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EDITORIAL

Part 1 of this volume focused on more specifically Western concerns. However, in refocusing on the East, we are confronted with a set of topics that are of crucial concern, for all Churches, in any part of the world. And not only for Christian churches. Globalization has, willy nilly, helped put questions of identity high on all agendas, religious, political, cultural. The overlap of these agendas is as great as ever; but perhaps more difficult to ignore.

Our Eastern focus is prompted by the Synod for the Catholic Church in the Middle East held in Rome, 10-24 October last. Issues about ecclesial identity, discussed in many of the following pages, find their echo in the political arena. Thus, words spoken in Indonesia last November by President Obama are apposite: 'We can choose to be defined by our differences ... or we can choose to do the hard work of finding common ground'.

This journal's starting-point is epitomised by our opening articles, demonstrating how diverse traditions—in this case Syriac and Western—announce, symphonically, the great Tradition of conversion to the mind of Christ.

A critical component of discussions about identity, not least in religious matters, is that of gender. It is troubling if this has become a side-issue on the ecumenical agenda. Its discussion in this issue is especially welcome.

The Groupe des Dombes Report, '*One teacher*': *doctrinal authority in the church*, presented below,¹ concludes as do we with words of Bruno Chenu:

'Every Christian is called to be a "universal brother" or a "universal sister" wherever they live. It would be a wonderful contribution if globalization were to open each human being to the possibility of an identity based, not on opposition or exclusion, but on relationship with others, in the awareness of a legitimate otherness and of an indelible resemblance, so that ultimately, in a Pauline or Irenaean dynamic, "God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28).'

¹ See pp. 186-95. For the passage quoted see Bruno Chenu, *L'Église sera-t-elle catholique?* (Paris: Bayard, 2004), 159.

THREE CHRISTIAN WOMEN OF THE ARAB ORIENT: RAFQA, MARIAM, HINDIYYA

Avril M. Makhoulouf *

The focus of this paper is Eastern Catholic mysticism as articulated by three Catholic women in the modern Middle East, each positioned at the axial point of a theological and cultural interchange between the Latin Catholic West and the Syriac Catholic East, especially as expressed by the Maronite Church tradition. Their lives span 1720–1914, a period which saw tumultuous change in the Middle East, and the emergence of a distinctive Middle Eastern Catholic ecclesial and religious culture. Rafqa, Mariam and Hindiyya contribute uniquely to understanding Eastern Catholic thought and theology and to the development of a wider canon for the study of Christian spirituality in the modern world.

Introduction

These three women all belonged to the Eastern rites of the Roman Catholic Church. Rafqa is a canonized saint, Mariam was beatified recently and Hindiyya remains under scrutiny. They lived in the period 1720–1914 and adequate records remain of their lives. All three women have the roots of their spirituality in the Syriac liturgical and theological tradition of the Christian Church, a tradition best known today as it appears in the Maronite rite to which Rafqa and Hindiyya belonged.¹ While Mariam was baptized in the Melkite or Greek

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¹ For the origins of the Maronite Church see Harald Suermann; 'Die Lage des Klosters Mar Maron', *Parole de l'Orient*, 13 (1986): 197-223; H. Suermann, *Die Gründungsgeschichte der Maronitischen Kirche*, *Orientalia Biblica et Christiana*, 10 (Wiesbaden: Harassowitz, 1998); H. Suermann, 'Maronite Historiography and Ideology', *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, 54/3-4 (2002): 129-48; Shafiq Abouzayd, 'Maronite Church' in *Blackwell Dictionary of*

Catholic rite and lived her life as a religious in Latin rite congregations, much of her life and actions show forth in a striking manner her Syriac heritage.

This liturgical and theological tradition is one which has been much undervalued in the West. Until recently, it has lived in the shadow of the better known Greek and Latin rites. Because of the influence of Western European religious orders on the Christians of the Middle East during the last four centuries it is sometimes difficult to identify the Syriac elements in the spirituality of any given individual.

What is of lasting fascination is that despite vastly different experiences, each of these women achieved a unique blending of the spiritualities to which she was exposed.¹

Characteristic Features of Syriac Spirituality

The Syriac spiritual tradition which developed in the early Christian centuries in the area now divided among the modern states of Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine and Israel is one in which it could be said that liturgy is meant to be the celebration of the gift of life and where life itself should be a liturgy of worship. Kairos time is where the incarnation, birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ occur in one divine moment of simultaneous creation, redemption and sanctification. In Christ God is united with the temporal world.

Eastern Christianity (2nd edn., Oxford: Blackwell, 2001): 305-8. For the contemporary revival of monastics and eremitical tradition see G.G. Hourani and A.B. Habchi, 'The Maronite Eremitical Tradition: A Contemporary Revival', *Heythrop Journal*, 45 (2004): 451-65; 'The Eremitical Tradition in the Maronite Church', *Christianity in the Middle East: Studies in Modern History, Theology and Politics*, ed. A. O'Mahony (London: Melisende, 2007), 500-38.

¹ For Syriac spirituality see Susan Ashbrook Harvey, 'The Sense of a Stylite; Perspectives on Simeon the Elder', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 42 (1988): 376-94; Seely J. Beggiani, *Early Syriac Theology* (University Press of America, 1983); Sebastian Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life* (Cistercian Publications, 1987); S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem the Syrian* (Cistercian Publications 1984); S. Brock, *The Wisdom of Saint Isaac the Syrian* (Oxford: Fairacres Press, 1977); S. Brock, 'Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition', *Variorum Studies in Syriac Christianity*, 40 (1992); Bernard Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la Réforme catholique: Syrie, Liban, Palestine, XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles* (Rome: Ecole Française de Rome, 1994).

Human beings are joined to God not only through their spirit but also through their bodies. The supreme Liturgy, the Eucharist, is the sacred time, the sacred place where the presence of the living Christ, who is the link between the eternal and the mundane, is celebrated by all the worshippers.

The Syriac writers, especially St Ephrem, emphasize that the worshipping Church in heaven is to be mirrored not only in the ecclesiastical body on earth but also in every individual believer.

This fusion of the individual person with Christ should take place within each human being whose clothing with Christ has begun with Baptism, as Jesus himself was clothed with human nature in the Virgin's womb. Through Baptism we are to regain the blessed state of the human being before the Fall. It is Christ's own Baptism that initially joins us to Him both individually and collectively in a spousal relationship. Here we should note that whereas in European Catholic thought a spousal relationship is seen as a divine gift representing the pinnacle of mystical development, in the Syriac tradition it is seen as the normal state of the baptized person which of course has to be fully realized in a virtuous life. In both spousal spiritualities the notion of spouse has nothing to do with gender, the soul being seen as feminine in relation to God.

Baptism is the first step in the process of the re-creation of the world, a step which makes our own union with Christ a possibility. The clothing with Christ therefore implies a special vesting of each of us with divinity. True, few of us will realize the full union before death and entry into Paradise, but such an event is not seen as impossible.

Perhaps a few words on the sense in which the word 'clothing' is used in this context are appropriate. Clothing is seen in this culture not so much as an external cloaking of the body but as a reference to a distinctive form of dress which conveys upon the person the reality of which it is the symbol. In the West we have almost forgotten the ritual meaning of dress apart from the uniforms worn by the police and similar important public servants, but in most of the world clothes do still indicate the gender, ethnicity, social status and religion of the wearer.

Given this sense of clothing we can perhaps begin to understand the tremendous importance in the Syriac tradition of the holy person, one whose body and soul are dedicated to the inner and outer clothing in Christ through virtuous deeds of all kinds, through faith in the

efficacy of sacramental rites and through a life of extreme asceticism. Furthermore, this person while on earth is to be a battleground for Christ's warfare against Satan. We shall see this clearly in Rafqa and even more perhaps in Mariam.

Moreover, the holy person is a link between the fully sanctified in heaven and those still struggling on the way. She or he is a living representative of the Church on earth.

So because of his or her special status the holy person becomes the celebrant of worship within his or her own being, the body being seen as the temple and the heart as the altar on which the offering to be laid is that of intense vocal and mental prayer. This is seen as a liturgy, one which is intimately linked with the Eucharistic Liturgy of the Church.

Behind this lies the biblical notion that the destiny of the human being is that of becoming the living image of God. This image is in fact fully achieved in Christ, hence the importance of the human person becoming the associate of Christ in all His aspects, especially that of priest. It has been well said that creation cannot be separated from God's self-revelation.

Here indeed is an ideal of ascetical perfection, lives lived as re-enactments of the salvific suffering of Jesus Christ, not only with the aim of showing forth His love for the world, but also of being so closely associated with His love as to make up in their own bodies whatever was lacking in the sufferings of Christ, as St Paul suggested.

For this way of life to be religiously valid, it is important that the individuals witness in their daily lives, in all their most mundane moments, to their personal union with Jesus, that person who is divine as well as human and who indeed did suffer for the sake of our redemption.

Rafqa, Mariam, Hindiyya: common features of their lives

We shall see how this specific form of holiness is developed in each of our women, but before doing so, let us remember that those who feel called to this incredibly arduous manner of life are considered to be worthy of honour even if while still with us on earth they do not seem to reach the heights of sanctity. They should be compared with those climbers who attempt to climb such giants as Everest and who do not entirely succeed, while there are many others who do succeed in scaling heights within a more attainable range.

All three had close relationships with God the Father, Jesus and His mother. Drawing upon this intimacy, in times of both weal and woe each showed a remarkable tenacity of purpose in their strivings to become more and more Christ-like, often despite the skepticism of religious authorities.

All three had extrasensory experiences. Indeed, those of Mariam and Hindiyya were of an astounding, and in some respects, original nature. Rafqa and Mariam displayed an amazing lightness of heart despite their severe physical and spiritual sufferings, and each retained throughout an ability to develop and maintain friendships.

In addition, Mariam was renowned for her marvellous sense of natural beauty and of how this beauty related to God. In this way she demonstrated her indebtedness to her Syriac forebears in the faith, many of whom were renowned for their hymns and poetry. Mariam was outstanding in her spontaneous, often lyrical, praise of her Creator, her profound understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit, her poetry, and the sheer joyousness of her bearing during the thirteen years she spent in Latin-rite religious congregations.

Rafqa was always a member of the Maronite Church. Although she was for some years in an active congregation of Latin inspiration, most of her religious life was spent in a monastic order of the Syriac tradition.

In fact, each woman spent the greater part of her life as a religious, Mariam as a Carmelite laysister, Rafqa as first a member of the Congregation of the Servants of Mary, then of the Maronite Lebanese Order of Monastics, Hindiyya as the foundress of a cloistered congregation which was certainly designed for Maronite women despite many of the devotional practices being based on Latin models. In addition, Hindiyya ended her life in the manner most honoured in the Syriac tradition, that of a virtual hermit.

Historical, geographical and cultural situation of Rafqa, Mariam and Hindiyya

We have noted that between them these three women span the period 1720–1914, two of the most tumultuous centuries of change in the Middle East, and that the actual region in which they lived is now divided among four modern states, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Israel, but until 1918 the Ottoman Empire was the ruling power throughout the area. Most of the inhabitants were Arab and Muslim,

although Arab Christians, indigenous Jews as well as other important minorities such as Kurds and Druze were important elements in the religious, cultural and commercial realms.

As the Ottoman Empire began its slow decline in the late seventeenth century the European powers, especially Great Britain and France, began to intrude culturally and politically into these now vulnerable lands. In the period immediately following the first World War, Great Britain and France found ways and means to occupy these territories, ostensibly under a League of Nations mandate to prepare the indigenous peoples for self-government. However, as victors in the late conflict, these two powers saw to it that their own colonial interests were well served. The almost total severing of the Lebanese territories from Greater Syria was finally effected by the French while the separatist tendencies of European Jewish immigrants to Palestine were encouraged by the British.

Now our three women did not find their lives much impacted by the political situation. What is important to remember when looking at the area in the twenty-first century, is that travel was simpler then than today. Thus Hindiyya was able to travel easily from Aleppo to the central mountainous part of Lebanon known as Kesrouan. As far as we know she did not again leave Kesrouan, an area then fast becoming the new heartland of the Maronite community. Rafqa, although she began her life in Kesrouan, spent several of her early years in Damascus. As a young nun she was sent south to teach in the Shouf, a largely Druze area. Rafqa lived the latter half of her life in the northern parts of Lebanon.

In contrast, Mariam was a world traveller. Her early childhood in Galilee in Palestine was followed by several years in Alexandria, Egypt, and in Beirut, Lebanon. She also visited Jerusalem. For some years she lived in southern France, and there was an important sojourn in India before she culminated her activities by helping to found Carmelite monasteries in Bethlehem and Nazareth.

However, all three were affected in different ways by the cultural restrictions of the times. While Hindiyya seems to have escaped any pressure to enter an arranged marriage, most probably because her spiritual advisors as well as her parents would have realized that she was called to the religious life, both Rafqa and Mariam had to resist the attempts of their families to arrange their marriages at very tender ages to much older men.

Hindiyya came from a family of some means. On the other hand Rafqa and Mariam, although by no means reared in poverty, spent the later years of childhood as maids in well-to-do households. This was not too unusual for the times since this practice was an acknowledged way of insuring that young girls were well trained in the domestic arts before marriage. As a matter of fact Mariam, as we shall see, was put to this work as a punishment for refusing marriage to a suitor who had been selected for her.

Formal scholarly education in those centuries, while not totally lacking for girls of any social class, was dependent on variable circumstances. Hindiyya seems to have been exceptionally well read in Arabic religious works, Rafqa was put to teaching in her first religious congregation and so had some years of formal education, Mariam apparently received little formal schooling. We do not know the extent of her training in literary Arabic but later attempts to have her learn to read French and Latin so that she could become a choir sister were seen as fruitless. Mariam remained a laysister, despite her evident intelligence and theological abilities.

We now begin a more detailed account of each woman. The choice has been made to begin with Hindiyya, the most enigmatic figure of the three, and the one most likely to remain a figure of controversy for quite some time. For although furthest in time from us, yet in some respects she is the most modern. Hindiyya was a person of strong and determined will, and such women are still not well received in many parts of this world.

Hindiyya Hanna 'Ajaymi

Hindiyya's baptismal name was Hanna, that is, Anne. Hindiyya is a nickname of several possible connotations. In her case it probably referred to an unusually deep olive complexion. She spent her childhood in Aleppo, a city which though predominantly Muslim, had a substantial indigenous Christian community divided among Catholics of various rites and adherents of other Eastern Churches. It is important to note that members of Western European religious orders, pre-eminently the Jesuits, Carmelites and Franciscans were an important presence in Aleppo.¹

¹ See A.M. Makhouf, 'Hindiyya Anne 'ajaymi and Her Spiritual Journey: The Essential Lightness of Being', *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies*, 4/2 (2001): 1-

Hindiyya was born in 1720 into a moderately prosperous family with a brother and several sisters, whose origins like those of many of the small Maronite community were in northern Lebanon.

Early in life she developed a deep prayer life, and her most important spiritual focus was the idea of herself as one called to be a chosen spouse of Christ. We have already seen that in Syriac spirituality this calling is seen as given *in potentia* to all Christians at their baptism. In addition, from the age of three Hindiyya was accustomed to receiving exterior and interior visions of Christ and occasionally of the Blessed Virgin and saints. She experienced locutions, that is, interior verbal communications from God or other spiritual entities, and she became convinced that she was commanded by God not only to become a religious, but also to form a new Maronite congregation dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Hindiyya had seen in the Heart of Jesus the most important symbol of the compassion of God, since in that Heart the love of humans for God and the love of God for humans are combined in a unique way. This approach to Christ, while not entirely incompatible with the then prevalent Western idea of the role of Jesus as the mediator between sinners and the wrath of God, nevertheless seems to portray Jesus in a rather more positive light. Incidentally, Hindiyya did have spiritual advisors to whom she listened with great respect, while undoubtedly forming her own distinctive views. She was punctilious in waiting for ecclesiastical permission before carrying out what she perceived as God's will.

26; 'Hindiyyah `Ugaymî and the monastic Life. The Rule of Life of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart', *Parole de l'Orient*, 18 (1993): 293-302; 'Hindiyya Anne Ajaymi, 1727-1798: A Story of Encounters, Human and Divine', *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies*, 3 (2001): 91-108; 'Hindiyye Anne Ajeymi in Her Ecclesiastical and Political Situation', *Parole de l'Orient*, 16 (1990-1991): 279-287; 'Spirituality Between East and West Christendom: the Maronite Mystic Hindiyya Anne Ajaymi', *Eastern Christianity: Studies in Modern History, Religion and Politics*, ed. Anthony O'Mahony (London: Melisende, 2004): 269-295; 'Umm Hindiyya's Syriac Heritage: Religious Life as a mirror to Liturgy', *The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, 56/1-4 (2004): 211-223; and Bernard Heyberger, *Hindiyya: Mystique et Criminelle (1720-1798)*, (Paris: Aubier, 2001).

In 1746 Hindiyya was twenty-six years old and of mature character formed by some thirteen years of austere discipline, when she made the decision to leave her family home and to seek the fulfillment of what she saw as her religious calling. Her parents, who were much influenced by the Jesuits—in fact her brother was to become a Jesuit priest—apparently endorsed this decision. Certainly there is no record of objections on their part. The decision meant that Hindiyya was to leave Aleppo, a cosmopolitan city, for the barely developed area of Mt Lebanon. It was there she would seek for some authority to endorse her mission.

Her Jesuit spiritual director in Aleppo had prudently made arrangements for her to enter a Jesuit-supervised convent in 'Ain Toura in Kesrouan. Hindiyya agreed to go there, but not to stay permanently. She left this convent after some months of suffering alternate cajolings to join the order and threats if she did not. Hindiyya subsequently suffered great hardships until she found a sponsor in the then Maronite Bishop of Tripoli, who became her spiritual counselor and also her helper in practical matters. A well-known Maronite family were persuaded to allot to her the religious endowment of a monastery at Bkerke for her first foundation. Incidentally by the twentieth century Bkerke was to become the seat of the Maronite Patriarch.

Hindiyya's religious order, known as the Congregation of the Sacred Heart, had a rule of life which is of interest for several reasons. First, there was in the eighteenth century a growing trend in Syria and Lebanon to allow the development of religious orders which differed from the older model in those parts, in which each monastery was traditionally independent. New institutions were generally under the supervision of a superior who had the responsibility of overseeing the spiritual and economic life of several religious houses. It followed that there had to be a common rule of life by which the successes and shortcomings of each house could be evaluated. Hindiyya's congregation fell into this new category. She herself came to the task armed with some experience of convent life deriving from her unhappy stay in 'Ain Toura and also from her apparently more congenial stay in the convent in Hrasheh, also in Kesrouan.

Second, the focus of Hindiyya's congregation was the cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This devotion was combined with another, that of veneration of the reserved Blessed Sacrament. Both these devotions

had undergone development in the context of Western European Catholicism, but they were to assume fresh meaning when taken seriously by Syro-Lebanese women of the Maronite Church.

Third, there are indications in Hindiyya's writings that she had some knowledge of the work and spirituality of the sixteenth century reformer of monastic life, St Teresa of Avila. Certainly St Teresa's writings had been translated into Arabic and were available in print by Hindiyya's time.

Fourth, and of most interest is that although the basic vows of poverty, chastity and obedience were taken by the nuns of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart, there is a striking difference in the manner in which these vows and the ideals that they embody are described. The motive given for the practice of obedience and humility is the honouring of Christ by the imitation of his perfection in these virtues. Christ's obedient and humble human heart is where God dwells. By imitation of these virtues human hearts will become dwelling places for Christ. Thus there is great emphasis placed on preparation for the divine indwelling, interior as well as exterior. It is in keeping with this emphasis that in the Rule the religious are expressly enjoined to keep the buildings clean, both the individual rooms and the communal areas. It is specified that clothes are to be changed and washed weekly. This would seem to mark a change from older asceticism that did not place such emphasis on personal cleanliness.

There is the same literalness in the understanding of the vows of chastity and poverty. Jesus Christ is considered to be betrothed to the religious who must strive to become worthy of her spouse.

The love of God and the love of the sisters for each other is to be based on the imitation of Christ's love for every individual, including those who are or appear to be his enemies. There are careful instructions for the care of ill and ailing sisters. Again the motivation is to be an intense desire to imitate Christ's love and care for the sick and infirm.

Then there are the canons that prescribe fasting and mortifications. There is an interesting section concerned with the cultivation of patient endurance. Thus again Christ's suffering the cross is to be remembered. At one point the sisters are told to be 'brides of the wounds', literally 'brides of the sufferings'.

There are two significant differences between such constitutions as those of the Sisters of the Visitation where Hindiyya had her first experience of convent life and those of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart. For that matter, they are different from most monastic practice, eastern or western. Thus, no widows were to be accepted, only virgins. Furthermore, there were to be no internal differences of rank, apart of course from the office of superior. These particular rulings seem to convey a literal interpretation of the biblical passages that describe virgins patiently waiting to serve their divine Bridegroom. This image of what constituted worthiness for spousehood is strengthened by another somewhat unusual requirement. No young woman of repulsive appearance, or who was blind or who had chronic ailments might be admitted. This seems in stark contrast to the description of the tender care to be given to religious who fell ill.

Another requirement was that both parents must be of the Christian faith. Now, these conditions might have been seen as simply dictated by practical considerations if it were not for the vehemence with which the strictures are presented. All in all, one has the strong feeling that the novices must appear first as unspotted lambs even if later they might be given the honour of imitating Christ through physical suffering.

In order to continue with further consideration of Hindiyya's spirituality one must look at other writings of hers. They are composed in Arabic and only one has been translated into a European language. Not all the manuscripts have been edited; among those which have are the Rule of her Congregation which has been described above, and one called 'The Shining Pearls of Mother Hindiyya's Counsels' which contains spiritual teachings for her nuns. It is noteworthy that the motivation for living the ascetic life as described in these counsels is a blend of the Syriac sense of the ascetic as one who does battle for God against His Adversary, Satan, on behalf of all believers and the Western European emphasis on asceticism as penance for individual and communal sin.

But the work which contains the most striking material relating directly to Hindiyya's spirituality is 'The Mystery of the Union'. It contains the first known account in Arabic of a mystical encounter between Jesus Christ and a Christian woman of the Middle East. In it Hindiyya describes how, starting when she was very young, she used frequently see a splendid person with wounds in his hands, feet and

side. When she questioned him as to whom he might be, the answer was 'I am your Lord and your God'. As the years went by she had many question and answer sessions with the person. Her mother whom she told of her visions made light of the appearances. It was not until Hindiyya was seventeen that she spoke of them to her spiritual director. Wisely enough, he recommended that she treat them as possibly diabolic in origin. But the visions continued to the point that she was told to consider herself as betrothed to him and to reveal everything that passed between them to the spiritual director. Hindiyya eventually was asked to assent to a special form of physical experience. Finally her spiritual director told her that she should agree to this, since he had come to accept that the person was indeed Jesus. The person had told her that he was Jesus the Nazarene, and that he wished her to offer her soul, body and heart to him so as to receive in a sensory manner an experience of his humanity in union with his divinity. Hindiyya did so, was filled with love and with the sensation of not only seeing but of being at one with the person whom today we would call the Risen cosmic Christ.

In my opinion there are profound theological insights being presented here not only for Hindiyya herself but also for the consideration of all Christians. The question which arises is whether this type of experience or insight has been experienced by other Christians. There are at least two: Nemesius, the fourth century theologian and bishop of Emesa, now Homs in Syria; and the seventh century martyred theologian and Father of the Church, St Maximus the Confessor. Nemesius refers to the glory of the human person residing in the notion of the individual human as constituting a microcosm where the physical and the spiritual are combined. Maximus, who may very likely have been of Palestinian origin, considers that love between God and the human person culminates in a union of the two but without loss of individual identity.

The descriptions Hindiyya gives of her experiences, descriptions which increased in depth over many years of her own theological and spiritual development, seem to be in remarkable harmony with the formal theological statements of these two saintly scholars concerning the true nature and destiny of human beings.

She sees with great clarity that it is through Christ that the human person can be penetrated by God, attain union with God, yet without any sense in her writings that she is falling into monism; God remains

God and the human remains human. It follows that it is possible for the whole universe to be suffused with God while remaining created, distinct.

Again, her vivid description of her experience of the body of the Risen Christ could be described as a simultaneous seeing of the macrocosm, the God-filled universe in which are included all living beings, especially all humans, and of the microcosm, the God-united human individual. This corresponds well with the insights of the sixteenth century mystic theologian, St John of the Cross, whose teachings on prayer presuppose three milieus in which prayer can take place, namely, the vastness of the individual human soul, the beauty of the created world and the community of all fellow human beings.

One may therefore describe the events that take place in the progressively enlightened soul of this woman as extraordinarily close encounters, encounters between God and one human being, encounters between the physical, psychological and spiritual elements of her human person, and also encounters between the masculine and feminine polarities of her own psyche.

Hindiyya in her Place and Time

Hindiyya at certain times in her life was revered as a saint and at others was seen as a threat to established order. Her mystical experiences were either believed, but often in a superstitious manner, or else disallowed as evidence of severe psychological and moral disorders. In addition there was and still is a tendency for those in favour of greater autonomy for the Maronite Church, especially as regards its role in Lebanese society, to laud her. Conversely, those opposed to this trend tend to downplay Hindiyya or even actively to excoriate her. Her position in the hearts and minds of Maronites has vacillated between that of folk heroine and that of convenient scapegoat for the failings of the Church.

Two important events which had a direct affect on Hindiyya brought matters to a head. One was the dispute in 1742 over the appointment of a new Maronite Patriarch. There were two candidates for the position, which was eventually filled by the candidate, one Sam'an Awad, chosen, or rather imposed by Rome.

In 1745 several bishops renounced their recognition of this appointee. One of these was the bishop of Tripoli, the sponsor and spiritual counselor of Hindiyya.

The other factor was that the Jesuits, who had been playing an important role in the development of Maronite educational establishments and who in addition had entered the eighteenth century with great power and influence in both the Catholic Church and in several European States, were by the 1750s distinctly falling out of favour with both. In 1762 their institutions in France and in the Middle East were taken from their control and where possible, placed in the hands of another religious body.

These events impinged on the life and work of Hindiyya. The temporary loss of morale in the Maronite Church produced by the confluence of these two factors left her by default in a position of power and influence in that body.

It needs to be emphasized that the only face-to-face investigation of Hindiyya, more especially of her mystical writings, by authorities appointed by Rome, had resulted in her vindication. This was despite the fact that it was apparent in the early 1750s that she had no training in current theological language and was therefore at a disadvantage when describing her visions, locutions and other mystical experiences. When Hindiyya was brought low, although her mystical experiences were denounced by some for their apparent heterodox implications, it was for other charges that her congregation was disbanded and she herself banished into obscurity.

The Congregation of the Sacred Heart was officially disbanded in 1779-1780. The reasons and causes cited did not include the form of monasticism which she had inaugurated. They were two-fold, one being the power Hindiyya supposedly wielded over the Patriarch and other ecclesiastics, and the other was the issue of serious disorders in one of her four monasteries, disorders which had resulted in the ill-treatment of novices, leading in some cases to death. Directly responsible seems to have been a Sister Catherine who appears to have been a less than balanced woman. While Hindiyya was considered ultimately responsible and therefore culpable it does not appear, despite the fact that depositions were taken and indeed mostly from her adversaries, that any serious attempt was made to allow her to give a considered account of her own actions or inactions. After some years of miserable exile in various convents, Hindiyya spent her last year in the monastery of Dair al-Haqleh near the remote mountain village of Dlepta.

According to oral tradition she lived an exemplary life until her death in 1798. As was the custom, Hindiyya's body was placed in the communal grave in the crypt of the monastery.

Saint Rafqa Choboq al-Rayes

St Rafqa¹ was born in 1832, died in 1914 and was declared a saint in 2001. Since the process of arriving at such a determination involves a careful scrutiny of the candidate it seems worthwhile to begin an account of her life by quoting the key statements of Pope John Paul II in his homily on the occasion of her canonization:

In canonizing Blessed Rafqa Choboq al-Rayes, the Church elucidates in a very particular manner the mystery of love given and received for the glory of God and the salvation of the world. Suffering always tormented her during the last twenty-nine years of her life. By it, Saint Rafqa always manifested a generous and passionate love for the redemption of her brothers, counting on her union with the crucified Christ for the strength to voluntarily accept and love the suffering as an authentic path to sainthood.

How did all this play out in the events of her life? How did she mirror, re-enact the suffering of Christ? In 1885, already for many years a professed religious, Rafqa was moved to make a gift of her physical good health to the Lord. Shortly afterwards she began to lose her eyesight and in 1907 she began to develop an excruciating form of slow paralysis. In all those long years she had only two partial remissions of her disabilities. On one occasion she was able to see for a short time the face of her beloved mother superior and on another she was able to drag her paralyzed body with its disarticulated joints to Mass on the feast of Corpus Christi. Amazingly, her voice and mental faculties remained intact throughout those years. Rafqa's salty humour never entirely left her.

But to begin at the beginning. Rafqa was born in the village of Himlaya near the town of Bikfaya in the north of Lebanon, on the feast of Sts Peter and Paul, 29 June 1832. It was on this account that the infant was named Boutrossiya or Pierrette after St Peter. She was to retain this name until her entry into religious life. Both her parents were of Bikfaya, her mother's name was Rafqa Gemayel and her father's Murad Sabr Choboq al-Rayes.

¹ For St Rafqa the best place to look for studies in English is the Internet. I recommend a search under the name Rafqa.

These were pious folk, early teaching their daughter to make the sign of the cross, to recite prayers and to attend Mass with them. Sadly, her mother was to die in 1859.

Times were very hard in the region. The Lebanese ruling family of Shihab had lost control of the country to the Egyptians under Ibrahim Pasha. His army occupied Bikfaya and other nearby villages. Anxious to do what he could for his daughter, Murad sent her as a servant to a Maronite family in Damascus. Rafqa was then only ten years old. She was to remain in their care until she was fourteen.

In the meantime her father married again and the union produced two daughters. When Rafqa returned to Himlaya it was to a household of strangers, so it is not surprising that she spent much of her time with her maternal relatives in Bikfaya. She received affection from her mother's cousin, Fahim, who welcomed her into his home. Fr Yusuf Gemayel, his brother, gave her his loving attention and it was he who discerned her vocation to the religious life. Rafqa's first instinct was to embark upon a hermit life, but no doubt wisely given her tender age, Fr Yusuf encouraged her to take an interest in a congregation which he, with the help of the Jesuits, now fully back in the service of Lebanon after the years of their exile, was establishing in Bikfaya. The name of the sisterhood was the Congregation of the Servants of Mary. To the usual vows of obedience, chastity and poverty was to be added another, that of work 'for the mission', which in this case was the schooling of young girls. Because of this task the sisters themselves were given some education.

