2]

Zhuhong (袾宏), leader of an influential lay Buddhist movement, rebuked Ricci's anti-Buddhist criticism in his Explanation of Heaven (天說, *Tian shuo*, 1608). Zhu Hong aimed at adapting Buddhism to Confucianism, similar to Ricci who attempted to bridge Christianity and Confucianism.

After Ruggieri and Ricci, other Jesuits investigated Buddhism, following Ricci's line: Diego De Pantoja, Martino Martini and Alvaro Semedo. The latter was a little more positive toward Buddhism, distinguishing, for example, between what he called an "exterior way" and an "interior way" that are, respectively, Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism. The Jesuits working in Tibet (in the 16th century)—Antonio De Andrade (in Tibet in 624) and Francisco Godhino—also had a much more positive attitude. Andrade almost considered Buddhism as a Christian sect.

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[2]Matteo Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, ed. Edward Malatesta, trans. Douglas Lancashire & Peter Hu Kuo-chen (Taipei/Paris/Hong Kong: Ricci Institute, 1985), n. 591.

Accommodation and its Surprises

Accommodation is the term by which Valignano's "gentle way" in China was called in China. Ricci mentioned this expression a few times in his writings.

The accommodation method, central in Jesuit missionary activity, is a concept that has its theological roots in Thomist thought and in the writings of Erasmus of Rotterdam. It was, according to Elisabetta Corsi, an instrument or a hermeneutical device, particularly apt to address complex religious and cultural challenges, and their doctrinal implications.

Ricci noted that many passages in the Chinese classic texts were in harmony with Christian teaching, and he proposed a parallel between the relationship of Christianity with Greco-Roman culture and that of Christianity with Confucianism. A key point in Ricci's interpretation of Confucianism is the distinction between the original teaching of the Classics and the later Neo-Confucian commentaries. Ricci asserted that the ancients believed in God the creator, therefore the ancient terms "Sovereign above" (上帝, *Shangdi*) and "Heaven" (天, *Tian*) are not impersonal and immanent, but personal and transcendent. Ricci adopted *Shangdi* and *Tian*, together with the neologism—at least then it was perceived as such—"The Lord of Heaven" (*Tianzhu,* 天主), to translate the name of God. The term "Lord of Heaven" was adopted by Ricci and Ruggieri as the Catholic name for God in Chinese as early as in 1583.

We now know that *Tianzhu* (天主)*,* the Lord of Heaven, was in fact not a neologism. The term *Tianzhu* appears over 100 times in the Buddhist canon. The number is not that high given the great extension of the canon, which amounts to 85 volumes. The term *Tian* is used in Chinese Buddhism to translate the Sanskrit word *Deva.* The latter is a term that indicates the immense number of supernatural beings of the highest excellence, but still subject to the *samsara,* the cycle of rebirth. Therefore *Tianzhu*, in Buddhist terms, can be translated as the "Lord of the Devas." As the various levels of Buddhist heavens are filled with an endless number of spirits (*devas*), *Tianzhu* can be understood as a term that refers to *Devas* that govern other *Devas.* Since there are

many heavens, there is more than one *Tianzhu*. But the most common use of *Tianzhu* in the Buddhist canon is to translate the spirit of Indra/Sakra, terms that belong to Hinduism and Buddhism, respectively. During the conversation between Indra/Sakra and Shakyamuni, reported in *The Sutra of the Questions by Indra/Sakra, as It Was Said by the Buddha* (*Foshuo dishi suowen jing,* 佛说帝释所问经), Shakyamuni addresses Indra/Sakra as *Tianzhu*.[3]

The late Jesuit sinologist Yves Raguin was, to my best knowledge, the first scholar who brought to the attention of the academic community the fact that the term *Tianzhu* appears in both Buddhist and Taoist literature. In a personal communication to the present author in 1998, Raguin affirmed that over the years, Ricci had accumulated a deep knowledge of Chinese religions, and therefore he could not have failed to be informed about it. Raguin then suggested that Ricci entitled his Catechism *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* exactly to clarify the Catholic meaning of the term *Tianzhu*. It is like Ricci saying: "you have already heard of the Lord of Heaven, however its true meaning is the one I illustrate in this book." I consider this hypothesis entirely credible, even if it cannot be confirmed by any of Ricci's actual texts.

Catechism and Christian Doctrine

One major piece of evidence of accommodation as a hermeneutical device is to be found in Ricci's method, i.e., the distinction between *Catechism* and *Christian Doctrine* which corresponds to the practice of indirect and direct preaching (see below). From Ricci's own account in *Della entrata della compagnia di Giesù e Christianità nella Cina* and in his *Letters*, the *Catechism* is described as a representation of basic concepts, such as the existence of God and the retribution of good and evil, in dialogue with Confucian scholars, and in dispute with Buddhists and

[3]I owe the information on the Buddhist Canon to research done by Harrison Adams, a student of mine in Macao, in 2008. It is reported here with his permission.

Taoists. For the things necessary to salvation, the readers are invited to read other books, i.e., the *Christian Doctrine*. In 1609, in a letter to the Vice Provincial Francesco Pasio in Japan, Ricci gave a Christian interpretation of Confucian texts:

> *By carefully examining all these books, we shall find very few matters against the light of reason and very many conformable to it. … And we can very much hope in the divine mercy that many of their ancestors have been saved by observing the natural law with the help that God shall grant for his goodness.*[4]

Catechisms were written mainly for the Confucian literati, but Ricci explained that they were aimed at catechumens and converts as well, and even at opponents of the faith; in sum, at anyone interested. Being a book for all and comprehensible to everyone, the Catechism was printed in large numbers and spread across the country. The copies travelled without the missionaries and reached neighboring nations, such as Japan and Vietnam. Particularly noteworthy is the case of Korea, where Christianity entered thanks to Ricci's *Catechism* and other Jesuit books brought back by Korean officials who had taken part in the customary embassies to Beijing. The true origin of all things (萬物真源, *Wanwu zhenyuan*) by Giulio Aleni (1628) belongs to the same genre as well.

The *Christian Doctrine* (*Tianzhu jiaoyao,* 天主教要, literally *The Essential Things of the Doctrine of the Lord of Heaven*) was published in March 1605, and gives a full account of what ought to be believed by catechumens receiving baptism and by believers practicing a Christian life. Being anonymous, this publication is even ignored by some of Ricci's biographers. Ricci kept it anonymous because its content is nothing but traditional Christian teaching: no one could put his name on that teaching.

According to scholastic theology, doctrines such as the existence of one God and the retribution after death belong to the natural revelation and can be accepted with the light of reason, that is, rational arguments. The doctrines proper to positive revelation, that is, those

[4]Matteo Ricci to Francesco Pasio (Beijing: February 15, 1609), in Matteo Ricci, *Lettere (1580–1609)*, ed. Francesco D'Arelli (Macerata, Italy: Quodlibet, 2001), 518.

which can be accepted only through Christian faith, such as the Trinity of God, Incarnation and Redemption, were instead proposed only to those who desired to enter the Church. Ricci adopted the distinction of scholastic theology between the apologetic presentation (natural revelation) and the dogmatic one (positive revelation). The distinction between natural theology and positive theology is to be found in the traditional scholastic theology that Ricci studied in Rome, Coimbra and India, and was consciously applied in writing religious books and in his oral preaching.

Indirect and Direct Preaching

As he became expert in Chinese socio-cultural dynamics, Ricci applied the distinction between *Catechism* and *Christian Doctrine* to his oral preaching by adopting "indirect preaching" and "direct preaching," according to whether his interlocutors were literati (practice of indirect preaching) or catechumens and neophytes (practice of direct preaching).

When practicing indirect preaching in his meetings with the literati, Ricci employed dialogue and disputation in a manner similar to the style of argumentation found in both Chinese and Western classical texts. His conversations initially dealt with scientific, ethical and philosophical topics, elaborating on similar points in Chinese and Western classical texts in support of his arguments. Ricci would then turn the conversations toward a discussion of religious and ethical beliefs such as the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and the reward of good and evil in heaven and hell. The outline of *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* gives a good idea of how those conversations developed: 1. God the Creator; 2. Human search for God; 3. The immortality of the soul; 4. The substantial difference between humans and the rest of the universe (where Ricci, in dispute with Neo-Confucianism, would argue that humans and the universe do not derive from one and the same substance); 5. Confutation of re-incarnation and other Buddhist doctrines; 6. Reward for the virtuous in heaven and punishment for evildoers in hell; 7. Human nature as distinct from the

rest of the universe; 8. The religion of the missionaries, their celibacy, and the mission of Jesus, master and worker of miracles.

In his conversations with visitors and literati, Ricci did not necessarily speak about the beliefs proper to the Catholic faith. A complete catechetic instruction was given only to those who desired to embrace the Catholic religion. Ricci's policy was that specific religious teaching was to be offered only upon request. In this way, consciously or not, Ricci followed the style of Buddhist masters, especially those trained in the Zen school, who offered their teaching only after their disciples proved able to appreciate it.

In other words, the purpose of the indirect preaching and written *Catechisms* was to discuss doctrinal matters based on rational arguments acceptable by way of reason, while the purpose of the direct preaching and written *Christian Doctrines* was to teach and practice the faith. The content of the *Catechisms* and indirect preaching could change according to the writer and speaker, the readership and audience, and the circumstances. The direct preaching and the *Christian Doctrine*, on the other hand, could not change: they transmitted the non-changeable essentials, and the texts were normally printed anonymously, as did Ricci in 1605.

There are striking similarities between Ricci's method and Christian catechesis of the early Christian centuries when the catechumens were introduced to the mysteries of faith *(arcana)* only gradually. Ricci, proposing a gradual introduction to the faith, did the same. The church he founded was indeed a church in its beginnings.

Jesus the Master

In his *Catechism*, Ricci introduced Jesus only in the eighth and last chapter, presenting him as a master and a worker of miracles sent by God. However, he did not explicitly describe Jesus as Son of God and savior of humankind. Arguably, Confucian literati could have found Jesus of interest if he had been seen as a Western equivalent of the "masters" in the Chinese philosophical tradition. His teaching,

according to Ricci, was the basis of Western civilization, and since the coming of Jesus, "many Western nations have made great progress on the way to civilization." However, Ricci refrained from proposing a direct comparison between Jesus and Confucius, each the master of a civilization. Indeed, Jesus was presented as superior to all masters, saints and kings. As much as he tried to approach his Confucian interlocutor in an accommodate way, Ricci did assert the superiority of Christ.

Ricci's critics noticed that in *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, Christ was mentioned only briefly and at the end. They concluded that Ricci spoke only of the Lord of Heaven and left out the mysteries of Christ and his crucifixion. They obviously ignored Ricci's method and the justification for it found in his writings.

Ricci and Longobardo

Ricci was also censured under the charge of concealing the religious nature of his mission in order to accommodate to Confucianism. According to critical remarks that were, however, expressed only after his death, Ricci pretended to be a scientist rather than a missionary, preaching *Tianzhu-ism* (from Tianzhu, 天主, the Lord of Heaven) as if it was a Confucian-like religion different from Catholicism. As a consequence, his critics have argued that those Chinese who converted to the Catholic faith were in fact deceived about the true nature of Catholicism. Critics also point out that even some Jesuits, such as Michele Ruggieri, as we have seen, and Ricci's own successor, Nicolò Longobardo, objected to Ricci's methods. These charges, resumed recently by critics contemporary to us, were put forward in late Ming and early Qing anti-Christian literature and by Jesuits' opponents belonging to other religious orders.

Longobardo, Ricci's successor as the Mission's superior, is often described as Ricci's opponent on the question of the Chinese Rites, but things are not as black and white on this issue as is often assumed. First of all, although the two men never met, it was Ricci who recommended and actually nominated Longobardo as his successor. Ricci, who read

the reports submitted by Longobardo from the southern residences, held him in very high esteem.

When he became Superior, Longobardo continued and developed the policies inaugurated by Valignano and Ricci regarding liturgical inculturation, the promotion of Chinese clergy, the independence of the China mission from Macao, and the scientific apostolate. In 1614, Longobardo dispatched Nicolas Trigault to Europe to recruit more missionary-scientists and to obtain more books. Another important task that Longobardo bestowed on Trigault was to get permission from the Pope to use Chinese as a liturgical language. Paul V granted this request in 1615, but it was never implemented in China.

There is no evidence of disagreement between Ricci and Longobardo on the controversy regarding the Chinese Rites, which began long after Ricci's death. What can be established is that Longobardo, together with Alfonso Vagnoni, promoted direct preaching to the population. Ricci, as he stated in his letters, thought that influencing Chinese society as a whole was better than establishing small Christian communities at its margins. Obtaining the trust and the approval of the central authorities was a prerequisite leading to mass conversions among the population at large. After securing the toleration of Christianity from the authorities, it would be safe to evangelize the population at large all over China.

Ricci, while he was superior of the mission when Longobardo evangelized in the southern residence of Shaozhou, was happy to acknowledge that Longobardo converted many common people. Ricci must have approved it and considered Longobardo's method a continuation of his own method. Ricci was not against the mission to the people. Rather, he was convinced that the solid foundation of the Christian presence, on which he was working, would naturally lead to the evangelization of the people in accordance with Longobardo's method. Ricci had to open the way to allow Longobardo and other missionaries to openly evangelize.

Certainly, if they had had the opportunity to discuss the matter, Ricci would not approve of Longobardo's position regarding

the names of God and the interpretation of Confucianism that Longobardo expressed after 1615.

The Terms Controversy

The point of disagreement between Longobardo and Ricci goes under the name of the "terms controversy," as we have seen above. For Ricci, the Confucian terms *Shangdi* (上帝) and *Tian* (天) were compatible with Christian doctrine, and he employed them to name God.

Longobardo's opinion was, however, very different. He found it necessary to reject not only *Shangdi*, *Tian* and all the terms deriving from the Chinese Classics, but even the commonly accepted *Tianzhu* (天主), Lord of Heaven.

The person who convinced Longobardo to embrace this extremely conservative standpoint was João Rodriguez, a Jesuit based in Japan who visited Beijing in 1615. Rodriguez was against using Japanese terms to name God, and persuaded Longobardo to apply the same policy in China. Missionaries in Japan were against using the local language to name God because of a supposed unhappy choice by Francis Xavier in translating the word God into Japanese. Jesuit missions in Japan and China were intimately linked and influenced each other. The web of their connections and reciprocal influences was vast and intricate.

Longobardo and Rodriguez argued that terms such as *Shangdi* were not compatible with Christianity because their contemporary use had been strongly influenced by materialistic Neo-Confucianism, a revised form of Confucianism profoundly influenced by Taoism and Buddhism. They advocated the introduction of a new term in the form of 陡斯 (*dousi*), a Chinese phonetic rendering of the Latin word *Deus,* even though Ricci had argued that it is impossible to pronounce correctly the letter "d" in Chinese. The term *dousi* was employed only occasionally in late Ming Christian writings and was later completely abandoned.

Longobardo's position was opposed by the majority of Jesuits in China, particularly by Giulio Aleni and Nicolas Trigault. The Jesuits met in Jiading in southern Jiangsu in late 1627 and early 1628 to discuss

the matter. On that occasion, Longobardo wrote a memorandum stating his position. After the negative result (for Longobardo) of the meeting, the document giving his position should have been destroyed. However, one copy survived, and years later it was given by a dissenting Jesuit to Domingo Navarette, the Dominican who devoted his life to advocating against the Chinese Rites. Navarette published Longobardo's memorandum in Europe in 1676, bringing the Chinese controversies into the European universities. Only in the early 18th century did the disagreement about the terms for God and the one about the Rites become two aspects of the same controversy. In 1704, Rome ruled that that the term *Tianzhu* should be used for God, but not *Shangdi* or *Tian*.

The Great Father-Mother

As a consequence of the controversy, several other expressions employed by the missionaries and Chinese Christians to name God were also dropped, putting to a stop a promising process of inculturation. Among the expressions rejected or abandoned were *Da Fumu* (大父母, Great Father-Mother), *Wanwu Zhenyuan* (萬物真原, The True Origin of All Things), *Tian* (天, Heaven), *Da Zhu* (大主, Great Lord), *Zhu* (主, Lord), *Zhuzai* (主宰, Supreme Lord), *Da Zhuzai* (大主宰, Great and Supreme Lord), *Taigao Tian* (太高天, Highest Heaven), and *Da Li* (大理, Great Principle).

Naming God as Great Father-Mother (*Da Fumu*) was one of the most remarkable choices made by Ricci and Ruggieri from the early days of their mission. This expression then occurred frequently in Chinese Christian literature used both by the missionaries, especially Giulio Aleni, and by the converts, particularly Yang Tingyun (楊廷筠) and Wang Zheng (王徵). The term's recondite origin is in Chinese cosmogony, centered on the concept of yang (陽), male element, and yin (陰), female element. In Confucianism, Great Father-Mother designated both the emperor and the local authorities. Yang Tingyun, one of the pillars of the early Chinese Catholic Church, developed a Christian interpretation: regarding God as one's own Father and Mother implies

that all human beings should be regarded as one's own brothers and sisters. The term also refers to the relationship between parent and child, which reflects the close relationship between God and humankind. The abandonment of the term Great Father-Mother is particularly regrettable in view of the search for inclusive language in contemporary theology, a language that wishes to avoid any masculine connotation of God.

On Taoism and Figurism

Differently from what is occasionally asserted, Ricci and the Jesuits did come into contact with and studied Taoism. Ricci offered long descriptions of Taoist doctrine and practices in his Catechism. Most probably, Ricci personally met the 50th Master, Zhang Guoxiang (張嗰祥), who died in 1611, as the latter lived in Beijing for almost 13 years, in the same period when Ricci was there. Ricci wrote of Taoism after careful observation: for example, Ricci reported a Taoist tale that has no corresponding version in traditional Chinese literature. Ricci's might be the only written version of an existing oral tale. According to sinologist Giuliano Bertuccioli, Ricci could have learned about this tale during his visit to the city of Jurong (局容), not far from Nanjing and very near to Maoshan (茅山), a mountain with many Taoist temples, and an important place in the history of Taoism.

Ricci and the other Jesuits indeed condemned Taoism as tainted with "superstition." His judgment on Taoism became harsh, and he certainly adopted many of the Confucian critical viewpoints. He strictly demanded of the converts to destroy all the "superstitious" articles such as books and images, statues and relics. The scholastic formation of Ricci, based on the principle of "being," could not but refuse a philosophy which employed concepts such as *wu* (無) that Ricci understood as meaning "not being," or "nothingness."

Ricci rejected "philosophical" concepts such as Taoist *wu* (無), the Buddhist *kong* (空; Ricci defined it as "void"), and the neo-Confucian *Taiji* (太極, "Supreme Ultimate"). All these terms refer to "principles" which have no beginning and no end, which have no appearance, and are the source of the universe and all within it.

Some scholars, such as Julia Ching, have suggested that concepts such as *wu* (not being) and *kong* (void) can be appreciated by Christians as a *via negativa* of speaking of God. Modern Chinese Christian intellectuals, such as John Wu Jingxiong, have compared, in a fascinating way, the way of *Dao* (道) with the spirituality of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus.

The so-called Figurists were a group of 18th century French Jesuits that proposed a most radical and fascinating approach to inculturation and alliance between Chinese culture and Christianity. The Figurists saw in the Chinese classical writings, especially in the Yijing (易經), the Book of Changes, more than a mere natural religion, but real vestiges of the original revelation that we have received through the Bible and the Messianic prophecies. Joachim Bouvet, one of the famous "Mathematicians of the King" dispatched by French King Louis XIV to the Court of Chinese Emperor Kang Xi in 1687, was the leader of the Figurists. Other active Figurists were Joseph de Prèmare and Jean Francois Foucquet. Their method, opposed by other Jesuits and by the superiors, was short-lived, but very fascinating and far-reaching in terms of the history of the inculturation of the Christian message.

Epilogue: A Tale of Two Cemeteries in Beijing

In October 2001, I was in Beijing to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the arrival of Jesuit Matteo Ricci in Beijing (1601). The participants of the symposium were invited to visit two "Christian Cemeteries" in Beijing.

Zhalan, the first cemetery, is located in the northwestern part of Beijing, on the grounds of the Beijing Administrative College (formerly called the Party School). It lies in a quiet and secluded area shaded in the green foliage of cypresses and pines and the majestic beauty of yellow poplars. With almost 400 years of history, it is Beijing's oldest Christian cemetery. The cemetery includes the tombstones of Italian Matteo Ricci, German John Adam Schall Von Bell, and Belgian Ferdinand Verbiest, three men that brought about a mutually enriching exchange between China and the West. The sixty remaining tombstones

remember prominent Chinese and foreign missionaries, including Antoine Thomas, mentioned at the beginning of this article.

The second cemetery is much less well-known. It is not really an independent cemetery, but a series of 36 tombstones of Jesuit missionaries, including the Figurists mentioned above, originally from *Zhenfuxi* (镇府西) where the French Jesuits had set up a cemetery in 1710. This cemetery was completely destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. The Beijing Cultural Bureau managed to preserve 36 of these tombstones. Today, they occupy a section of the Beijing Art Museum of Stone Carvings located in the western part of Beijing, at the beautiful Indian-style Five Pagodas Buddhist Temple (*Zhenjue* in Sanskrit, *Wutasi* [五塔寺] in Chinese). The location offers an unusual and remarkable panoramic sight. One can visit old Indian-style Buddhist pagodas, learn about numerous folk religions and Taoist symbols, and see many Confucian and Chinese-classic related inscriptions and poems. In this unique mixture of Chinese history, culture, religions and art, the visitor comes upon an area devoted to the memory of the presence of the Christian mission during the Qing era.

Christian symbols are placed side by side in the company of traditional Chinese Buddhist, Taoist, folk-religions' and Confucian motifs and symbols. It seems that this is a witness, a sign that Christianity is indeed part of China yesterday, today and tomorrow. The results of the Catholic mission in Late Ming and Qing China appeared to some commentators as so insignificant that they spoke of it as a failure. While the results were certainly modest and controversial, they were, nevertheless, well grounded and enduring.

The "Christian" cemeteries in today's Beijing are a clear sign, an eloquent witness, that from an evangelical perspective, even a modest result can have great significance. The Christian tombstones at the Beijing Art Museum of Stone Carvings seem also to be a prophetic symbol, a sign of hope, an indication of a path on which all Chinese and other world religions should walk: a path of respect, dialogue, mutual understanding and appreciation, collaboration and unity. Religions, cultures and art can and should contribute, in China as anywhere else, to

the elevation of the human spirit, to the promotion of human aspirations, to the dignity of human life in all its complexities and expressions.

These cemeteries, whether in the nostalgic shade of the old Indian-style Buddhist pagodas or shaded among cypresses and pines, with their fascinating tombstones of people of different religions, nationalities and epochs, provide visitors with an exceptional and unique setting for deep and creative reflection on the encounter of Christianity with cultures and religions in China.

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AN UNDERSTANDING OF ORIGINAL SIN FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF *DAO* AND *DE* IN THE LIGHT OF PAUL RICOEUR'S *SYMBOLISM OF EVIL*

Linyi Zhai, S.J.

The Christian doctrine of original sin has been challenged and many people today question whether such a doctrine is still sustainable in light of evolution. In the *Symbolism of Evil*,[1] Paul Ricoeur reinterprets this doctrine in the contemporary culture by retrieving symbols of evil and analyzing myths of its genesis. He offers a phenomenological appreciation of the meaning of symbols, and shows not just how primal myths speak to humanity then and now, but also how they once spoke for men and women. Ricoeur has thus shed light on the interpretation of original sin by examining symbols of evil and analyzing myths in which those symbols and their dramatic narrative (myth) give rise to thought.

If that is the case, then a different culture born of different symbols and mythical traditions concerning evil would engender a different view of the problem of evil and create a different understanding of sin. The uniqueness of Chinese culture could then be traced to its own primal thought. It is on this assumption and

[1]Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbol of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (New York, Evanston, and London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1967).

in the light of Ricoeur's working framework that this author seeks to understand the notion of evil in Chinese tradition by detecting some possible symbols of evil and analyzing the anthropogenic myth of the so-called "fall"—with the complementary addition of some early philosophical thoughts on evil—in order to elucidate the Christian doctrine of original sin in this context, particularly from the perspectives of the notion of *Dao* and *De*.

In so doing, this author intends to emulate Ricoeur's phenomenology, extend his observations, and apply the hermeneutical principle proper to the Chinese context in order to draw light on the understanding of original sin in a Chinese context. This is both possible and desirable because, although Ricoeur himself was working primarily with Judeo-Christian materials, he has drawn and cast light on a broad range of symbols and myths which have implications for the study of China. However, before unfolding Chinese symbols, myths and thoughts about evil, there is the important task of crystallizing Ricoeur's framework so that, on the one hand, it unfolds Ricoeur's approach and insights on the problem of evil and original sin and, on the other hand, offers some meaningful comparisons which may be drawn between the two.