About this time Rafqa overheard a conversation in which a planned marriage for her was discussed. This apparently came as something of a shock, especially as her stepmother and her maternal aunt had conflicting ideas as to who should be the husband. The consequent air of dissension increased Rafqa's sense of isolation and she quickly decided to apply for entry to the congregation in Bikfaya. Upon entering the church of Our Lady of Deliverance near the convent in order to pray she heard a voice issuing from the statue of the Blessed Virgin telling her that she would become a religious.

The mother superior of the congregation, a Sister Hanna, had met Rafqa previously during a visit to Fr Yusuf at Bikfaya. Accordingly she had no hesitation in accepting her immediately. Rafqa's parents had not known of her intention. As soon as they heard of her entry into the convent they immediately came to demand her return to their

house. Rafqa declined to see them and said she would prefer to join her mother, that is to die, than leave the convent.

After one year as a postulant Rafqa was admitted into the novitiate. Six months later, in 1862, she pronounced her final vows. For the next seven years she worked as a cook in the Jesuit seminary in Ghazir. According to her own testimony she spent her free time continuing her study of Arabic, of writing and of mathematics.

In 1860 Rafqa was sent to Dair al-Qamar in the south of Lebanon to aid in her congregation's work of education. There she experienced at least one instance of the horrible massacres then so frequent in this mountainous region. Rafqa returned to Ghazir where she continued her work at the seminary until in 1863 she was sent to work in her congregation's school in Jbeil. Here, and then later in Ma'ad, Rafqa's gifts as a teacher and her knowledge of liturgy, especially of sacred chants, began to be noticed. She was known for her love of the Eucharistic Liturgy and was an advocate of the devotion known as the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.

For some years she lived as a kind of governess to children in the house of one Antoun Issa. In her spare time Rafqa visited the sick in their homes. In hindsight one can see that this period which lasted until 1871 and moreover allowed her only occasional contact with other members of her congregation was a preparation for her later more austere vocation.

An event which affected Rafqa deeply was the decision made by the Jesuits in the interests of the spiritual and material welfare of the sisters to combine her congregation with another doing the same work of education. This step involved the formation of a new congregation. The sisters were given the option either to join the new congregation or to return to secular life.

For Rafqa this meant a momentous decision. She had lived some years separately from her congregation and probably would have had difficulty in adjusting to the change in circumstances. On the other hand it was inconceivable that she should return to secular life. There would be no welcome for her in her former home and in those days the notion of a woman living alone and earning her own living did not exist in Lebanon. While at prayer in a church Rafqa fell asleep. She had a dream in which once more she heard a voice telling her that she was to become a religious. Perhaps her adolescent desire to become a hermit had surfaced again, in any case she told her protector in whose

home she was living of her dilemma. Rafqa told him that her desire was to enter the Maronite Lebanese Order, a religious order of great antiquity and austerity. In 1732 there had been a reorganisation and the amended Rules endorsed by the Holy See. As we shall see, certain Western European devotional practices had been included in the regimen.

Although he would have preferred to keep Rafqa with his daughters, Antoun Issa was persuaded by Rafqa, especially after she had told him of yet another and more specific dream, to take her to the monastery of Mar Sam'an al-Warn. Antoun approached the appropriate authorities and within a short time Rafqa was accepted as a novice. In little more than a year Rafqa made her final vows, on 25 July 1872.

What changes in her life did this mean for her? For the rest of her life Rafqa would spend her days and nights in prayer, contemplation, work and in the solitude for which she had yearned for so long. It was not that she lived entirely alone. In the first monastery where she remained for seventeen years Rafqa had initially more than fifty companions.

The sisters fasted until noon most days, attended Mass and, unusually for the times, received Communion every day. They daily chanted the seven canonical hours of the breviary, prayed for half an hour before Mass, and read spiritual literature every evening.

In addition the sisters made several visits each day to the reserved Sacrament. It is in this practice as well as in other activities such as special worship of the Blessed Sacrament on Sundays and of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on Fridays, a month-long remembrance of St Joseph in March, of the Blessed Virgin in May, of the Sacred Heart in June and a month-long remembrance of the souls in Purgatory in November that we see an importation of Western European devotions.

The sisters were required to engage in manual labour, such as household tasks, the raising of silkworms, the manufacture of silk being at that time an important part of the Lebanese economy, and also knitting.

Rafqa was soon to distinguish herself by her perfect conduct as a religious and above all by her profound understanding of how the patient endurance of pain was a means of joining oneself to the salvific work of Christ. It is certain that she witnessed the sufferings of many of the sisters, sufferings caused by the harsh climate and the

poor diet. Rafqa herself suffered from a severe stomach ailment in the period 1876 to 1878. But she felt this was not enough pain to qualify her as being totally associated with the sufferings of Jesus. In 1885 Rafqa prayed for more suffering and her petition was granted almost immediately. She began to be afflicted with terrible pain, first in her eyes and then in all her head. The aftermath was blindness in one eye and the beginning of the paralysis of her body.

Attempts to achieve a cure were certainly made. The superior sent Rafqa to many doctors, but in the end she was pronounced incurable. She lost sight in both her eyes and her paralysis worsened until her joints became disarticulated. Yet, whenever she could Rafqa continued to take some part in the life and work of the monastery. Finally, in 1897 Rafqa and five other sisters were transferred to another monastery, that of St Joseph al-Dahr in Batroun where the climate is less severe than that prevailing in the region of Mar Sam'an.

Throughout these years Rafqa's mind and tongue remained alert. She was not without a sense of humour. However, despite her blindness she could not tolerate light and very often she remained in her room with the door closed. Her constant prayer were the words, 'in union with the passion of Christ'. Her joy and determination to remain a contemplative religious gave a wonderful example of stamina and faith to all her sisters.

Rafqa ceased speaking three days before her death other than to indicate that she wanted each sister to come and bid her farewell. After receiving her last Communion she was anointed. Rafqa died on 23 March 1914, giving her soul to the care of the Blessed Virgin and St Joseph. It was not long before miraculous cures attributed to her intercession began to occur.

St Rafqa is indeed an example of the Syriac tradition of the holy person, a hermit who willingly embraced suffering, whose body and soul became a place where Christ could continue his passionate prayer for the redemption of the world. Only someone who had inwardly grasped the meaning of incorporation into Christ with its vital connection with the Eucharist and the need for confident joy in the Spirit throughout her incredible pain could possibly have sustained that arduous life, right to the moment that Almighty God would give her the signal to go to Him, for all was now consummated.

Blessed Mariam of Jesus Crucified

Of our three women Blessed Mariam is perhaps the one most easily accessible to Western sensibilities despite her extraordinary spiritual experiences. We can to some extent sympathise with much of what she went through in her life of barely thirty-three years.¹

Mariam was born on 5 January 1846 in the village of Ibillin in Galilee, not far from Nazareth. Her mother was Mariam Shahine, from the village of Tarshish, her father was George Baourdy, by which surname we know that his occupation may well have been the manufacture of gunpowder. He was originally from another village, Horfesch. These were three Palestinian villages inhabited by Arab Christians, Muslims and Druze. The pair suffered greatly in their lives, not only from the death of twelve boys in infancy but also from an incident in which George was falsely accused of manslaughter. He was imprisoned until he was found to be innocent.

The valiant mother then apparently had an inspiration that they should go to Bethlehem, a journey of one hundred and seventy kilometers, to ask there of the Blessed Virgin a great favour. They prayed for a daughter whom they would name Mariam. Their prayer was granted, in due course Mariam was born in their new abode, the village of Ibillin. Ten days after her birth she was baptized in the Greek Catholic church. Two years later a brother was born. His name was Paul. It was not long before both parents died within a short time of each other. Even sadder was the fact that the brother and sister were then separated, each one going into the care of members of their extended family who lived in different villages. Although in later life Mariam made attempts to get in touch with Paul these were in vain. They never met again. Paul was given a home by a maternal aunt and was taken to Tarshish while Mariam was adopted by a paternal uncle who lived in Ibillin. Until she was eight years old Mariam lived there, a place which she loved for the most part in her memory, all her life. This is important for our understanding of Mariam because where she

¹ Again the Internet is the best place to find studies. Search under her name of Mariam Baourdy. Probably the most accessible printed work is: *Mariam: Sainte Palestinienne. La Vie de Marie de Jésus Crucifié*, Père Estrate, 1916 reproduced by Pierre Téqui for Editions Gabalda, Paris, circa 2003, with a foreword by Jean-Gabriel Rueg OCD.

spent her childhood is a place of great natural beauty. From the heights of Ibillin it is possible to see the whole of upper Galilee, right up to the mountains in the south of Lebanon, while to the east there are hills before the lake known as the Sea of Galilee. To the west at least the mind's eye can discern Mount Carmel and beyond that the Mediterranean.

But also very important for the understanding of Mariam is that she felt a kinship with Jesus and Mary because of having spent her childhood in the same beautiful part of the world. Like Jesus she loved all of nature, birds, trees, flowers, insects, all these beauties and wonders of creation filled her mind and heart and caused her to feel very close to her Creator. She seemed to have no fear, even of snakes. Her important experiences of death, including that of her pet birds, gave her a sense of the transitory nature of all life and made her healthily aware of the need to direct her energies and hopes towards the next life.

Miriam's precocious awareness of the realm of the spirit was noticed by at least two experienced older and religious men. They remarked on this to her family, but to no great avail as we shall see. Her desire to receive Communion was known to the parish priest and owing to her misunderstanding of a word he had spoken she went forward on her own at a very early age. The pastor wisely allowed her to continue the practice.

When only eight years old Mariam had to leave her beloved Ibillin and to go with her uncle's family to live in the port of Alexandria in nearby Egypt. There her life continued almost as before until she was nearly thirteen.

Now Mariam's early education was hardly devoted to the gaining of literary skills. This was not so unusual, since as has been said, girls at that time were supposed to be ready for marriage by twelve. They had to master household duties by that age and had little chance of learning anything else. Mariam remained unable to read until well into her adult life, and then with difficulty. She seems to have mastered a little French but as far as we know, no written Arabic, her native tongue. In later life attempts to inculcate a little Latin so that she might be enrolled as a choir sister were in vain.

At thirteen Mariam's life was to abruptly change. Unknown to her, she had been promised in marriage to a brother of her uncle's wife.

One day she was told the conjugal duties of a wife, given bridal jewels and garments and told that the wedding would shortly take place.

Knowing that marriage was not for her, Mariam had to use strength and finally ingenuity to circumvent the plans. Nothing would move her, even the words of priests who counseled her to obey her uncle. She prayed and heard a voice telling her to trust the inspiration she would receive.

The night before the public betrothal Mariam simply cut off her long hair, as a sign that she wished to remain a virgin. The loss of long hair in that society made the wedding impossible. Needless to say the fury of her uncle was visited upon her; whereas until then Mariam had been seen as a cherished daughter of the house, now she was treated as their lowliest servant.

It so happened that one of her uncle's former servants, a Muslim young man, was distressed by her plight and offered to take a letter to her little brother in Ibillin. Mariam agreed to visit the young man's family and all went well until they urged her to convert to Islam, which at that time and place would have put her outside her uncle's power. Quite possibly the young man was enamoured of her and wanted her as his wife. When Mariam adamantly refused to abandon her commitment to Christ he attacked her, probably in a fit of jealousy, stabbing her in the throat and leaving her for dead in an alley.

Again, strange as it may seem today, her uncle's family made no attempt to find her, choosing to assume that she had run away and was now bringing further disgrace on the family by living a disorderly life.

Then something astounding happened. Mariam later was to recount this event several times to her religious superiors. Mariam told how she returned to consciousness and discovered she was being nursed in a grotto by a blue-clad religious woman who told her that her neck wound had been stitched. She was fed delicious soup and cared for until she recovered. Towards the end of her stay Mariam was told that she would not see her family again, would go to France where she would first join a congregation named after St Joseph before joining another connected with St Teresa of Avila, clearly the Carmelite order. Furthermore, she was told she would receive the Carmelite habit in one convent, make her final vows in another and die in a third. The woman who had nursed her to health then took her to a church and

left her in the care of a Franciscan priest who realized her desperate situation and found her a post as a servant in a Christian family.

Now all these events were connected with the feast of the Birth of the Blessed Virgin and Mariam felt that the blue-clad woman was indeed the mother of Christ. She seems to have had a near-death experience and could describe heaven and many holy people therein, including her own parents. She wanted to remain there but was told that 'her book was not finished'.

Mariam had no recollection of how long she had been a convalescent and one might be tempted to dismiss the whole story as happening in delirium if it were not for the fact that in her later life in France more than one physician saw the scar in her neck. Each verified that the tracheal artery had been severed, an event which normally would have resulted in death.

The young Mariam was now to find herself for several years in difficult situations, which even today would be considered amazingly strenuous for a very young girl. These included being twice falsely accused of theft. She worked as a servant in many households, the poorer the better, always seeking out those who most needed her help.

When she was almost fifteen she managed to take ship to Palestine to find her young brother. A storm at sea prevented her reaching the appropriate port and instead she joined a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, where again a priest found her work with a suitable family.

Eventually Mariam found a home in a family in Beirut in Lebanon. This family were able to attest in writing to her genuine piety and virtue. Through them she was able to achieve a good domestic position with a Lebanese family in Marseilles. At eighteen and in France Mariam found herself at last in a secure and stable situation.

However, no sooner had her daily life settled down than she found herself prone to ecstatic states. Again divine Providence intervened in the shape of an Arab priest of the Melkite Catholic rite to which Mariam belonged. It was he who grasped her extraordinary character and arranged for her acceptance in a convent of the Sisters of St Joseph. Here Mariam felt happy and at home, but after some months the sisters realized that they were not equipped to deal with her ecstasies and her clear call to contemplative prayer. Accompanied by another of the sisters, interestingly enough an English woman who was to become her lifelong friend, Mariam was accepted in the

enclosed Carmelite convent of Pau. She was to remain in that order until she died.

Supernatural and Mystical States

Before continuing with the fascinating events of the next ten years or so, it is essential to know something of the spiritual phenomena which Mariam experienced during her life as a religious. Remember that all these things happened in the middle of the nineteenth century and were witnessed and indeed scrutinized by very able persons, both secular and religious.

Catholicism knows of many documented cases of persons having various types of supernatural experiences but what is most unusual here is that Mariam seemed to have all of them, and in abundance. Before discussing these in some detail it most important to note that the greatest testimony to their validity as gifts of the Spirit, rather than products of a disturbed psychological state, is Mariam's virtuous conduct, the common sense answers she gave when in a state of rapture, her remarkable admonitions to her sisters on the importance of certain virtues, and most important of all that when in an unusual supernatural state Mariam could always be recalled to her scheduled duties by a word from her superior. She immediately returned to a state of normal perceptions.

The best answer to the question as to why these extraordinary states occurred so often and so publicly comes from a Cardinal Sevin, who in answer to the question as to why God had raised up such a great soul at that time, replied that it seemed that God was opposing to our increasingly secularized way of living, a woman living a life that was remarkably supernatural. In other words, Mariam was a living witness to the reality of the Risen Christ whose body and soul inform the whole universe whether we are aware of this or not.

One of these states is that of religious ecstasy. This is said to occur when persons are so enraptured by a sense of God's presence that they sing, pray, or remain motionless, often despite any conscious knowledge of their state. After the ecstasy has passed the person sometimes can give an account of what occurred, sometimes not. Ecstasies were such a common event with Mariam that the sisters took them in their stride.

Ecstasy is sometimes accompanied by levitation which is when the person rises into the air with no means of support. The sisters at Pau

grew accustomed to seeing Mariam balancing herself on a small branch at the top of a tree while she sang God's praises. Never did she fall, and if summoned by a superior Mariam would descend gently to solid ground and embrace the sisters.

Another common phenomenon is the stigmata, the imprint of Christ's wounds in the hands, feet and side. Again Mariam experienced this from time to time. Distinct from stigmata but often associated with it is the piercing of the heart with a spear. The one receiving this is transfixed with both pain and an ecstatic experience of being loved by God and of loving God above all others. After Mariam's death her heart was examined. Those present saw in it the marks of a deep wound.

Mariam experienced visions of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin, St Joseph, angels, and of many other saints, especially those associated with the Carmelite Order beginning with St Elias the Prophet, whom she referred to as her compatriot. The sight of Mt Carmel, so familiar to her in her childhood, was of course closely associated with St Elias.

It is hardly surprising that Mariam had the gift of prophecy in both spiritual and mundane matters. Her prophetic words referred to individuals who sought her counsel as well as to great ecclesiastical and secular affairs. It is also of importance and worthy of study that Mariam had a profound sense of the importance of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes her intuitive gift was so great that she seemed to have the ability to bilocate, so vivid was her sense of being present and of being seen at faraway events, events later verified in public news items. She was able to urge that Carmelite convents be established in Bethlehem and in Nazareth. Mariam herself was to have a hand in both of these as well as in the foundation at Mangalore in India.

But not all her experiences were delightful. Twice Mariam underwent a rare torment, that of God allowing Satan to temporarily overpower her senses with horrible temptations. This phenomenon was paralleled with that of angelic possession, when for four days Mariam acted as the mouthpiece of special teachings.

New Religious Foundations

After such wonders it is necessary to return to the slightly more humdrum story of Mariam's earthly life. We must remember that her mission as a religious was to work with her sisters and brothers in the Carmelite Order to spread knowledge and love of Jesus Christ. Indeed

Mariam made such a good impression on the Carmelites of Pau that they gave her the habit of a novice after only one month of postulancy. As has been mentioned, she was never able to learn enough Latin to be accepted as a choir sister and so remained a lay sister to the end of her days.

It was not long before Mariam was sent to help in a new Carmelite foundation in India. The journey there alone with what she accomplished in Mangalore warrants several pages. Suffice it to say that Mariam's mystical experiences grew in intensity beyond what the new convent could cope with, and Mariam was sent back to France.

Then in 1875 there came about what she had been longing for all her life, a return to her native land of Palestine, where a Carmelite convent was to be founded in Bethlehem. Here Mariam had perhaps her first opportunity to speak Arabic. For this reason she was appointed the overseer of the builders. Then, in almost the last year of her life, Mariam was able to visit her beloved Ibillin. In Galilee she had a voice in deciding upon the site of the new Carmelite convent in Nazareth.

But on her return to Bethlehem an accident caused a fatal gangrene. Mariam died after several days of great suffering. Like her beloved compatriot, Jesus of Nazareth, she was then in only the thirty-third year of her life. On 26 August 1879 Sister Mariam of Jesus Crucified, her full religious name, went forever to live in heaven, a place with which she had been familiar all her life.

Conclusion

What thoughts do we come away with from the accounts of these remarkable women? I suggest that the hope they offer us is that the acceptance of an inner call to sanctity joined with independence of mind and spirit, an unselfish devotion to the good of others, an honouring of virginity and chastity, a love of beauty, a determination to know and to live the truth despite opposition, all these qualities being undergirded by a humble, obedient and ascetic way of life, can and do work wonders in our torn and troubled world.

ISAAC OF NINEVEH, JOHN OF DALYATHA AND EASTERN SPIRITUALITY

+ Antoine Audo SJ*

This paper, first presented as a lecture at The Centre for Eastern Christianity, Heythrop College in November 2009, is dedicated to the spirituality of two of the great Syriac Christian mystics and writers, Isaac of Nineveh and John of Dalyatha in comparative perspective with the Latin Catholic tradition, especially the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyala and the Carmelite tradition. Both the Jesuit and Carmelite orders have had a strong presence in the modern Middle East and have made a significant contribution to the emergence of a distinct Eastern Catholic tradition. The study is embedded in the theological and ecclesial culture characteristic of the Chaldean Catholic tradition.

What do we mean by Eastern spirituality? Truth to tell, it is a broad question which first of all reminds us of the schools of Antioch and of Alexandria, which each had their own theology and spirituality. Later, Constantinople too had its glory days, and its theological influence. From the tenth century onwards, Eastern spirituality also includes the whole spiritual tradition which developed within the Orthodoxy of Eastern Europe. The common denominator of Eastern spirituality is therefore very broad and also includes the Armenian, Coptic and Syriac traditions, which had their own theological literature with theological authors and poets, and various liturgies.

Faced with this great Eastern monument, we need to find the door

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into the subject of spirituality. As I come from the Chaldean Church, I would like to talk to you about two famous mystics who came from the Eastern Syriac tradition, sons of the Eastern Church, our Church, who lived during the seventh and eighth centuries: Isaac of Nineveh and John of Dalyatha.

I will not speak as an expert on the Eastern Syriac Fathers. As I myself belong to that tradition, I shall try to read each author from two famous texts, which deal above all with the question of God's love: Isaac of Nineveh's 'Penitence leads to love of God', and 'The folly of love for Christ'; and John of Dalyatha's 'Love and delight', and 'Love of enemies'.

With each writer I will proceed in four stages:

First, we will read the text so that we are in touch directly with the author. As the texts are short, this exercise will be useful for approaching our subject.

Secondly, we will pause to make a commentary on the text—vocabulary, themes, images, style and so on to enable us to penetrate the author's mind. Commentary in literary studies presupposes that we will look at a second text alongside the first.

Thirdly, we will try to interpret, by uncovering the characteristics and originality of this spirituality. Interpretation supposes a further step towards understanding the text—as readers we become involved, questioning the author from our own positions to make him speak more clearly.

Fourthly, having tried to understand this Eastern spirituality, we will ask how Western tradition can react to it. A comparison with Western tradition, such as Ignatian or Carmelite spirituality, can enrich our reflection.

1. Isaac of Nineveh

Isaac of Nineveh lived at the end of the seventh century. He is one of the most renowned of the Eastern mystics. His addresses were translated into Greek as early as the ninth century.

Text 1: Penitence leads to love of God¹

Fear is the paternal cane which leads us to the spiritual Eden. When we have reached it, it leaves us and departs. This Eden is the divine love in which the paradise of all things is found. Blessed Paul was fed

¹ 'The First Part', Syriac Homily 43 = Greek Homily 72.

with spiritual food, and after he had tasted of the spiritual tree, and after he had tasted of the Tree of Life which is planted there, he wrote, 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him' (1 Cor. 2:9 (American KJV)). Adam was deprived of this tree for having followed the devil's advice. This Tree of Life is God's love, this love which Adam was stripped of, and after that he did not know joy, but worked and toiled in the thorny earth. And those who are deprived of God's love still eat bread won by the sweat of their brows, even if they practise justice, as was commanded to the founder of our race (Gen. 3:19), when he was stripped of this love; and until we find it we will work in this thorny earth, and it is among the thorns that we will sow and reap, even if it is a harvest of justice. And all the time we are pricked, even though we are justified, and we live with sweat on our faces.

But as soon as we have found love, we eat a heavenly bread and we have painless sustenance without fatigue. And this heavenly bread is the bread 'which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world' (John 6:33). It is the food of the Angels. Whoever has found love eats Christ all the time, and thus becomes immortal; for 'whoever eats this bread will not taste death' (John 6:50). Happy are those who eat the bread of love, which is Jesus! Whoever feeds on love feeds on Christ who is the God above everything. John witnesses to this in his words: 'God is love' (1 John 4:16). So he breathes in the life-giving air, that air which the righteous will delight in at the Resurrection.

Love is the Kingdom which our Lord spoke about, when he mysteriously promised the Apostles that they would eat in his Kingdom: 'You will eat and will drink at my table in my kingdom' (Luke 22:30). What will they eat, if not love? Love can sustain human beings in place of food and drink—this is the Wine which gladdens the heart of man (Ps. 104:15). Happy are those who will drink of this Wine! It is the Wine of which the impure drank, and became chaste; sinners drank of it, and forgot the ways which made them stumble; drunkards have drunk of it, and become abstainers; the rich have drunk of it and aspired to poverty; the poor have drunk of it and become rich in hope; the sick have drunk of it and been strengthened; the ignorant have drunk of it and become wise.

Just as one cannot cross the ocean without a boat or a ship, so no-one, in the fear which leads to love, can cross the fetid sea which is between us and paradise. We cross it in the boat of penitence, which has oars of fear. But if we are not on the ship of penitence—this ship on which we cross the sea of this world to go towards God—we will sink in the fetid sea. Penitence is the ship, fear is its skipper, love is the

divine port. Fear places us on the ship of penitence, makes us cross the fetid sea of this world, and leads us to the divine port which is love; and from there we look back at all the crushing exhaustion of penitence. For as soon as we arrive at love, we have arrived near God, and our path has come to an end: we have crossed the sea and reached the island which is above the world, where the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are. To him be glory and honour, and may we be made worthy to fear him and love him. Amen.

1. Commentary

The text does not seem to develop, but only wishes to communicate one idea—Love is the source of all that is good. It is God, Christ, par excellence. Whoever has found Love will ‘eat’ and ‘drink’ Christ.

Having mentioned fear once at the very start of the text, Isaac of Nineveh only returns to it in the final paragraph. We might say that, in terms of the structure of the text, Love is at the centre, the heart and the goal, while fear is only a way to reach it.

The author develops the theme of Love, which seems to return to reality, beautifully: this love is only accessible through fear which is the ‘cane’, the ‘ship’, the ‘oars’, the ‘skipper’, etc. There are many images representing Love which touch our feelings: food, drink, the tree of life, crossing the ocean, a ship or boat, the fetid sea, the divine port, the island, etc.

What is striking in the first reading of the text is the abundance of symbols and comparisons, so that, although the theme could give rise to abstraction, nothing is abstract. The writer’s thought proceeds as if it is embodied in the characters and becoming concrete.

Note, too, the influence of the Bible and in particular the Gospels—the fall of Adam, the tree of life, Christ, the bread of life. Everything is movement, relation, dynamism, with contrasting terms.

2. Interpretation

This text surely flows from a profound personal experience, and we feel the vibrant emotion. The writer has experience of human misery, Adam eating bread in the sweat of his brow, and Christ, who becomes the food for whoever has found him.

The author’s thought is paradoxical, and constructed in hyperbolic terms. For example, look at how he describes those who are deprived of God’s love: ‘they still eat bread won by the sweat of their brows, even if they practise justice’; and ‘until we find it we will work in this

thorny earth, and it is among the thorns that we will sow and reap, even if it is a harvest of justice'; and 'all the time we are pricked, even though we are justified, and we live with sweat on our faces'.

The element of hyperbole is based on repetition and dramatisation, while the paradoxical element is shown in contrasts, and the rapid movement from the reality of human misery to the reality of heavenly happiness with Christ.

The author says, 'But as soon as we have found love, we eat a heavenly bread and we have painless sustenance without fatigue'. Let us first of all note this rapid movement from one reality to another. The writer continues, 'Whoever has found love eats Christ all the time, and thus becomes immortal; for "whoever eats this bread will not taste death" (John 6:50)'. We might sooner expect an expression such as, whoever has found Christ will eat the heavenly bread; but the author surprises us by his form of expression.

Finding love—this is a very abstract and very absolute way of expressing himself—How? When? Where?

Eating Christ all the time—this is a very direct way of expressing himself, since he talks about eating a person, a divine person, no less, without any mediation.

3. *A view from Western tradition*

Ignatian spirituality

A more rational mind might perhaps have begun by speaking more about fear, from the start, to reach love definitively, without going back again. Isaac of Nineveh's spirituality in this text fluctuates more—he moves unhesitatingly from love to fear, from rejoicing to penitence, from the thorns to the paradise of delights. This perhaps corresponds more to the reality of life and the spiritual path, which is not always progress, going forward, but being tested, going backwards, falling, conversion. Finally, love's goal is reached. But we might say that the author fears going backwards. He quickly ends his text with a brief prayer of praise and supplication, which contains penitence and love.

If we first of all compare this with Ignatian spirituality, and particularly with the process of the Spiritual Exercises, we will easily note both similarities and differences.

Talking about going from penitence to love of God, anyone who knows the Spiritual Exercises well will immediately say the first week:

contemplation to obtain love. Indeed, the first week of the Spiritual Exercises helps the retreatant to meditate on the mystery of sin and his own sin in order to lead him/her, through penitence, to true forgiveness. With fear and penitence, the figure of Adam and the sea to be crossed, it is certain that Isaac of Nineveh is speaking about the state of sin in face of the love of Christ. Love of God, which is communion with Christ, on the other hand, is expressed differently by Isaac of Nineveh and St Ignatius.

In Spiritual Exercises 231, St Ignatius, speaking about contemplation to obtain love, says that 'love consists in mutual communication', while Isaac of Nineveh speaks about the port where the ship is to arrive, or the island reached which is above the world. In St Ignatius' Exercises, before arriving at the end, *Ad amorem*, we have to progress gradually in following Christ from the second to the fourth week, with the choice/election as a powerful moment of commitment of freedom to follow Christ.

Isaac of Nineveh condenses his experience, and does not pause at meditations. He is aware of the weight of sin and humanity, but does not pause there; but, having already tasted the Love of God, he wishes to arrive there immediately. A Western sensibility would talk more about the means, the stages, the historical dimension, the relationship to Christ and to the Church.

Carmelite spirituality

St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross talk a lot about the path of purification, of shadows, of suffering, to reach love and union with God.

In the Spiritual Canticle, St John of the Cross returns to the image of the tree of life, which is the tree of the cross. He does not speak about penitence, punishment and death, but only about betrothal and life: 'the apple tree is the tree of the cross on which the son of God accomplished redemption and, consequently, betrothed himself to human nature by speaking to every soul, giving each grace and a pledge for this, through the merit of his passion.' 'I have given you life on the tree of the cross.'

Text 2: The folly of love for Christ¹

Love, in its nature, is something burning, and when it falls, unlimited, on humanity, it makes the soul seem foolish, because the heart which feels it cannot contain or bear it without a considerable and unusual change appearing in it. And the signs of this change are revealed by the heart in an obvious way: suddenly the face becomes red and joyful, the body warms up; the person rejects fear and shame and becomes as one with no sense of modesty; the ability to be level-headed is lost; impetuosity and agitation rule him. His own life, in comparison with the object of his affection, is now, in his own eyes, as nothing; this is why death itself, death which we fear more than anything, becomes almost a sort of pleasure for him. And despite all this, his mental image is not divided by the exaltation which is in him, as though it were an imagined thing. If the object of his love is far away, it speaks to him as though it were close; if it is hidden from view, it is in the great mystery that he loses himself; what he sees comes from nature and rebels against sensory perception. He is enflamed in his actions as much as in his vision. He remains alone, but his thoughts speak as though he were with another; and he is struck by amazement.

The martyrs were drunk on this passion; the Apostles were moved by it and as madmen travelled the whole earth; and the saints accepted torments and insults, and wandered in the desert. Men of order, they became disordered; wise, they made themselves voluntarily insane; dignified, they became undignified with discernment; without passions, and yet in the flesh, that flesh which incessantly demands and which is pacified without being coerced.