Ricoeur's Symbolization of Evil and Interpretation of Original Sin

Implied in Ricoeur's presentation, or at least in its structure, is an evolution in the symbolization of evil from evil primarily conceived as defilement to evil conceived as sin, and finally as guilt. Firstly, according to Ricoeur, defilement is the first primary symbol of evil because involvement in evil is commonly described as becoming dirty or defiled. Defilement, as a symbol of evil, is widespread and primitive enough to be considered universal. However, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, defilement was superseded by sin as an indication of evil. Secondly, for Riceour, sin as a violation of divine interdicts is a necessary transition from defilement to describe evil. Here, humans are set up against God or, more accurately, "before God." In the fundamental experience of Israel in covenantal relationship with God, human culpability is redefined in terms of human violation of the

Covenant or overstepping a sacred boundary that defined the human-divine difference or relationship. "Thus, sin is a religious dimension before being ethical; it is not the transgression of an abstract rule—of a value—but the violation of a personal bond."[2] Moreover, sin is also seen as captivity by the evil power: "it is a power that binds man, hardens him, and holds him captive."[3] The captivity also suggests a social and intersubjective situation from which humans need to be liberated. Thirdly, according to Ricoeur, this problem of evil, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, is understood in terms of guilt, that is, in acute and personal consciousness of radical evil. Guilt is the interiorization of sin. Because what is demanded of the human is beyond what the law requires, it appears that the human bears responsibility for her/his actions and motivations, even to the extent of having to choose between God or nothingness. Finally, Ricoeur uses the concept of the "servile will," i.e., "the unavailability of freedom to itself,"[4] to sum up human experience relating with the symbols of evil in the scheme of defilement-sin-guilt, but it does not deal with the origin and end of such experience. Ricoeur thus moves on to examine mythical symbols.

Ricoeur examines the Adamic myth thoroughly to illumine the understanding of evil and reinterpretation of original sin. In the Adamic myth, the human is seen as created as good, although with limited freedom that may be misused to incline toward evil whose nature is revealed as contingent, historical, and irrational. Turning away from God, the human must face the consequences of suffering and death, but the story does not end in Genesis; rather, it is a symbolic representation oriented toward the future, toward the coming of Christ. Paul identifies Christ as the Second Adam who justifies creation and sets things aright with God's will once again.

Drawing new insights from his analysis of the symbolisms of evil, Ricoeur reflects further on the meaning of the theological work

[2]Ricoeur, *The Symbol of Evil*, 52.

[3]Ricoeur, *The Symbol of Evil*, 93.

[4]Ricoeur, *The Symbol of Evil*, 151–157.

crystallized in the concept of original sin. His method, which works from images and mythical symbols to rational symbols (original sin), is a hermeneutic one within the framework of symbolism, retrieving the intentions of the concept by way of deconstruction which recovers its meaning.

Original sin was a theological explanation that was conceived in order to explain the universality of sin and the necessity of salvation by Christ. Reading the story of Genesis literally, Augustine regards Adam and Eve as specific historical figures. Augustine explains original sin by referring to Adam's sin which destroyed the created human state of original blessedness, along with its gifts of immortality, integrity, and knowledge. This resulted in death, concupiscence, a hostile disposition toward God, and consequently, the need for God's forgiveness. Moreover, Augustine explains the universality of sin through the biological mode of transmission by which humans inherit Adam's sin. Thus, even an infant needs baptism in order to remove the condition of original sin, but concupiscence remains. Only by the grace of Christ are all saved. Augustine intends to emphasize here the solidarity of all humankind in sin and the universal need of all for Christ.

This traditional concept of original sin, however, must be deconstructed in order to recover its religious meaning in our contemporary time, for we can no longer read the Adamic story literally, as if it happened in history. Ricoeur sees the symbolic function of original sin as a rational symbol: "In tracing back the origin of evil to a distant ancestor, the myth discovers the situation of every man: evil has already taken place. I do not begin evil; I continue it. I am implicated in evil. Evil has a past; it is its past; it is its own tradition."[5] Thus, by retrieving the intentions of the concept by way of deconstruction, Ricoeur notices that the centre of the scene is occupied not so much by Adam and the consequences of sin on humanity, but by Jesus Christ and the grace which, through Him, was abundantly poured upon

[5]Paul Ricoeur, "Original Sin: A Study in Meaning," in Don Ihde, ed., *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 282.

humanity. Nevertheless, the power of evil in the heart and history of humankind is undeniable.

In general, some contemporary views of original sin are in line with Ricoeur's triple description: "[1] the reality of sin anterior to every awakening of conscience, [2] the communal dimension of sin, which is irreducible to individual responsibility, [3] the impotence of will that surrounds every actual fault."[6] Looking at human history and the human situation as a whole, the meaning of sin in "original sin" may refer to a situation or state of being in which humans are sunk, or it may mean the actual turning away of humans, as individuals or as a collective whole, from God. Perceiving human experience inwardly, sin may also refer to the broken interiority of the person which is characterized by the absence of integrity and the conflict of different forces in the human. The term original in "original sin" also has many possible meanings: it may refer to the historical inauguration of sin by our first ancestors, whoever they may be, or the bad influence of humans on others. Sin is thus passed on through social structures and cultural institutions. It points to the ontological solidarity of humankind as sinners before God or the existential fact that all humans sin, thus pointing to a global or cosmic sinfulness. Such is our experience as humans in the world, which desperately needs God's saving grace through the coming of Jesus Christ whose death and resurrection brought new creation and set things aright with God's will once again

Symbols of Evil in China

Having briefly surveyed Ricoeur's symbolization of evil and interpretation of the meaning of original sin, can these be applied, as is, to a study of China's symbols and myths of evil in order to make sense of the Christian doctrine of original sin in the context of China? The easy but simplistic response is merely to impose the Western defilement-sin-guilt scheme on this non-Western culture. One may

[6]Ricoeur, "Original Sin: A Study in Meaning," 282.

easily come to the conclusion that it would not make sense, at least not as much as it does in Western culture.

This is not to say that evil as defilement-sin-guilt has not survived in the Chinese consciousness, but this conception does not constitute the standard for understanding evil or morality in China. Fighting against evil is not manifested through sin or divine law but through *Dao* (道). One who does not act in accordance with *Dao* is said to have lost the *De* (德) which is given to human nature. However, these philosophical characterizations are already post-mythic developments. What were the more primeval symbols of evil?

A simple and direct way to discover the symbols of evil in Chinese culture is to trace the roots of the composition of ideographs or characters which themselves are symbols in Chinese language. Chinese writing is special in that it does not employ an alphabet, but rather characters or ideograms that were originally pictures or conventional signs manifesting the "thoughts" behind the language.

The Chinese term expressing the notion of "evil" is *e* (恶). The composite ideograph *e* (恶) consists of two components—inferior or second-rate (亚) and heart (心). Thus, the ideograph *e* indicates that the cause for evil, *e*, originates from an "inferior heart." In other words, people are considered to be evil if they do not act whole-good-heartedly. Thus, in the traditional Chinese context, "evil refers less to ontological imperfections in the universe—'inequality' in things—or even to the evils connected with human suffering and death, than to the problem of evil in the human heart: moral perversion in its individual or collective manifestations, which bring about so much suffering and havoc, usually to the innocent."[7]

The Chinese word heart 心, which can be equally taken as "mind" in a western sense, or more precisely as "mind-and-heart," derived originally from an image of fire. "It refers to intentions, feelings, as

[7]Julia Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity: A Comparative Study* (Tokyo, New York & San Francisco: Kodansha International, 1977), 73.

well as the activity of knowing and judging. The mind-and-heart is that which discerns between right and wrong, as well as that which commands conformance with its judgments."[8] What is remarkable about heart in Confucian understanding is that it is the *locus* of humanity's meeting with Heaven. Mencius says: "He who gives full realization to his heart understands his own nature, and he who understands his own nature knows Heaven."[9] In addition, the well-known Confucian philosopher Wang Yang-ming, of the 15th century BC, affirms: "the heart is the Way (*Dao*), and the Way is Heaven. If one knows [his own] heart, he would also know the Way and Heaven."[10] Clearly, for Confucianism the heart comes to us from Heaven; it also leads us back to Heaven. In Julia Ching's words, "it represents both the symbol and reality of man's oneness with Heaven … the heart is also the reason for man's oneness with himself."[11]

If one fails to hold a whole-good-heart, s/he loses her/his nature and breaks her/his oneness with Heaven and oneness with her/himself. That is where the "inferior or second-rate heart"—the Chinese word for evil *e* (惡) comes in. In other words, *e* (惡, "evil") is the result of one's misuse of her/his gifted integrity of heart, i.e., of breaking the oneness with Heaven as well as with oneself.

Yuet Keung Lo, who uses "*Shuowen jiezi*," a second-century lexicon that explains the etymology of ancient Chinese ideographs, in his article "*The Idea of Evil in Early China*,"[12] studies some terms of transgression

[8]Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity*, 91.

[9]*The Book of Mencius*, 7:1, Readings in Chinese Philosophy (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Philosophy Department, 1993).

[10]Cited by Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity*, 91.

[11]Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity*, 92.

[12]Yuet Keung Lo, *The Idea of Evil in Early China* (National University of Singapore), http://www.interdiscipinary.net/ati/Evil/Evil%208/Lo%20paper.pdf, 2007), 1–9.

which are the symbols of evil or are closely related to the idea of evil. Lo's study adds more evidences for the effort to trace back to the "thoughts" behind the symbols of evil.

> *e* is glossed with *guo* 过, which means transgression or error. *e* can also function in a verbal sense, which means "to loathe" or "to despise." The two senses of *e* are actually cognate—when a person commits a transgression, it will be despised by others. Clearly, evil is considered man-made. Indeed *guo* is the most common term for transgression; it literally means "to pass by" or "pass over." From this basic meaning, *guo* also connotes the sense of overshooting. In this derived meaning, *guo* is often used in connection with *bu ji* 不及 (undershooting), both refer to the act of missing the mark and are considered human error alike. A common synonym for *guo* is *qian* 愆. The composite graph *qian* consists of three components—a path (行), water (水), and heart (心). The water graph is placed in the middle of the path graph indicating that the path is flooded. Evidently and graphically, something goes amiss. It is crucial that the heart graph, which is placed beneath the path graph and the water graph, is integral to the composite graph *qian*. Its presence connotes that the cause for the trouble originates with the human heart.[13]

Thus, Lo concludes that "the cognate relationship among the terms of transgression suggests that 'evil' (*e*) was considered to be man-made and thus not perceived to have its own ontology. It was unequivocally understood as the result of man's own errors in judgment."[14] To some extent, this understanding of evil, illumined by tracing back to the roots of the composition of ideographs related with evil, is in line with what Ricoeur discovered about the meaning of evil: "that evil is not something that exists, that evil has no being, no nature, because it comes from us, because it is the work of freedom."[15] Expressing Ricoeur's words in Chinese understanding: "evil is not being but doing, because it comes from us, because it is the work of misuse of the heart."

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[13]Lo, *The Idea of Evil in Early China*, 8.

[14]Lo, *The Idea of Evil in Early China*, 9.

[15]Ricoeur, "Original Sin: A Study in Meaning," 272.

Chinese Myth of Evil

Is there a Chinese story of a Fall? According to Whalen Lai, who presents a thorough study on the possible Chinese myths of fall in the light of Ricoeur's study on symbolism of myth in his article "Symbolism of Evil in China: The Kung-Chia Myth Analyzed,"[16] there is no one central myth comparable to that in Genesis. There have been enormous attempts to group the oriental mythical thoughts under the "cosmic egg" variety, coming up with mythical oneness and human-divine continuity thinking.[17] Nonetheless, it is difficult to locate a primeval myth of fall/evil in China given the major source of myth in the Confucian classic, the *Book of History*.