May we be worthy to reach this folly from now, through the grace of the God we adore! Amen.

1. Commentary

In the first paragraph, the author describes the effects of love on the soul. On reading the text we do not know what kind of love this is, or who is the object of this love. Isaac does not mention 'the one who is loved', only the lover.

In the second paragraph, we are suddenly transposed into the spiritual realm. Note this swift movement. By quoting the martyrs and apostles, Isaac of Nineveh leads us to understand that he is talking about man's love for Christ (although Christ is never named).

The author concludes this description with a short prayer, an indirect prayer in which God is not directly addressed, but named in

¹ Syriac Homily 33 = Greek Homily 24.

the third person: 'May we be worthy to reach this folly from now, through the grace of the God we adore! Amen.'

Initially, we might think we are at a purely human level. The symptoms of love are those of a creature smitten with the person he or she loves. Note, further, the absence of any reference to Christ as the object of this love.

This is a way of saying that this love is very observable, human, and yet beyond being observable: 'And despite all this, his mental image is not divided by the exaltation which is in him, as though it were an imagined thing ... what he sees comes from nature and rebels against sensory perception.'

Having described humanity's mad love, and finding ourselves puzzled and wondering about the identity of the one who is loved and the lover, the author abruptly moves us to the second paragraph, as though it were a result of that passion which overcomes man. It is at this point that the writer mentions martyrs, apostles and saints, showing us how they were transformed because of this love:

Men of order become disordered
Wise men make themselves voluntarily insane
Dignified men become undignified with discernment.

We might say that these three types of men correspond to the martyrs, apostles and saints; and finally, when he says 'without passion', that this is a description which includes all three and which at the same time concludes his development with the final prayer.

2. Interpretation

If we try to penetrate Isaac of Nineveh's process in this text a little more, we would say that his thought is both very concrete, that is, observable, and very general.

It is very concrete in his lively and detailed description of man overcome by this mad love, which makes him resemble a drunk who has lost almost all reason. His thought is also very concrete because it works through a list of people in the same state of madness, their various transformations, because of this love which has affected them. In a word, it is not an abstract or cerebral reflection.

But perhaps what replaces this aspect of abstraction is the 'general' side of the author's thought. Nothing is situated in time or space. For example, aside from the title, we do not know who is loved, nor why, nor how. Christ is not named and suffering hardly mentioned, only to

show that it is overcome.

However, if passion for Christ (the folly of the cross) is not mentioned, we can guess it from the effects rooted in the Gospel and from the inversion of values which it brings:

Death is pleasure
 Life is nothing
 Far away is close
 Order is disorder
 The wise man is insane
 The dignified man is undignified
 Without passion in the flesh.

One question will help us to understand the author better: why does the author not talk directly? Why does he not mention the Church explicitly? And as we have already noted, why does he not name Christ explicitly?

First of all the writer is probably addressing Christians, and monks, who are already in the Church and who are living out the Gospel, which may surprise us, but in this context his address becomes entirely natural.

In addition to this aspect, which is both concrete (observable) and general, there is a language which links the particular and the universal, in which all Christians can find themselves in some way. For example, note how, in the first paragraph, the writer mentions the man who has gone mad because of love. This is an individual who is immersed in his feelings and, at the same time, liberated from death. On the other hand, in the second paragraph, we leave the anonymity of feeling and the general to see this state become concrete in the martyrs, the apostles and the saints. It is from their transformations that the author speaks about the cross, the Church and, finally, the Christian mystery.

3. *A view from Western tradition*

The folly of the cross, or folly because of love for Christ, is a fundamental Christian experience, rooted in the very cross of Christ which reveals to us God's love for his creatures. In addition, the martyrs, apostles and saints, as Isaac of Nineveh mentions, were affected by this folly in various ways. The history of the Church is full of witnesses who wished to embrace Christ's cross in a radical way, going as far as the total gift of themselves.

This concept of 'folly' on account of Christ shows that this is a

supernatural reality, something which is not of the ordinary human order, madness always being outside normal social existence. And yet, as Isaac of Nineveh says, 'without passions, and yet in the flesh, that flesh which incessantly demands and which is pacified without being coerced', it is in the flesh that God's holiness is demonstrated, healing and transforming it.

Ignatian spirituality

If we glance at the Ignatian tradition we realise how St Ignatius, at the start of his conversion, dedicated himself to extravagant practices, but after a certain time, having listened to a more interior, more apostolic call, he cut his hair and his nails to dedicate himself to study, with an apostolic aim of service.

Isaac of Nineveh also writes in this text, 'dignified, they became undignified with discernment; without passions, and yet in the flesh', expressions which would please an Ignatian mind.

In this context, Ignatian spirituality would focus more on the contemplation of Christ's humanity from the Gospels, and would also spend more time on Christ's Passion and Resurrection, which is a call to follow and imitate him.

Carmelite spirituality

In Carmelite spirituality, the theme of the transformation of the object of love is strong. The one who loves is changed into the one who is loved, and is also made inferior to the object of love (Ascent I, 4,67-8).

The spouse, Christ, demands that the soul resemble him by movements and acts of love, to the extent of transforming itself into him (Ascent III, 13, 341).

What is proper to love is the desire to be united, joined, to be equal to and to resemble that which is loved in order to perfect oneself in the good of love (Night II, 13,594).

In the light of what we have just said, note that Isaac of Nineveh does not talk about union with Christ. Is this a question of modesty? He only talks about love's suffering, and the desire to die for Him, like the martyrs, to become 'mad' for Him. In addition, Isaac of Nineveh hides himself behind this experience and does not talk about himself, through discretion, so as to encourage a large number of disciples to taste this experience, as we have already explained.

2. John of Dalyatha

John of Dalyatha lived in the eighth century, and was one of the great mystics, in his originality and his depth.

Two of this writer's texts will help us to approach him in order to note some of the characteristics of Oriental spirituality and, in particular, of the tradition of the Eastern Syriac Church. As with Isaac of Nineveh, we will certainly not claim to draw these writers' full teaching from these brief analyses of their texts. Our aim is to introduce, to draw attention to elements of what might be called an Eastern spirituality from short, concise texts. As a sort of introduction, we can state that the Syriac tradition is directly linked to the Bible and, in its Semitic roots, this tradition was also influenced by the school of Antioch without being marked by Greek philosophy.

We might say that this spirituality is more poetic and symbolic than philosophical and rational. I think that this is due to its Semitic roots and to the use of the Aramaic language. There are three important traditions in the history of the Church: the Latin, Greek, and Syriac, the last having a direct geographical and linguistic link to the Bible, for which it deserves our attention. So let us approach this author from the Eastern Syriac tradition, John of Dalyatha, to better know and love this heritage, which also belongs to the Church.

In the first paragraph of his Apostolic Letter *Orientalis Lumen*, Pope John Paul II wrote:

Since, in fact, we believe that the venerable and ancient tradition of the Eastern Churches is an integral part of the heritage of Christ's Church, the first need for Catholics is to be familiar with that tradition, so as to be nourished by it and to encourage the process of unity in the best way possible for each.

Our Eastern Catholic brothers and sisters are very conscious of being the living bearers of this tradition, together with our Orthodox brothers and sisters. The members of the Catholic Church of the Latin tradition must also be fully acquainted with this treasure and thus feel, with the Pope, a passionate longing that the full manifestation of the Church's catholicity be restored to the Church and to the world, expressed not by a single tradition, and still less by one community in opposition to the other; and that we too may be granted a full taste of the divinely revealed and undivided heritage of the universal Church which is preserved and grows in the life of the Churches of the East as in those of the West.

We will examine John of Dalyatha as we did Isaac of Nineveh, by reading two of his texts. We will use two texts which also deal with the question of Love, the most important theme in the spiritual traditions.

Text 1: Love and delight¹

‘If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love’, says the Word of God (John 15:10). As we advance on the path of the commandments we remain in love, and by accomplishing them mercy brings us to the peaceful port of delight.

But you say, ‘Show me the difference that there is between love and delight’. Listen, my brother, to what I will tell you: Love itself reaches the holy perfection of delight, just as a small child reaches his perfect size. Whoever remains in the place of love, his work is to keep the commandments, and when he reaches their perfect observance, He who has given the commandments makes him the gift of his holy delight, daughter of those commandments whose father is love. And love’s grand-daughter, delight, becomes the mother of those who are loved. The Lover of delight is also called the Loved of delight, that is, that he loves with delight, and is loved by his own. Love, therefore, is granted to the one who is still in the place of keeping the commandments; it is the portion of servants, while delight is what sons share with their fathers, and fathers with their sons.

Whoever keeps the commandments forgets love when delight comes and he wants nothing other than to be in his God. He has gone beyond the relation of love, in which he incessantly exhausted himself by keeping the commandments: love has delivered him up to delight, which is a consuming fire which torments the spirit with desire for union with and in Him who is loved by delight.

And from then on, it is with a free confidence that delight asks Him, ‘Give me what was said by your Father’, that is, ‘So that they may be one in us’ (John 17:21). From Your holy mouth delight has heard You say, ‘My Father is your Father, my God is your God’ (John 20:17). You have called us Your brothers: join us to You and to Your inheritance, making us God’s heirs and co-heirs with Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:47).

1. Commentary

This text’s literary genre is a conversation between master or teacher and disciple. This is a teaching of wisdom which is based more on experience than on rationality and reason. We have already noted this

¹ Unpublished Homily 23, ‘On love and delight’.

in the texts we have examined.

If we try to summarise the author's main idea, we would say that it is the movement from law to the liberty of love. In the language which John of Dalyatha uses, love is a path, or the commandments, while delight (tender, pure love) is the 'aim' or the 'port'. This delight allows children to enter into their inheritance. Love demands a progression in the commandments, their observance. It is the portion of servants. To describe this link between love and delight, the author uses a comparison drawn from family ties, which seems, at first glance, to be rather unsubtle:

Love is the Father
 Delight is the Son
 But the daughter becomes the Mother of those who are loved.

In addition, in delight, the lover is also loved, 'the Lover of delight is also called the Loved by delight', that is, 'he loves with delight and is loved by his own.' There is, therefore, reciprocity between lover and loved; this is the link between father and son, and son and father.

John of Dalyatha emphasises the movement from love to delight. Whoever enters delight forgets the past, with its purifications and progressions: He has gone beyond the relation of love, 'in which he incessantly exhausted himself by keeping the commandments'. There is a before and after, and it seems that the one who has reached delight cannot go backwards. John of Dalyatha speaks of a 'transforming' union which is then 'consuming' and uniting—'love has delivered him up to delight, which is a consuming fire which torments the spirit with desire for union with and in Him who is loved by delight'.

Finally, whoever reaches perfection, delight, is bold: he has Jesus' very desire to be united with his Father. He discovers himself to be a true brother of Jesus: 'And from then on, it is with a free confidence that delight asks Him [note how the believer becomes delight, and the delight addresses Jesus], "Give me what was said by your Father", that is, "So that they may be one in us" (John 17:21).'

In his final paragraph, John of Dalyatha addresses Jesus without naming him: 'You have called us Your brothers: join us to You and to Your inheritance, making us God's heirs and co-heirs with Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:47).'

2. *Interpretation*

Here we are in the midst of that Christian tradition which tends towards communion with God. As expressed in the final prayer, this is about reaching sonship in Jesus Christ, through fidelity to the commandments. This is a movement of growth which goes from fidelity to the commandments to the gratuity of God's love. The double movement from purification to communion is part of the spiritual, and particularly the mystical tradition. Great spiritual authors talk about the different stages of reaching the goal. Some mention three stages, others four, or even seven (St Teresa of Avila).

What holds our attention in John of Dalyatha is the double movement. He does not stop at the stages (the determining factors), but wishes to reach the goal swiftly (the symbolic axis). If we start by noting this way of proceeding, it is because we think that here we can find a characteristic of Eastern spirituality which, as soon as it has revealed its goal, uses the shortest path to get there, shortening the path to reach the summit, a style therefore which is simple, paradoxical, but limited to the essentials and not interested in rational construction. On the other hand, it sometimes uses puzzling images and comparisons to compensate for this lack of argumentation.

On the path progressing from the commandments to delight there is a continuum between love and delight, and also a break, since we have to move from one reality to another, between one stage and another. The writer, and here is another characteristic of Eastern spirituality, does not emphasise the break which is there, but rather the continuity—the image of the family, 'the small child who reaches his perfect size'; 'holy delight, daughter of those commandments whose father is love.' 'Love's granddaughter, delight, becomes the mother of those who are loved.'

In this construction the small child (commandments) and the daughter of the commandments who has become holy delight are the same. This small daughter of love, delight, becomes the mother of the loved ones.

There is therefore more emphasis on continuity than on a break. This aspect of continuity is also emphasised in the statement that 'the (divine) Lover of delight is also called the Loved of delight, that is, that he loves with delight, and is loved by his own.' Total communion between the Lover and the loved one is reached, to the extent that one has the impression that the roles are reversed and confused.

This attraction towards the perfection of communion does not give any weight to walking in the commandments, the goal somehow eliminates mediation, or in a philosophical formulation, we might say the axis of determining factors.

3. *A view from Western tradition*

Ignatian spirituality

Having examined this text of John of Dalyatha by emphasising its characteristics and originality, we can first of all react to it from Ignatian spirituality, which was born in the context of the European Renaissance, and which marked the West in various ways. Having said this, our aim is not to show the superiority of one way of thinking over another, but to draw attention to some elements which will better help the links between East and West to be understood.

1. Throughout the Spiritual Exercises, there is an emphasis on the different weeks, and therefore on the different stages, before reaching the final *Ad amorem*, which in John of Dalyatha's language is Delight. In other words, there is a progression, but without removing the breaks: sin is to be acknowledged in general and in a personal way, choice, personal taste, the creature with his creator, the giving of alms, food, the examination of conscience, etc.
2. A further aspect in Ignatian spirituality is that of personal determination: the 'I looking at You, Christ'. In John of Dalyatha, however, it is the axis of 'We' which is emphasised with the image of the family—child, father, son, daughter, mother, granddaughter, etc. The functions are mixed up and transformed, as we noted.
3. This individual 'I' implies a choice. Man looking at Christ must choose and his freedom is questioned and called to make a commitment. Faith is not about destiny but about personal freedom.
4. In Ignatian spirituality we have a focus on the reality of the incarnation of God's Word in history for the salvation of the world (the reign, the two standards). The symbolic axis, this attraction to the *Ad amorem*, does not eliminate the axis of determination in which human freedom is called to act; but on the contrary, contingency is the place where the human decision affirms its freedom.
5. It is certain that John of Dalyatha's text begins with a question which the disciple asks his master, and ends with a prayer as 'We' which broadens the writer's experience to all the brothers, but this does not stop us from asking about the apostolic dimension of such an

approach. Ignatian spirituality also tends towards communion with God, but towards a communion which is only realised in the here and now, in the world, with all.

Carmelite spirituality

1. St Teresa of Avila, in the Interior Castle and the Way of Perfection, warns against a certain over-confidence of having reached the perfection of love. However far we have come, we can go backwards.
2. St John of the Cross, in the Spiritual Canticle, talks about successive transformation—as Christ's riches are infinite, the soul continually advances towards new realisations and transformations.
3. In addition, in verse 39 of the Spiritual Canticle, St John of the Cross returns to Jesus' priestly prayer, asking his Father that his disciples might be transformed, 'united to the Father, as he is'. Christ wants them, the disciples, to be a single entity with God through their union of love, from which it follows that souls have the same relationship through participation as he does through his nature (907-8).
4. St Teresa of Avila, in her 'Thoughts on the Love of God', adds a further important note: apostolic zeal. The soul does not only wish to enjoy God alone, but 'the Spouse only seeks God's honour and glory in all things ... his neighbour's spiritual profit is his object, and nothing more'. St Teresa of Avila quotes the Samaritan woman who was an apostle to her compatriots following her meeting with Jesus (Thoughts, ch. 7).
5. Finally, St Teresa of Lisieux spoke of being 'a mother of souls through my union with you, Jesus'.

This brings us back to John of Dalyatha's experience, also expressed as being an 'apostle' with respect to union in God.

Text 2: Love of enemies

Why is your heart distressed when you hear the words of my enemies? Have you ever seen anyone whom outrages and insults have rendered detestable and have soiled? Or has anyone ever been made beautiful by decorated phrases and words of praise? Who can give me so great a joy as that of being proclaimed impure and despicable before the world by false witnesses? As my Lord is alive, I do not murmur against them to anyone, I do not even protest to Him; but I pray for them as I do for my friends; I love them in the same way as those who bind my wounds, and in the joy of my heart I cry:

How I would like, if it were possible, every dumb creature to repeat the mockery to which I am subjected and thus to become hated by

every man, so that my anxieties should be cleansed by iniquity! How much must I thank the Doctor of souls because, before the wounds of my soul became infected and poisoned, he prepared dressings to heal them!

To you be the glory, O true Doctor who, with your saving remedies, bind the wounds of those who have been struck! May the mercy of your grace be upon those who repeat the slander against me, and may the ablution which you sprinkle be on those accused of impurity! Amen.

1. Commentary

To a certain extent, this text is in the lyric literary genre. The writer talks about his soul intimately, as the psalmist often does: 'Why are you cast down my soul, why groan within me?' (Ps. 43). It seems that this merciful glance towards his enemies is in response to a deep sadness which can only be healed by the grace of Christ himself.

The style of this text is very lively—calling, question, response, exclamation, prayer. The writer makes demands, he goes directly to the goal and takes us straight to the heights, where we are almost affected by vertigo. As we already noted with other texts, he treats any intermediary, any path through stages of sadness with disdain; and in the end, we wonder at the source of his suffering. Is it not perhaps hidden in the first words of the text, 'Why is your heart distressed ...?'

By way of summary, we might say that the author is addressing himself, to encourage himself to walk in Christ's way, to pray like him for those who persecute him, even to become one with them. Man is and remains a sinner; so it is a grace that his 'enemies' discover his weaknesses, 'the wounds of his soul', so that he may go to the 'true Doctor' who binds his wounds. This Doctor binds all wounds, not only the wounds of sin, but those of sufferings which arise from the enemy's attacks.

The writer does not end with those who persecute him. He knows that through them, it is Jesus the Doctor of souls who wishes to heal him. How can the sick man be healed if he does not know he is sick? His enemies therefore become his benefactors, leading him to the way of salvation, and John of Dalyatha asks for God's mercy on them.

2. Interpretation

To go further into the author's logic, a logic based on the paradox of the Gospel, which overturns natural logic, we need to recall two realities in the text.

The first is the affirmation of the author's attachment to the Lord: 'As my Lord is alive'. All his experience and statements, which seem to be paradoxical, are founded on the person of the living Christ. In his reflection, the author thus states a fundamental fact of faith, and it is on this reflection that everything is built. This reality replaces any list of Christ's sufferings, or any allusion to his enemies and his forgiveness, and the author is so united to Christ in this experience of healing and pardon that he himself repeats the actions and gestures of his master:

I do not murmur against them ...
 I do not protest to Him
 But I pray for them ...
 I love them
 And in the joy of my heart I cry out ...

Healed by Christ, though a sinner, he somehow becomes a source of healing for his enemies, just as his Lord does.

The second thing to notice comes from the theme of adversity itself. Rather than the discussion progressing in its description of the enemies' violence versus the believer's innocence, we have a reversal of paradoxical logic. It is the believer himself who becomes more and more critical of himself to deserve more healing by Christ for himself and his enemies. *Felix culpa*, sins are the place where the mercy of grace is demonstrated both for him and for those who persecute him.

This text is very strong in the vision of faith which it carries, and in the level of humility and confidence which it demands. John of Dalyatha is not afraid of being made to despair at the sight of his misery, nor is he humiliated by the fact that it is plain for all to see. He only has eyes for a single goal—the healing given by Jesus, to him as to his enemies, He the best and most merciful of doctors.

3. *A view from Western tradition*

Ignatian spirituality

In the Spiritual Exercises 98, St Ignatius asks the retreatant, at the end of the meditation, to make the following offering of himself:

Eternal Lord of all things, I make my oblation with Thy favour and help, in presence of Thy infinite Goodness and in presence of Thy glorious Mother and of all the Saints of the heavenly Court; that I want and desire, and it is my deliberate determination, if only it be Thy greater service and praise, to imitate Thee in bearing all injuries and all

abuse and all poverty of spirit, and actual poverty, too, if Thy most Holy Majesty wants to choose and receive me to such life and state.

In Ignatius' text, sin and enemies are not directly mentioned as they are by John of Dalyatha. The person of Christ is of course central, as is the desire to imitate him by enduring all injustices and all scorn. It is certain that Ignatius is alluding to the Passion suffered by Christ, and the way in which Christ responded to his enemies.

In terms of content, the Spiritual Exercises lay out a path for conversion and imitation of Christ, as John of Dalyatha does. But in terms of style, nothing seems to be paradoxical or affirmative, but one moves forward with determination and prudence, seeking to imitate Christ. Here we are fully in the *discreta caritas* (discerning love).

Carmelite spirituality

1. Regarding reflection on offence or persecution, St Teresa of Avila said in the 'Way of Perfection' that it is very important not to forgive oneself because one gains humility, and further imitates Christ, who remained silent before his persecutors; and, in addition, we are never without fault. Then she adds, 'When I heard that very little was being said, when I was being falsely accused, I had still offended God in many ways, and they were, in my opinion, many ways which were not being mentioned; in addition I found it much less painful to see myself accused of supposed faults than to hear all sorts of truth said about me' (ch. 15).

2. At the start of the Madrid chapter, John of the Cross had prophesied that he would be 'thrown into a corner, like an old rag, an old cooking cloth'. This was in fact what happened and Mother Mary of the Incarnation wrote to him to tell him of her pain and indignation. John of the Cross wrote to Mother Mary on 6 July 1591: 'As for me, daughter, do not be pained because this is not done to me. But when the fault is thrown on the one who is innocent, that pains me greatly. Because it is not men who do these things, but God who knows what is good for us and does everything for our good. Do not think otherwise than that God does all things. And where there is no love, give love, and you will receive love'.

Conclusion

We have tried to say something about Eastern spirituality, starting with these two mystical authors of the Church of the East, Isaac of Nineveh and John of Dalyatha. Through them, too, I have tried to sketch out a complex identity which the Christians of the East, the Middle East, seek to maintain and to express. The comparison with two Western spiritualities of the Renaissance, Ignatian and Carmelite, has enabled us to see how the Christian mystery can be expressed from different awarenesses.

In our reflection we have made use of the determining factors and the symbolic axis, philosophical categories for thinking about the structure of language. We noted from the texts we analysed that a vision of Oriental spirituality is more attracted to the symbolic axis, reaching out directly and immediately to completion, the absolute of communion. A Western spirituality such as Ignatian spirituality, on the other hand, rather emphasises the historical determining axis before reaching the *Ad amorem*, or even asking for love from within contemplation.

The Western genius has brought about rational dispute, and the secularisation of public life has taken on such a radical nature that *laïcité* has sometimes become negative and destructive. In theology, the Arian threat is often present in the West, refusing perfect divinity to Christ and consequently reducing humanity to being only human, closed in the determining factors of history and contingency. In a word, man is simply man, and the centre of himself.

In the East, by contrast, Monophysite temptations, which state that there is only a single, divine nature in Christ, and that the divine nature absorbs the human nature, risk damaging human freedom and the weight of history. God is no longer the one who enters into dialogue with man, but the one who imposes the response out of hand.

It is up to us to continue to reflect on and live out this mystery in dialogue with God; the quality of our human encounters is dependent on him.

THE RENEWAL OF THE COPTIC CATHOLIC CHURCH: GRAPPLING WITH IDENTITY AND ALTERITY

Fadel Sidarous SJ*

The Coptic Catholic Church [CCC] is a minority, twice-over: Christian, in an overwhelmingly Muslim society; and Catholic, in relation to the Orthodox majority. Furthermore, its potential role as bridge with the Orthodox seems overlooked by the Roman Church. The temptation to retreat into an exclusivist identity is strong. The difficulty of engaging with secular reality is exacerbated by the clericalisation of the various religious communities in Egypt, where religious affiliation has replaced political involvement. A plea is made for an 'enlightened secularisation', for a Gospel openness to today's world—serving the 'whole man'—which embraces the CCC's multi-faceted plural identity, as opportunity, not threat.

Two events, both of which give it a particular focus, inspire this presentation: on the one hand, reflection on the renewal of the Coptic Catholic Church,¹ launched in October 2008 by its Patriarch, His Beatitude Antonios Naguib, following on an earlier initiative by His Most Eminent Beatitude, the late Patriarch Cardinal Stephanos II Ghattas, in 2000; and on the other hand, preparations for the Synod for the Catholic Middle East, being held in Rome in October 2010. I offer, then, some elements of personal reflection, at once contextual, pastoral, spiritual and theological.²

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¹ Hereinafter CCC.

² Drawing on four of my previous publications:

I will approach the topic from two complementary angles: a diagnosis of the present situation of the CCC and its challenges, and the principal elements for renewal.¹ By way of introduction, a brief description of the Egyptian Church is required for an understanding of this subject.

1. A Brief Description of the Egyptian Church

The religious situation in Egypt consists of a Sunni Muslim majority (94-95 per cent of the 80 million inhabitants). The country is governed by Islamic Law (*Shari'a islamiyya*), which is the main source of the Constitution; religious guidance comes from *Al-Azhar*—the ulemas, the mosque, university and schools of this prestigious thousand year old pan-Islamic institution; although this does not prevent the existence of numerous Sufi confraternities, somewhat removed from formal Islamic orthodoxy, and animating popular religion.

According to the tradition of the early centuries, Christianity in Egypt dates from St Mark the Evangelist. The whole of Egypt was Christian before the Islamic conquest of the seventh century. Following this, Egyptian Christians were called Copts (*Qibt or Aqbât*), from the Greek *Aiguptos*, probably originating in turn from a Pharaonic word, *Het-Ka-Ptah*, meaning 'house of the spirit of (the

Eglise Copte et Monde Moderne, Thesis in pastoral theology, presented at the Faculté des Sciences Religieuses de l'Université Saint Joseph, Beirut, 1978. For a resume see *Proche-Orient Chrétien*, XXX, 1980, 211-265;

Les nouveaux courants dans la communauté copte orthodoxe, in collaboration with P. M. Martin and C. Van Nispen, *Proche-Orient Chrétien*, XL, 1990, 245-257;

L'Égypte Chrétienne: Traditions, Défis et Espérances, in *Eglises au Moyen-Orient : défis et espérances* (in collaboration), Cahiers de l'Orient chrétien no. 3, CEDRAC (Beyrouth, 2005), 15-31;

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, April 2005, Textes et Etudes sur l'Orient Chrétien no. 6, CEDRAC (Université Saint Joseph, Beirut, 2008), 215-237.

¹ Towards the middle of the nineteenth century, the Coptic Orthodox Church experienced a movement of 'reform' (*Islâh*) initiated by Patriarch Kyrillos IV, and of 'renewal' (*Nahda*) inaugurated by Patriarch Kyrillos VI in the 1960s, taken up in the seventies by his successor, the current Shenouda III.

god) Ptah'.¹ The passage from Christianity to Islam and the Arabic language occurred progressively through the centuries.

Today, Egyptian Christianity consists of a Coptic Orthodox majority, the largest Christian community in the Middle and Near East. After them come the Coptic Catholics, with some 200-250,000 believers, and close to 50,000 other Catholic denominations (including 35,000 Sudanese of the Latin rite, together with Syro-Lebanese of various Eastern rites). Finally, there are Protestants of different denominations, most having arrived from the US in the nineteenth century, together with the Anglicans, representing some 150,000 believers.²

Article 18 of the United Nations Charter, regarding liberty of worship and of conscience, has been signed in principle by Egypt, but is not in fact respected. If Christian worship is tolerated, Muslim conversion to Christianity by contrast is not; marriage between Muslims and Christians is forbidden; the building of churches is authorised only by decree of the President of the Republic, in accordance with an Ottoman law of the nineteenth century—the *Hattî Hamayûn*—dating from the time of Ottoman rule and regulating relations between the State and the different Egyptian Churches.

2. A diagnosis of the situation of the Coptic Catholic Church and its challenges

It appears to me that three traits characterise the diagnosis of the present situation of the CCC and represent, in fact, three major challenges: the identity and alterity which for me lie at the heart of the problem, and which govern two other aspects, one concerning its ecclesial mission, the other its minority relationship to Islam.

¹ According to official figures Copts make up some 4 million people (5-6 per cent of the population), a probably accurate figure, since as long as there have been statistics in Egypt, from the time of the French and the English, the proportion of Christians has scarcely varied. According to the Copts themselves, they number 8-10 million, a less likely figure.

² All these figures are subject to caution, as no credible official statistics are available. The number of Jews is currently less than one hundred, following massive emigration after the Suez War against Israel, England and France, although their community, of ancient origin, was particularly active in the commercial life of modern Egypt.

1. *The Interaction of Identity and Alterity*

This governs the entire issue of the diagnosis and consequent challenges with respect to a renewal of the CCC.

Must the current international phenomenon of a return to specific identities be understood, in general terms, as a normal and natural reaction to the phenomenon of globalisation (economic, political, cultural, mass media, internet, fashion...), in order to safeguard the inviolable uniqueness of every society, religion, community or person? Or may the insistence on identity be due to a phenomenon other than globalisation, such as the invasive ideological fanaticism of a religion or community which imposes itself on an 'other', seen as different, menacing its existence or identity? Probably both at the same time. A too literal insistence on identity is always a dangerous phenomenon, since it cultivates, wittingly or unwittingly, dangerous social reactions: a withdrawal and closing in on oneself, a weakening of relationship to the other, to what is different, even suspicion or rejection of them; violence against others considered to be a threat... It is at this point, according to the suggestive title of the Lebanese writer Amin Maalouf, that 'murderous identities' arise.

The CCC does not escape this diagnosis: confronted by foreign globalisation (modernity) on the one hand, and by two majority national identities on the other, it is in fact tempted, just like all the other religious communities in the country, to take refuge in its own identity in order to preserve it from what is outside, different and menacing. It is fully Coptic, which is the aspect of its identity; it is also fully Catholic, which is the aspect of its alterity, becoming an inseparable constitutive element of its identity. We are confronted here with the well known phenomenon of plural identities, thanks precisely to openness to the other, openness to the universal, in the final analysis. The Catholicity of the CCC is a powerful agent of openness, constituting an opportunity for the CCC, if indeed it knows how to make good use of it and to work with it. By contrast, a unilateral insistence on its Coptic identity runs a strong risk of imprisoning it an identity closed in on itself, even 'murderous', clearly not in actually killing the other—that is not the evangelical spirit—but in seriously compromising its own existence through a relational

rupture, which would provoke, in the long term, its disappearance.¹ A unilateral insistence on its Catholic identity, on the other hand, would cause it to lose contact with the context of Egyptian reality, national and ecclesial. Today, it is particularly the insistence on its Coptic identity which represents a real danger. A balanced view, the only true one, consists in living out the particular (Coptic) and the universal (Catholic).