After examining some existing myths, Lai determines: "Emperor Kung-chia of the Xia dynasty, the first ruler to lose his *de* 德 (virtue) and the Mandate of Heaven (the rule), is the first evil man and that embedded in three myths about him is the Chinese myth of the Fall."[18] There is clearly a judgmental account of this evil king given in the *Book of History*: "Emperor Kung-chia was enthroned. He liked to serve the spirits. He also was licentious and unruly. The *de* of the Xia clan declined and the feudal lords showed discontent."[19] This king Kung-chia, who lost his *de* and the mandate to rule, could well represent fallible humanity uprooted from the original (heavenly) good. Where did he go wrong? Lai finds a surviving myth about him indicating a clue:

> When emperor Kung-chia was enthroned, Heaven sent down two dragons. Kung-chia was unable to feed them; this is because he could

[16]Whalen Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China: The Kung-Chia Myth Analyzed," in *History of Religions* Vol. 23, No. 4 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 316–343.

[17]Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China," 320.

[18]Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China," 321.

[19]The *Book of History*, as cited by Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China," 333.

> not avail himself of the service of the clan of Dragon-Nurturers that once served the Sage Yu at the founding of Xia.
>
> So the reign declined. Later there was a man called Liu Lu who had acquired somewhat the art of nurturing dragons from the old Dragon-Nurturing clan. He came to serve the emperor. Kung-chia made him the Master of Dragons.
>
> *But somehow the female of the dragons died and it was made by the caretaker into food for the emperor. Later when the King asked for it, Liu Lu fled.*[20]

In order to understand this myth, first of all, the notion of dragon needs some explanations in this context. The classic definition of dragon (龍, *long*) can be found in *Shuo-wen chieh-tzu*: "*Long*, Dragon: most superior of all scaled beings; can be dark or light [i.e. yin or yang], small [like the *chiu* dragon] or gigantic [like the leviathan], short or long [i.e. capable of infinite transformations]; in the spring equinox, it rises to the sky [like a bird] while in the autumn equinox, it descends to the deep [like a fish]."[21] According to the mythical tradition, the dragon is believed to be the sum of all beings; it is bird, beast, and reptile all in one. Moreover, Lai points out that "the dragon is in fact a composite animal which contains archetypes of all water, land, and air beings, from which the birds of the air, the beasts of the forest, and the fishes of the water may evolve."[22] Thus, the dragon is the being of all beings and the latent dynamics of life itself. All Chinese emperors were believed to be living dragons.

Lai analyzes the myth further: as a descendant of *Yu*, *Kung-chia* was himself a son of a dragon and should entertain such kin. That he failed to keep them alive is an indication that he did not "know himself," that is to say that he lost his Heavenly gift—the two dragons, in demythologized

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[20]Yüan Ko, *Ancient Chinese Myths* (Shanghai: Shang-wu, 1957), as cited by Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China," 334.

[21]Shang Wu, *Shuo-wen chieh-tzu ku-lin* (Taipei: Kuo-min, 1964), as cited by Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China," 332.

[22]Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China," 332.

language, were his *de* (virtue)—enough to lose his life, the *Xia* throne, and the mandate to rule. In forgetting his dragonic essence, in failing to nurture the dragonic essence in him, this first human died a human and came down in Chinese history as an evil emperor.[23]

Kung-chia's dilemma is the dilemma of all Chinese politically, morally, and religiously. Politically, he is the emperor who, inheriting the Mandate of Heaven (two dragons), brought his house down because he failed to live up to his charge. Morally, he failed to nurture his inner *de*. Mencius would charge him with failure to realize his nature. Religiously, Taoists would lament his inability to "chase" and to "catch the dragon," namely his going away from the "*Dao*."

Kung-chia acted out of ignorance of his true nature, and this was his "sin," the fall. It is not sin in the sense of violating a divine interdict. The fault lies in humanity's inability to make full use of the gift. "Men who lose their *de* simply cannot live long, for *de* is the essence of life."[24] In terms of Neo-Confucianism, there is the notion of the two sides of human nature: "the heavenly, 'essential' nature which is good, and the physical 'existential' nature which may be good or bad, depending upon the quality of the *qi* 气 (vital force, material principle) with which it is endowed."[25] Kung-chia's state of sin represents the transition from "essence" to "existence," i.e., from the created good (dragonic gift) to existential estrangement (inability to know himself and act accordingly).

The "infinite demand of law" is unknown to the Chinese, but the dictum of moderation remains in the Chinese mind. This is precisely why later Confucian philosophy has developed, not a theory of sin as offense against God, but a theory of moral evil and its relationship to human nature. According to *Zhong Yong* (中庸), a Chinese literary

[23]Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China," 333–343.

[24]Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China," 340.

[25]Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity*, 77.

classic, heaven proposes *ming* (命, mandates), and humankind disposes (*cheng,* 承; humankind completes what nature has already set into motion). If humankind disposes wrongly, not according to the *ming*, then evil arises. "The goal is to reach a man-heaven unity, to bring the dragonic gift in man in line once more with its source in heaven for the well-being of oneself, heaven, and all beings under heaven."[26]

Early Chinese Views of Human Nature with Regard to the Notion of Good and Evil

"Instead of ascribing evil to a super-human principle, or of relegating it to a basically unreal phenomenal world, the Chinese Confucian theory of evil is inseparable from its theory of human nature."[27] The human nature was not a central theme of Confucius' teaching. "We can hear our Master's (Confucius) views on culture and its manifestation, but we cannot hear his views on human nature and the Way of Heaven [because these subjects are beyond the comprehension of most people.]"[28] Nevertheless, Confucius said: "By nature men are alike. Through practice they have become far apart."[29] Apparently, Confucius was more concerned about the power and influence of cultivation on the shaping of humanity rather than about the comprehension of human nature. Nevertheless, a more articulated notion of human nature was developed by Mencius, a third-generation follower of Confucius. Mencius was known in his time for his doctrine that human nature is good (*xing-shan*, 性善). His classic explanation is based on the "four-germ" theory of human nature:

> The heart of compassion is the germ of benevolence; the heart of shame, of dutifulness; the heart of courtesy and modesty, of observance

[26]Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China," 340.

[27]Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity*, 74.

[28]*Analects* 5:12, Readings in Chinese Philosophy (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Philosophy Department, 1993).

[29]*Analects* 17:2.

> of rites; and the heart of right and wrong, of wisdom. Man has these four germs just as he had four limbs. For a man possessing these four germs to deny his own potentialities is for him to cripple himself …. If a man is able to develop all these four germs that he possesses, it will be like a fire starting up or a spring coming through.[30]

This is what Mencius meant by the four germs—the germs of *De*, the heart of compassion, the heart of shame, the heart of courtesy and modesty, and the heart of right and wrong. The four germs must be cultivated so that the four hearts will be able to come to fruition and blossom into benevolence, dutifulness, propriety, and wisdom. In Arthur Waley's words, "goodness meant conformity to the way of Heaven … it meant the possession of 'power' (*De*) that this conformity brings."[31] Evidently, as Lo points out, "the Mencian theory of human nature is preoccupied with the positive potentialities in human nature and how they can materialize into moral conduct. The question of 'evil' thus was never the focus of Mencian philosophy. At most, it lies only in the background."[32] Thus, Lo concludes: "To Mencius, it would seem that 'evil' is not the result of one's own making; rather, it is the natural consequence of one's failure to do goodness …. 'Evil' can materialize itself only when human goodness leaves a void."[33]

Coming from the same school of Confucianism, Xunzi took a different approach. He was known for his doctrine that human nature is "evil" (*xing-e*, 性恶) and that goodness is the result of conscious activity. Xunzi said:

> The nature of man is such that he is born with a fondness for profit. If he indulges this fondness, it will lead him into wrangling and strife, and all sense of courtesy and humility will disappear. He is born with feelings of envy and hate, and if he indulges these, they will lead him into violence and crime, and all sense of loyalty and good faith will

[30]*The Book of Mencius*, 3.6.

[31]Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power: A Study of the Tao Te Ching and Its Place in Chinese Thought* (New York: Crove Press, Inc., 1958), 21.

[32]Lo, *The Idea of Evil in Early China*, 4.

[33]Lo, *The Idea of Evil in Early China*, 4.

> disappear. Man is born with the desires of the eyes and ears, with a fondness for beautiful sights and sounds. If he indulges these, they will lead him into license and wantonness, and all ritual principles and correct forms will be lost… Therefore, man must first be transformed by the instructions of a teacher and guided by ritual principles, and only then will he be able to observe the dictates of courtesy and humility, obey the forms and rules of society, and achieve order. It is obvious from this, then, that man's nature is evil, and that his goodness is the result of conscious activity.[34]

Xunzi acknowledges fondness for profit or gain, feelings of envy and hate, and sensual desires as inborn or natural in human nature, and he identifies them as the primary causes of evil. Based on Xunzi's understanding of human nature, Lo remarks,

> Xunzi does not consider evil itself to be innate. Evil is constituted and only occurs when human beings give free rein to their inborn fondness for profit, natural feelings of envy and hate and instinctual sensual desires. Evil does not have its own ontology; it does not come into being when goodness reigns as a result of human conscious activity. Conscious activity as such is the efficient cause of good, and its lack will lead to evil.[35]

As discussed above, while Mencius argues for an innate moral sense in human nature, he emphasizes human agency in turning innate germs of goodness into actuality. Xunzi does not believe in an innate moral sense but he never questions the ability of human beings to hold in check their natural self-serving propensities in the interests of personal good and community welfare. Xunzi and Mencius are not quite opposed to one other in these regards; both exhort people to moral goodness. They both identify a fundamental dualism present in humans, who are attracted, at the same time, both to good and also to evil—the pull of flesh to fondness for profit or gain, feelings of envy and hate, sensual desires and the call of the human heart to

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[34]Burton Watson, *Hsün Tzu: Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 157, as cited by Lo, *The Idea of Evil in Early China*, 5.

[35]Lo, *The Idea of Evil in Early China*, 5.

compassion, shame, courtesy and modesty, and the heart of right and wrong within us. This is exactly what Paul and each of us have experienced: "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Romans 7:19).

Taoism generally prioritized the natural over the artificial. Taoism does not seek to understand human nature in terms of good and evil, which are understood to be merely conceptions of human valuation. Laozi said: "When the people of the world all know beauty as beauty, there arises the recognition of ugliness. When they all know the good as good, there arises the recognition of evil."[36] If good and evil were indeed inevitable in understanding and describing human nature, the Taoist would recognize them as a pair of bipolar opposites, with good corresponding to the operation of *Dao* and evil violating it. Simply put, for Taoism, good and evil are not inherent in nature; they are entirely artificial.

In conclusion, neither the Confucian nor the Taoist theories of human nature admit of the essential existence of evil in the universe. From the Confucian point of view, evil is the natural consequence of one's failure to do goodness, namely, the consequence of the loss of *De*, which is the essence of life and the power to do goodness. From the Taoist point of view, evil is described as not acting in accordance with *Dao*, i.e., when one, in wrongly using one's free will, departs from *Dao* and corrupts his/her gifted holism and becomes fragmented.

Interpretation of "Original Sin" from the Perspectives of *Dao* and *De*

In the light of Ricoeur's presentation on original sin, derived from thoroughly examining and analyzing the symbols of evil, and having examined some symbols and thoughts of evil in the Chinese tradition,

[36] *Dao De Jing*, chap. 2, Readings in Chinese Philosophy (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Philosophy Department, 1993).

we concluded that the two key symbolisms of evil, i.e., the departure from *Dao* and the loss of *De*, play a prominent role in Chinese culture. Next, we proceed to unravel the meaning of *Dao* and *De* in order to shed light on the understanding of original sin.

Dao (道), a symbol basic to Chinese thought, commonly means "way," but *Dao* is overflowing with meaning. The Chinese character is composed of the head of a human combined with a primitive depiction of walking. Its simplest sense is a road, path, or way, and hence, the way in which one does something—method, principle, doctrine. However, to Laozi and Chinese mystics, it refers to "the Way" as "the eternal pattern and model of the universe: the Way it operates."[37] Laozi describes this in the *Dao De Jing*:

> There was something undifferentiated and yet complete, which existed before heaven and earth. Soundless and formless, it depends on nothing and does not change. It operates everywhere and is free from danger. It may be considered the mother of the universe. I do not know its name; I call it *Dao.* (ch. 25) The Great *Dao* overflows everything. All things depend upon it for their existence …. It loves and nourishes all beings and does not make itself the owner. (ch. 34)

In Hieromonk Damascene's words describing Laozi and his notion of *Dao*:

> For Laozi, the Way was precisely what its adopted name signified, in its full metaphysical sense: the Way, Path or Pattern of Heaven, the Course that all things follow. The Way is the Uncreated Cause of all things. It is the Way that creates, and it is the Way that nourishes, develops, cares for, shelters, comforts, and protects the creation, balancing the strife of opposites by itself not contending.[38]

If one is familiar with Greek philosophy, one may immediately conclude that what Laozi calls the *Dao* corresponds to the notion of *Logos* which

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[37]Joseph Petulla, *The Tao Te Ching and the Christian Way* (New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 127.