This double identity of the CCC is today severely threatened by feelings of doubt regarding its own identity due, on the one hand, to its non-recognition by the Coptic Orthodox Church, which considers it dissident;² and on the other hand to the bringing into question of its vocation as a 'bridge' between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, insofar as the Roman Church initiates direct contact with the Coptic Orthodox Church and dialogues with it, without crossing over the bridge represented by the CCC. Faced with the threat of these doubts, it is necessary to carefully redefine its double identity.

The Coptic part which constitutes the identity of the CCC signifies that it adopts the Coptic tradition and integrates it into its basic personality in order to exist: history, tradition, patrimony, liturgy, and rites. It also signifies that the CCC is an entirely 'national' Church, wholly integrated into Egypt and profoundly linked to its destiny.

As a result, it is called to enter into a dialogue of life with the local Coptic Orthodox Church, in a community of feeling and projects, both desiring its renewal and accepting it as it is, even if this is not fully reciprocated.

In effect, the Second Vatican Council encouraged 'ecumenical relations' and prohibited what appeared to the Orthodox Churches as 'proselytism' (*indimâm*, a term signifying adhesion, integration; *khatf*,

¹ Hastened by the double phenomenon of emigration and conversion to Islam and to Orthodoxy.

² It is difficult to trace the precise origin of the CCC: the continuation of an Egyptian Christianity faithful to Chalcedon in 451, not having shared in the separation of the Church of Alexandria after that council (and described as anti-Chalcedonian), but following the other (Chalcedonian) Churches, resulting in the creation of a Coptic Catholic patriarchate in 1899, according to the understanding of the CCC itself? a creation of Catholic missionaries in the nineteenth century, as maintained by the Coptic Orthodox? or both?

a pejorative term signifying theft, abduction).¹ This approach, excellent in itself, was not without problems as regards the identity of the CCC, particularly its vocation as 'bridge' between Orthodoxy and Catholicism, which the Catholic Church had always sought for it: how to conceive of its presence in the midst of a Christian Coptic Orthodox majority, which did not recognise it, or even its right to exist, and considered members of the CCC (and also Protestants) to be all of Orthodox origin, and therefore obliged to return to their mother-Church? How then can it live out the ecumenical dimension, confronted by a Coptic Orthodox Church which rejects it? The situation is delicate and serious. It is a source of real suffering for the CCC, of grave doubt regarding its identity, of rancour and resentment both towards the Orthodox Church which rejects it, and the Catholic Church which sought its creation but does not sufficiently support it.

It is easy to understand to what extent 'ecumenical dialogue' remains a pious dream, an aspiration, if indeed it still exists, since it does not correspond to reality, with inter-community tensions having been strong for more than thirty years. At present, the 'ecumenical winter' experienced by the West in its relations with the various Orthodox Churches is experienced here as a breakdown of dialogue.² In effect, Coptic Orthodox culture is at present, just like Arab Muslim culture, gravely threatened by being closed to the other in order to preserve the purity of its own identity.³ However, it is precisely this situation which represents an opportunity for the CCC to bring a breath of change, inspired by its Catholic connection to Egyptian

¹ See the conciliar decrees: *Unitatis Redintegratio* and *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*.

² Without doubt, the forceful personality of Pope Shenouda III has much to do with this, without forgetting the context of the entire country, characterised by mutual defiance, not solely religious but also political, rather than by openness to the other, tolerance, a sincere desire for dialogue, and collaboration.

³ On the subject of Arab Muslim culture, see section 3, p.58, below. On Coptic Orthodox culture, it is noteworthy that, after Chalcedon, having broken off relations with the other Churches, with the exception of the Syriac and Armenian Churches (all three anti-Chalcedonian), it has merely referred back to its glorious theological past before the fifth century, with no innovation since, and with the Islamic conquest serving only to reinforce its ecclesial isolation and theological conservatism.

Orthodoxy. Is it convinced of this? Perhaps not entirely; there is a need for greater awareness in this area. In any case, it remains a real challenge for the CCC not to lose hope for a happier future.

In effect, the Catholic part of its plural identity serves precisely to indicate its alterity, through its openness to the different other, which expresses its catholicity in a specific way. In principle, it is called to have concern for the other, as Paul bore the concerns of all the Churches of Christ (2 Col. 11:28). However, its attitude to the other is, on the contrary, frequently characterised by fear and a closing in on itself, for instance with respect to foreign religious Orders, which it regards with suspicion; to foreign ecclesial movements, which it strongly distrusts; to modernity, which it instinctively fears; and this not forgetting the two threatening majorities which encircle it, Islam and Orthodoxy.

In this context, it should see alterity as a source of enrichment and renewal of its identity, rather than as a threat. In effect, there is no true human identity without a real and constant contribution from what is different. Did Paul Ricoeur not speak of 'Oneself as Another'? The alternative is to fall back on what is the same, the 'same old', which betokens poverty and anaemia, at the opposite pole to any renewal.

How to live in a Christian way this critical situation of double belonging? As participation in the suffering of Christ, who was always misunderstood and rejected in his concern to open himself and to open others to himself? By asking forgiveness for the errors of the past? As purification of memory in the present? By ecumenical dialogue in the future, when inter-community relations allow it? So many trajectories for reflection, and challenges to face.

In conclusion, the interaction of identity and alterity we have described requires analysis at two levels, one regarding the mission of the CCC at the heart of Egyptian society, the other its relations with Islam, in the majority in Egypt.

2. Sacred and Secular mission

Taken together, the Christian communities of Egypt are characterised by a misguided, otherworldly 'spirituality' which does not sufficiently value human mediation or seriously take into account the secular, the temporal, and the earthly. From this a real danger arises for Christians of a dichotomy between the spiritual and the temporal, the heavenly

and the things of this world, between the sense of ecclesial and civil belonging; in a word, between the sacred and the secular. In fact, a certain kind of enlightened secularisation is required, knowing how to distinguish human realities, recognising the specificity, particularity and autonomy of each of them.

The CCC does not escape this, all the more since its ecclesial mission is, in fact, ordered to the spiritual and the pastoral, through its parishes. Secular activities do not yet impinge on its ecclesial life, since its engagement with the social, educational and medical domains is still in its infancy; since the nineteenth century, when foreign Catholic missionaries predominated, such engagement has reached only timidly into the heart of the CCC.¹

Interest in cultural and intellectual affairs is practically non-existent,² although Syro-Lebanese Christians (*Chawâm*), fleeing Ottoman massacre in the second half of the nineteenth century, settled in Egypt, land of openness and liberty, as well as in America, another land of freedom, and initiated a cultural renaissance for the entire Arab world (*Nahda*).³ Participation of members of the CCC in

¹ The Catholic Church currently has 165 schools, founded and run mostly by members of religious Orders (a few by the dioceses); a number of social, charitable and developmental institutions (such as Caritas, the Upper-Egypt Association, the St Vincent de Paul Conference, Faith and Light, Orphans); and medical institutions (hospitals, particularly dispensaries, and homes for the elderly) run by Religious. Two CCC centres, the initiatives of two priests, have recently seen the light of day: an orphanage, and a residential school for the mentally handicapped. Interest in this area has grown in the dioceses, and prison visiting has begun to spread in a number of dioceses, at the initiative of priests.

² Today, the Catholic Church in Egypt has a Centre for Cinema and a Centre for Eastern Patristics, both supported by the Franciscans, a Centre for Islamic Studies run by the Dominicans, various Cultural Centres run by the Jesuits, a Centre for teaching Arabic to foreigners run by the Combonians, and a Centre for intellectual and socio-political reflection (Justice and Peace). Three great libraries belonging to the Franciscans (Eastern Patristics), Dominicans (Islamic Studies), and the Jesuits (Theology and modern and contemporary Egypt), are intellectually recognised throughout the country. The absence of the CCC in all these fields is evident.

³ Syro-Lebanese Christians also clearly expressed their conviction that it is possible to be entirely Arab, notably Christian Arab, without necessarily being a Muslim.

the political life of the country, and in taking up political positions, are also non-existent, although its sister Orthodox Coptic community experienced a century of decisive political engagement (from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries), and played an effective role in the social life of Egypt and in all the Arab countries. How, under these conditions, is it possible to promote a culture within the CCC open to the entirety of the human?

In further emphasising its ecclesial mission through its parishes, we are led to recognise that the CCC cannot envisage the incorporation of followers who are not Coptic Catholics into its parishes: the reception of Orthodox would be perceived as 'prosyletism' (*khatf*); the reception of Muslims as 'evangelisation' (*tabchîr*). Consequently, for good or ill, it is restricted to concerning itself exclusively with its own followers. This cannot but reduce the evangelical spirit of openness and universality of all Christian mission. How to escape this dilemma?

It is precisely in its secular mission that the CCC will find a motivating *raison d'être* for its evangelical life and its Catholic nature. In fact, various secular activities, not directly religious and spiritual, enable it to serve non-Christians and non-Catholics without attracting the suspicion of those already suspicious and threatening.¹

There is another means to corroborate this secular mission of the CCC, the role within it of lay people. In fact, to the extent to which their role has been clearly defined by the Second Vatican Council and strongly advocated by Pope John Paul II, they are in principle authorised to take up their responsibilities at the centre of their community, in parishes, movements and activities.²

However, the reality in the CCC is very different, since co-operation between clergy and laity is not always easy, and is often governed by conflicting interests. Lay formation is not always much in evidence, even if institutes for catechesis and theology are being established in

¹ By way of example, the Catholic schools have 50-55 per cent Muslim students, the majority of the Christian students being Coptic Orthodox. Such is the case in all the Catholic 'secular' institutions and projects, without any religious or confessional discrimination, something which is universally recognised and appreciated.

² Cf. Vatican II: *Apostolatium Actuositatem, Gaudium et Spes, Inter Mirifica*; also the Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II *Christifideles Laici* (1988) and his numerous interventions and initiatives on their behalf at the time of the third millennium.

various dioceses. Central responsibility for the parish rests entirely with the parish priest, without always leaving a place of trust for lay people. International lay movements¹ struggle for a presence in Upper Egypt where the predominance of the clergy is almost total, and they exist only in large cities such as Cairo and Alexandria, still not without difficulty in terms of recognition.²

3. *Relations between a Christian minority and a Muslim majority*

To the difficulties above is added another, no less real and trying for the CCC: the minority status (*dhimmis*) of Egyptian Churches in an Islamic country, where they do not enjoy their full civil rights: in such matters as employment, in senior positions, building churches, marriage, and conversions.

Furthermore, the Egyptian Churches are influenced by the ambient Arab-Muslim culture, with its strong or even exclusive sense of identity, allowing no space for alterity. While the Golden Age of the Abbasids (750-1258) was enriched both intellectually and practically by encounter with the different other—the philosophy and science of the ancient Greeks, thanks notably to those Christians who translated them into Arabic—a reaction closing in exclusively on Arab culture was not long in coming. Thus, in philosophy, *Mutazilism* (recognising the place of reason) was finally vanquished by *Asharism* (belief based essentially in religion). Similarly, the bold intellectual advances with regards to rationality of Averroes (1126-1198) and Ibn Khaldoun (1332-1406) were carefully avoided; the openness of the Arab renaissance (*Nahda*) of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been usurped by the Salafi-Wahabi movement (from Saudi Arabia in 1902 by the Ibn Saûd family) and the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood (from Egypt, by Hassan el Banna, 1906-1949), promoting a return to the

¹ Focolare, Neo-Catechumenate, Charismatics, Community of Christian Life, Eucharistic Youth Movement, etc., with the exception of the Legion of Mary, which is fully accepted and well represented in every parish.

² It is significant that the renewal advocated by the Coptic Catholic hierarchy has been inaugurated by them and members of the diocesan clergy, and that the Commission selected to initiate reflection is composed of them exclusively. An alternative way of envisaging reflection on renewal would have been to include, from the beginning, lay people, a lively force within the CCC; of men and women religious active within the CCC; of representatives of other Catholic communities; and of experts.

Ancients in reaction to modernity, and the islamisation of society in response to its liberalisation. From a political perspective, all the regimes of the region are totalitarian and hereditary, allowing no opposition whatsoever, or a different ideology. The evident consequence of these disputes is that Arab-Muslim culture is not currently disposed towards a true meeting with the other, nor to an integration of alterity as part of its own identity. It is precisely in this closed context that the CCC, having begun to open its own identity to alterity, may have a beneficial effect on the ambient culture of the country, and this through its secular activity, as indicated above.

Moreover, the minority situation of the Christian Churches permits their official recognition only through their religious leaders. In other words, clericalisation of the Christian communities is imposed, to the detriment of the role of the laity in civil society. Although at the end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth the laity of the Coptic Orthodox Church had an effective role and dominant activity in the cultural, civil and political life of the country, there occurred, with the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, a very pronounced clericalisation of the various religious communities of the country, including the Muslim community, since under the dictatorship of Gamal Abdel-Nasser (1954-1970) political life was no longer a rallying-point, its role replaced by religious affiliation, Muslim or Christian. Previously, political life had been a factor of national and civil integration for all the religious communities; but with the dictatorship, only the mosques and churches, not the unions or a coming together for the *res publica*, enjoyed the freedom to assemble citizens together. In the long term, this became a source of division between the two sections of the populace. Furthermore, the rise of religious fanaticism, fuelled and exacerbated by Saudi Arabia and Libya, could only serve to deepen their division. From that time began, for the Egyptian Churches, firstly the Syro-Lebanese and then the local Coptic Churches, the phenomenon of mass migration of their lay people, representing the intelligentsia of the country. The precarious economic situation, caused by a poorly integrated Soviet socialism, could only further encourage this emigration.¹ Clergy, more educated than previously, now replaced the lay emigrants, and it was

¹ Some 20,000 members of the CCC emigrated, and several hundred thousand belonging to the Coptic Orthodox Church.

clergy who now officially represented the Church, with charismatic personalities such as the Coptic Orthodox Pope Kyrillos VI (1959-1972) gathering his entire community around him in the face of threatening political and religious power, as well as the personality, at once both political and charismatic, of the present Pope, Shenouda III (1972-). This has favoured, ecclesially and not just politically, the emergence of a clerical class at the expense of the laity. Things are no different in the CCC, which is officially represented by its religious leaders and not lay people.

However, the double 'belonging' of the CCC, Coptic and Catholic, expresses its vocation to be faithful to the national and ecclesial context in which it is called to live and to witness. It must witness, above all, to the values of the Gospel, distancing itself from surrounding values. It is 'salt for the earth' and 'leaven in the dough', often having to disappear, as well as 'light for the world', having sometimes to shine out. In the hostile context surrounding it, welcome, gift, forgiveness, love for enemies, grace, and hope remain as much challenges to be accepted as an opportunity to take on and transcend its difficulties, both internal and external. Its witness is also expressed through all the secular domains in which it finds itself, as we have previously noted. At the heart of its secular engagement, it is called to witness to its hope to all who ask it (1 Pet. 3: 15).

3. Constitutive Elements of Renewal

In considering the different elements of the analysis and challenges given above, two fundamental anthropological elements constitute, in my opinion, the content of the renewal of the CCC, one concerning its connection with human time, the other its connection with human space.

1. Connection to human time

This connection concerns the three moments of human time: past, present, and future. I wish to indicate, from the outset, that authentic identity is not located solely in the past, but also includes insertion into the present and openness to the future.

As regards the past, renewal requires a renewed vision: not simply a fixation on the past—the myth of a 'golden age' relegated to the past, but a clear distinction between 'Tradition', which is essential to Christianity, and 'traditions', which are purely accidental. If the CCC,

like the Coptic Orthodox Church, is essentially a 'traditional' Church, in the positive sense of the word, the weight of tradition can nevertheless be hard to bear, especially for the increasing number of young people, who are a sign and agent of 'modernity'. In comparing the CCC to its neighbours, the young African Churches, one cannot but notice the latter's rapid development, free of a past of circumstances, vicissitudes and bondage not essential for Christian life. A mature discernment between the essential and the accidental is required, undertaken in a spirit both wise and critical, courageous and respectful, creative and faithful, prophetic and wise.

In the present, realism remains the normative virtue for discerning the divine will; for the present is the place par excellence where God reveals his plan of salvation through human mediation, representing the events and circumstances of the present time. Nothing is fortuitous, the fruit of chance or of mere luck, as the surrounding culture would have it, rather, everything signifies God's constant salvific action, which works for the good of all who love him. (Rom. 8:28).

As to the future, the CCC is called to true development, forgetting like the Apostle Paul what is behind in order to pursue the future, the glorious Second Coming, and the transfiguration and freedom of the children of God (Rom. 8:19-21). Gregory of Nyssa called this disposition of mankind towards God *epectasis* (Ph. 3, 13), constituting an essential element of Christian anthropology, beyond our earthly life, the promise of future happiness.

2. *Connection to human space*

The renewal of the CCC will operate through people, and at different levels. It is, in the first place, the whole of the human person which is affected by the renewal of the CCC: their spiritual life, clearly the basis of any renewal, but also the three faculties of their souls (affectivity, will, and especially rationality which is not given the place it deserves in the surrounding cultural climate); their secular life (family and professional, social and civil, the stuff of their existence); and their sense of service, as the total gift of themselves (John 13), in the image of Christ who came to serve and not to be served (Mk. 10:45). Finally, what is fundamentally at stake in the renewal of the CCC is, according to the fine expression of Jacques Maritain, *l'homme intégral*, 'the whole man'.

It is also all of humanity which is called, since Isaiah invited his people crying 'Widen the space of your tent' (Is. 54:2; cf. Is. 60), to welcome all who come. And Jesus universalised and radicalised this call: not simply to welcome those who come, but to go out to others: 'Go out into the whole world' (Mk. 16:15); 'teach all nations' (Matt. 28:19-20), particularly *ad intra* to non-Christians and non-Catholics, but also *ad extra* towards Africa, as did the early Egyptian Church.

Within the space of the CCC, renewal is an opening to all without distinction, in a *koinonia* powerfully lived out in the early Church, with one spirit, one heart, one body, one prayer (Acts 4, 5): clergy, religious, lay people, the young: adherents and others. In order not to remain simply an unreal, idealised life, the points of tension in these different relationships must be expressed in a frank and open dialogue, in order to integrate and overcome them: relations between regular and secular clergy, between priests and the laity, between the young and their elders, between spirituals, charismatics, prophets, leaders; all within the unity of the Body of Christ which is brought about by the one Spirit (1 Cor. 12: 14).

I would like to make particular mention of the importance of theological renewal, as there can be no renewal without a serious theological basis. The Egyptian Church of Clement and Origen, of Athanasius and Cyril, of the Councils inspired by the extraordinary personalities of the Alexandrian School of theology, no longer has the universal impact of old. The CCC of today could offer, at least, a locus of sound theology, open to East and West, united, incontestably, with that of Lebanon. This hoped for theology would not be limited solely to the religious and spiritual, dogmatic and liturgical, historical and traditional sectors, but would also be open to a theology of the 'secular', such as that mentioned throughout this presentation, including the questionings of modernity and post-modernity by which the CCC is constantly confronted.

Conclusion

It would appear that the renewal of the CCC is fundamentally grappling with its identity and alterity, whose union gives birth to a multi-faceted plural identity which constantly integrates alterity—something which cannot but enrich it through contextual insertion on the one hand (its Coptic aspect)—and universality (its Catholic aspect): the double condition for a true renewal.

If I have included the expression 'grappling with' in my title, it is because the interaction of identity and alterity is emblematic of the CCC, and for its renewal it can represent a problem, a challenge, or an opportunity.

I would like to end with two signs of hope. The CCC, like all Egyptian Christianity, is two thousand years old, bearing within it the charism of fidelity to its Christian faith throughout its long history, having survived Roman and Islamic persecution, in a way that for example the Church in North Africa has not. Furthermore, it coexists alongside Orthodox and Protestant Churches, which is not the case for the Churches of Ethiopia, Greece or Russia, for example. On these two signs of hope, the CCC can found its renewal.

'COMMUNION AND WITNESS'. RENEWED LITURGY AND THE EASTERN CHURCHES: A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Robin Gibbons*

This article examines the place and role of liturgy in the life of the Eastern Catholic Churches, not only as a source of spirituality and life, but also as a tool of evangelisation and witness. The recent Synod of the Catholic Churches in the Middle East called for a renewal and adaptation of liturgical life, this being a pastoral response to the needs of the various Christian communities there and in diaspora countries. Some recent liturgical shifts in the Roman rite have tended to focus on a number of external elements and fidelity to the Latin tradition and translation; however, the call to renewal by the Eastern Catholic Churches is in essence a return to the pastoral vision of the Second Vatican Council and a recovery of authentic 'Tradition' amongst diverse 'traditions'—a healthy sign!

1. Setting the scene

There is a problem that we need to acknowledge before we can get down to examining the possibilities and hopes for the liturgical life of the Catholic Churches in the Middle East as a means of confirming and strengthening their identity and communion.¹ It is quite simply

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¹ Cf. *Instrumentum laboris*, 3. The *Instrumentum* can be found at: <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20100606_instrumentum-mo_en.pdf>. Henceforward referred to as *IL*. The *Lineamenta* can be found at <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20091208_lineamenta-mo_en.html>.

that the narrower concerns of 'Roman Catholic' liturgical directions and debate, especially during the present pontificate of Benedict XVI, in particular a polarisation of groups, cannot and should not impinge on what this Synod is about. For a start the word one immediately looks for is 'Catholic', not 'Roman' (Latin) or 'Greek' but the wider communion of those Churches *sui iuris* with the Latin Church which are quite definitively Eastern. As with the Roman Church, these Churches look to the Second Vatican Council as a source of hope and continual renewal, for we must remember that several of the Eastern Catholic Bishops, such as the Melkite Patriarch Maximos IV, played an important part in the work of the Council. The context of Vatican II as a source is noted in the documentation of the *Lineamenta* and *Instrumentum laboris* particularly through the conciliar documents that directly affect the Eastern Churches, both Catholic and Orthodox, such as *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* (OE), *Unitatis redintegratio* (UR) and others that have an important bearing on the life and work of these Churches such as *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC), *Lumen Gentium* (LG), *Dei Verbum* (DV) and *Nostra Aetate* (NA).¹ This is a valuable pointer to a wider approach for the ongoing reception of the Council in the future life of these ecclesial communities, and it is also to be hoped that where these Churches exist outside of the Middle East, the Synod and the call for renewal and mission may also help and inform the work of renewal in the 'Great Church of the West' that is the Roman or Latin Church.

This is timely because in countries of immigration these Middle Eastern Catholic and Orthodox churches are beginning to have a small but nevertheless important presence. What happens to them outside their original homelands matters to Christianity as a whole; their survival and life outside these countries will also be crucial for the survival and witness of them in the Middle East. These 'living stones' need the support of the Universal Church to show them that they do not walk alone, and when it concerns the Catholic Churches, it particularly matters how they are treated in countries of emigration

¹ These are variously: Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches (OE); Decree on Ecumenism (UR); Constitution on the Divine Liturgy (SC); Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (LG); Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (DV); Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions (NA).

by the largest group, the Roman Catholic Church. History has not always shown a clearly identifiable rapprochement between them, particularly their past treatment as 'uniates'. Proper ecclesial provision has not always been adequate for their existence alongside their 'sister Church' especially in a correct historical understanding of authenticity and origin as Churches *sui iuris*. The sheer practicalities of struggle in new lands, the simple realities of church organisation and distance from their homeland meant that it was easier to link with the well established Latin Church. Whilst this may have had many advantages, such as access to education in Catholic schools, to sacraments and worship in a Catholic setting, the downside was (and is) the neglect of their authentic and eastern patrimony, both spiritual and material. Particularly problematical was the assimilation of liturgical and devotional customs, not to mention the enforced celibacy requirement for prospective priests in territories outside the patriarchal remit. All this has been the subject of renewed focus since the Council and is again one of the items that the synod has recognised as important.

When examining the situation of the Catholic Churches in the Middle East there is an Eastern one, the Greek-Catholic Melkite, followed by the Latins. This shapes our perception of just what it means to be 'Catholic', namely recognising the variety of communities that owe their origin not to Rome but to Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria, sister churches, *sui iuris* and nearly all with their Oriental and Orthodox counterpart! One must also acknowledge that the Orthodox look carefully at what is happening to and with the Eastern Catholic Churches; how Rome deals with them sends signals to other Eastern Churches, so in a very real and pragmatic sense ecumenism must be seen to be 'done' at home!

The *Instrumentum laboris* for the 'Synod of Bishops: Special Assembly for the Middle East' has as its theme, 'The Catholic Church in the Middle East: Communion and Witness. Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul (Acts 4: 32)'. This takes us to the heart of the mission of the apostolic community and to a firm understanding that in proclaiming the Gospel of the Risen Lord, the Christian *kerygma* centres on this presence of the 'Risen and Living Lord in the midst of the community of believers' but also on

the transforming power and gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).¹ A primary context for the presence and gift of the Lord and the Holy Spirit is that of worship, the sacramental and liturgical life of the community. It is therefore unsurprising that in dealing with particular issues of importance and necessity, the *Instrumentum* makes continual reference to the place and role of the liturgy in its documentation. This of course is a theological, ecclesial, pastoral and spiritual necessity, for the liturgical life of any Catholic Church is integral to its mission, presence and witness, as well as a means of creating, sustaining, holding and forming the faith and relationships of particular ecclesial communities together in often rather difficult circumstances. It is also the main catechetical and theological reference point for many of the faithful who may not have easy access to Church programmes of pastoral and catechetical formation. In juridical terms their liturgical rite also identifies them as members of a distinctive church family.²

In a deeper sense it is a reminder that the worship of a community is also part of primary theology, the *lex orandi* which is also the *lex credendi*.³ A renewal of emphasis on liturgy as primary theology underpins the real importance of the celebration as the expression, interpretation and explanation of faith, which points to a living engagement in which the liturgy is the immediate locus of the divine encounter of God amongst us as a community of witnesses. The interplay between liturgy and theology has gone through growth and change, not always healthily so, but it is crucial for the life of the Church. The eastern liturgist, Archimandrite Robert Taft SJ, explains this evolution in terms of tradition, which I am particularly linking to the 'living' expression of tradition as foundationally the articulation of faith celebrated and expressed in worship:

The Past is always instructive but never normative. What its study, like all study, should provide is an understanding of Tradition, that essential continuity that can legitimately be called 'Tradition' with a

¹ *IL*, preface, p. iii.

² See *Instruction for applying the Liturgical prescriptions of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* (Congregation for the Eastern Churches, Vatican City, 6 January 1996), para. 8: 'Articulations of the Eastern Churches' and para. 16: 'The liturgical heritage in the Eastern Catholic Churches as a source of identity'.

³ *Instruction for applying...* para. 33.

capital 'T', riding above the ebb and flow of the shifting tides of 'traditions' with a small 't' ... the church's self-consciousness now of that which has been handed on to it not as an inert treasure, but as a dynamic principle of life.¹

We can understand just how this can be, when we look at the importance the liturgy can have for a fragile community and see it at work in some of the Eastern Churches particularly in periods when they had little physical or intellectual support.

2. Renewed and faithful to 'Tradition'

The historical situation of some of the Eastern Churches has meant that the survival of their community and its faith has been articulated through their worship, often the only point of contact. This survival in the face of loss and often persecution highlights its primary role even in the direst and most destructive moments of a community's life. But more importantly for our reflection on the Synod's call for 'a Renewed Liturgy Faithful to Tradition',² the Eastern Catholic Churches have to build on those elements of conciliar teaching that are appropriate for them as Churches 'whose roots are as equally apostolic and autonomous'³ and that includes significant parts of the Liturgy Constitution, and for the Latin Church in the Middle East, its entirety. This of course does not vitiate against the Codes of Canons nor the Liturgical prescriptions, but it gives an overwhelming impetus to a truly pastoral renewal. In this it has the potential for new horizons in a less insular and 'European' exploration of liturgical experience and hopefully for a refreshing change from the calls for hermeneutic of continuity or not (whatever that may truly mean) found in some sections of European and American liturgical discourse! As Rita Ferrone points out in her work on *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 'It is clear that the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy has had a profound and lasting effect on the church in our time. It continues to give shape to Catholic understanding and practice, and to inspire as well as direct

¹ Robert Taft SJ, *'Eastern Presuppositions' and Western Liturgical Renewal*. <<http://www.archeparchy.ca/documents/Taft%20Eastern%20Presuppositions.pdf>>. Paginated text.

² *IL*, 70-75.

³ Taft, *'Eastern Presuppositions'*, 14.

the actions of the faithful with respect to the liturgy'.¹ She acknowledges the ups and downs of change and reform in certain areas, and of course the present state of play in the Roman Catholic Church, but essentially is optimistic about what this Constitution represents and its impact on the future. Whilst all its prescriptions deal with the Latin Rite, key sections reach out to liturgical renewal in the Eastern Catholic Churches and it is perhaps here that the gentle wind of the Holy Spirit may be felt in the words of the *Instrumentum*, calling for renewal:

the Divine Liturgy today is capable of not only keeping alive the faith of believers but also of attracting the interest of those who have drifted from the faith or who do not believe. In this regard, many responses express a desire for liturgical renewal, which, while remaining firmly grounded in tradition, takes into account modern sensibilities as well as present day spiritual and pastoral needs.²

This is not only a call to serious liturgical research, from what the document calls the 'commission of specialists for the reform of the liturgy' but it is call to everyone to deepen their awareness and reflection on the pastoral realities and needs of a worshipping people. This is also an awareness of real ecclesial plurality and distinctiveness, to be grasped and seen as positive enrichment within the one Catholic Church. The sense that the liturgy is the 'summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed' and the 'font from which all her power flows'³ is at the heart of the vision of the council. Nevertheless the Liturgy cannot be expected to bear the weight of such a high theological and spiritual demand without serious support from those involved, that is, all the assembly gathered for worship. Liturgy does not stand alone; it is a work, an activity demanding care and concern from us all in so many different areas. Care in the sense that good theology, practice, proper concern for the needs of the people, the tradition of the liturgy and the formative underpinning through education is understood as only part of the process. My hope and concern is for a uniting 'vision' through the work of scholars, experts and commissions, that will open the hearts, minds and spirits of

¹ Rita Ferrone, *Liturgy: Sacrosanctum Concilium (Rediscovering Vatican II)* (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), 91.