[38]Hieromonk Damascene, *Christ the Eternal Tao* (Platina: Valaam Books, 1999), 31.

Heraclitus (who lived at about the same time that Laozi lived in China), a Greek philosopher, had in mind. The *Logos* of Heraclius, according to one textbook of Greek philosophy,

> is the first principle of knowledge: understanding of the world involves understanding the structure or pattern of the world, a pattern concealed from the eyes of ordinary men. The Logos is also the first principle of existence, that unity of the world process which sustains it as a process.[39]

Undoubtedly, the encounter between God's revelation and the Christian community's experience of Jesus as the risen Christ with the Greek philosophical symbol of the *Logos* engendered the Prologue of the fourth Gospel. Nonetheless, the Gospel did not merely borrow an old term; rather, it was transformed and brought into the light of God's revelation. For now the *Logos*—the Word, Pattern and Ordering Principle of nature—was made flesh, and dwelt among us, for the first time in history. What if the author of the fourth Gospel had encountered the Chinese symbol of *Dao* from Laozi instead of the Greek *Logos*? It is not unreasonable to assume that the gospel would go like this: "In the beginning was the *Dao* and the *Dao* was with God …."

With this notion of *Dao* in mind, it is easy to understand that evil arises as humans depart from the *Dao*. According to Damascene's interpretation of the human fall based on Laozi's notion of *Dao*, when human beings, in wrongly using free will, departed from the *Dao*, they corrupted their primal state of simplicity and communion with the *Dao* and became fragmented. In other words, "[their] will became divided. Now [their] 'natural will,' which remained inclined to follow the *Dao* in all things, was set against [their] 'free will,' which had now taken on itself an inclination to depart from the *Dao*."[40] As soon as human beings depart from the *Dao*, they fall in love with themselves instead of desiring the uncreated source of their joy. Accordingly, Damascene

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[39]Reginald E. Allen, ed., *Greek Philosophy: Thales to Aristotle* (New York: The Free Press, 1985), 9–10.

[40]Damascene, *Christ the Eternal Tao*, 219.

claims that "[a]ll evil in the world can be traced to these two things: self-love and love of sensual pleasure."[41]

In this context, therefore, the Christian doctrine of original sin can be understood as humanity's departure from the *Dao*. For Laozi, as human beings depart from the *Dao*, they lose sight of the *Dao* and become trapped in their individuality and in the desires of their false identity. This is precisely the same understanding that some Christian interpretations of original sin have: sin may mean the actual turning away of the humans, as individuals or as a whole, from God. This is what humans—whether Adam or us—do when we sin.

However, the central theme of Laozi was not so much the consequences of this departure, but the seeking of a way of return. In order to return to the state when humankind was nearer to *Dao*, Laozi took the path of direct intuition, looking back to the state in which humanity was first created, before humanity first departed from the *Dao*: "The primitive origin of man: Here indeed is the clue to the *Dao*" (*Dao De Jing*, ch. 14). If we distill Laozi's teaching on human conduct, it would be simply that one should do what is natural. To be natural, however, one must first find the original nature of humankind. "Acting in accordance with his nature, one acts in accordance with the *Dao*. Thus one no longer has to be choosing all the time, but can be wholly spontaneous. Being spontaneous, one can forget oneself and give oneself over for the good of others."[42] Laozi neither knew, nor could he have attained purely through intuition, the state of intimate personal union with *Dao*—the *Dao* became flesh and dwelt among us. In contrast, for Chinese Christians, when the *Dao* became a human being in Jesus Christ who revealed Himself as "I AM The Way" (John 14:6), Jesus Christ becomes the concrete Way of their return to the true identity of union with the Way.

[41]Damascene, *Christ the Eternal Tao*, 220.

[42]Damascene, *Christ the Eternal Tao*, 235.

De (德), being essential to Chinese moral consciousness, is the second character of the title of the *Dao De Jing*, indicating that *De* after *Dao* is the most important idea. Commonly it refers to virtue, power, moral force, and its influence. Nonetheless, Ellen Marie Chen contests the inadequacy of these translations to convey the original meaning of *De* in *Dao De Jing*.[43] Looking at the etymology of *De*, Chen finds that the Chinese character is composed of three parts: first, the crossroad sign "to move," second, an "eye," and third, "the heart." Thus Chen argues that the meaning of *De* is "the state when the eye is turned inward to the kernel of things, thus it discovers and follows the inner rhythm of things."[44] Joseph Petulla quotes a second-century Chinese dictionary defining *De* as "the outward effect of a man and inward effect of self."[45] Classical scholar Yen Ling-feng writes: "*De* is the manifestation of the Way. The *Dao* is what *De* contains. Without the *Dao*, *De* would have no power. Without *De*, the *Dao* would have no appearance."[46] But in Laozi's mind, *De* plays a special role—he called it the "Mysterious Power" of the *Dao*:

> *"Dao* produces them (the ten thousand things) and *De* nourishes them …. Therefore the ten thousand things esteem *Dao* and honor *De* …. *Dao* produces them but does not take possession of them. In acts, but does not rely on its own ability. It leads them but does not master them. This is called Mysterious *De* (*xuan de* 玄德) (*Dao De Jing*, ch. 51). Deep and far-reaching is Mysterious *De*! It leads all things return, till they come back to the Great Harmony!" (*Dao De Jing*, ch. 65)

Reflecting upon these words of Laozi describing the "Mysterious *De,*" Chinese Christians cannot but equate Laozi's notion of *De* with God's

[43]Ellen Marie Chen, "The Meaning of De in Dao De Jing: An Examination of the Concept of Nature in Chinese Taoism" in *Philosophy East and West* Vol. 23, No. 4 (University of Hawaii Press, 1973), 457–470.

[44]Chen, "The Meaning of De in Dao De Jing," 460–462.

[45]Petulla, *The Tao Te Ching and the Christian Way*, 128.

[46]As cited by Damascene, *Christ the Eternal Tao*, 238.

providence or the works of the Spirit insofar as it oversees the growth, maturity, and finally, the return of all things to the earth. However, *De* as God's providence or the works of the Spirit is not a force guiding from above, but is the power within nature itself. Thus, when humans follow *Dao*, they are endowed with the power of *Dao* which is called *De*; they follow the freedom and spontaneity of their own natures. Thus, Damascene convincingly concludes: "The word *De*—in those places where Laozi employs it to speak of the Uncreated Power of the *Dao*—corresponds to the English word 'Grace'."[47]

These explanations of *De* shed light on why Confucianism would charge Kung-chia's fault in the myth of the fall, which was above, as residing in his loss of inner *De*, the essence of his life (symbolized by the dragonic gift) and why Taoism would indict him for departing from the *Dao*, for without *De* one simply cannot be in union with the *Dao*. In this sense, therefore, the Christian doctrine of original sin can be understood as the state in which humans have lost their *De*. The consequence of human loss of *De* is the inability to achieve the human "original goal" of being in Great Harmony with Nature. It is only through *De* that "leads all things return, till they come back to the Great Harmony!" (*Dao De Jing*, ch. 65).

The loss of *De* is manifested firstly and concretely in the inner contradiction of each individual. Every day we experience this reality, the conflict of different forces in ourselves—the pull of flesh to fondness for profit or gain, feelings of envy and hate, and sensual desires, as Xunzi testified, and the call of heart to compassion, shame, courtesy and modesty, and the heart of right and wrong, as Mencius identified. Secondly, the loss of *De* is also manifested in the brokenness of humankind's history and a social context of unjust structures in which oppression, violence, injustice, and suffering are engendered. For Laozi, "the one who possesses *De* can be compared to the newborn baby. Poisonous insects will not sting him. Fierce beasts will not seize him. Birds of prey will not strike him" (*Dao De Jing*, ch. 55). In other words, what Laozi intends to say is that all forms of harms and sufferings are

[47]Damascene, *Christ the Eternal Tao*, 239.

results of the loss of *De*. Laozi says: "The Way of nature is to benefit (all things) and not to harm them" (*Dao De Jing*, ch. 81). Thus, "the advice that the natural world should not be tampered with is evidently based on the belief that it is so perfect that no suffering exists in it."[48] The suffering that humans encounter is entirely human-made because of the loss of *De*. In addition, the increasingly prevalent ecological problems as of late reveal more about the consequences of human loss of *De* and incapacity for living in harmony with nature. The conquest of nature for human use in the modern civilization of technology is soundly condemned by Laozi as a great human loss of *De* by violating nature through willful actions. "The world is a sacred vessel; one should not tamper with it …. Therefore, the sage does no willful actions; thus, there is no spoiling (failure)" (*Dao De Jing*, ch. 29, 64).

All of these call for a return to the *Dao* through nurturing of the seed of uncreated *De* within us. One may crystallize the gist of the entire teachings of Confucius and of Laozi as cultivating one's inner *De* so as to achieve the fullness of living with/in/through *Ren* (humaneness, for Confucius) and with/in/through *Dao* (for Laozi). Moreover, in Christianity we find the incarnation of the *Dao* and the embodiment of *De*—Jesus Christ—bringing not only a personal and visible manifestation of *Dao* but, more importantly, His life becoming the source of our *De* (grace) and enabling the whole of humanity and the entire cosmos to return to union with the *Dao*. This is precisely what the doctrine of original sin tells us in a Chinese context: in and through the incarnated *Dao*, Christ's uncreated *De* (grace) becomes our source of *De* so that we are able to live again in union with *Dao* despite our loss of *De* and departure from the *Dao*.

Conclusion

Symbols and their dramatic narrative (myth) indeed give rise to thought. Reflecting on the new thoughts arising from the symbolisms

[48]Sung-peng Hsu, "Lao Tzu's Conception of Evil" in *Philosophy East and West* Vol. 26, No. 3 (University of Hawaii Press, 1976), 301–316.

of evil, Ricoeur has shed light on the understanding of the "mystery of evil" and the Christian doctrine of "original sin." His working paradigm was situated in a Western culture, primarily a Christian one. Can his method be applied to a Chinese paradigm with its own symbols and myths of evil in its history of civilization? The answer is yes. The fruit of this process of examining the symbols, myths, and thoughts on evil in Chinese civilization is to help us uncover the meanings of *Dao* and *De* which are deeply embedded in Chinese consciousness, and furthermore, to render a Chinese understanding of the Christian doctrine of original sin from the perspectives of *Dao* and *De*. Surprisingly, the lights of the understanding of original sin drawn from the perspectives of *Dao* and *De* are perfectly in line with Ricoeur's outcome. What a surprise! Or perhaps we should not be surprised, because the *Dao* and *De* that we discovered in Laozi's and Confucius' thoughts were already, to a certain extent, in line with God's revelation of Himself which became visible and tangible when the *Dao* became flesh and dwelt among us.

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"DO NOT HOLD ON TO ME"

John 20:17 Revisited

Anthony Nguyen Sieu, S.J.

> Jesus said to her, "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." (John 20:17, RSV).

John 20:17 is one of the most difficult and certainly among the most disputed verses in the New Testament.[1] Raymond E. Brown lists the strange solutions of some authors to the question why Jesus forbids Mary to touch him, namely: Jesus' wounds are still sore; or Mary Magdalene will be defiled if she touches a dead body; or the risen Jesus is so holy a high priest that Mary should not sully him with ordinary contact.[2] In order to avoid the difficulty of explaining this verse, some authors try to amend its syntax or to read it in an unusual way. Reimund Bieringer gives us some striking examples of attempts to solve the difficulty either by putting a full stop after the

[1]Reimund Bieringer, "'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to My God and to Your God' (John 20:17): Resurrection and Ascension in the Gospel of John," in C.R. Koester & R. Bieringer, eds., *The Resurrection of Jesus in the Gospel of John* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 233.

[2]Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, xiii–xxi (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 992–993.

prohibition "Do not hold me," or by considering "for I have not yet ascended to the Father" as a question.[3] Fortunately, it seems to this author that, with the recent research project of the Leuven group,[4] a certain agreement is now being made about the meaning of this thorny verse. This article hopes to contribute something to the understanding of 20:17, a significant verse in the Fourth Gospel.

The Greek text of John 20:17 is as follows:

20:17a λέγει αὐτῇ Ἰησοῦς,

20:17b Μή μου ἅπτου,

20:17c οὔπω γὰρ ἀναβέβηκα πρὸς τὸν πατέρα·

20:17d πορεύου δὲ πρὸς τοὺς ἀδελφούς μου

20:17e καὶ εἰπὲ αὐτοῖς,

20:17f Ἀναβαίνω πρὸς τὸν πατέρα μου

καὶ πατέρα ὑμῶν καὶ θεόν μου καὶ θεὸν ὑμῶν.

The Immediate Literary Context of 20:17

Mary Magdalene appears for the first time in John 19:25, together with other women standing by the cross: Jesus' mother, his mother's sister and Mary the wife of Clopas. Her name suggests that she is Maria from Magdala, a town on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. In the gospel of Luke, Mary Magdalene belongs to the group of women who, after being healed of evil spirits and infirmities by Jesus, followed him and helped him and his group in their needs (Lk. 8:2–3). These

[3]Bieringer, "'I am ascending to my Father and your Father …'," 209–217.

[4]Barbara Baert, Reimund Bieringer, Karlijn Demasure & Sabin Van Den Eynde, *Noli me tangere: Mary Magdalene: One Person, Many Images* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2006), 23.

women, who "had followed him from Galilee," witnessed his death and his burial (Lk. 23:49, 55).

Mary Magdalene appears in the gospel of John for the second time in John 20:1–18. She was the first one who came to visit the tomb in the early morning of the first day of the week (Jn 20:1). Without seeing the body of Jesus, she, in panic, ran back to alert Peter and the other disciple (20:2). Mary apparently returned to the tomb with them. When they were to go back home (20:10), she was still unwilling to leave (20:11). She stayed behind and was the first one who had the privilege to meet the risen Jesus (20:16), and to receive the mandate to proclaim the good news to his *adelphoi* (20:18).

In all four gospels, Mary Magdalene was an eye-witness to Jesus' death (Matt 27:56; Mark 15:40; Luke 23:49; John 19:25), and was one of those who went first to the tomb (Matt 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:10; John 20:1). In the Synoptics, it was a group of women who went to the tomb on the first day of the week, and Mary Magdalene was always mentioned first on the list (Matt 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:10). In John, the figure of Mary Magdalene became all the more prominent. It seems that she was the only woman who went to the tomb (John 20:1), and the only one who saw the risen Jesus (John 20:18). Yet this is part of the literary style and characterization of John, the evangelist, because when Mary Magdalene reported the incident to Peter and the other disciple, she said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and *we* do not know where they have laid him" (John 20:2).

When Mary Magdalene saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb, and surmised that the body of Jesus was not inside, her only preoccupation was to know where it was in order to retrieve it. Three times she showed her anxiety about this loss, expressed in almost the same words—to Peter she said: "They have taken (ἦραν) the Lord from the tomb, and we do not know (οἴδαμεν) where they have laid (ἔθηκαν) him" (20:2); then to the two angels sitting in the tomb, she told them the reason for her weeping: "Because they have taken away (ἦραν) my Lord, and I do not know (οἶδα) where they have laid (ἔθηκαν) him" (20:13); finally to the risen Jesus himself, who asked her: "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?" (20:15), she

answered, "Sir, if you have carried him away (ἐβάστασας), tell me where you have laid (ἔθηκας) him, and I will take him away (ἀρω)" (20:15). It seems that her personal concern and involvement became stronger after every answer: from the "we" and "the Lord" in 20:2 to the more personal "I" and "my Lord" in 20:13; from the passive resignation in 20:2, 13 to the active and personal engagement in 20:15 that showed a strong desire to take the dead body back. However, in the language of Mary, what she was seeking is not just a dead "body of Jesus" (19:40). It was "the Lord" who was taken away and laid somewhere else[5] (20:2. 13). Mary's efforts to seek her Lord in tears and anxiety were a sign of her affectionate relationship with her teacher.[6] She was shocked at his terrible and ignominious death, and then further shocked at losing his dead body. When she recognizes the voice of the Lord Jesus calling her name (cf. 10:3, 16), in a flash she knows that this is not the gardener as she thought. She was seeking for the dead body of her teacher, and what she found was her *Rabboni* alive. This brings her the sudden joy beyond telling in her heart (cf. 16:20, 22).

Although it is not said explicitly that Mary has touched or held Jesus, F. F. Bruce suggests that "[t]he most natural interpretation is that Mary, in her delight at finding her Lord alive, clutches him lest she should lose him again."[7] Craig S. Keener also thinks that: "it is

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[5]For Mary Magdalene, Jesus is the Lord, her Lord, who was lost and whom she is trying to find (20:2, 13). The Lord is also the prominent title of the risen Jesus Christ in Johannine Easter narrative (20:18, 20, 25, 28; 21:7, 12, 15, 16, 17, 21). Here this title is theologically and narratologically exact.

[6]Some commentators liken Mary's persistent seeking to the woman's seeking of her lover in the Song of Songs (3:1–4). See Colleen M. Conway, *Men and Women in the Fourth Gospel: Gender and Johannine Characterization* (Atlanta, Georgia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 194, note 368.

[7]F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans, 1984), 389. Note that some manuscripts (א[1] Θ Ψ (f^{13}) *pc* vg[mss] sy[(s).h]) put this verse right before 20:17, "και προσεδραμεν αψασθαι αυτου" (she ran to him to hold him). This explains Jesus' prohibition in 20:17a.

difficult to envision Mary, under such circumstances, merely poking a suspicious finger at Jesus' arm or grabbing his right hand for an ancient promise of fidelity."[8] Moreover, the Gospel of Matthew kept a stronger witness of the women who "took hold of his feet and worshipped him" when the risen Jesus met them (28:9).

The Meaning of μή μου ἅπτου (John 20:17b) in its Literary Context

The verb ἅπτομαι here is a *hapax legomenon* in John. There are two questions to be discussed in 20:17b: the meaning of the verb ἅπτομαι, and the meaning of the negated present imperative of this verb.

Some understand that ἅπτομαι means to touch.[9] Sandra M. Schneiders denies the meaning of holding or clinging of this verb, arguing that John knows the verb κρατέω (to hold on to) and he uses it in 20:23.[10] Reimund Bieringer remarks that "[t]he 37 NT occurrences of ἅπτομαι are mainly in the Synoptic gospels and express touching by or of Jesus."[11] Many other translators and commentators, however, understand ἅπτομαι in the sense of to hold or to cling to.[12]

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[8]Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Vol. 2 (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson, 2003), 1193.

[9]Among them, J.H. Bernard, *Gospel according to John*, Vol. II, ed. A. H. McNeile (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1963), 669; Conway, *Men and Women in the Fourth Gospel*, 196.

[10]Sandra M. Schneiders, "Touching the Risen Jesus: Mary Magdalene and Thomas the Twin in John 20," in Craig R. Koester & Reimund Bieringer, eds., *The Resurrection of Jesus in the Gospel of John* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 171.

[11]Bieringer, "'I am ascending to my Father and your Father …'," 229.

[12]The translation of RSV is "Do not hold me." The NRSV: "Do not hold on to me." Urban C. von Wahlde in *The Gospel and Letters of John*, Vol. 2, Commentary on the Gospel of John (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, U. K.: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010): "Do not hold me." Francis J. Moloney

In fact, the verb ἅπτομαι (middle voice) may cover various meanings: to fasten oneself to, cling to, hang on by, lay hold of, grasp, touch.[13] In 7:39, Luke uses ἅπτομαι to describe all the acts of the sinful woman: wiping Jesus' feet with her hair and anointing them with the ointment. Thus, semantically speaking, this verb may signify to touch, to hold or to cling to.

Some authors understand the negated present imperative in 20:17b as a command not to continue an action that has already begun.[14] Max Zerwick affirms that μή with present imperative forbids the continuation of an action. Thus μή μου ἅπτου means stop clinging to me.[15] Reimund Bieringer agrees that it is the normal interpretation in the handbooks of Greek language.[16] But he argues that in John, "[a]mong the 16 occurrences of the present imperative, there is only one that clearly forbids an action that has already begun, namely John 2:16: 'Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!'"[17] Bieringer concludes,

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in *The Gospel of John* (Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical Press, 1998), 524: "Do not cling to me." Ben Witherington III in *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on The Fourth Gospel* (Louisville, KY.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 329: "Do not hold on to me." Rudolf Schnackenburg in *The Gospel according to John,* Vol. 3, trans. David Smith & G. A. Kon (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 314: "Do not hold me." Brown in *The Gospel according to John,* 980: "Don't cling to me."

[13]See H.G. Liddell & Robert Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 112.

[14]The New American Bible: "Stop holding on to me." George R. Beasley-Murray in *John* (Nelson Reference & Electronic, 1999), 365: "Do not keep on trying to hold me."

[15]Max Zerwick and Mary Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, rev. ed. (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981), 345. See more: Max Zerwick, *Biblical Greek* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1963), 246–247.

[16]F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 172–173.

[17]Bieringer, "'I am ascending to my Father and your Father …'," 230.

"Neither the semantics of the verb nor the *Aktionsart* of the verb form necessitate this. The fact is that in the immediately preceding context nothing suggests that Mary Magdalene actually touches Jesus. We only hear that she turns and says 'Rabbouni.'"[18]

It is true that in the immediate context of John 20:16–17, as Bieringer remarks, there is nothing that suggests Mary's touching or clinging to Jesus,[19] but in the larger context of John chapters 19 and 20, such an act is more likely.

The Relationship Between 20:17b and 20:17c

20:17b μή μου ἅπτου,

20:17c οὔπω γὰρ ἀναβέβηκα πρὸς τὸν πατέρα

As has been noted above, 20:17b is more likely to be understood as Jesus' command to Mary to stop holding to him, although this does not exclude the possibility that Mary just tries to touch or to hold the risen Lord. In any event, the reason that Jesus gives to justify his prohibition in 20:17b is apparently found in 20:17c: "*for* (γὰρ) I have not yet ascended to the Father." But it is hard to understand the causal connection between them. That is why some commentators try to solve the problem. Michael McGehee considers the γὰρ as an anticipatory γὰρ, and he puts a full stop after 20:17b. Eventually there is no causal relationship between 20:17b and c.[20] Sandra M. Schneiders, on her

[18]Bieringer, "'I am ascending to my Father and your Father …'," 230. He also notes that in John 10:37, it is impossible to understand μὴ πιστεύετέ μοι as forbidding an action that has already begun. Thus the present imperative with μη in a prohibition sometimes signifies the breaking off of the attempt to perform an action.

[19]Moloney reminds that "to cling" is used to indicate the ongoing holding of someone and does not have any pejorative significance (*The Gospel of John*, 528, note 17).

[20]Michael McGehee, "A Less Theological Reading of John 20:17," *JBL* 105 (1986), 299–302.

part, reads 20:17c not as an affirmation but "as a rhetorical question expecting a negative reply, that is, 'Am I as yet (or still) not ascended?' The proper answer to the question is, 'No, you are indeed ascended, that is, glorified.'"[21] Thus for her, the reason for Jesus' prohibition is precisely his ascension and glorification that already happened. The Jesus who appears to Mary is the glorified Jesus, and so the old way of relationship has come to an end. Reimund Bieringer makes some comments about McGehee and Schneiders' positions by saying that not only do their readings not accord with the immediate context of 20:17 but also their understanding of some words is grammatically debatable.[22]

"Do not hold me (17b), for I have not yet ascended to the Father (17c)." Why was Mary forbidden to hold or to cling to him when he has not yet ascended to the Father? Does it imply that Mary is permitted to hold Jesus *after* his ascent to his Father? Why is it that in Matthew 28:9–10, Jesus said nothing when the women "came up and took hold of his feet (ἐκράτησαν αὐτοῦ τοὺς πόδας) and worshipped him?"

In the light of what has been discussed, we hope to find answers to these questions. Naturally, there is nothing wrong if Mary holds on to her beloved Rabbouni who was dead and then found alive. Her holding is the acceptable sign of her deep affection and unexpected joy. Jesus then forbids her for another reason. Together with most commentators, Moloney posits that "Jesus' words, *me mou haptou*, instruct her that she must desist from her attempt to reestablish the relationship she once had with him."[23] For Brown, "when Magdalene sees Jesus, she thinks that he has returned as he promised [as in 14:18–19; 16:22] and now he will stay with her and his followers, resuming former relationships."[24]

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[21]Sandra M. Schneiders, *Written that You may Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1999), 198.

[22]Bieringer, "'I am ascending to my Father and your Father …'," 213, 216.

[23]Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 526.

[24]Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1012.