² *IL*, 70, 71.

³ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10.

people to the mystery of the Triune God at work in worship and in the power of the Holy Spirit leading us to find the different presences of the Living Lord Jesus Christ, which is so forcefully seen in the liturgies of the East.

3. Preliminary conversion

There is however an initial problem of perception mainly in the West, which the Middle East might help dispel, that is an almost 'romantic' view of the eastern Liturgical tradition. Taft makes some very trenchant remarks about this, pointing out for instance an historically obvious but selectively overlooked fact:

... there was no 'Golden Age of patristic liturgy' except in our daydreams. Even if there had been, present day eastern usage certainly has not preserved it—indeed, it has preserved some of the very abuses the fathers of that supposed 'Golden Age' railed against with force, such as the decline in frequent communion. Far from being a bastion of immovable tradition, preserving intact the liturgy of apostolic times, the east was the main source of change, responsible for every single liturgical innovation from Jesus until the Islamic conquests, which stifled this remarkable creativity.¹

This, I believe, is a forceful call to re-establish a proper study and investigation of liturgical theology and the pastoral practice of liturgy in a much wider context. It would also help us appreciate the Latin rite(s) as bearers of 'tradition' but not necessarily exemplars of Taft's total 'Tradition'. Perhaps one of the long term aims of renewal in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church in the Middle East might be to re-establish a true perception that the Latin rite is one amongst many in a very real way; after all the Catholic Church in that part of the world is pre-eminently eastern, or as in the case of the Latin rite partially Arab. This is important for it gives a whole different flavour to translation of liturgical and scriptural texts with the potential for co-operation with the eastern churches (Catholic and Orthodox) who use that language as the vernacular language for worship (pace the Hebrew-speaking and immigrant groups).²

For the wider Church it may help the Latin rite face different situations and solutions to translation and adaptation of the liturgy

¹ Taft, *'Eastern Presuppositions,'* 7.

² This is a point brought out clearly in the responses to the *Lineamenta*. See *IL*, 72,73,74,75,83

and helpfully remove any trace of liturgical colonialism which once so erroneously taught that the Roman rite was *ritus praestantior*, whilst reminding us all that liturgy never has been static, nor in fact a substitute for the life of the world. The Orthodox liturgist, Fr Alexander Schmemmann pointed this out in his writings about the Byzantine tradition and prophetically called for a 'Eucharistic conversion', in the sense of reconnecting two elements which he saw were in danger of separation: the eschatological, what one can discern in the constant reference to the loss of 'mystery' which is usually couched in negative terms of absence or loss within the Latin rite—and correspondingly the fascination with the liturgies of the East and the need for 'restoration' encapsulated in the misused phrase, hermeneutic of continuity; and the ecclesial dimension of the Divine Liturgy as the work of the people of God in the world. Schmemmann sees this reintegration as the refusal to abstract the various components of Liturgy (in this case the Eucharist) into various parts, sacrifice, memorial, meal, from the vision and experience of worship in its primary role as action, true *leitourgia*. This he terms as the rediscovery of the Eucharist as Sacrament of Church and of Christ, organically connected: 'The true meaning of the *leitourgia* of the Church has to be found again. The whole development of liturgical piety must be re-evaluated. The formidable inertia and opposition of dead conservatism and pseudo-traditionalism has to be met and overcome'.¹ It is interesting that though this was written in the 1970s, the situation still applies across the Churches.

The goal of the Synod has several aims, and as the *Instrumentum* points out the responses to the *Lineamenta* clearly showed that people had grasped two objectives of the synod, to 'confirm and strengthen the members of the Catholic Church in their Christian identity through the Word of God and the Sacraments; and to foster ecclesial communion among the Churches *sui iuris*'.² Whilst this is essential for the Middle East it has wider ramifications, for in any country where Eastern Catholics have settled and have a recognised ecclesial structure, this twofold aim needs to be integrated into the life of the Catholic Church in that country. Not to put too fine a point on it, in

¹ Thomas Fisch, ed. *Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemmann* (New York: SVS Press, 1990), 87.

² *IL*, 3.

this present century with frequent travel and media communication that is instantaneous, the Synod's deliberations affect the Church throughout the world.

In liturgical terms the call to renewal based on the strong foundation of the Second Vatican Council is a wakeup call to those in the West who feel that the impetus and reception of that Council have been diminished. Clearly the pastoral desire from those Churches is not a return to a past 'golden age':

In this regard many responses express a desire for liturgical renewal, which, while remaining firmly grounded in tradition, takes into account modern sensibilities as well as present-day spiritual and pastoral needs. Other responses mention specific cases where renewal is being attempted through the establishment of a commission of specialists for the reform of the liturgy.¹

This largely refers to the Eastern Rites, but it also gives a welcome stimulus to the Latin tradition and perhaps allows that tradition to help its sister communities, for many of the reforms of Vatican II have been well received, in particular the pastoral rites. It also recovers the true nature of those reforms, as Taft points this out:

In addition to some failures, important lessons have been learned, important values acquired, hopefully with some permanence. Despite fearful reactions and attempts to turn back the clock, such efforts surely will not succeed, since Vatican II Catholics have succeeded in facing the modern world. For the most part they have done so, I believe with courage, honesty, integrity and imagination. It is impossible to overemphasize how important it was to do that, if Christianity is to have a future in the modern secularised world. For Christians the only 'ideal period of liturgy' is the one they are living in.²

The late Metropolitan Anthony Bloom often used to point out how important it is for Christians to know their own tradition, to love the 'place we are at,' that is the situation of the Church one belongs to, its traditions and history, so that one can then dialogue and learn to understand the riches contained in and with others.

The fact that we have such a plurality of rites and Churches in the Catholic tradition deserves to be more widely known and understood, but it cannot be from a position of antiquarianism or as a kind of nostalgia for something that never really was, be it the eastern

¹ *IL*, 71.

² Taft, *'Eastern Presuppositions'*, 12.

liturgical tradition or the Council of Trent. Collaboration and appreciation of the vast richness of these Churches and their liturgical heritage means we can move away from all this. For their part, the Catholic Eastern Churches can act as precursors of adaptation and of a recovery of the 'deep tradition'. Here is Kevin Seasoltz describing church art and architecture as a paradigm for the whole liturgical experience:

the Church has admitted styles from every period in keeping with the cultures and conditions of various peoples and the requirements of liturgical rites as understood and practised at a particular time. History in this regard can be instructive, since each generation of Christians has manifested its own shifts in ecclesial and liturgical consciousness, with corresponding shifts in the architectural and artistic forms by which that consciousness has been expressed.¹

Does this mean anything for the realpolitik of the Middle East and the diaspora? I hope that the answer is a resounding yes, for it moves the Church out of its euro-centric (this in the widest sense) comfort zone into a position of listening, learning and of course mutual sharing. In the concern over liturgical reform the problems of certain sections of the Latin rite have dominated agendas and the problems of liturgical translation; this and the whole issue of a sacred form of language has not been helped by a rigid application of *Liturgicam Authenticam*,² that of literal fidelity to the Latin text, which has not always been in consistent harmony with the pastoral and ecumenical vision of the Council, in particular with regard to the English translations. Curiously in respect to the Eastern Churches an almost opposite point of view has prevailed:

... one sees a push from Rome toward literalism and away from ecumenical work on texts within the Roman rite, expressed in *Liturgicam Authenticam*. But at the same time one sees that in other official acts of the Catholic Church, in the service to ecumenism some very different ways of approaching liturgical texts are manifest.³

¹ R. Kevin Seasoltz, *A Sense of the Sacred: Theological Foundations of Christian Architecture and Art* (London: Continuum, 2005), 376.

² For a measured debate and insightful historical comment on the issue of translation and the issues surrounding *Liturgicam Authenticam* see Ferrone, *Liturgy...*, 73-77.

³ Ferrone, 75.

This was particularly noticeable when in 2001 the Catholic Church entered into agreement with the Ancient Church of the East and acknowledged the authenticity of their ancient anaphora of Addai and Mari, which has no explicit institution narrative. There is also a similar willingness to encourage the Eastern Catholic Churches to work towards the recovery of their authentic and ancient traditions in co-operation with their Sister Churches.¹ Why a similar attitude cannot be extended across the world of Roman Catholicism in terms of linguistic and cultural adaptation let alone ecumenical initiative, particularly with translations, is a big question still to be answered.

4. Pastoral Renewal

The fact that renewal has been called for is a hopeful sign that in the matter of liturgical and pastoral needs the Catholic Churches of the Middle East might learn to see themselves as Churches of prophetic vision. They are not 'bridge churches' as has so often been thought, a hybrid between Catholicism, perceived as Roman and the Orthodox and Oriental East. They are and remain Churches *sui iuris* with histories of their own, some of them long pre-dating some of the autocephalous Churches of Orthodoxy and many with counterparts. They are in fact a witness to the first millennium of Christianity when much of East and West was in communion, and for this reason they have a vital role to play in the wider ecumenism of the Church of Christ. Liturgical renewal as a part of adaptation in meeting the needs of the modern world need not necessarily be seen as a departure from the traditions of the East (nor of the West in the case of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and other Latin groups such as the Hebrew speaking Vicariate and immigrant communities). In fact having the spirit of the Council behind them may help revitalise aspects of eastern liturgical tradition. Schmemmann and Taft point out that the Byzantine tradition has most often adapted its rites to accommodate different peoples in the past, and this is one of the rites loved by the more conservative factions in the Roman tradition as an exemplar of mystery and transcendence!² But, it has to be pointed out that this

¹ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 50; Code of Canons for the Eastern Churches, 655; *Lineamenta*, 60; *IL*, 72-75.

² A. Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (London: Faith Press, 1966), chapter 4, 'The Byzantine Synthesis'; Taft, 'Eastern Presuppositions', 7.

sense of mystery, reverence and also homeliness comes from a tradition that the West needs to recapture:

Throughout all the vicissitudes of its history, the Christian East has preserved a continuity of faith and worship, rooted in the resurrection and hope of the world to come, that has sustained its faithful during the dark ages of oppression. Political circumstances have often deprived the Eastern Churches of the need or possibility of developing the more active apostolic activities that are so integral to church life and organisation in the West. But as long as the mysteries can be celebrated, the Church lives, held together not by organisation nor authority nor education, but by communion year after year in the regular cycle of the offices of the Church. Isn't that what liturgy is all about?¹

This is true and especially so of those Churches in the Middle East today, but it is not the whole picture. The Eastern Church also needs to come to terms with the pastoral issues facing those of us who live in the West, particularly modernity, secularism and that connected legal referent in governmental and state terms, *laïcité*. That is why the liturgical renewal of the Eastern Church must be built on the insights of Vatican II. This together with an ecumenical endeavour to renew in the spirit of our ancient traditions and to preserve what is fundamental and essential, should be at the heart of any structural adaptation. This must involve the creation of commissions of specialists in liturgy, theology, history, pastoral practice, and the patrimony and arts of the Church. It must also involve catechesis and formation on a structured scale.²

What then of liturgical and pastoral practicalities? Firstly I must confess that my own dealings lie firmly within traditions represented in Europe and Great Britain, nevertheless, what happens in these places should be patterned on what ought to take place in the Middle East, and perhaps by virtue of scholarship in Europe, there can be some connectivity in a very real way. There is a great interest in the Eastern Churches, nevertheless a fascination for eastern liturgical life should not blind us to the realities of situations which the Catholic Churches find themselves facing at this period of time. In Europe, these communities face a significant number of pastoral problems,

¹ R. Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West* (Collegeville MN: The Liturgical Press, 1986), 291.

² See *Instruction for applying...*, para. 20: 'Criteria for Liturgical renewal'.

some in the context of the Latin Church, others to do with education and law both European and National. These I believe are beginning to be noted by the 'Mother' Churches, but once again it will have to be recognised that in countries of immigration one cannot continue forever as a cultural and linguistic, 'ethnic' chaplaincy—that is simply not helpful to either the faithful in the Middle East or their relatives and fellow Catholics abroad. They need to be seen and understood as proper Churches *sui iuris*, and respected as such at all levels, Bishops Conferences, International Commissions and of course in any Catholic-Orthodox Commission.¹ In terms of liturgical renewal this is crucial because of the problems inherent in some perceptions within the Latin rite at present, which is of course the largest Catholic presence in the diaspora and will have an influence on identity and mission. In the past this has resulted in pressure to adopt and Latinise elements of devotional and liturgical life. This of course is fiercely rejected by the Vatican Council and any subsequent documents on Eastern Liturgy in all kinds of areas from sacramental celebration to liturgical symbols, patrimony, titles and vesture.² Pope John Paul II is quoted in the 'Instructions on Liturgical Prescriptions' exhorting for example Coptic Catholics:

Do not adhere with excessive improvisation to the imitation of cultures and traditions which are not your own. This means that every eventual adaptation of your liturgy be founded on an attentive study of the sources, objective knowledge of the specific features of your culture and maintenance of the tradition common to your Coptic Christianity.³

It will also mean the absolute necessity of greater plurality and ecumenism with the Orthodox.⁴

The Melkites have long recognised the necessity of the vernacular language in liturgical use without prejudice to the origins of the rite itself, times change and in this area we should note the pastoral focus given in the *Instrumentum* itself:

¹ I wrote about this in a previous article: R. Gibbons, 'Pride and Prejudice: the Vocation of the Eastern Catholic Churches', *One in Christ*, 43/2 (Winter, 2009): 35-53.

² For example, *Instructions*, 38, 39, 36.

³ *Instructions*, 20.

⁴ *Instructions*, 21.

The most significant aspect of the advances which have taken place in liturgical renewal thus far is the translation of liturgical texts and devotional prayers into the vernacular—principally in Arab—so that the people might better participate in the celebration of the mysteries of the faith. In this regard, while few prefer to maintain the original language, the overwhelming majority voiced the idea of adding the vernacular to the original language.¹

If this says anything to the wider Church it is the fact that God communicates to us through the medium of any language, the pastoral use of the vernacular is essential—but good vernacular. That also means far more collaboration with the Orthodox of the same ritual tradition and linguistic usage, seeking to find common texts for worship and, let it be said, good poetic translations of the Sacred Scriptures themselves. There is a tendency to ‘sacralise’ liturgical language as though that would help us achieve some measure of mystery, but words are the medium not the message and we need to be sensitive to challenges and changes in common use, particularly issues like a language’s particular terminology relating to gender. For instance, in the English-speaking world, society and practice have definitely and rapidly changed word use and added new ones and this must be taken into account, but so also must the cultural distinctions between the different countries! In all of this expert guidance is needed.

Underlying all this is a recognition that for the Catholic Churches of the Middle East (and more particularly the Eastern Catholics), the countries of the Diaspora can be extremely useful and the faithful there seen, not as something that needs to replicate what takes place in the Lebanon or Syria or wherever, nor as an ethnic group of a local Church waiting to return from ‘exile’, but as an opportunity for the recognition of that Church *sui iuris* as important for the whole Christian family. The liturgical renewal amongst the diaspora communities could be of great benefit. It would enrich the wider vision of the Catholic Church, help us move away from what seems to be rather polarised positions about liturgy, in particular issues dealing with any reform of Vatican II and such like. Being made aware of other legitimate rites and their need for pastoral renewal might help give heart to those who want to see the continuation of the vision of the Council remain part of a wider ecumenical enterprise, a

¹ *IL*, 72, also *Instructions*, 25.

hermeneutic of the 'Liturgical Movement' rather than a 'narrow' Latin rite focus. Pope John Paul II wrote about this in *Orientalis Lumen*:

A particular thought goes to the lands of the diaspora where many faithful of the Eastern Churches who have left their countries of origin are living in a mainly Latin Environment. These places, where peaceful contact is easier within a pluralist society, could be an ideal environment for improving and intensifying cooperation between the Churches in training future priests and in pastoral and charitable projects, also for the benefit of the orientals' countries of origin.¹

The emphasis here is on 'pastoral' projects, surely chief of which should be a renewal of liturgy for the good of the people of God.

Where the West can learn from the liturgical East is the emphasis I have pointed out on good tradition, the rootedness in what is best of the past; a true sense of the mystery and transcendence of God, but also of the approachability of God within the liturgy, what one could also call the deep focus on the work and role of the Holy Spirit and of course the ability to regulate and change the liturgy according to a more synodal structure, that is without recourse to a centralised authority in every instance. That surely would be good in stopping the unpleasant practice, usually amongst conservative groups, of writing complaints to the Curia in Rome, bypassing the local Bishop or Episcopal Conference which is contrary to any acceptable understanding of *koinonia*! In turn the East would benefit from Western values such as flexibility, the understanding of change as part of modern culture, a sense of openness and fairness, the ability to self-reflect and critically analyse, freedom of religion and conscience, and most importantly, especially given a particular tendency amongst Middle Eastern communities, to recognise themselves as part of a wider picture of a global community and Church.²

¹ Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Orientalis Lumen*, 2 May 1995, 26.

² I owe part of this insight to Robert Taft's article at the end of which he writes: 'If Christianity is to survive as a viable lifestyle attractive to modern men and women, it will not be as an obscurantist, ant-intellectual culture of folklore and ritualism, sustained by the rejection of modernity and change'. *'Eastern Presuppositions'*, 13. See also *IL*, 36-7 on 'Freedom of Religion and Conscience'.

6. Conclusion

There are many aspects of liturgical renewal that could be elaborated on in particular detail, but that would overload the general thrust of my own thesis that such renewal is not only needed for worship but essential for a wider renewal in ecclesiology and ecumenism. The focus on the Word of God which the *Instrumentum* points out as foundational for guiding our lives and as an assistance 'facing the challenges of today's world', with its challenge to rediscover its immediacy in our lives, means that there must be better use of scripture in the Liturgy, renewed homiletics, the use of *lectio divina*, and especially in the choice of readings for any of our lectionaries. Here the Latin Rite provides a good example of what can be done, restoring elements that had long been attenuated (e.g. the responsorial psalm) and re-introducing OT readings throughout the year. The fidelity of some Eastern Churches to the pastoral celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours may bring about the same renewed practice in the other Catholic Churches.¹ There is also the desperate need to come to an agreement about a shared date for Holy Pascha. Within the pastoral and sacramental rites there is an urgent need to revise elements that are no longer helpful or relevant in particular to the needs of children or young people.² This is especially true in a parish setting where great sensitivity needs to be shown. The practice of concelebration on important occasions or events when the local Catholic Churches come together needs to be regulated and carefully directed. Too often in the West it is the Latin rite which retains constant pre-eminence, though it is good to see other rites presiding with clergy wearing their own liturgical vesture. Then there is the urgent need to remove inappropriate syncretism (what one often calls latinisations in Eastern rites) and to derive from very early and authentic tradition those normative principles that will enable us to cut away the secondary traditions that have become hardened parts of later theology and church structure'.³ This should include a real appreciation of the patrimony of art, architecture and music. In returning to the sources, tradition with a small 't' will help reinvigorate such architectonic forms and foci as the *bema* in Syrian

¹ *IL*, 72-73.

² *IL*, 73.

³ Schulz, Hans Joachim. 1986. *The Byzantine Liturgy*. Pueblo, NY. ix

churches and a renewed tradition of iconography in the byzantine and other Churches.¹ '[B]ecause the Liturgy is so firmly so strongly rooted in Eastern culture, the Divine Liturgy today is capable of not only keeping alive the faith of believers but also attracting the interest of those who have drifted from the faith or those who do not believe.'² In my own pastoral experience that is so often true, but it comes when a community is living, celebrating and praying the Liturgy as they should, true full and active participation.

¹ For an excursus on the origins of liturgical foci including the Syrian *bema* see R. Gibbons, *House of God: House of the People of God* (London: SPCK, 2006), 72-82. There is a renewed interest in iconography and the distinctive features of particular traditions within it. For instance the British Iconographers Association painted the Icons in an Arabic-Melkite style for Archbishop Elias Chacour's chapel at Ibillin and are painting the festal icons for the Melkite Community in Great Britain.

² *IL* 70.

ORIENTALE LUMEN. ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE IN THE TRADITION OF VATICAN II: A MONASTIC PERSPECTIVE

Nikola Proksch OSB^{*}

This paper, first given at the Orientale Lumen conference held at Heythrop College in May 2010, identifies the tradition of monastic life as a vital presence from the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement, through Vatican II, to the present day. As a living expression of the faith shared by East and West, monks and nuns inspired pioneering ecumenical initiatives. By their studies, and the encounters they foster, for example at Minster Abbey, they continue to facilitate a dialogue in truth and love.

Apostolic Letter: *Orientalium Dignitas* (1895)

The Apostolic Letter *Orientalium Lumen* of Pope John Paul II marked the centenary of Pope Leo XIII's Apostolic Letter *Orientalium Dignitas*. In this letter Pope Leo expresses the greatest esteem for the Eastern tradition—especially the 'jewel' of ancient liturgical rites—however, it is clear that he seeks to preserve and safeguard it in the Eastern Catholic Churches.

The Second Vatican Council: *Unitatis Redintegratio*

The Decree on Ecumenism of Vatican II, promulgated on 21 November 1964, shows a striking development in the approach to the Eastern/Orthodox Churches.

A key concept is articulated in *UR* 7 which states categorically: 'No ecumenism is worthy of the name without conversion.' What this entails is clarified through the inclusion of a quotation from Ephesians: 'I, a prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling you have received, with all humility and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace' (4: 1-3). Here, in a single sentence, we are presented with the appropriate attitude for, and the challenge

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and aim of all ecumenical dialogue! *UR 8* elaborates, ‘... this change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement, and merits the name "spiritual ecumenism"’.

The section of the Decree devoted to ‘The special position of the Eastern Churches’ encourages those committed ‘to the work for the restoration of the full communion that is desired between the Eastern Churches and the Catholic Church’ to make themselves thoroughly acquainted with the particular characteristics of these churches which are characterised as ‘a treasury from which the Church of the West has drawn largely for its liturgy, spiritual tradition and jurisprudence’. The decree affirms their apostolicity and highlights the great themes of the Ecumenical Councils held in the East: the Trinity, Christology, Mariology. It acknowledges the suffering the Eastern Churches have undergone to witness to the faith (*UR 14*).

The Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and the Saints and Fathers of the Church are venerated according to ancient tradition; the celebration of the liturgy with great devotion, particularly the Eucharistic celebration is instrumental in building up the Church; the decree acknowledges that the Eastern Churches possess the true sacraments and that some *communicatio in sacris* is ‘not merely possible but encouraged’ (*UR 15*).

This section also includes the two sentences specifically devoted to monasticism in the Decree:

In the East are to be found the riches of those spiritual traditions which are given expression in monastic life especially. From the glorious times of the Holy Fathers, that monastic spirituality flourished in the East which later flowed over into the Western world, and there provided a source from which Latin monastic life took its rise and has often drawn fresh vigour ever since.

In *UR 16* the power of the Eastern Churches to govern themselves according to their own disciplines is solemnly declared; it is to be clearly understood that ‘the perfect observance of this traditional principal is a prerequisite for any restoration of union’. Legitimate differences in theological expressions of doctrine, rooted in Scripture, are to be seen as complementary rather than conflicting. They are authentic, ‘nourished by the living tradition of the apostles ... and directed toward ... a full contemplation of Christian truth’ (*UR 17*).

To sum up, the preservation of the 'rich liturgical and spiritual heritage of the Eastern Church' is vital 'in order faithfully to preserve the fullness of Christian tradition and to bring about the reconciliation between Eastern and Western Christians' (UR 15).

Post-conciliar documents: Renewal and Reconciliation

In the years immediately following the Council no further official mention is made of monasticism in the context of ecumenical dialogue. However, the themes of renewal and reconciliation, and especially of metanoia recur repeatedly.

Thus, for example, in the Common Declaration of Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I of 7 December 1965:

This reciprocal act of justice and forgiveness cannot suffice to put an end to the differences, ancient or more recent, which remain between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church and which, by the action of the Holy Spirit, will be overcome, thanks to the purification of hearts, regret for historical errors, and an effective determination to arrive at a common understanding and expression of the apostolic faith and its demands.

Again, in the Ecumenical Directory I, 14 May 1967, no. 2:

The Ecumenical movement begins with the renewal by which the church expresses more fully and perfectly the truth and holiness which comes from Christ our Lord. Every one of the faithful, as a member of the Church, should share in this renewal in truth and charity so as to grow in faith, hope and love ... and bear witness in the Church to God and our Lord.

The Ecumenical Directory II, 16 April 1970, no. 70, dealing with the necessary spiritual formation for dialogue, states:

Since the Holy Spirit must be regarded as at work in the ecumenical movement, the first thing to be attended to in ecumenical education is conversion of heart—spiritual life and its renewal, for 'from newness of mind, from self-denial and from the outpouring of charity, desires for unity proceed and mature' (UR 7).

Purification and purity of heart, renewal, conversion of heart, these are part of the staple monastic diet!

One may speculate whether—if Blessed Pope John had lived to lead 'his' council—a more profound and extensive appreciation of monasticism in the context of ecumenism would have resulted.

Certainly, he had a great love for the Orthodox Churches and, I believe, for the monks of the East.

Pope John Paul II: Apostolic Letter *Orientalis Lumen*

In Pope John Paul II the Church was given another pastor with 'monastic sensibilities' and one who brings a poet's gift of eloquence and appreciation for beauty to the exploration of the role of monasticism in the dialogue between the churches. The style of his apostolic letter *Orientalis Lumen* departs from the magisterial, it is personally engaged, at times pleading, passionate, determined.

Eight entire sections (9-16) of the Apostolic Letter are devoted to monasticism as the 'specific vantage point' from which to 'look at the vast panorama of Eastern Christianity'. In his exposition, the Pope summarises the essence and the aim of monastic life—it is impossible for monks and nuns to read these passages without resonating to the truths and aspiration set out in them.

Monastic life is a symbolic synthesis of the life of the Christian, the monastery a prophetic place where creation becomes praise of God. Monastic life is the 'soul of the Eastern Churches', part of the lumen, the light passed on to the West (*OL* 9).

In the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, as the monk 'chants with his brothers the prayer that sanctifies time,' he assimilates the Word of God. In listening to the personal call of the Lord obedience is born. Monastic life invites us to respond to the Word in obedience, humility and love. In the liturgy Christ reveals the dignity and purpose of creation; the liturgy involves the whole of the human person, mystery and devotion, beauty and participation in the divine, especially in the Liturgy of the Eucharistic (*OL* 10, 11).

Monastic life teaches us how to become truly human, the image of Christ who is the Image of the Father; in gazing at Christ we are transformed, conformed to his likeness in a constant conversion. The 'rhythm of the Spirit' makes us transparent—growing in self-knowledge, recognizing our poverty and yet knowing ourselves to be loved by the Father (*OL* 12). Monasticism holds the treasures of guidance in the Spirit by spiritual fathers and mothers, of true communion/koinonia in cenobitic life and service of the Church and the gospel (*OL* 13, 14).

The Word who became flesh is our path to the Father; he leads us to communion in love. Knowledge and participation in the divine

become a reality—yet all knowledge moves ultimately into adoring silence—being present to the hidden, mysterious yet personal presence of the Trinity (*OL* 15, 16).

These are

the values which I feel are very important today for expressing the contribution of the Christian East to the journey of Christ's Church towards the Kingdom ... The strong common traits uniting the monastic experience of the East and the West make it a wonderful bridge of fellowship, where unity as it is lived shines even more brightly than may appear in the dialogue between the Churches ... I feel that meeting one another regularly is very important. In this regard, I hope that monasteries will make a particular effort, precisely because of the unique role played by monastic life within the churches and because of the many unifying aspects of the monastic experience. (*OL* 9).

This appeal was not made in a vacuum. At this point it is necessary to return to the early decades of the twentieth century in order to show the beginnings of another, interwoven strand of the development of ecumenical endeavour.

Benedictine Prophets of Reunion

The vision and inspiration of several Benedictine monks in the first half of the twentieth century, seen as impracticable or even dangerous in their day, have since been vindicated and endorsed by the new approach to ecumenism of Vatican II. Indeed, their contributions can be seen to have influenced that new approach though this has not (yet) been explicitly acknowledged. I would like to present three of these 'prophets' very briefly.

Each in his way was inspired by an encounter with Eastern liturgy and monasticism and endeavoured to respond to Pius XI's *Equidem Verba* of 1924 to the Abbot Primate of the Benedictines. In this exhortation the Pope had proposed that the Benedictine monks of each country or each congregation establish one monastery specifically dedicated to the study of the Eastern tradition and work towards union with the Christian East. I shall confine myself here to a very short outline; in the case of Dom Bede Winslow I have given a

more detailed account because of his influence on and inspiration for our community at Minster Abbey.¹

Dom Lambert Beauvuin founded his monastery for reunion at Amay-sur-Meuse in 1925 and in 1927 began the publication of the renowned journal *Irénikon*. However, his notion of 'psychological rapprochement' through spiritual and intellectual preparation, his rejection of proselytism and his sharp criticism of an 'imperialist conception of religious unity' resulted in twenty years spent in exile. He only returned to his community, which had since moved to Chevetogne, in 1951.

Dom Constantijn Bosschaerts, the founder of Vita et Pax, one-time secretary and lifelong friend of Mgr Roncalli, also suffered misunderstanding and opposition. His desire to bring together in one community Christians of different traditions to grow into unity through living and praying together remained a dream. In 1936 he started the community of Cockfosters in North London. He placed great emphasis on beauty in the liturgy and liturgical art.

Dom Bede Winslow of St Augustine's Abbey, Ramsgate, had his first contact with 'things oriental' when he visited Rome in 1924. Everything to do with the East, prayer, liturgy, monastic life, theology, fascinated him—he himself, while firmly remaining loyal to his own tradition, described it as a 'love affair' with Eastern Christianity. He founded the *Eastern Churches Quarterly* in 1931. It was to become the best known and respected journal in the English language on the Eastern Churches. Dom Bede summarised its purpose in 1953 as follows:

The Eastern Churches hold a very important position in any work for Christian Unity. It is obvious what a tremendous effect such a union (Eastern Churches—Rome) would have on Christians as a whole ... even if we are only considering numbers ... what is far more important is the effect that such a union would have on the thoughts of Catholics and how this integrating of the two great Christian traditions would prepare the way for the complete healing of divided Christendom.

¹ A fuller appreciation of these three monks and their exceptional contribution to ecumenism may be found in the collection of papers presented at the 'East-West Meeting 2000' at Minster Abbey, edited and published by Turvey Abbey and Minster Abbey. On Dom Bede Winslow, see also Sr Benedict Gaughan's memoir in *One in Christ*, 43/1 (2009): 3-9.

Never was the West with its liturgical, scriptural and neo-patristic movements, so ready to meet and understand the East ... the monastic life is often spoken of as the first meeting point of the two traditions ... In meeting this new Christian world movement, I believe the Orthodox hold a unique position ... Our approach to the Orthodox must be one of love, of willingness to own our past mistakes, clear-sightedness and understanding, and then, through the Holy Spirit, unity will come. This is the work and aim of *ECQ*.

From the middle of the 1940s Dom Bede initiated, and in cooperation with the Dominicans organised ecumenical study meetings at Blackfriars, Oxford. These eventually fell foul of the Catholic hierarchy.

There is more than just a faint echo of Dom Bede's 'manifesto' and the aspirations of other monastic 'prophets' in Pope John Paul's Apostolic Letter *Orientale Lumen*!

Benedictine (monastic) Ecumenical Initiatives

I would like to list here some examples of the work of monks and nuns in ecumenical encounter. This list includes initiatives begun well before Vatican II and continued since, as well as a number of more recent contributions. It is in no way comprehensive, but tries merely to convey something of the range of monastic involvement.

Dom Lambert Beauduin's community at the Abbey of Chevetogne continues to contribute to the ecumenical dialogue especially through Annual Conferences (since 1942). Like Chevetogne, the Abbeys of Niederaltaich in Bavaria and Pannonhalma in Hungary are constituted of both Latin and Eastern Rite Deaneries, promoting greater love and knowledge of the riches of the Eastern Liturgy. The monasteries of Vita et Pax also share a particular concern to make the riches of the liturgical music and art of the East better understood and appreciated. Turvey Abbey, for example, provides workshops on the theology, the writing and the liturgical use of icons. Ampleforth Abbey regularly hosts celebrations of the Byzantine Liturgy. A local choir, competent to sing the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, has been formed.

Some Benedictine Congregations have their own Ecumenical Commissions, thus e.g. the English Benedictine Congregation, whose Commission, chaired by Fr Colin Battell OSB, meets at Ampleforth. A number of Benedictines teach in the various Oriental Colleges in Rome.

In 1998 a Collegium Orientale was erected in the Diocese of Eichstätt, Bavaria, with the strong support of the Benedictine Abbey of Plankstetten, Bavaria, and particularly its abbot, Gregor Maria Hanke (now bishop of Eichstätt).

Through the work of scholars like Daniélou and de Lubac there had been in the West a revival of interest in the study of the Fathers of the Church, a rediscovery of the Eastern Fathers, Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria, the School of Antioch, and especially the Cappadocians. A number of monasteries host regular conferences on the Fathers of the Oriental Churches, thus e.g. the Abbey of Ligugé in France on the life and writings of St Ephrem. In the 1970s and 1980s the English Benedictine Congregation organised annual patristic study meetings as did our own community at Minster in the late 1980s and early 90s under the expert guidance of Fr Antony Meredith SJ.

The Abbey of Pierre-qui-Vire in France is one example of a monastery cultivating an annual exchange with Orthodox communities for a shared experience of Christian life and witness, in this case with a Romanian Orthodox Diocese, its seminary and monasteries.

One 'rediscovered' monastic gift is *Lectio Divina*. In *Orientalis Lumen* Pope John Paul II speaks of the particular appreciation of the Word of God in the Churches of the Reformation. This ancient monastic treasure is a gift increasingly shared by monks and nuns with the wider Church, with oblates, guests, parishes and schools. In the context of monastic ecumenical encounter it seems essential to give pride of place to the Word of God, so that in listening to the one who calls us to greater unity we may open the 'ear of our heart' (cf. *Rule of St Benedict*, prologue 1) also to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

A Specific Response to *Orientalis Lumen*: The East West Monastic Meetings at Minster

Some years ago when we welcomed at Minster both the Greek Orthodox and the Syrian Orthodox Archbishops of Aleppo, someone remarked that the first Syrian archbishop to visit Minster was St Theodore (602-690), Archbishop of Canterbury from 668 to 690. In 670 St Theodore signed the foundation charter of the first monastery at Minster. He also consecrated St Mildred to the monastic life in about 675. She became Minster's second Abbess.

The veneration of this much loved Anglo-Saxon Saint was revived by Dom Bede Winslow OSB in 1935, when he was Parish priest at Minster. The annual pilgrimage instituted by him in honour of St Mildred continues today. Dom Bede had hoped to found a monastery for reunion and obtained permission to explore this plan from his abbot and the English hierarchy. Although his dream was never realised, Dom Bede was instrumental in the return of monastic life to Minster. Our founding sisters arrived there in 1937. During the 1950s the community gradually developed its ecumenical contacts, notably with the Anglican Benedictine Nuns of West Malling, and Mother Walburga von Waldburg-Zeil's friendship with Metropolitan Anthony Bloom. Looking back one might say the community became infected with Dom Bede's ecumenical enthusiasm. Mother Walburga always referred to him as 'that great ecumenist'! We trust that our East-West involvement has his blessing!

I do not intend to present here a detailed list of the meetings held at Minster. By highlighting some areas of engagement and a few specific topics I hope to show the value of these meetings and the fruit they have born for our community and the response they are generating.

In 1996 we hosted our first East West Monastic Meeting. This was initiated and organized by Sr Benedict Gaughan as a response to the inspiration of *Orientale Lumen*—and had the strong support of our whole community.

The Setting: Monastic Prayer and Liturgy

It seemed to us that as a monastic community the only appropriate setting would be to retain the liturgical structure of the day and thus embed the talks, encounters and exchanges in prayer—the prayer of the community together with all our guests. Although liturgical customs, chant traditions and languages are different, we have known a real communion in prayer. All residential meetings have also included one or more visits to Orthodox communities to celebrate the liturgy with them, whether the local Greek Orthodox and Coptic Parishes or the Monastery of St John the Baptist at Tolleshunt Knights where we have always been welcomed with overwhelming hospitality.

The beauty and richness of these liturgies of St John Chrysostom and St Basil—the simplicity of the Jesus Prayer said in common at St John's monastery—are deeply moving. They engage one totally—and yet, in the Eucharistic liturgy we know the pain of not being fully ONE. We

are called to be one as Christ and the Father are one, a union of being—one body—and our experience of the ‘not yet’ increases our longing that Christ’s prayer for unity be fulfilled.

As the Greek Orthodox Archbishop Paul Yazigi of Aleppo wrote to the community, ‘It is a great suffering to us that while we meet in love, various circumstances prevent us from fully living the mystery of love which is partaking of the one cup. We pray that this moment will come very soon ... I need not say that you are always in my prayers—and I ask yours for me in return’ (letter 5.6.2000).

Participants

Our participants have come from the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox tradition: clergy, monks and nuns and also laity of the Greek Orthodox Church, both of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Antiochene Patriarchate, the Russian Orthodox Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church in Syria as well as in Turkey, the Coptic Orthodox and Coptic Catholic Churches, the Chaldean and Syrian Catholic Churches and the Church of the East. Some of our encounters included participants from the Church of England, particularly our Benedictine sisters of St Mary’s Abbey, West Malling.

While some meetings were geared primarily to in-depth study of particular sources or topics for monastic participants, others were opened for wider participation (e.g. study-days for up to seventy participants). Several meetings were organised in conjunction with other bodies, such as St John’s Diocesan Seminary at Womersley or the present meeting here at Heythrop College.

Topics

1) Tradition. In *Oriental Lumen* Pope John Paul II exhorts monks to study the traditions of the East. For monks that must include the shared inheritance of monastic ascetical teaching in the great monastic fathers: Saint Anthony, Saint Pachomius, and in particular Saint Basil to whom Saint Benedict refers in his Rule.

The focus of our first meeting in 1996 was on the Rules of Saint Basil, his spiritual and ascetical teaching for the life of the Christian and life in community. Studying seminal texts for monastic life and spirituality together with Eastern monastics is an enriching experience, making these sources come alive in a new way, enabling us to support and confirm each other in our following of the Gospel as monks and nuns. There is also the sheer excitement of revisiting these sources from

within their own traditions, so to speak—traditions and Churches that are alive and flourishing today. We have benefitted from the expertise of Dr Marcus Plested lecturing on the Great Letter of Saint Macarius, and more recently on the reception of Saint Thomas Aquinas in the Orthodox Church. Dr Norman Russell introduced us to the literature on theosis/deification. We are indebted to Dr Sebastian Brock for teasing out for us the manifold strands of the Syriac tradition, and for speaking to us on the writings of Ephrem and Isaac of Niniveh and on 'The ecumenical role of monastic literature'. It has been moving to witness the affection of different Syriac Christian communities for Dr Sebastian Brock who has done so much to promote the Syriac tradition and make it more accessible and in some cases save its treasures from oblivion.

2) Historical subjects. These have ranged from 'Theodore of Tarsus, a Man from the East for the West' (Sr Benedicta Ward) to 'The Orthodox Church in communist Russia' (Dr Philip Boobyer, University of Kent). At the 2003 meeting we felt we saw 'history in the making' when Archpriest Sergej Hackel spoke with astounding frankness of the obstacles to unity presented by Eastern national churches and pleaded eloquently for a dialogue of love and 'hopes for convergence in the single cup'.

We have come into contact with the more recent history of the Christian Churches in the Middle East through personal encounters with clergy from Syria, Lebanon, Iran and Iraq. We keep these suffering communities in our prayers, and try to be informed about events. I would like to mention here Dr Suha Rassam's fascinating book *Christianity in Iraq*.¹ Over the years we have also hosted several pilgrimages of Syriac Christians—mostly from Iraq—to St Theodore and St Mildred'. A couple of hundred people meet and recreate together, sharing a meal, celebrating the liturgy, dancing and singing ... These exiles come from a monastic Church—something they do not easily find in their diaspora in the West. Visiting a western monastery they are instantly at home—a concrete, practical instance of community, *koinonia*. Our monastic community—our *ecclesiola*, situated in the local church of deanery and diocese, can build these bridges, can welcome our brothers and sisters in Christ—the East is right here in our midst.

¹ Leominster: Gracewing, 2005 and 2010.

3) Theology. We are indebted to Dr Anthony O'Mahony for introducing us to the various ecclesial/doctrinal dialogues of the different Oriental Churches with the Roman Catholic Church, and the Eucharistic agreements with the Assyrian Church and the Church of the East in particular. Another theme was 'The Mother of God' in the Theology of the Russian, Catholic, Ethiopian Churches and the writings of the Caroline Divines.

One of our most recent meetings echoed the current theme of the Official Dialogue between the Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, 'The Office of Peter'. Archimandrite Demetrios Charbak of the Diocese of Aleppo, who has taken part in the East West Meetings at Minster since 2000, is one of the official delegates to the dialogue for the Antiochene Patriarchate. His messages from the meetings at Ravenna shared with us a real feeling of hope, a sense that the Spirit is moving among us to bring us to the goal of unity in Christ.

The most challenging theme proved to be Christology, more specifically the question: Does Chalcedon still divide? In preparation for this meeting the monastic community studied the Acts of the Council of Chalcedon, newly edited by Fr Richard Price. The three volumes spent very little time on the bookshelf; the annotations certainly demonstrated that these acts are far from being dusty tomes, removed from present day concerns. This was also most vividly brought home to us by the encounter with Fr Shenouda of the Coptic Orthodox Church, who had been specifically delegated to represent Pope Shenouda at the meeting. While we 'Westerners' would speak of Pope (St) Leo the Great and Discoros, bishop of Alexandria, Fr Shenouda spoke of 'Our holy father Dioscoros' and 'the Roman Leo'. It was a salutary shock to become aware of our own tacit assumption—and his—as to who must have been in the right, to acknowledge the still existing pressure points, to recognise and respect the other's particular sensibilities. It was all the more moving to witness the graciousness and genuine appreciation with which Mar Gregorios, the Syrian Orthodox Archbishop of Aleppo, accepted the gift of a copy of the Acts of Chalcedon!

Experience of Ekklesia

In our attempts to contribute to the growing understanding between the Churches of East and West we have been inspired by the encouragement of the hierarchy. For the meeting in the Jubilee Year 2000, for example, we were blessed to receive the assurance of prayers from Pope John Paul II, Archbishop Gregorios of Thyateira, Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor, our Archbishop Kevin MacDonald, Archbishop Paul Yazigi of Aleppo, and Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia. Both our Archbishop and our Area Bishop have shown their support by attending and contributing to the meetings held at Minster.

Our friends from local churches have helped with providing transport and hospitality, the school choir of the local Catholic Parish delighted our guests. The Anglican parish of Minster has several times hosted a celebration of Vespers—in Latin and in Russian ... and a local House Church provided help with organising football matches!

In all these encounters, in this network of prayer and welcome, study and celebration, we see a reflection, albeit in anticipation, of the Communion of Saints—a communion of believers, striving for ever greater unity in faith and in love.

Conclusion

'We all subscribe to the principle of LOVE—but love may be impeded by prejudice or inadequate knowledge. If we love truly we want to know more, to "know" with a broader mind and a wider heart.'¹ Saint Benedict has these words of encouragement for the monk who sets out on the way to the kingdom, the beginner, who may find the way to salvation daunting: 'As we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God's commandments, our hearts overflowing with [literally: 'stretched by'] the inexpressible delight of love' (*Rule*, prologue 49). The heart may also be stretched by suffering, the passion of the church still divided. And the heart is stretched by the passionate desire for deeper union.

What, then, is the role of monasticism in the wider ecumenical dialogue, what fruit does it bear for the Church? Does any of this go beyond the walls of the monastery? What do our prayers, our

¹ Abbot Hugh Gilbert OSB, 'The Contribution of Monasticism to East West Dialogue', 2004 East West Meeting; also passim in the following paragraphs.

sacrifices, our studies, our good will, charity and welcome accomplish? What is our mission, to what do we bear witness?

Monastic meetings, after all, are the exception, not the rule—in a sense they draw their value from their rarity; most of us, most of the time are just living ordinary monastic life day by day. If we faithfully live this ordinary life, then our monastic encounters, whether more particularly for study or more generally for welcome and exchange, can sow seeds and give us encouragement.

They provide an opportunity for serious study of each other's traditions, making us grow in respect for and understanding of the other. They foster a greater appreciation of our respective traditions. They lead us to reflect in greater depth on our faith. They make our prayer of intercession more fervent. They continue to fuel our desire for the time when we shall all be one in Christ.

In essence, our mission is to be true to our vocation as monks and nuns. The root of monk, monachos, is 'monos' – 'one'. In the end it is in being faithful to our search for unity with God that our witness lies.

I would like to conclude by quoting from a letter of Archbishop Gregorios, in which he reminds us of 'your own rule, that of Saint Benedict, who is numbered among the saints in the calendar of both East and West. As the saint rightly commends, "may you prefer nothing whatever to Christ" (*Rule 72,11*)' (Letter 4.9.2000).

CONTEMPORARY ORTHODOX-CATHOLIC DIALOGUE IN THE PATRIARCHATE OF ANTIOCH

Demetrios Charbak*

This paper, first given at the Orientale Lumen conference held at Heythrop College in May 2010, describes current problems confronting Christians in the East, as well as recent and continuing progress Orthodox and Catholic are making in Antioch, in the dialogue of truth, both local and official, as well as in the dialogue of love.

The importance of the Christian presence in the East

The East is considered the cradle of Christianity, and the holy place, blessed by Jesus who walked on its soil and suffered greatly there, and above all fulfilled his mission on earth, rose from the dead, ascended to heaven and achieved his promise to send the Holy Spirit on his followers who accepted him, thus transforming them from ordinary fishermen to fishers of men, as promised by God himself, so that they became unafraid. They no longer hid in the upper room but bravely came forth to preach the word of God.

Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic letter *Orientale Lumen* says: 'The light of the East has illumined the universal Church'. And Cardinal Kasper has recently reminded us how Christianity came from the East where it grew up, and where the first councils which defined the Christian faith were held. The West then accepted Christianity and developed special characteristics from the start. In contrast to the East, the West focused on the legal and regulatory aspects more than the philosophical and spiritual ones.

The sun of Christianity rose from the East and it is very important to keep its light shining there.

The demographic transition of the region

The whole area has changed. It is no longer Christian but largely Islamic with its distinctive character. In some regions we find a fanatic Islam fighting Christianity and its presence in these countries,

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depriving Christians of their civil and human rights. Here one should mention the Israeli presence in Palestine, the violation of human rights and the torture practised there, causing tremendous suffering.

I will not say much about this because I am confident that most of you already know these things either through personal visits to those places or through media reports. This does not apply, thank God, in Syria, the country where I live, where such extreme cases do not occur, except very rarely, and where most of the religious and liturgical rites can be practised and beautifully carried out.

Attacks against Church and faith

With globalization a lot of atheistic ideas have entered our East, their power intensified by poverty and ignorance. These ideas, whether they come from partisan thought or religious groups, are often hostile to the Church and to Christ. To facilitate their presence, they enter under the guise of religion and call themselves churches, such as the church of Satan which advocates devil worship. These are serious because they influence young people, encourage them to commit suicide, and to think of themselves as victims. Then there are assemblies which profess themselves Christian presenting themselves as communities without denomination because their aim, so they claim, is the unity of Christians. This is very sensitive matter and has serious consequences for all churches because they are drawing Christians from their own churches into these sects.

Mixed marriages

These are very common in the East, especially in Syria. For instance, in the city of Aleppo, the proportion of mixed marriages is about 75 per cent. This requires great understanding and acceptance from the churches involved, in order to deal with them sensitively and objectively, in the profound belief that both sides share the same Christian faith, despite their different traditions. I will give you an example from my own experience. It arose from my visit to a family whose husband is Orthodox and the wife Catholic—her story demonstrates how things have changed in this area.

The wife comes from a family of three Catholic girls, each of whom married an Orthodox man. When the first girl married her father was deprived of communion for a year. The second marriage was accompanied with tolling of the bells as if she were dead. The

third and most recent marriage took place fifteen years after the first; it was celebrated without any of the previous difficulties.

And now I am going to discuss two types of dialogue: Dialogue of truth, and Dialogue of love.

Dialogue of truth

We in Antioch do not have only a local dialogue with the Catholic Church, we are also part of the official dialogue which takes place between the two Churches at the universal level, through the international commission for theological dialogue, shared by all the Orthodox churches.

I will just mention two examples concerning Antioch:

On 25 January 1959, Pope John XXIII issued his invitation to a council which had as its aims the renewal of the church and the unity of Christianity. During the council, Patriarch Maximos IV of the Eastern rite Catholic bishops played a significant role in defending the Eastern Churches and their theological heritage. The council was an occasion to introduce to the West the heritage of the Eastern Church.

The meeting after the council between Patriarch Maximos and Patriarch Athenagoras in June 1964 was very impressive because the bishops embraced each other and Athenagoras said to Maximos: 'You spoke on our behalf in the council'.

Archbishop Elias Zoghby, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Baalbek in Lebanon, pointed out that there is no real justification for the great schism between the Roman and Orthodox Churches. Upset about the slow pace of theological dialogue, he suggested to the Roman Catholic synod held in August 1975 a project of a mutual partnership, which would allow Roman Catholics who left the Orthodox without sufficient reason to rejoin them, without leaving their partnership with the bishop of Rome. The synod put this view to the proper Roman authority but the answer was negative, and it was also negative from the Antiochian Orthodox synod.

Not satisfied with the reasons given, Bishop Zoghby published in 1981 a book in French entitled 'We are all schismatics', in which he declared his desire to belong to both Churches, setting aside all differences.

In July 1996, encouraged by Archbishop Zoghby, the synod of Roman Catholics acted again and issued a statement offering unity with the Orthodox while preserving partnership with Rome, as it was in

the first millennium. The Orthodox synod studied this statement and graciously refused it, because the dialogue at the level of Antioch cannot be separated from the international formal dialogue, and clarified a few points to be discussed. The statement of the synod of the Orthodox church held in May 1997 was more irenic than the previous one regarding the resumption of the dialogue: 'With regard to the relationship between the See of Antioch and the Roman Catholics of Antioch the council has confirmed the necessity of continuing the dialogue through a committee formed from two Orthodox members and two Catholic members'.

The synod of Roman Catholics, held at Al-Rabow from 21 to 23 July 1994, renewed the call to continue the dialogue. The bishops decided to strengthen the relationship between the two churches at all levels, religious and social. They encouraged the committee to continue to organize meetings where historical and theological research will highlight common points of faith and theology of Antioch, and clarify points that are still debated. The Roman Catholics were convinced that reunification of the church requires long term efforts on every level. So, they were unable to accept the notion of immediate unity with the holy Antiochian See until complete unity between Catholics and Orthodox is achieved.

All now look forward to the next meeting which may bring us a valuable gift concerning the concept of primacy during the first millennium, which was debated in Cyprus last year and will be continued this year in Vienna by God's will. We also recall the important Ravenna Document issued in 2007 which clearly shows that unity at universal church level is expressed in the Eucharist, the mystery of thanksgiving, and cannot be understood without it. In this way the two churches discovered the importance of Ecclesiology and Eucharist, basic to the consciousness of the one and undivided Church. This awareness creates a new horizon for future dialogue between the churches, a horizon full of hope and confidence to overcome all the difficulties and obstacles that may prevent this dialogue from fulfilling the desire of the master, that all should be one.

Here we must also emphasize the development of the 'dialogue of love' which has made important steps especially in recent years, because this dialogue of love enables theological dialogue, the dialogue of truth, to come up with results which could never have been predicted earlier.

Dialogue of love

In Antioch in particular we have notable and important expressions of this kind of dialogue. In most Syrian cities there is a joint council of Orthodox and Catholics bishops which meets regularly once a month and discusses common matters which concern all Christians in the city and the region. This council is of great importance in coordinating relations between the churches on one hand, and between the churches and the state on the other. Its important ecumenical concerns and activities include the following:

Ecumenical religious ceremonies

In Aleppo we have celebrated two notable anniversaries: 1700 years commemoration of Sts Kosmas and Damian, and 1600 years commemoration of St John Chrysostom. Celebrations continue for almost an entire year and involve lectures, seminars, exhibitions, pilgrimages to monasteries and churches, and a dedicated website. Also, a play was shown about the life of St John Chrysostom to which all interested people, including university and school students, were invited. Although the true meaning of unity cannot be fully expressed in projects, activities and meetings, these things still help to provide an atmosphere of openness and acceptance of others among all believers.

Annual prayer for unity

The council of bishops appointed a small committee to prepare for this prayer and choose appropriate texts for a booklet, usually from the World Council of Churches material. Several choirs from different churches are invited to chant prayers. These events usually take place at two levels: one is meeting of clergy, and the other of the faithful. Here, it is worth mentioning that prayer for any cause or matter is necessary, but this doesn't cancel the hard work for what a prayer wants to achieve. The desire for Christian unity must be ongoing and must not end with the Week of Prayer.

Joint spiritual meditations and retreats

These occasions are for both priests and people. In Aleppo, we have experienced this twice with Catholics and the result was marvelous—we exchanged a lot of experiences and discussed many common concerns. There were practical proposals to overcome many obstacles which face us and this paved the way between the clergy and

believers and contributed to a prevailing atmosphere of love and openness between everyone.

Shared churches

This is something new, wonderful and hopeful. There is now a purpose-built, shared church for the Orthodox and the Catholics in Damascus and Aleppo. These churches are managed by a joint committee. The liturgies are held at two different times, but usually there are a lot of shared activities. These shared churches combine within them the traditions, the art of icons, and the sacred vessels of the two Churches.

The unification of Easter

If we were together at Easter this year, it was not due to us, but to the calendar which was more generous than we are. But, thank God, some citizens were aware of the importance of a mutual Easter and what it contains of love, happiness and testimony of Jesus Christ as one, and proclaimed the need to have one celebration together, as happened four years ago in Safita, the city whose church I serve today. Safita was the forerunner in this and an example for all other cities. People come to it from other provinces where each year, Christians, Orthodox and Catholics, celebrate Easter on the same day after receiving the holy light together. It must be noted that in the East the subject of the celebration of Easter according to the Eastern or Western calendar causes scandal for other religions. People ask, has your Christ risen yet or not? Is it your feast or not? Do you celebrate this Sunday or next? How can you crucify Christ twice? as well as many other questions which weaken our Christian witness in a multi-religious world. No one in Syria cares much about what talks are going on, or about conclusions from the committee of international dialogue between the two churches. The most important question in all lectures and seminars is: when are we going to celebrate Easter together?

We were in union for the first thousand years, we were schismatics for the second millennium; we look forward in the third millennium to unity in diversity. It is true that this unity is still a child crawling on all fours and needs a lot of help to stand on its feet, but the most important thing is that it is born, and we have to care for it until we see the faithful and our Church on Earth as it is in heaven: a One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

NICOLAS LOSSKY: AN INTERVIEW

Nicolas Lossky was born in 1929 in Paris. He is a priest of the Russian Orthodox Church. He is professor emeritus of English intellectual history at the University of Paris-Nanterre, and professor of Church history at the Orthodox theological Institute of St Sergius (Paris). He was formerly director of the Higher Institute of Ecumenical Studies. From 1974 until 1998, he was a member of Faith and Order. Then he was a member of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches until 2006. Thierry Marteaux OSB interviewed him earlier this year.*

TM *For many years now, the Orthodox Churches have been preparing a pan-Orthodox council. Things seem to be progressing, recently some decisions have been taken in order to accelerate the process: for example the creation of regional Episcopal Assemblies.*

NL You are right and it is with a great joy that I saw the Patriarch of Constantinople visiting Moscow (22-30 May 2010). The fact that they celebrated Pentecost together is of great significance. Patriarch Kirill had already visited Constantinople. Patriarch Bartholomew's visit will certainly help the preparation of a pan-Orthodox council to make further progress. For decades this pan-Orthodox council has been in preparation. We do not want to call this council *ecumenical* because we are not in communion with you. I know that Paul VI considered the Councils which took place after Nicaea (seventh ecumenical Council, 787) as general western councils and not ecumenical councils in the proper sense of the expression. I think that ultimately the pan-Orthodox council will take place. I am very optimistic about it particularly after an event as important as the visit of Patriarch Bartholomew to Moscow.

TM *Is Moscow particularly sensitive to this question of primacy among the Orthodox Churches? During the*

* Br Thierry Marteaux is a monk of the Monastery of the Holy Cross, Rostrevor.

debates surrounding the question of the presidency of these new regional Episcopal Assemblies, it was said that the bishop from the patriarchate of Constantinople would be de facto the president, and then Moscow reacted negatively.

NL

Indeed, in the Patriarchate of Moscow (and not only in this patriarchate), there are some people who affirm with authority that there is no universal primacy in the Orthodox theology and tradition. This is completely wrong and this attitude reveals a clear lack of historical knowledge. At the first Ecumenical Council of Constantinople (381), which was the second Ecumenical Council, at which Constantinople received the title of New Rome, second in the order of the diptych, it was clear that Rome would remain the first. If and when we will re-establish communion between our Churches, Rome will take its first place again. The great weakness of many Orthodox faithful is their nationalism. They ask: 'Why would a Greek always be president of the regional Episcopal Assemblies?' I think that, as long as Rome has not taken its first place, there is no doubt that Constantinople holds the primacy, the first in the diptych.

The present patriarch of Moscow, who is a great friend (when he was rector of the Seminary and Academy of Leningrad we spent lots of time together), once asked me: 'In our present situation, what would you advise me to do in order to upgrade the academic level of our students?' My answer was: 'Make them learn other languages and particularly French, because of *Les Sources Chrétiennes*, and not because there is the translation from the Greek or the Latin but because there are notes and introductions which should help them to think as theologians'

TM

In many of your writings (for example in your article in the Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement) you insist a lot about the nationalism or phyletism in the Orthodox Churches. Is it a major problem?

NL

It is a terrible problem. It is the real weakness of present day Orthodoxy. There are some exceptions, but there is a 'little flock'. If you ask an Orthodox: 'What is ethnophyletism?' the answer will be: 'It is a heresy'. Then if you ask him about the way he lives, the way his Church lives, you will quickly notice that he is nationalist.

I recall vividly that when I was professor at the University of Paris-Nanterre, there were some Greek students.

When I asked them: 'Are you an Orthodox?' they answered 'Yes, but atheist'. I added, 'So your orthodoxy is an aspect of your Hellenism?' 'Yes, absolutely.' I would go on, 'Do you mean that we can be an Orthodox only if we are Greek?' and they would answer 'Yes'. I would pursue the conversation, 'So what do you think about me?' They would answer, 'For you it is different because you are Russian, we (the Greeks) have given you Orthodoxy.' 'And if I tell you that I am a French Orthodox?' 'No, that is not possible...'

It is the same problem in Russia, among the Orthodox there are a lot of nationalists, fortunately the present Patriarch is not.

Today we have a good Patriarch and some good theologians but they all agree that the decision to re-establish communion between the Churches has to be a decision of all the Churches and not one Church which would do it in its own. This is why I have some problems with the re-establishment of communion between your Church and the Orthodox Churches: if we were to go ahead, all those from the world of the Reformation would feel that we (Orthodox and Catholics) have created a comfortable club, leaving them outside. I think that we have to wait and continue the multilateral dialogues in order to help the journey of the ecumenical movement. Note that I do not like the word 'ecumenism' because it gives the impression that we are settled in the present situation: we can stay where we are, we practise eucharistic hospitality and all is fine. For me we are engaged in a movement which looks for the common

ground that we share: Scripture and Tradition. From this starting point, we can talk about a movement towards the visible unity of all Christians so that the world may believe that the Father sent the Son for the salvation of the world. I am completely for the re-establishment of communion but we have to keep in mind our brothers and sisters issued from the different reformations.

TM *In your contribution to 'Petrine Ministry and the Unity of the Church' (ed. J. Puglisi, 1979) entitled 'Conciliarity-Primacy in a Russian Perspective', you write that we have to seek to replace our self-consciousness by an ecclesial consciousness and you add 'If this point is taken seriously, it will ... throw light on the painful problem of eucharistic hospitality in an Orthodox perspective' (p. 133). Could you develop this point?*

NL When I receive the communion of the Holy Body and Holy Blood of Christ, I do not receive communion as an individual. As Metropolitan Kallistos Ware and Metropolitan John Zizioulas say, there is no room for individuality in the Church. We are called to become persons. The word person means that we are necessarily in communion. When I receive communion I am not alone, it is not me as an individual who receives communion, it is the whole Church to which I belong, my community, which receives communion in me, through me. I must replace my psychological consciousness (or as my father Vladimir Lossky would say, my self-consciousness) by an ecclesial consciousness. We are not individuals but persons in communion, reflecting the Holy Trinity.

Each time I visit one of your monasteries, I always explain that I am unable to receive communion: as long as our Churches are not in communion, my conscience forbids me to do so. If I come back to my parish and if I say that I received communion in a Catholic church, I would immediately be excommunicated by my brothers and sisters.