According to him, Jesus wants to correct Mary's mistaken idea about their relationship and thus gives a prohibition: "In telling her not to hold on to him, Jesus indicates that his permanent presence is not by way of appearance, but by way of the gift of the Spirit that can come only after he has ascended to the Father."[25]

For this author, the real reason is focused in Jesus' words in 20:17c (γὰρ). First, in the process of ascending to the Father after his death, the appearances of the risen Jesus belong to a temporary phase[26] which has specific purposes as we have seen above. They are important for the disciples rather than for the risen Jesus. The phase of appearances stands between the ongoing ascent of the risen Jesus and his complete ascent to the Father still to come. This phase is "only provisional and transitional"[27] because it does not last forever, and once the purposes are achieved, its existence is no longer needed. As has been noted, on the one hand, appearances prove that Jesus is already risen and he is on the way to his Father (20:17f); on the other, they show that the process of ascending is not yet finished (20:17c) by the fact that he still appears to the disciples. Therefore, a certain holding to Jesus is acceptable, but too much affectionate holding or clinging to the risen Jesus may be inappropriate. Not that if Mary holds on to the risen Jesus, he cannot ascend to the Father, but because it is not fitting if Mary continues to cling to a phase of provisional and transitional appearances of Jesus, and forgets that Jesus still has a destination to reach: to be forever with his Father in intimacy and glory.[28]

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[25]Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1012.

[26]Xavier Léon-Dufour wrote: "*la montée auprès du Père marquerait la fin du bref délai pendant lequel ont eu lieu les apparitions pascales. Jésus dirait à Marie que, s'il est encore sensiblement près d'elle, ce n'est que transitoire*" (*Lecture de L'Evangile selon Jean*, Tome IV [Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1996], 222–223).

[27]Bieringer, "'I am ascending to my Father and your Father …'," 210.

[28]This is the position of Michael Theobald, "Der johanneische Osterglaube und die Grenzen seiner narrative Vermittlung (Joh 20)," in Rudolf Hoppe &

Second, while clinging to Jesus, Mary may also forget that her union with her Lord from now on will be much deeper than before as Jesus said in the Farewell discourse: "In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (14:20). Her affectionate love for Jesus must not be expressed by the holding on to the resurrected body and stopping there, but as Jesus said: "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (14:23). All of this will come true when the Paraclete, the spirit of truth, will be sent by the Father in Jesus' name (14:26).

Now we can return to the question: when Jesus has ascended to his Father is it permitted for Mary to cling to Jesus? For James McPolin, "'clinging' expresses the notion of intimate attachment to or communion with Jesus and he assures her that she will receive this gift of intimate communion when he has 'ascended' to his Father …."[29] Thus Jesus forbids Mary to attach too much to him because he is trying to focus her on a deeper and more intimate union with him that is offered from now on. His prohibition also provides him an occasion to reveal more about his present state, and that is a much more important message.[30]

Third, in this moment of deep psychological involvement, Jesus not only gives a prohibition but also a command: "but go to my brothers and say to them …" (20:17de). The task given is another reason for Mary not to stay too long with Jesus. Her main message of Easter to the disciples is simple: "'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said

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Ulrich Busse, eds., *Von Jesus zum Christus: Christologische Studien: Festgabefür Paul Hoffmann zum 65. Geburtstag* (BZNW 93; Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1998), 111–112, quoted in Bieringer, "'I am ascending to my Father and your Father …'," 211: "Do not hold on to me, for (as the one who is standing before you now, namely as *the one who is raised from the tomb*) I have not yet ascended to the Father; (my mode of existence as *risen one* is not yet my actual mode of existence with the Father, but it is only provisional)."

[29]James McPolin, *John* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1979), 215.

[30]Conway, *Men and Women in the Fourth Gospel*, 196.

these things to her" (20:18). This is a witness to what she saw and heard. She announces to the male disciples that she has concretely experienced the presence of the Risen Jesus, both physically and spiritually.

Another question often posed is why Thomas was invited to touch Jesus while Mary was prohibited. One may note that the verbs are not the same in the two pericopes (v. 17: *haptomai*; v. 27ab: *pherein*; v. 27c: *ballein*), and the contexts are different.[31] In this author's opinion, it is not because Jesus has already ascended to his Father when he "came" to meet Thomas that Thomas was invited to touch him.[32] In fact, there are some differences in these two cases. At the moment of hearing her name being called, Mary immediately recognizes her Rabboni standing by her, not the gardener (20:16). Her act of holding Jesus comes from her joy and affection for Jesus the Lord. Implicitly, she believed that he is risen. Jesus' prohibition prevents her from the excessive attachment to his temporary mode of appearance, and reminds her of his coming destination in the world of the Father. Thomas, on the contrary, has not yet believed in the witness of Mary and his co-disciples. He said "unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe" (20:25). All of this is the condition *sine qua non* of his faith in the resurrection of his Master. The risen Jesus wants to satisfy Thomas' excessive demands because he does not want to lose him (17:12). That is why he came to him and permitted him to do what he wanted to.[33] The purpose of Jesus' condescension is to help Thomas to move from ἄπιστος to πιστός (20:27). The evangelist did not tell us whether Thomas did what he had demanded or not.

[31]See Witherington, *John's Wisdom*, 332.

[32]W. Marxen, *The Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. M. Hohl (London: SCM Press, 1970), 60–61.

[33]Bernard contends that "[t]he only *explicit* statement in the Gospels of the Risen Christ being touched is Mt. 28:9. Nevertheless Lk. 24:39 and Jn. 20:27 sufficiently indicate that, in the judgment of the evangelists, it was possible to touch Him, and that He invited such experience to be made" (*Gospel according to John*, 669).

Yet Jesus achieved his goal with the confession of Thomas: "My Lord and my God" (20:28). Thus there is no inconsistency between Jesus' prohibition against the holding of Mary and his invitation to Thomas to have contact with his body.[34]

In conclusion, the prohibition of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel goes very well with John's Christology. It gives the evangelist an opportunity to develop his message of Easter. The scene of holding Jesus' feet in Matthew 28:9 is only an act of affection and worship on the part of the women, but in John 20:17, Jesus' prohibition of holding on to him leads to the revelation about his ongoing journey to the Father.

In the Fourth Gospel's resurrection narrative, one thing we should note is that the evangelist pays much more attention to "seeing" the risen Jesus than to "touching" him. The verb "to see" (ὁράω) is used seven times in 20:18–29. This same verb was already used in 16:16, 17, 19, 22 to describe the future encounter between the risen Jesus and his disciples. The witnesses of the resurrection essentially focus on seeing: "I have seen the Lord" (20:18); "we have seen the Lord" (20:25). Thomas has asked to see the print of the nails in Jesus' hands (20:25), and the risen Jesus, in turn, told him: "see my hands" (20:27). After the confession of Thomas, Jesus did not say anything about touching, but he insisted on the relationship between seeing (or not-seeing) and faith: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" (20:29).

The Relationship Between 20:17c and 20:17f

20:17c οὔπω γὰρ ἀναβέβηκα πρὸς τὸν πατέρα

20:17f ’αναβαίνω πρὸς τὸν πατέρα μου καὶ πατέρα ὑμῶν καὶ θεόν μου καὶ θεὸν ὑμῶν.

[34]See R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 243.

How does one reconcile "I have not yet ascended to the Father" (20:17c) with "I am ascending to my Father …" (20:17f)? It is possible to understand 20:17c from the whole theological framework of Johannine Christology.

From God the Father, the Logos "came into the world" (1:9), "came to his own home" (1:11), and became flesh in Jesus Christ (1:14). The whole journey of Jesus the incarnate Son on earth is summed up in this saying: "I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and going to the Father" (16:28), or more briefly, "he had come from God and was going to God" (13:3). God the Father is his point of departure and his destination. The Fourth Gospel is the story of this journey, and John uses his literary genius to tell it.

The Fourth Gospel has no narrative of "ascension" like the ones in Luke 24:50–51 and Acts 1:9–11, although the notion of ascension does exist in John. John uses many times the expression "I go to the Father" to express Jesus' return to the One who sent him (ὑπάγω πρὸς τὸν πατέρα: 16:10, 17; πορεύομαι πρὸς τὸν πατέρα: 14:12, 28; 16:28). John also uses similar expressions: πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ὑπάγει: 13:3, and ὑπάγω πρὸς τὸν πέμψαντά με: 7:33. Moreover, John uses the verb "to ascend or to go up" in regard to the Son of man in 3:13, ἀναβέβηκεν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν, and 6:62, ἀναβαίνοντα ὅπου ἦν τὸ πρότερον. If there is something totally new in 20:17c, it is not the proposition ἀναβέβηκα πρὸς τὸν πατέρα, but the adverb of time οὔπω. This unexpected adverb suggests a chronological process.

Bieringer is right when he posits that "in 20:17c John is speaking about a process of ascension that is not yet completed."[35] That is a reason why the verb ἀναβαίνω is used here instead of πορεύομαι or

[35]Bieringer, "'I am ascending to my Father and your Father …'," 224. Ibid., 216, he wrote: "In John 20:17c the semantics of the verb ἀναβαίνω imply an action that takes time. The durative *Aktionsart* together with the perfect tense suggests that Jesus is saying in this verse: 'I have not yet completed the process of ascending to the Father.' This would be in keeping with the use of the present tense ἀναβαίνω in 20:17f, which could be paraphrased: 'I am in the process

ὑπάγω as John did earlier in the gospel. Thus when Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene, the process of ascending to the Father is happening or has begun already: the present tense is used in 20:17f ’αναβαίνω πρὸς τὸν πατέρα μου.[36] But that process is not yet finished: the perfect tense is used in 20:17c οὔπω γὰρ ἀναβέβηκα πρὸς τὸν πατέρα. Jesus began his ascent to his Father when he was raised from the dead. Between his resurrection and his "complete" exaltation or glorification were his appearances to his own disciples. Because the Easter appearances play an important role in the tradition of the early Church, the evangelist of the Fourth Gospel had to adjust his christological framework by using the notion of process in 20:17. Andrew T. Lincoln perceptively observes the evangelist's attempt in this remark:

> The mention of Jesus' ascent to the Father reflects the Johannine understanding of Jesus' hour of crucifixion and glorification as his return to his Father. For the evangelist, Jesus' death, resurrection, ascent, and glorification can all be grasped as one event. Jesus' words about his ascent are part of the evangelist's attempt to bring this perspective to expression within the constraints of the traditional resurrection accounts.[37]

The risen Jesus tells Mary that he has not yet (οὔπω) ascended to the Father (20:17c), but he begins to ascend to Him already (20:17f). The question is when Jesus' full ascension occurs. Bieringer summarizes different opinions suggested by commentators about the "chronological"

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of ascending.' In this interpretation 20:17c does not contradict the Johannine interpretation of the cross as exaltation and glorification."

[36]Cf. Blass and Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 166, about the durative (linear or progressive) in the present stem.

[37]Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel according to Saint John* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 493. In the same vein, for Brown (*The Gospel according to John,* 1014), John 20:17c and f is the evangelist's technique of dramatization to achieve this goal in a narrative that is necessarily sequential: Jesus is lifted up on the cross; he is raised up from the dead; and he goes up to the Father—all as part of one action and one "hour."

sequence of resurrection and ascension as follows: all happened in Jesus' exaltation on the cross (Sandra Schneiders); the ascension occurred between the appearance to Mary Magdalene and the appearance to the disciples without and with Thomas (Hartwig Thyen); the ascension happened after the appearance to the disciples with Thomas (Gert Hartmann).[38] It is, however, possible to suggest an alternative reading that as long as the risen Jesus still appeared to his disciples on earth (and the appearance to Thomas was not the last one!), Jesus has not yet ascended to his Father. Jesus' complete ascension to his Father happens when he no longer appears to his disciples. This suggestion agrees with the conception of the Synoptics, or at least of Luke. Jesus' ascension is the full stop of his post-resurrection appearances to the apostles (Acts 1:1–11; Luke 24:50–53). In the mentality of the Jews, it is impossible to believe that Jesus is risen if his body is still in the tomb. In the same vein, it is also very hard for the disciples to believe that Jesus has ascended already to his Father when he still appears to them. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* posits that the "mysterious words" of the Risen One in John 20:17 "indicate a difference in manifestation between the glory of the risen Christ and that of the Christ exalted to the Father's right hand, a transition marked by the historical and transcendent event of Ascension."[39] No doubt at the moment of his Resurrection, Christ's body was glorified, but when he manifested himself to his disciples during forty days, "his glory remains veiled under the appearance of ordinary humanity. Jesus' final apparition ends with the irreversible entry of his humanity into divine glory … where he is seated from that time forward at God's hand."[40]

Urban C. von Wahlde sums up very well two ways of thinking in John: "In one important sense, his ascension was complete when

[38]Bieringer, "'I am ascending to my Father and your Father …'," 233.