My father's book that I quoted from earlier was translated into English. I sometimes hear Russians say that it was translated into French. This is a mistake. My father wrote everything in French. He was a disciple of Etienne Gilson, with Cardinals Jean Daniélou (1904-1974), Yves Congar (1904-1995), and Henri de Lubac (1896-1991). In 1944, after the Liberation of Paris, these men asked him: 'What we know about Orthodoxy we know it from Fr Martin Jugie (1878-1954, an Assumptionist Father). We would like to hear an Orthodox talk to us about what Orthodoxy is.' In 1944, he gave 12 lectures, which I remember well because I was present. Some philosophers from the Sorbonne were present. These 12 lectures were published as a book, *Essai sur la théologie mystique de l'Église d'Orient* (in English: *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*).

The first chapter of the book states very clearly that mysticism is not reserved to exceptional people like St Teresa or St John of the Cross. Mysticism is for everybody. Theology has to be mystical and mysticism must be theological.

TM *In May 2010, I was in London for a Conference organised by Heythrop College. Bishop Kallistos Ware gave a brilliant lecture on the Ravenna Document¹ and the three levels of primacy in the Churches. Many reactions from Moscow seem not so much to criticize the recognition of the primacy of Rome, as to fear the primacy of Constantinople in the East.*

NL I know Bishop Kallistos Ware very well. We were together at Oxford and I knew him when he was an Anglican. I told him that he is for the Orthodox Church what John Henry Newman was for Catholicism. He has brought the best of his tradition to Orthodoxy, just as Newman did when he joined the Catholic Church.

¹ Document approved by the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, 2007.

Regarding the reactions from Moscow, again it is the problem of nationalism.

TM *The subject of the relationship between Rome and Moscow is a vast subject. When one reads the documents and the debates, there is one expression which comes back all the time: 'canonical territory'. It seems to be a major problem for Russian Orthodoxy.*

NL The whole debate seems a bit ridiculous. The expression works only if it means that each Church has its own territory. But it stops working when you consider communities who are the result of emigration.

Let us take an example: I am a priest of the Russian Church, I am part of its canonical territory despite the fact that I was born in France and live in Paris. The Russian canonical territory covers all those who live in France, in England ... Because we have to acknowledge that there are Catholics everywhere in the world, the canonical territory of the Catholic Church is the whole earth. It is as if Russians do not realize what they imply when they speak about canonical territory.

TM *Cardinal Walter Kasper declared in 2008 that 'it is hard to discern a quality difference between Catholic dioceses in Russia and Orthodox dioceses in the West'.*

NL Absolutely. And Patriarch Kirill told me the same thing.

TM *According to you, the debate on the canonical territory is not valid?*

NL No. It is not serious because ultimately as long as we have not re-established communion the debate is not relevant. When communion will be re-established, then the territorial aspect of our ecclesiology will be relevant. It is clear that we will be able to re-establish communion only if the bishop of Rome renounces his universal jurisdiction. I know many French Catholic bishops who are against this universal jurisdiction. I think that John Paul II was aware of this problem, he practised it but he

was conscious that things have to be looked at in a new way. From that perspective, in *Ut Unum Sint*, there are some outstanding lines.

TM *Fr Jean-Marie R. Tillard (1927-2000) has played a major role in the development of the theology of communion and the nature of the church.*

NL Yes, indeed. When my students in Russia ask me 'What is the best book on Orthodox ecclesiology', if they can read French, I advise them to read *L'Église locale* by Tillard.

TM *Regarding the primacy of Rome: what could be done today by the Catholic Church about the Petrine ministry in view of reconciliation with the Orthodox Churches?*

NL The questions which were considered most important at the beginning of the 20th century (the debate on the *filioque* in the Creed for example) are no longer a problem.

It seems to me that the only thing that remains is this question of the universal jurisdiction of Rome. Recently I met with Cardinal Walter Kasper and he also expressed the view that the main theological problem in the dialogue between the Orthodox and Catholics is the question of universal jurisdiction.

During our meal, Cardinal Kasper added that the problem with the Orthodox is that in the dialogues and conferences, Orthodox members are largely ignorant with regard to western Christianity. In fact he is right. For nationalist reasons each Orthodox Church has a representative, they are nationalists and they ignore western history. At St Sergius, I teach the history of the Church in the West. When I began there were some colleagues who said: 'There is no Church in the West, there are only heretics'. The Orthodox representatives do not know the history of the Church in the West: the evolution of the papacy, the Reformation, the Counter-Reformation ...

TM *After Harare 1998 (8th Assembly of the World Council of Churches), where are we in regard to the problems between the World Council of Churches and the Orthodox Churches?*

NL One important change has to do with the decision-making procedures. I would like to insist on the fact that the Orthodox Churches were not the only ones to ask for a change in these procedures. The introduction of a method of decision-making based on consensus instead of the yes/no vote was a request from different groups in the WCC (some Lutherans for example). This change was proposed in order to avoid votes on women's ordination. A majority vote does not coincide necessarily with truth. For 25 years, until Harare, I was a member of Faith and Order, then I was appointed a member of another Commission of the World Council of Churches until Porto Alegre (2006, 9th Assembly of the world Council of Churches). At that time I had the unpleasant feeling that, in Faith and Order, things were going backwards, particularly in regard to what had been accomplished in the insistence upon the re-establishment of visible communion between Christians. Until Harare there was a progression, after it, things went backwards.

TM *Why?*

NL I do not know. I read the next texts published by the World Council of Churches and they seem more interested in inter-religious dialogue. We were opposing the trend which consists in putting Jesus Christ between brackets and in speaking about One God in order to be able to dialogue with Jews and Muslims.

TM *What about the relationships between Orthodoxy and the Oriental Churches?*

NL It is a very sad situation. We always thank the World Council of Churches for its role in giving us the opportunity to meet with the Oriental Churches. With the Chalcedonian and the non-Chalcedonian Churches,

we have the same faith, it is just a question of terminology.

However there is the problem of the sanctoral, and it is a big problem for the dialogue. There are those who have been anathematized, and those who have been canonized. On both sides we have to agree on this question. Some will say that it is a trivial question ... yes indeed it is but it touches on very deep feelings among the Christian people. The people have to be convinced that the anathemas should be lifted.

TM *In 1971, you wrote an article for Sobornost entitled 'An Orthodox approach to Anglicanism'. Thirty years later, if you were invited to write an article with the same title, what would you say?*

NL I spent my life studying Anglicanism. The Anglican Communion is going through very serious problems. Since 1971, new problems have arisen which change the perspective. In the 1930s, Fr Sergius Bulgakov (1871-1944) had declared that it was possible to re-establish communion with Anglican Communion. What would he say today?

The ordination of women: Metropolitan Kallistos Ware and Metropolitan John Zizioulas pleaded with the Anglicans to wait for the Catholics and Orthodox to elucidate the reasons why we do not ordain women to priesthood and episcopate. They did not wait ...

TM *Could you give me the verse of the Scriptures which is dearest to you?*

NL It is very easy: 'He has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and *may become participants in the divine nature*' (2Pet. 1:4). The nature of our salvation is to have a share in the divine nature.

It is this verse which inspired St Irenaeus: 'For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man ... might become a son of God'

(*Adv. Haeres.* 3, 19, 1). After him, St Athanasius and others said the same thing. Even St Thomas Aquinas expresses the same idea: 'The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods' (*Opusc.* 57, 1-4). It is important to notice that it is not only an Eastern perspective.

TM

What is your hope for the ecumenical movement?

NL

It has always been the same: the re-constitution, or rather the constitution (since we cannot return where things were twenty centuries ago) of the visible unity of the Churches, unity in diversity, respecting the languages, the local traditions, the different liturgies of the Churches. Some Orthodox people think that there are only three liturgies: the liturgy of St John Chrysostom, that of St Basil and that of St James, full stop. I am sorry but it is not true.

In the United States of America, in the Orthodox Churches, there are many Western liturgies which have been brought from the Presbyterian and other traditions. I do not agree with those who think that we have to use only the three ancient liturgies just mentioned.

After my death, when I have 'fallen asleep in the hope of the resurrection' (as we say in the Eucharistic prayer of the liturgy of St John Chrysostom), I will continue to hope.

MODERN CATHOLIC THOUGHT ON ISLAM AND CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Anthony O'Mahony*

*This paper considers 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, 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.*

1. Judaism, Christianity and Islam: theological confrontation

The 'Clash of Civilizations' has in recent years been posited as the global framework for relations between the different nations and religions of the world.¹ The theme has been taken up to describe the encounter between Islam and Christianity as 'The Clash of Theologies'.² 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

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¹ David Camroux, 'Le choc Huntington', *Études*, 6 (1996): 735-746.

² 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.

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?¹

The historical study of the relationship between Muslims and Christian communities, between Islam and Christianity is still in its beginnings.² 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, is still being enacted.³ 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 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

¹ R. Arnaldez, *Three Messengers for One God*, trans. Gerald W. Schlabach with M. L. Gude and D. B. Burrell (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 1.

² Hugh Goddard, *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000).

³ The Eastern churches had early contact with the Muslim faith and the theological reflection which emerged during this period still is 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); '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.

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.¹

Even as a child, Nwyia was sensitive to the tensions between Christianity and Islam.² 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.³

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.⁴ 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

¹ Paul Nwyia, 'Pour mieux connaître l'Islam', *Lumen vitae*, 30 (1975): 159-171.

² 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 great 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', *Re-Discovering Eastern Christendom*, ed. A.H. Armstrong and E.J.B. Fry (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1963), 154-166. Here at p.155.

³ Jane Dammen McAuliffe, 'The Abrogation of Judaism and Christianity in Islam: A Christian Perspective', *Concilium*, 4 (1994): 116-123.

⁴ Hugh Goddard has set out the six following dimensions of Christian-Muslim Relations, namely, the Theological, Philosophical, Historical, Social, Political and Cultural dimensions, in 'Christian-Muslim Relations: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 3/2 (2003): 1-14.

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.¹

Yohannan Friedman has reminded us that 'We 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 his creation.'² For Muslims, Islam is not simply God's final revelation but also God's first.³

Christianity nevertheless has a significant, if 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.⁴ A Christian might respond that this is not correct, since Christianity does not understand itself as abrogating Judaism.⁵ The Christian tradition 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.⁶ This

¹ J. Aucagne, 'L'Islam par rapport à l'unicité et à la division du peuple de Dieu', in J.M.Garriques, ed., *Approches chrétiennes du Mystère d'Israël* (Limoges: Criterion, 1987): 170-209.

² Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 14.

³ Guy Monnot, 'L'idée de religion et son évolution dans le Coran', in *The Notion of Religion in Comparative Research*, ed. Ugo Bianchi (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1994): 97-102.

⁴ 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 *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. Lee I. Levine (New York: Continuum, 1999), 287-299.

⁵ Jane Dammen McAuliffe, 'The Abrogation of Judaism and Christianity in Islam', 119.

⁶ Frederick Mathewson Denny, 'Corruption' in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (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):

doctrine has supported an overall concept of Islam as abrogating both Judaism and Christianity.¹ The concept of corruption, especially scriptural, is key to Muslim self-understanding and to the Islamic traditions' relations with the religious Other.²

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.³

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 Trinity⁴ do not

303-317; and 'The Qur'anic Context of Muslim Biblical Scholarship, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 7 (1996): 141-158.

¹ Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge University Press, 1991).

² 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 become an important paradigm for some. See Ronald L. Nettler, 'Early Islam, Modern Islam and Judaism: The *Isra'iliyyat* in Modern Islamic Thought', *Muslim-Jewish Encounters: Intellectual Traditions and Modern Politics*, ed. Ronald L. Nettler and Suha Taji-Farouki (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 1998), 1-14.

³ David Marshall, 'Christianity in the Qur'an', *Islamic Interpretations of Christianity*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (Richmond: Curzon, 2001): 3-29.

⁴ 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 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', *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*, 368-72. See also Michael Iprgrave, *Trinity and Interfaith Dialogue: Plenitude and Plurality* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003).

match with mainstream Christian self-understanding.¹ As Goddard has reminded us, 'The 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'.² 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'.³

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 Qur'anic 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 prescribed for all time—that Adam, Abraham and the prophets have always practised in the same way.⁴

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

¹ Jane Dammen McAuliffe, 'The Abrogation of Judaism and Christianity in Islam', p. 120.

² H. Goddard, *Muslim perceptions of Christianity*, London, Curzon, 1996, p. 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.

³ Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus; Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 12

⁴ 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*, 1886, Vol. XII), with a preface by Daniel Massignon, introduction by Père Henri Cazelles and observations by Père Albert M. J. Lagrange. Collection "Studi arabo-islamic del PISAI", no. 5, Rome, PISAI, 1992.

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.¹

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.²

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. And this mutuality of disturbance is not confined to the order of

¹ Jacques Jomier, 'Le Coran et la Liturgie dans l'Islam', *La Maison-Dieu*, 190 (1992): 121-127, here p.121.

² Charles Malik, 'Introduction', *God and Man in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, ed. Ch. Malik (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1972), 90. Charles Malik, Greek Orthodox of the Patriarchate of Antioch, Professor of Philosophy at 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; three times President of the Security Council and President of the General Assembly.

theory: it expresses itself in the growth of distinct historic communities, with conflicting norms, laws and mores.

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 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'.¹

Paul Nwya 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 Nwya to study and reflect on Islam throughout his life until his tragic death

¹ Charles Malik, 'Introduction', *God and Man in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, 91-2.

in 1980.¹ 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.²

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. This tension has been operative since Islam began; it reflects the complex attitude of Muhammad towards the religious other: polytheists, Jews and Christians. Islam is faced with a crucial dilemma of how to find 'the synthesis between historical and spiritual truth'.³

Within the Qu'ran, 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. A dictum in the Qu'ran placed on Muhammad's lips, 'to you your religion and to me mine' (109:6), can

¹ Nwyia'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*, 13 October 2007.

² Among his numerous academic studies see, 'Ibn 'Abbad de Ronda et Jean de la Croix: à propos d'une hypothèse d'Asin Palacios', *Al-Andalus*, 22 (1957): 113-130; *Ibn-'Abbad de Ronda (1332-1390): un mystique prédicateur à la Qarawiyn de Fès* (Beirut: Imprimerie catholique, 1961); *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique: nouvel essai sur le lexique technique des mystiques musulmans* (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1970).

³ Paul Nwyia, 'Mutabilités et immutabilité en Islam', *Recherches de sciences religieuses*, 63 (1975): 197-213.

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.¹

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. The Jesuits Henri Sanson and Christian Troll have suggested that Christians should reflect on their missionary vocation towards Muslims 'in the mirror of Islam'. 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. 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.²

2. 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. 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 2007.³

¹ Kenneth Cragg, 'Islam and Other Faiths', *Studia missionalia*, 42 (1993): 257-270, here p. 257.

² 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.

³ Andrew Unsworth, 'John Paul II, Islam and the Christian-Muslim Encounter', *A Catholic-Shi'a Engagement*, eds. A. O'Mahony, W.Peterburs & M.Shomali

On 20 October 1965, the Second Vatican Council (October 1962–December 1965)¹, after many long discussions and emendations of the original text, promulgated a declaration on the relations of the Church with non-Christian religion. 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 toward Islam as a major religion.² 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 Relations of the Church with Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*. Several fundamental theological principles are said 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.

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. Here the origins of *Nostra Aetate* are complex and still an open historical question. John XIII died on 3 June 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,

(London: Melisende, 2006), 253–302; Barbara Wood & A. Unsworth, 'Pope Benedict XVI, Interreligious Dialogue and Islam', *One in Christ*, 41/4 (2006): 89–108.

¹ 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.

² 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), 201–36.

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.¹ 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 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.²

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,

¹ Recognizing the sensitivity of this issue, in his presentation of the text of *Nostra Aetate* to the general congregation on 25 September 1964, Cardinal Bea made a specific disclaimer that the sections of the document on Judaism were entirely of a religious and not a political nature. See *Council Daybook: Vatican II, Session 3*, ed. F. Anderson (Washington: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1965), 62-63.

² I would like to express my debt here to the important account given by the Jesuit scholar Christian Troll of the evolving structure of Catholic thought on Islam, see in particular 'Changing Catholic Views of Islam'. See also the following studies, all in *New Blackfriars*, vol.88, no.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'; and Martin Ganeri, 'Catholic Encounter with Hindus in the Twentieth Century'.

especially in such groups as the *Cercle Saint Jean-Bapiste* and in the thought of Louis Massignon, Jean Daniélou SJ, and Jules Monchanin.¹

As has been 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, 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.

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. Paragraph 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.²

¹ See the important studies by Françoise Jacquin, 'L'abbé Monchanin et l'Islam', *Islamochristiana* (Rome), 23 (1997): 27-42; 'Louis Massignon et l'abbé Monchanin', *La vie spirituelle*, 694 (1991): 175-183; *Histoire du Cercle Saint Jean-Bapiste. L'enseignement du père Daniélou* (Paris: Éditions Beauchesne, 1987).

² Norman Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (London/Washington: Sheed/Georgetown, 1990), vol. 2, p. 861. Some Islamic opinion objects 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 that the Qur'an contains a reference to a Trinity consisting of God, Jesus and Mary (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 Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 76-80.

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 is put on the subjective level: 'they profess...'¹

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 was no theologian and never systematized his thought but presented it in flashes of an intuitive nature.² 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.³

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'.⁴

According to Louis Massignon's 'theological' vision, Muhammad possessed the faith of Abraham, though he did not experience mystic

¹ Christian Troll, 'Changing Catholic Views of Islam', *Islam and Christianity: Mutual Perceptions since the Mid-20th century*, ed. Jacques Waardenburg (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 23-27.

² A.O'Mahony, 'Our Common Fidelity to Abraham is What Divides: Christianity and Islam in the Life and Thought of Louis Massignon', *Catholics in Interreligious Dialogue: Monasticism, Theology and Spirituality*, eds. A.O'Mahony & Peter Bowe (Leominster: Gracewing, 2006): 151-190.

³ 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.

⁴ Robert Caspar, *A Historical Introduction to Islamic Theology*, 98.

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 Islam. This is nowhere more apparent than in the case of al-Hallâj.¹ 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.²

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 position was not adopted by the conciliar texts.

The figure of Abraham is a controversial figure in the encounter for Christianity and Islam.³ Some two hundred and forty-five verses in

¹ 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 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*, Bollingen Series XCVIII. Princeton University Press, 1982, 4 Vols.

² Neal Robinson, 'Massignon, Vatican II and Islam as an Abrahamic Religion', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 2/2 (1991): 182-205.

³ Y. Moubarac, 'Abraham en Islam', in 'Abraham, père des croyants', *Cahiers Sioniens*, 5/2 (1951): 104-120.

twenty-five sūras of the Qur'an make reference to Abraham (Ibrâhîm), the 'progenitor of the nation of Israel'. Among the biblical figures, only Moses¹ 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). Although, according to Reuven Firestone, 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.²

For Jews Abraham's special covenantal relationship with God established him as 'the authenticator and founder of Judaism'. 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).³ 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 further deny the religious sanctity of Mecca, despite Abraham's intimate association with it (Q 3:95-8) as outlined in the Islamic tradition.

Abraham in Islam also has a defining role in the abrogation (*naskh*) of Judaism and Christianity. For Yohanan Friedmann this is intimately

¹ Y. Moubarac, 'Moïse dans le Coran' in 'Moïse, l'homme de l'alliance', *Cahiers Sioniens*, 8/2-3-4 (1954): 373-393.

² 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'ba, with Arabian cultic practice and with terminology of Islamic religious conceptions. I am indebted to the account given by Reuven Firestone in 'Abraham', *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, vol. 1, 5-11; '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 *Journeys in Holy Lands: The evolution of the Abrahamic-Ishmael legends in Islamic exegesis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

³ Jean Daniélou, 'Abraham dans la tradition chrétienne', in 'Abraham, père des croyants', *Cahiers Sioniens*, 5/2 (1951): 69-87.

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.¹

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. It was against this background that the Second Vatican Council sought to give account of Islam.

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. Abraham's faith is recognized, but it is not said how he exemplified this faith. Muslims see Abraham as a champion of monotheism and attribute to him the rebuilding of the Ka'ba, 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.² As long as there is a readiness to respect the different interpretations, the

¹ Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 16.

² On Abraham, see R. Caspar, 'Abraham in Islam and Christianity', *Encounter: documents for Christian-Muslim understanding*, no. 92 (1996): 1-17; Jean-Louis Ska, 'Abraham dans le Coran ou le prototype du "musulman"', *Abraham et ses hôtes: Le patriarche et les Croyants au Dieu unique* (Bruxelles: Éds Lessius, 2001), 61-84.

figure of Abraham provides common ground for the followers of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.¹

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 Church's relation to the 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 Islamic doctrine, stressing those features that are common to the two religions; for example, 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 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.

Although a radical 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 radical novelty of the declaration is obvious.

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

¹ Michael L.Fitzgerald, 'From Heresy to Religion: Islam since Vatican II', *Encounter: documents for Christian-Muslim understanding*, 29 (2003): 1-13.

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.¹

Two characteristics of this text are immediately 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.²

The opening sentence of the paragraph constitutes a unique statement and an absolutely new beginning insofar as it is an official declaration about Islam issued by the highest teaching authority of the Church.³ John Paul II took up this theme on 19 August 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'.⁴ This is an indubitable 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.⁵

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

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,

¹ Norman Tanner SJ, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (London/Washington: Sheed/Georgetown, 1990), vol. 2, 861, 969-70.

² Robert Caspar, *Traité de Théologie Musulmanne* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica, 1987), 83-87.

³ This analysis owes much to Christian Troll, 'Changing Catholic Views of Islam', *Islam and Christianity: Mutual Perceptions since the Mid-20th century*, ed. Jacques Waardenburg (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 23-27.

⁴ 'The Speech of the Holy Father John Paul II to Young Muslims, Casablanca, Morocco, 19 August 1985', *Encounter: documents for Christian-Muslim understanding*, 128 (1986): 1-12.

⁵ Roger Arnaldez, *Three Messengers for One God* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 3.

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.¹ So we should remember 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.²

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.³

The Council refused to add 'through the prophets' to the phrase 'who has spoken to humanity',⁴ because of the ambiguity of the

¹ Robert L. Fastiggi, 'The Incarnation: Muslim objections and the Christian response, *The Thomist*, 57 (1993): 457-493.

² Robert Caspar, 'The Permanent Significance of Islam's Monotheism', *Concilium*, 177 (1985): 67-78.

³ The letter was written in 1076. See C. Courtois, 'Grégoire VII et l'Afrique du Nord', in *Revue Historique*, CXCIV (1945): 97-122, 193-226.

⁴ 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

reference to the prophets, who are not always the same, do not always have the same 'face' nor play the same role,¹ 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 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

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.

¹ One of the essential differences between Islam and Christianity is that of 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', *How to Understand Islam* (London: SCM Press, 1989), 140-148. Maurice Borrmans, in Louis Gardet & J.Cuoq, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims*, (Rome: Ancona, 1969) states, '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', pp. 57-58. See also Robert Caspar, 'Muhammad's Prophetic Office and the inspired nature of the Qur'an', *A Historical Introduction to Islamic Theology* (Rome: Pontificio Instituto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica, 1998): 89-134.

than a great prophet.¹ 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.²

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 fulfilment.

'They have regard for the moral life' is the phrase that remained, after the Council had discussed a proposed, fuller text: '... for the 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.³

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

¹ D. Marshall, 'The Resurrection of Jesus and the Qur'an', *Resurrection Reconsidered*, ed. Gavin D'Costa (Oxford: Oneworld, 1996), 168-183.

² D. Marshall, 'Mary in the Qur'an', *A Faithful presence: essays for Kenneth Cragg*, eds. David Thomas & Claire Amos (London: Melisende, 2003): 155-165.

³ Norman Tanner sj, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 2, 861, 969-970.

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.¹

There can be no doubt that the Council's statements regarding Islam, in the light of history represent a radical novelty. 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 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'.² 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.³

3. 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,

¹ Robert Caspar, *Traité de Théologie Musulmanne* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica, 1987), 87.

² Georges Anawati, 'Exkurs zum Konzilstext über die Muslim', *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*. Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil (Freiburg: Herder, 1967), vol. 2, pp. 485-487, quoted in Christian Troll, 'Changing Catholic Views of Islam', *Islam and Christianity: Mutual Perceptions*, 27.

³ R. Caspar, 'La religion musulmane', *Vatican II. Les relations de l'Église avec les religions non-chrétiennes*, 215.

Christians and Muslims together make up over half of the population. Statistics are inevitably estimates; yet Christians make up 33 per cent (approximately 2.3 billion) and Muslims 18 per cent (1.5 billion).¹

Christian-Muslims relations increasingly must be set within a context of global religious resurgence. 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, 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.²

¹ H. Goddard, 'Christian-Muslim Relations: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 3/2 (2003): 1-14.

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

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 have a global context. Large numbers of Christians and Muslims are to be found throughout Africa. We should not forget the continent's association with ancient Christianity, in Egypt, Nubia (Sudan) and Ethiopia. According to Lamin Sanneh, it is estimated that in Africa in the year 2025 there will be 600 million Christians and 500 million Muslims.¹ 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, the Philippines and South Korea having Christian majority populations. China, with over 5 per cent of its population Christian, and growing by 5 to 10 per cent each year, is rapidly becoming one of the largest concentrations of Christians in the world.² Europe now has sizeable Muslim communities, whereas the Americas (North and South) have dominant Christian societies with extremely small Muslim populations.³ 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.⁴

¹ Lamin Sanneh, 'Religion's Return', *The Times Literary Supplement* (London), 13 October 2006. See also Klaus Kock, 'Christian-Muslim Relations in the African Context', *IJSCC*, 3/2 (2003): 36-57.

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

³ Philip Lewis, 'Christians and Muslims in the West: From Isolation to Shared Citizenship?', *IJSCC*, 3/2 (2003): 77-100.

⁴ David Marshall, 'Heavenly Religion or Unbelief? Muslim Perspectives on Christianity', *Anvil*, 23/3 (2006): 89-100.

REVIVING THE GENDER AGENDA: A HUMAN DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

Trish Madigan OP*

Since the two International Decades for Women (UN and WCC) a much needed discussion about gender seems to have fallen from the ecumenical agenda. After reviewing the position in which women find themselves in the world and church of today and the ecumenical treatment of this question, this article will look at how the ongoing discussion on gender across cultures and faiths might be re-visioned and revitalized through an ethical (human development) approach drawing on the 'capabilities' paradigm of development of Nobel Prize Winner Amartya Sen and his collaborator, Martha Nussbaum.

Introduction

Since the two International Decades for Women (UN and WCC) a much needed discussion about gender seems to have fallen off the ecumenical agenda although, as Cardinal Kasper in *Harvesting the Fruits* has recently stated, the question of theological anthropology is one of the crucial questions which needs to be addressed by churches today. After reviewing the position in which women find themselves in the world today and the ecumenical treatment of this question, this paper will look at how the ongoing discussion on gender across cultures and faiths might be re-visioned and revitalized through an ethical (human development) approach drawing on the 'capabilities'

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paradigm of development of Nobel Prize Winner Amartya Sen and his collaborator, Martha Nussbaum.

There is much evidence to show that it is labour and class relations, bolstered by particular constructions of women's identity, which lie at the heart of global processes which disadvantage women.¹ A proper understanding of women's societal standing must include a multi-layered exploration of the relations between state and society, democracy, economic growth and development, ethnic and religious identity and conflict, environmental concerns and especially human and women's rights. When women generally are empowered as part of modern development, societies show themselves capable of moving towards a holistic appropriation of economic and cultural change, with both women and men being given the possibility of reaching their full human potential.

The position of women at the beginning of the twenty-first century

At the turn of the twenty-first century global inequality reached a new magnitude. The World Bank reported that about half the world's population (2.8 billion people) survived on less than two dollars per day, and 1.3 billion on less than one dollar per day.² UN studies show that females continue to score poorly in every development sector.

Women bear a disproportionate burden of the world's poverty, representing 70 per cent of the world's poor. They are most at risk of hunger because of the systematic discrimination they face in education, health care, employment and control of assets. Being poor can also mean they have little protection from violence³ and have no role in decision making.

¹ Delia D. Aguilar, 'Introduction' in Delia D. Aguilar and Anne E. Lacsamana, eds, *Women and Globalization* (New York: Humanity Books, 2004), 17.

² Delia D. Aguilar, 'Introduction', *ibid.* and Jeff Haynes, *Third World Politics* (Oxford UK and Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1996), 17, 150-1.

³ Recent Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show that in thirty years there has only been a miniscule 1.5 per cent decrease in violence against women in Australia. See Nina Funnell who says, 'With these statistics at hand, the claim that women have achieved equality and that feminism is now redundant seems implausible.' ('All jokes aside, it's a disgrace', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 November 2008).

Women work two thirds of the world's working hours yet receive only 5 per cent of the world's income and own only 1 per cent of the world's property. Two thirds of the world's illiterate are women.¹ Every minute a woman dies from complications during pregnancy, childbirth or the six weeks following delivery.²

Women face persistent discrimination when they apply for credit for business or self-employment and are often concentrated in insecure, unsafe and low-wage work. Women generally get paid proportionately less than men for the same work.³ In the era of globalized economics where a 'race to the bottom' is critical for superprofits, in assembly plants, export processing zones and garment sweatshops, it is women's labour that allows and guarantees maximum profitability for the corporate elite, a tiny minority of the world's inhabitants.

Although women's political participation is a fundamental prerequisite for gender equality and genuine democracy, the proportion of women parliamentarians internationally has increased by only 8 per cent in the decade from 1998 to 2008, to the current global average of around 18 per cent.⁴

In case we think that these statistics only relate to developing nations, we need to look no further than in my own country of Australia where, as in many developed economies, we also find that women continue to earn substantially less than men. Female wage and salary earners working full time receive, on average, only 84 per cent of that received by their male counterparts, a pay gap which has not changed or improved since 1990.⁵ In 2009, Australia had only 27 per

¹ UNIFEM: Women, Poverty and Economics <http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/women_poverty_economics/> accessed 19 February 2010.

² UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2009*.

³ UNIFEM: Women, Poverty and Economics.

⁴ UN Press Conference on 'Annual Statistics of Women in Politics', 5 March 2009 <http://www.un.org/News/briefings/docs/2009/090305_IPU.doc.htm> accessed 27 February 2010. See also UNIFEM: *Progress of the World's Women 2008/2009: Who Answers to Women?* <<http://www.unifem.org/progress/2008>> accessed 19 February 2010. Yearly gains are so slow it is estimated that it will take twenty years to reach the minimum target of thirty per cent set by the United Nations.