[39]*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 660.

[40]*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 659.

he rose from the dead although, from another perspective, it was not complete until after his appearances to the disciples."[41]

The Newness of 20:17def

"Jesus says he is still on the move, and he also sets Mary in motion to bear the news to the disciples"[42] whom he calls now his brethren (20:17d). In the Farewell discourse, Jesus has opened a new kind of relationship with his disciples when he said, "No longer do I call you servants … but I have called you friends" (15:15). Only after his resurrection is the risen Jesus represented as speaking of His disciples as "my brethren" (20:17d; cf. Mt. 28:10; Heb. 2:11,12). Margaret M. Beirne argues: "that ἀδελφοί μου is inclusive of women and of men disciples beyond the Twelve, is clear from the fact [that] the new family of disciples is founded on the mother of Jesus and the beloved disciple (cf. 19:26b–27a)."[43] With the resurrection of Jesus and the beginning of his ascent to the Father, the disciples' relationship to him becomes more intimate now, and as a result, they have a new and special relationship to God, Jesus' Father. The disciples are introduced into the intimate world of the Father and the Son, the world of love as Jesus has promised in the Farewell discourse (14:20–23). "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (20:17f): this verse is the proclamation of the victory of Jesus who successfully finished his work entrusted by his Father (19:30). It is also the good news for the disciples: to share the divine sonship of Jesus.[44] Xavier Léon-Dufour argues that the evangelist does not intend to emphasize the difference

[41]von Wahlde, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 841.

[42]Rodney A. Whitacre, *John* (Downers Grove, Illinois/Leicester, England: 1999), 476.

[43]Margaret M. Beirne, *Women and Men in the Fourth Gospel: A Genuine Discipleship of Equals* (New York, NY: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 215.

[44]John 20:17f may be a reminiscence of Jeremiah 31:33 and Ruth 1:16.

of "my God" and "your God" in 20:17f. Here John does not want to distinguish the sonship of Jesus by nature and the believers' sonship by adoption (although that distinction exists). For him, "*le* 'kai' *a ici une valeur conjonctive et non disjonctive*."[45] Sandra M. Schneiders calls this "the Easter kerygma" in which "the work of the Word made flesh is complete (by his glorification), and its fruits are available to his disciples."[46] "Jesus eternally is the Son of God; he gives to those who believe in him the power to become the children of God (1:11)."[47]

Bieringer reads John 20:17 in a theocentric perspective. He explains Jesus' prohibition of holding, and the expression "my Father and your Father, my God and your God" as an act of the evangelist "to shift the focus away from the risen Christ to God."[48] Even the risen Christ is not someone to be worshiped. For him, "[t]he Johannine Jesus deflects the attention away from himself in two directions, to the Father and to the 'brothers'."[49] Chapters 20 and 21 of John are, however, very christocentric. The risen Jesus is the center of all resurrection narratives. To see the risen Lord is crucial for the disciples (20:18, 20, 25, 27, 29), and Jesus' divine identity culminates in the confession of Thomas: My Lord and my God. However important the role of the risen Jesus is, he never eclipses God who "has sent him" (20:21). God is the destination of Jesus' ascent, and the One whom he calls lovingly "my Father, my God" (20:17). The conclusion of the Gospel focuses

[45]Léon-Dufour, *Lecture de L'Evangile selon Jean*, 225–226, note 79. In the same vein, Ernst Haenchen, in *Das Johannes Evangelium: Ein Kommentar* (Tübingen: J. C. Mohr, 1980), wrote: "*Damit verfehlt man gerade die Absicht des Evangelisten. Er will in Wirklichkeit sagen, dass nun Jesu Gott auch der Gott der Jünger, Jesu Vater auch derjenige der Jünger sei*" (571).

[46]Schneiders, *Written that You may Believe*, 199.

[47]C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956), 471.

[48]Bieringer, "'I am ascending to my Father and your Father …'," 232.

[49]Bieringer, "'I am ascending to my Father and your Father …'," 234.

on the faith in Jesus the Christ who is the Son of God (20:31). In fact, the evangelist needs not refocus on God in 20:17 because in his whole Gospel, there has never been a conflict between Father and Son. John 20:17 is so christocentric that it leads to God, and it is so theocentric that it glorifies Jesus.

Who is the Jesus whom Mary Magdalene Encountered?

Bieringer states, "Even in the scene where she recognizes Jesus, it remains unclear whether Mary Magdalene understands that Jesus is risen from the dead. Only when she announces to the disciples that she has seen the Lord (20:18; cf. 20:25) does the reader who is familiar with the language of the New Testament recognize a complete faith in the resurrection."[50] Michael Mullins suggests: "The fact that she wanted to cling on to Jesus emphasizes that she saw him as the very same person, Jesus of Nazareth, and not as a wraith or ghostly apparition of a kind familiar to a Greco-Roman from reading the Homeric literature, or to a modern reader familiar with Shakespeare's ghost of Hamlet's father."[51] In the same vein, Ignace de la Potterie also posits that when Mary recognizes Jesus and cries out *Rabbouni*, "it is not yet a matter of authentic Easter faith …. It is the Teacher who has returned *as he was before* …. Obviously 'the Jesus whom Mary sees is the Jesus of the past, Jesus before his death.'"[52] Similarly, Raymond F. Collins contends that even at the moment Mary recognizes Jesus when he calls her by name,

[50]Reimund Bieringer, "*Noli me tangere* and the New Testament: An Exegetical Approach," in Barbara Baert, Reimund Bieringer, Karlijn Demasure & Sabin Van Den Eynde, *Noli me tangere: Mary Magdalene: One Person, Many Images* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2006), 23.

[51]Michael Mullins, *The Gospel of John* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2003), 406.

[52]Ignace de la Potterie, *The Hour of Jesus: The Passion and the Resurrection of Jesus according to John: Text and Spirit,* trans. Dom Gregory Murray (England: St Paul Publication, 1989), 213.

"her faith is inadequate for she believes that Jesus' resurrection is a matter of his resuscitation, of his being restored to his former state of life."[53] Her form of address "Rabbouni" reflects her level of faith. For Brown, "when Magdalene sees Jesus, she thinks that he has returned as he promised [as in 14:18–19; 16:22] and now he will stay with her and his followers, resuming former relationships."[54] As a result, for the above commentators, Mary thinks that the Jesus who appears to her is not the risen Jesus, but the earthly Jesus whom she knew before the passion.

Some other commentators have a different view. For them, when Jesus calls Mary by her name she recognizes him as the risen one. Rudolf Schnackenburg notes: "The risen one is no other than the earthly Jesus; he now encounters Mary in a new way. She turns to him—an outward gesture, which at the same time expresses an opening up of her inner self and a believing openness to the risen Lord."[55] Xavier Léon-Dufour expresses the same opinion: "*En s'exclamant 'Rabbouni', Marie exprime spontanément l'émotion de la présence retrouvée, mais aussi subitement sa foi.*"[56] D. A. Carson also affirms: "Whatever the cause of her blindness, the single word *Mary*, spoken as Jesus had always uttered it, was enough to remove it."[57] Mary's recognition of the voice of the risen Jesus is often linked with John 10:3–4 in which the shepherd calls his own sheep by name and they know his voice.

The opinion of Schnackenburg, Léon-Dufour and Carson is more plausible. First, Mary failed to recognize him immediately from the outset, simply because he had not appeared as the same earthly Jesus, as the one whom she knew before. There was a real transformation

[53]Raymond F. Collins, *These Things have been Written: Studies on the Fourth Gospel* (Louvain: Peeters Press/Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 34.

[54]Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1012.

[55]Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to John*, 317.

[56]Léon-Dufour, *Lecture de L'Evangile selon Jean*, 221.

[57]D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1996), 641.

in Jesus. Therefore, when afterwards she recognized him by his call, it is the transformed Jesus whom she recognized.

Second, in all the Easter narratives in the gospels, it is Jesus who appeared to reveal himself to his disciples as the resurrected one. They moved from non-recognition to recognition, or stayed in their unbelief. There is no "transition" between the two phases. For example, the two disciples of Emmaus thought Jesus was a visitor to Jerusalem (Lk. 24:18), but when Jesus broke the bread, they recognized him immediately (Lk 24:31). Thomas moved from ἄπιστος to πιστός as soon as Jesus generously satisfied his demands (Jn 20:27–28). When Jesus stood on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, the disciples did not know that it was Jesus (Jn. 21:4), but after the big catch of fish, the beloved disciple recognized him at once, saying: "It is the Lord!" (John 21:7). Mary is not an exception. She need not hear Jesus preaching about his ascent to his Father in order to recognize him as the Resurrected. There is no sign in 20:17 that shows her progress of faith in the earthly Jesus to the risen one. In 20:18, Mary proclaims: "I have seen the Lord." The Lord, who is risen, is her Rabbouni.

Third, when Mary recognizes Jesus as her Rabbouni, she cannot forget that she was the eye-witness of his death on the cross some days ago, and she is looking for his body until now. If he appears now to her as a living person, he must be resurrected. Mary calls the risen Jesus *Rabbouni*, and she clings to him as her risen Lord, not simply as her Teacher before. Mary begins to recognize the risen Jesus as soon as she heard his voice calling her, not as "Woman" (20:15) but by her personal name "Mary." She had looked for the body of Jesus (τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ: 20:12), but what she found was his resurrected body. There was a complete change in this body,[58] but it was not another body of Jesus. When Mary touches or holds it, we do not know whether she recognizes the difference, because "his body was not the same physical

[58]Saint Paul tries to explain this mystery in 1 Cor. 15:42–45. He wrote: "It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body (σῶμα ψυχικόν), there is also a spiritual body (σῶμα πνευματικόν)" (1 Cor. 15:44).

body he had before the Resurrection."[59] One thing is certain: she has had a unique experience of encountering the risen Christ. No doubt, this initial recognition of the risen Jesus would be deepened by the following encounter and conversation with him as summarized in 20:17.

Hence, on the one hand, "there is a real continuity between the earthly and the risen Jesus"[60] as the resurrection narratives intentionally point out: he appears to Mary and she recognizes him as her Rabbouni. On the other hand, there is a complete transformation in his whole person, even in his body: he was not recognized by Mary at first sight. He came into the room when the doors were shut. It is probable that the Jesus whom Mary thinks she has encountered is the earthly Jesus who has died and now is risen. But the risen Jesus is not a corpse revivified as the resuscitated Lazarus. "Jesus is no longer in the flesh (i.e., he is no longer mortal). He is no longer subject to the conditions of time, space, causality."[61]

Conclusion

John 20:17 reveals itself as a verse succinct and rich in content. This verse is theologically and christologically important in the Fourth Gospel because it presents, for the first time, the connection between the resurrection and the ascension, not as identical entities, but as distinct aspects of the same mystery in process. In this verse, one can find the close ties between the risen Jesus with his disciples whom he calls brothers and sisters, and the intimate community between God, Jesus and his disciples. "'This is the first use of 'brothers and sisters' (*adelphous*, ἀδελφούς) to refer to Jesus' disciples, and the first and only

[59]von Wahlde, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 847.

[60]Pheme Perkins, *The Gospel according to St. John: A Theological Commentary* (Chicago, Illinois: Franciscan Herald Press, 1978), 234.

[61]Schneiders, "Touching the Risen Jesus: Mary Magdalene and Thomas the Twin in John 20," 174.

reference to God as 'your Father' in a positive way (contrast 8:41, 41, 44)."[62] Being ἀδελφοι of Jesus (cf. 21:23) is the foundation for the fraternity and sorority among Christians in the community.

John 20:17 gives Mary Magdalene an active role as an *apostola apostolorum*. The risen Jesus "*authorizes* her to bring *a specific message* of great importance to *specific people*: 'Go to my brethren and say to them ….'"[63] Mary is the first one who was told carefully by the risen Jesus what to proclaim: the good news of his ongoing ascent to the Father combined with the good news of the divine sonship of the believers. In our world today, we need a Mary Magdalene who goes to Jesus' disciples and witnesses "I have seen the Lord."

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[62]Marianne Meye Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001), 96.

[63]Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Gospel of John* (Cambridge: University Press, 2007), 320.

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