⁵ Australian Women Online, 'Equal Pay Day—Gender Pay Gap Widens in 2009' <<http://www.australianwomenonline.com/equal-pay-day-gender-pay->

cent women in the lower house of Parliament and 35 per cent in the upper house which places us on a par with Namibia, but doing better than the US (16 per cent in Congress) and Britain (close to 20 per cent). However, we lag behind Cuba (43 per cent), Sweden (46 per cent) and Rwanda (56 per cent).¹ In the top 200 companies listed on the Australian Stock Exchange women hold only 8.3 per cent of board directorships, a drop of 0.4 per cent in the last two years.² In the Federal Court of Australia, women make up only 13 per cent of the bench.³

This world-wide pattern of women's disadvantage is also reflected in the social order of Catholicism. Although the number of women working in the Vatican has virtually doubled from 11 per cent in 1978 to 21 per cent in 2007, most women are in support staff positions and have little decision-making input—a pattern replicated in archdioceses and dioceses around the world. The two top positions in every Vatican agency must be held by the ordained who currently must be male.⁴

World religions are among the most powerful ideological, sociopolitical and spiritual forces, and they play a crucial role in the interpretation, organization and reinforcement of particular gender relationships. Religion is only one determinant of women's status and role in society. Political and socio-cultural conditions are equally, if not more, important. Nevertheless the influence of religion can be a powerful factor in mediating women's status.

gap-widens-in-2009/> and <<http://www.eowa.gov.au/>> accessed 19 February 2010, and Kelsey Munro, 'Women's pay gap blamed on unequal bargaining', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 March 2010.

¹ Statistics compiled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union 2009 <<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>> accessed 19 February 2010.

² Moira Rayner, 'Australian superwomen left holding the poison', *Eureka Street*, 3 November 2008. This contrasts with Norway which, through introducing quotas for women on boards, discovered the value and uniqueness of women's contributions (Adele Horin, 'Why a gender quota is the only solution to board imbalance', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 March 2010).

³ Australian Human Rights Commission—fact sheet—Women in Leadership <http://www.hreoc.gov.au/listeningtour/launch/fact_sheets/factsheet_1.html> accessed 19 February 2010

⁴ Robert Mickens, 'Revealed: the true role of women in the Vatican', *The Tablet*, 26 August 2006.

Through a process of ‘symbolic interaction’, religion is often used to restrict women. Religious authorities have often made women’s bodies the turf on which their own power struggles are played out. But religion also has the potential to lend support to more gender egalitarianism. In the context of religion and women’s human rights, a question which must be asked is ‘What renewal and transformation of theological teachings and practices are needed to ensure a better understanding of the position and role of women and to enhance the full development of both women and men in today’s world?’ In this process religion, too, may undergo a manner of change and transformation.

Women in the Ecumenical Movement

Over the last ten years a topic frequently raised is the noticeable ‘stagnation’ of the ecumenical movement, usually phrased in terms of an ‘ecumenical winter’ with the promise of a coming spring. But spring has shown no sign of arrival. In fact some churches seem to be constructing ever-higher walls to keep the buds of any new ideas well and truly out.¹ Nowhere is this more obvious than around questions of gender in church life.

It is sixty years since women in the World Council of Churches began insisting that women’s place in the church is an ecclesiological question, having to do with the very nature of the church.² A report by Sarah Chakko from the Syrian Orthodox Church on ‘The Life and Work of Women in the Church’ first raised the question at the first assembly of the WCC in 1948. Despite the Faith and Order study *The Community of Women and Men in the Church* (CWMC) being carried out in the 1970s, neither the WWC *BEM* document nor the 1990 Report which followed showed much engagement with this study. They were unwilling to grapple seriously with the issues raised about women’s ministry.³

¹ An observation made by many of the contributors in Paul D. Murray, ed., *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning* (Oxford: OUP, 2010). See especially Murray’s chapter ‘Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning— Establishing the Agenda’, 9-11.

² Janet Crawford, ‘Women and Ecclesiology: Two Ecumenical Streams?’, *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 53, no. 1 (2001), 14.

³ *ibid.* 17-19.

In January 1987, noting that the UN Decade for Women had had little impact on the churches, the WCC central committee decided to observe an Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998) to sustain the energy generated by the UN Decade. However, hope among women gradually turned to frustration as the decade turned out to be, rather, a decade of women in solidarity with other women and with the Churches!¹

From the time of *BEM* onwards it was noticeable that the two specific issues in relation to the mutual recognition of ministries, namely episcopal succession and the ordination of women, were receiving very different treatment in ecumenical dialogues. Episcopal succession was addressed directly. Both episcopal and non-episcopal churches were counselled to change their perspective for the sake of mutual recognition. But on the issue of women's ministry, discussion has not occurred.² In the ten years following the *BEM Report* the challenge that the question of women's ministry issued to the churches has become further marginalised and swallowed up in other concerns. By 1998 the language of the Faith and Order document *The Nature and Purpose of the Church* had reduced the church to a community of neutered human beings, with diversity of male and female rendered invisible.

It is clear that although the debate on women's participation and ministry in the church is related to the three major issues identified in *BEM* (scripture and tradition, sacraments and sacramentality, and the

¹ *Living Letters: A Report of Visits to the Churches during the Ecumenical Decade - Churches in Solidarity with Women* (WCC: 1997), 13-14.

² Several letters of exchange between Paul VI and Archbishop Donald Coggan, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1975-1976 and between John Paul II and Coggan's successor, Archbishop Robert Runcie, made it clear that the Anglican plea for consideration of women's ordained ministry as a gospel issue met only with papal statements warning it would constitute 'a new obstacle placed in the way of Christian unity.' See correspondence between Donald Coggan, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Paul VI (1975-1976) <<http://www.womenpriests.org/church/cant1.asp>> accessed 8 June 2010; correspondence between Robert Runcie, Archbishop of Canterbury, John Paul II and Cardinal Jan Willebrands (1864-1976) <<http://www.womenpriests.org/church/cant2.asp>> accessed 8 June 2010; and Simon Caldwell, 'Vatican official to Anglicans: Women bishops would destroy unity', *Catholic News Service*, 7 June 2006.

search for common perspectives on ecclesiology), and although the debate is vital for the future visible unity of the church, in contrast to the issues of episcopacy and primacy it has not received the attention it deserves.

Perhaps unknown to many Western Christians the subject of women's ministry and participation in the church has been a significant topic on the agenda of the Orthodox churches from the 1970s. In 1976 an Orthodox churches consultation in Agapia, Romania brought together Orthodox clergy, lay women and men to discuss the topic 'Orthodox Women: their Role and Participation in the Orthodox Church.' In this consultation and in subsequent consultations in Rhodes (1988) and Crete (1990) recommendations included a plea for greater involvement by women in decision-making bodies of the church and a recommendation that the female diaconate, which had continued in the Orthodox churches up to the twentieth century, be studied and 'reactivated.'¹ These issues were raised again by Orthodox women in two consultations held in Damascus (1996) and Istanbul (1997) as part of the mid-decade assessment of the progress of the Decade of the Churches in Solidarity of Women. Although these recommendations have been accepted in principle by some Orthodox churches any concrete changes have been slow coming.

A similar pattern has emerged in the Catholic Church in Australia where the Catholic bishops in 1994 began a five-year study project to look at the participation of women in the church. An overwhelming number of submissions called for greater participation by women in the Church, in particular through the involvement of women in decision making at all levels of Church life.² Yet after ten years of implementation there was little progress to report.³

¹ Kyriaki Karidoyanes Fitzgerald, *Orthodox Women Speak* (Geneva: WCC, 1999), 8-13; Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and Kallistos Ware, *The Ordination of Women in the Orthodox Tradition* (Geneva: WCC, 2000), 9.

² Research Management Group, Australian Episcopal Conference, *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus* (Sydney, N.S.W: HarperCollinsReligious, 1999), 386.

³ See Sonia Wagner, *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus: A Retrospective*, paper presented at the Conference 'Women: Gathering, Affirming, Celebrating', Canberra, August 2009 <<http://www.opw.catholic.org.au/latest-news/23.html>> accessed 19 February 2010. In 2010 the sixteen agencies of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference are led by six women (37.5 per cent) and ten men (62.5 per cent). Organisations having liaison with the ACBC are

The questioning of religious attitudes and practices which contribute to women's inferior status will be important in promoting the full development of both men and women in Catholicism. A platform for Catholic thinking has been well provided by Pope John XXIII in his ground-breaking encyclical *Peace on Earth* (1963), which has been described as 'the most powerful and thorough statement of the Roman Catholic understanding of human rights in modern times',¹ and the Second Vatican Council which stated:

There must be made available to all people everything necessary for leading a life truly human, such as food, clothing, and shelter; the right to choose a state of life freely and to found a family, the right to education, to employment, to a good reputation, to respect, to appropriate information, to activity in accord with the upright norm of one's own conscience, to protection of privacy and rightful freedom even in matters religious.²

What some Catholic reformists are saying

The central issue for Catholic reformists today is the involvement of the patriarchal leadership of the Catholic Church in an ideological struggle to maintain control of social and cultural reproduction—both the reproduction of the species (especially through its teachings on contraception and abortion) and the social reproduction of the church (opposition to the ordination of women).³ Church tensions and struggles have become clustered around issues of (a) human sexuality—e.g. abortion, contraception and to a lesser extent

led by one woman (16.7 per cent) and five men (83.3 per cent), and Executive Secretary positions for Bishops' Commissions (12) are at first glance held evenly by women and men until one notices that one individual religious sister holds four of the six 'female' positions!

¹ John XXIII, 'Peace on Earth', April 1963, especially nos. 11-12. See David Hollenbach, *Claims in Conflict* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 41.

² Second Vatican Council, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, December 1965, no. 26.

³ Robert Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1997), 23. Rosemary Ruether records: 'The Vatican has made contraception and abortion and women's ordination indiscussible topics and has required new bishops to take (secret) oaths not to be open to change on these issues ... hierarchical Catholicism views feminist theology with deepest suspicion' in *Women and Redemption* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 190.

homosexuality (the reproduction of the species), and (b) the struggle over the ordination of women (the social reproduction of the church). This has meant that the critical issues around which a battle is being waged are centred on women, their identity and their participation in church and society, even though these issues seem to have little to do with the fundamental teachings and essential doctrines of Christianity.

Many of the doctrinal teachings and attitudinal positions which are being protected should have been superseded long ago but, because of their systematic and interlocking nature, to change one concept or practice is to introduce change to the whole edifice. As Camille Paul argues: 'Change one part and the remainder is thrown off-centre ... [c]hange one concept and all is changed.'¹ Furthermore, these issues have taken on ideological significance in the Church's rejection of 'secular' modernity. In order to justify women's subordination and exclude women's leadership, such teachings and practices draw heavily on a Catholic anthropology based on erroneous Aristotelian biological theories. They draw on scriptural interpretations, images of God, language which excludes women, and ethical teachings, especially as they touch on women's bodies and lives, to reinforce legal restrictions on women's participation in the church community and liturgy. However, as many contemporary scholars point out, in doing so they also risk denying some of the most fundamental and traditional teachings of Christianity.

Catholic anthropology and teaching on 'natural law'

One basic area of critique has been an examination of the anthropology embedded in interpretations of the Biblical creation stories in Genesis which have often been used in Christian tradition to misrepresent women's sexuality and to justify women's subordination.² Another area of Catholic thought which is receiving a thorough feminist critique is that of Catholic ethics,³ specifically its appeal to a morality based on human 'nature' or 'natural law', the paradigm for which was provided in the thirteenth century by Thomas

¹ Camille Paul, *Equal or Different?: Women, the Papacy and Social Justice* (Mulgrave: John Garratt Publishing, 1999), 100.

² See, for example, Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Women and Sexuality* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1992), 26ff.

³ *ibid.* 6-7.

Aquinas.¹ While the strength of the natural law approach to ethics lies in its ability to appeal to common human values, known experientially, its inherent limitation is that these experiences will always be interpreted, and values generalized, from particular historical and cultural standpoints. With the enormous economic and social changes taking place in the modern era, there is now a large question-mark around assertions that parental and domestic roles have an asymmetrical importance for women as opposed to men.

Contemporary Catholic anthropology is still dependent on teachings and conclusions once derived from the old biologicistic, procreative and hierarchical model of sexuality, especially women's sexuality defined primarily in terms of motherhood, domesticity, and submission to the husband/father instead of a partnership of equals. This is just as true of John Paul II's idealized and romanticized 'Theology of the Body', so widely popularised among young Catholics today. Some theological commentators have judged it to be overly tied to a vision of a return to the lost innocence of creation with inadequate consideration of how human sexuality is integral also to 'the messy healing work of redemption'.² There is a need to restate the Catholic approach to sexuality towards a more integral, embodied, and social perception of the meaning of sex, which applies essentially the same interpretative framework for men and women.

This is especially so due to the serious threat to the safety and well-being of women which can result from church teachings that support women's disempowerment and subordination. While it may be laudable for the pope to denounce male violence, as he does in the encyclical *Mulieris Dignitatem* (On the Dignity and Vocation of Women), it is disturbing that it is precisely within this kind of

¹ Like Augustine, Aquinas followed Aristotle in his understanding of woman as an 'anomalous' man (*aliquid deficiens et occasionatum, a mas occasionatus - Summa Theologica (ST)*, I, q 92, a 1). He asserted not only the illegitimacy, but also the invalidity, of women's ordination and also of a women's preaching, on biological grounds (*ST*, II-II, q 177, a 2).

² John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body: human love in the divine plan* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997) and commentary by William Mattison, 'When they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage', in Lisa Sowle Cahill, John Carvey, T. Frank Kennedy, eds, *Sexuality and the U.S. Catholic Church* (New York: Crossroad, 2006), 48.

thinking on the nature of women that the roots of violence against women are found.¹

Other scholars note the moral responsibility which proponents of natural law have to enter into serious engagement with those whose lives are marginalized by its claims to truth. They draw attention to the ways in which unjust power relations between men and women can shape the lens through which we view the moral order.² When religious leaders introduce definitions of women as 'equal but different', it is necessary to look at who is doing the defining and who is benefiting from the very unequal division of power. It has parallels to the 'separate but equal' argument which once sanctioned racial segregation and which was equally dangerous and discriminatory.

Having outlined some deficiencies of present approaches to questions of gender and religion I now move on to reflect on two sources which might provide some bases for constructing an alternative approach to addressing questions of gender within the religious thought of Christianity and in dialogue between Christians and people of other faiths. The first I see as 'a turn towards the ethical' by some Christian theologian-philosophers, and the second is the growing influence of the 'capabilities' approach to human development of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum in international forums on human rights and development. The first, having Christian theological foundations, and the second, drawing on Aristotelian-Thomistic concepts of human 'flourishing', may have something to contribute to a new paradigm of gender relations in both church and society.

¹ Joanna Manning, *Is the Pope Catholic? A Woman Confronts Her Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 76-9. In the present Catholic 'natural law' ethical framework birth-control is presented as intrinsically evil, along with abortion and masturbation, while homosexual acts are 'intrinsically disordered.' However, sex with a minor girl is considered only 'gravely sinful', and within the clerical system the repentant priest-abuser is easily forgiven (A. W. Richard Sipe, 'Sex: Obedience and Disobedience', *National Catholic Reporter*, 1 June 2010).

² Carter Heyward quoted in Elizabeth A. Clark and Herbert Richardson, eds, *Women and Religion*, expanded edition (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 299. See also Gerard Mannion, 'Cast in stone?', *The Tablet*, 20 October 2007, 12-13 for a critique of the 'immutability' of natural law.

A 'turn to the ethical'

This 'turn' to the ethical can be found in a growing number of Christian scholars who are attempting to bring the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas into conversation with Christian scripture and theology.¹ Glenn Morrison, for example, has argued that if one begins with the idea that intrinsic to the very understanding of Trinitarian *praxis* is the notion of alterity, then ethical transcendence must be the very inspiration for theology if it is to go beyond the limits of objectivity, being and presence. The ideas of Levinas, he maintains, applied to a theology of the Trinity, can offer Christian theology the possibility of breaking out of the limits imposed by traditional notions of objectivity, being and presence towards 'ethical transcendence'.

Drawing on the ethical metaphysics of Levinas, Morrison asserts that the deepest problem to be faced by theology is one of giving priority to the ethical over the ontological. Consequently, he argues for a conception of Christian life that goes beyond the categories of ontology and experience. He proposes a notion of Trinitarian *praxis* in which we come to God by way of ethical transcendence. In other words, we come to God by taking to heart the biblical call to be like God, welcoming the stranger, the widow and the orphan (Deut. 10:18-19). Trinitarian *praxis* is being sensitive, open and intent enough to love our neighbour.

He goes on to say 'Doing theology with Levinas is both possible and impossible. It is largely possible because Levinas' thought is like a treasury of keys to unlock the mysteries of personhood, prayer and ethics. Yet, we also face a sense of the impossible as the language of alterity itself beckons a whole eternity to be proclaimed.'

This may seem like a singular thought pattern until we notice that a similar 'ethical turn' was taken by Benedict XVI in an interfaith context during his visit to the Synagogue of Rome on 17 January 2010. Although there was some criticism of the pope for not addressing important theological questions such as the continuing significance of

¹ For example, Jonathon Ryan, 'Like Bread from One's Mouth: Emmanuel Levinas and Reading Scripture with the Other', *Pacifica*, October 2008, and Glenn Morrison, 'The Im(possibilities) of Levinas for Christian Theology', Conference Paper, 'Responsibility, God and Society' (Leuven, 7-10 May 2008) <http://researchonline.nd.edu.au/theo_conference/1/> accessed 14 March 2010.

the Jewish covenant and the legitimacy of missionary efforts directed at Jews,¹ the pope chose to distance himself from historical and theological issues and instead spoke at some length of the common heritage found in the 'centrality of the Decalogue as a common ethical message of permanent value' and the common task of preparing or ushering in the Kingdom of the Most High, especially in the care of creation entrusted by God to human beings (see Gen. 2:15).

The pope said:

The Ten Commandments call us to respect life and to protect it against every injustice and abuse, recognizing the worth of each human person, created in the image and likeness of God. How often, in every part of the world, near and far, the dignity, the freedom and the rights of human beings are trampled upon! Bearing witness together to the supreme value of life against all selfishness, is an important contribution to a new world where justice and peace reign, a world marked by that 'shalom' which the lawgivers, the prophets and the sages of Israel longed to see.²

In taking this path of proposing the Torah as the basis of a 'great ethical code' for humanity, the pope seemed to be encouraging a shift from 'inter-religious' to 'inter-cultural' dialogue and opened the way for Jews and Catholics to move beyond theology into 'several possible areas of cooperation and witness' on a cluster of issues including:

recognising the worth of each human person created in the image and likeness of God, especially promoting justice for 'the poor, women and children, strangers, the sick, the weak and the needy'.

This is in keeping with Benedict's stated conviction that, while interreligious dialogue is not possible without putting one's own faith into parenthesis, intercultural dialogue on the other hand, is both possible and urgent. The accent is not on new theological breakthroughs but rather new alliances in the social, cultural and political spheres.³

¹ John Pawlikowski quoted in John Allen Jr., 'Pope welcomed to Rome synagogue despite tensions', *National Catholic Reporter*, 18 January 2010.

² Papal Address at Synagogue of Rome, *Zenit*, 17 January 2010 <<http://www.zenit.org/article-28074?l=english>> accessed 13 March 2010.

³ John Allen Jr., 'A theologian-pope sidelines theology', *National Catholic Reporter*, 22 January 2010; John Allen Jr., 'Making Sense of Benedict's Jewish Policy', *Forward*, 20 January 2010 <<http://www.forward.com/articles/123888/>> accessed 15 March 2010.

The concept of ‘an intercultural dialogue that develops the cultural consequences of the religious option’ is a very interesting one. It is one that could lead us into new approaches on the crucial question of theological anthropology which Cardinal Kasper cites as being at the root of Western church divisions. It is one of the most urgent issues confronting society today, he says, and it includes differences which have recently emerged on ethical questions related to marriage and family, and human sexuality.¹ Perhaps such an ‘ethics of just relationships’ could help resolve some of the tensions which have developed round the place of women in church and society today.

The ‘capabilities’ approach to human development.

One such approach to an ethics of just relationships applied to gender is found in the thought of social economist Amartya Sen² and philosopher Martha Nussbaum,³ whose work on the underlying dynamics of poverty, gender inequality and human development has had considerable influence on the UN Development Programme and the formulation of the UN *Human Development Report*. Sen came to prominence in the 1980s, coincidentally the same decade that much feminist theory also developed, winning the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1998.

Sen’s interest in ‘economics as freedom’ developed out of his own experience as a child when, during an afternoon of communal violence in his hometown of Dhaka, a man came through the gate screaming and bleeding profusely. He was a Muslim labourer who had come into this largely Hindu and hostile area in search of work because his family had nothing to eat, and been attacked by some communal thugs. The penalty of his economic unfreedom, Sen notes, turned out to be death, which occurred later on in the hospital. Sen describes how the incident alerted him to ‘the remarkable fact that economic unfreedom, in the form of extreme poverty, can make a person a helpless prey in the violation of other kinds of freedom.’

¹ Walter Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits: Basic Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue* (London and New York: Continuum, 2009), 203.

² See especially Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford: OUP, 1999).

³ See especially Martha C. Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Other experiences also drew his attention to the relation between gender and violence, and class and violence.¹

The capabilities approach developed by Sen and Nussbaum is significant for this study since, unlike the Thomistic idea of a human 'nature' in which women are dependent on men for the realization of their full humanity, the idea of 'capabilities', which also has strong Aristotelian connections, is directed towards the perfection of each human life in a relationship of human 'flourishing'. This 'flourishing' may vary from being adequately nourished and free from disease to more complex activity such as being able to take part in the life of the community and having self-respect. The evaluative focus of this 'capabilities' approach can be either on the *realized* functionings (what a person is actually able to do) or on the *capability* set of alternatives she has (her real opportunities).

Martha Nussbaum's work on capabilities has often focused on the unequal freedoms and opportunities of women. With Sen, she views 'substantial freedoms', such as the ability to live to old age, engage in economic transactions, or participate in political activities, as constitutive of development, and poverty as capability-deprivation. These capabilities depend both on our physical and mental characteristics as well as on social opportunities and influences, and they can serve as the basis not only of assessment of personal advantage but also of efficiency and equity of social policies.

Sen argues that human development is a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy (rather than identifying development with growth in the gross national product, or with rise in personal incomes, or with industrialization or technological advance or with social modernization—though these may be a *means* of expanding the freedoms enjoyed). Development requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom, poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or overactivity of repressive states. Only when such barriers are removed can the citizen truly be said to act out of personal choice.

¹ Tore Frängsmyr, ed., *The Nobel Prizes 1998* (Stockholm: Nobel Foundation, 1999) <http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/economics/laureates/1998/sen-autobio.html> accessed 20 March 2010.

In Sen's thought, personal freedoms are not only the primary ends of development, they are also among its principal means. He sees a remarkable empirical connection between different kinds of freedom e.g. political freedoms help promote economic security. Social opportunities facilitate economic participation. Economic opportunities help generate public resources for social facilities. Freedoms of different kinds can strengthen one another.

Nussbaum has taken special care to contrast her work with the traditional utilitarian views which see development purely in terms of economic growth. Also, rejecting any charge that such an approach is 'western' or culturally inappropriate, she views the capabilities approach as 'fully universal' since the capabilities in question are important for each and every citizen, and in each and every nation, and each is to be treated as an end. Her aim is to provide the philosophical underpinning for an account of the basic constitutional principles that should be respected and implemented by governments of all nations, as a bare minimum of what respect for human dignity requires. She argues that the capabilities in question should be pursued for every human person, treating each as an end and none as a mere tool of the ends of others for 'women have all too often been treated as the supporters of the ends of others, rather than as ends in their own right; thus this principle has particular critical force with regard to women's lives.' Her list of ten capabilities which she sees are central to full human functioning include the right to life, to good health, including reproductive health, the right to use the senses—to imagine, think and reason, cultivated by adequate education—the right to emotional attachment without having one's emotional development blighted by overwhelming anxiety or fear, to have control over one's environment which includes political participation, and the right to hold property.

She recognises that feminist philosophy has frequently been sceptical of universal normative approaches. Nevertheless she argues that it is possible to describe a framework for such a feminist practice of philosophy that is strongly universalist, committed to cross-cultural forms of justice, equality and rights, and is at the same time sensitive to local particularity, and to the many ways in which circumstances shape not only our options, but also beliefs and preferences. A universalist feminism need not be insensitive to difference or imperialistic. Rather, a particular type of universalism, framed in

terms of general human powers and their development, will offer us the best framework within which to locate our thoughts about difference.

Conclusion

That the 'gender agenda' needs renewed discussion in churches and religions seems to be self-evident. For Christianity and the Catholic Church in particular, an 'ethical turn' based on Trinitarian foundations has the potential to unlock doctrinal positions of a theological anthropology which no longer connects with human experience or contemporary notions of justice. Because of its Aristotelian philosophical roots (in the case of Western Christianity, especially Catholicism), and because of its universalism (in the case of other faiths and cultures) the 'capabilities' paradigm of human development I believe has the potential to bring a new direction to consideration of gender relations in the broader religious and societal context. An 'ethical turn' based on Trinitarian foundations, especially if brought into conversation with the 'capabilities' approach to human development, may have the potential to re-vitalize a discussion about gender in the context of church and society, an issue which is crucial not only for women, but for our future survival and human flourishing on this planet.

EPISKOPE: A RECENT STUDY OF THE LUTHERAN– ROMAN CATHOLIC DIALOGUE IN AUSTRALIA

Gerard Kelly*

The dialogue between Lutherans and Roman Catholics in Australia has worked patiently since 1975 on major questions dividing the churches. Its most recent statement challenges both churches about the understanding and practice of the ministry of oversight (episcopal ministry). This article will give some background to the study before focusing on certain sections of the final text: the dispute at the time of the Reformation and its relevance today; the divine institution of episcopal oversight; the apostolic succession; and the relationship between bishops and the pastorate.

It is not too great a claim to say that the Australian Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue has been one of the most fruitful in the country. It has been meeting continuously since 1975, and over that time has produced six substantial documents.¹ The first, in 1977, was on Baptism. This was followed by a document on the Eucharist in 1985, called *Sacrament and Sacrifice*. In 1989 the document *Pastor and Priest* was completed. The next phase of the dialogue examined issues relating to the church and mission, and produced a document in 1995 called *Communion and Mission*. After that came the study on justification, and a document was finalised in 1998. The most recent

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¹ The texts of these statements may be found in Raymond K. Williamson, ed., *Stages on the Way: Documents from the Bilateral Conversations between Churches in Australia* (Melbourne: Joint Board of Christian Education, 1994) and Raymond K. Williamson, ed., *Stages on the Way II: Documents from the Bilateral Conversations between Churches in Australia 1994-2007* (Strathfield: St Pauls, 2007).

document, *The Ministry of Oversight: The Office of Bishop and President in the Church*, was completed in 2007.¹

This last document is significant for a number of reasons. In the first place it began as a response to a crisis between the two churches—a crisis which tested the maturity of the relationship. Secondly, it highlighted the importance of a deepening spiritual relationship between the churches if the theological dialogue is to bear fruit. Thirdly, the dialogue topic challenged both churches to examine their own practice of ‘*episkope*’. Finally—and this point is related to the previous one—the final statement set out some very clear directions for its reception in both churches.

The Impact of the Agreement on the Doctrine of Justification

The statement on justification has undoubtedly been the most celebrated of the Australian statements. It was being prepared at the same time as the two churches were studying this question internationally and at the highest level. The result of the international dialogue was the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, which was signed by Bishop Christian Krause, President of the Lutheran World Federation and Cardinal Edward Cassidy, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity on 31 October 1999 in Augsburg. The Joint Declaration made two important points in its conclusion. The first was that the consensus achieved in the Declaration was such that any remaining differences of language, theological elaboration, and emphasis in understanding are acceptable.² The second was that the consensus in the basic truths concerning the doctrine of justification must influence the life and teachings of each church. This will be particularly important when dealing with those issues that still divide Lutherans and Roman Catholics. The following were some of the topics identified: the relationship between the Word of God and church doctrine, ecclesiology, ecclesial authority, ministry and the sacraments.³ The

¹ Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue in Australia, *The Ministry of Oversight: The Office of Bishop and President in the Church* (Brooklyn Park SA: Australian Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue, 2007).

² *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge UK: Eerdmans, 2000), 40.

³ *Ibid*, 43.

conclusion to the Australian statement had expressed similar sentiments. The final paragraph also expressed the hope and confidence that this agreement had engendered among the dialogue partners:

With joy and gratitude to God, we recognise that in substance we do share a common faith in the doctrine of justification and that this dialogue has strengthened the bonds between us. Our agreement on justification must inevitably form the basis for all further dialogue between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. This opens the way to exploring the possibility of a more visible unity—as Jesus prayed, ‘that they may all be one’ (John 17:21).¹

It is worth noting, however, that the optimism expressed in both of these documents is also tempered by a realism acknowledging that agreement on justification has not resulted in both churches now being re-united, and that more work still needs to be done.

The Challenge of *Dominus Iesus*

This realism hit the Australian dialogue with a jolt in August 2000 with the release of the document *Dominus Iesus* by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. While this document was concerned to affirm the uniqueness of Christ and focused mainly on questions around inter-religious dialogue, it also referred to churches and communities not in full communion with the Roman Catholic Church, saying that ‘ecclesial communities which have not preserved the valid Episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic mystery are not churches in the proper sense’.²

This statement effectively implied that the Lutheran Church of Australia was not a church and that the leadership of the Lutheran Church—whether called bishop or president³—was not the same as a

¹ *Justification: A Common Statement of the Australian Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue*, in *Stages on the Way II*, 221.

² *Dominus Iesus* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000), 17.

³ The question of the naming of presidents/bishops in the Lutheran Church is discussed in the dialogue document, *The Ministry of Oversight: The Office of Bishop and President in the Church* (Adelaide: 2008): ‘The Scandinavian church retained the episcopal office through the Reformation, in the cases of Sweden and Finland, with unbroken succession’ (37); ‘During the last part of the twentieth century many other Lutheran churches around the world have decided to use “bishop” as the title for the presiding leader of the church, and

bishop in the Roman Catholic Church. This had the potential to halt the dialogue. This may seem a dramatic claim, but it should be noted that in other parts of the world, and even in Australia, the actions or decisions of one dialogue partner have caused dialogues to break down. One need think only of the international Catholic–Orthodox dialogue which did not meet for about ten years. Again, at the Australian consultation on bilateral dialogues in Brisbane in July 2007 it was noted that several dialogues were in a state of suspension while some churches sorted out their internal issues. Perhaps in a uniquely Australian way, these dialogues never completely came to a halt, as all parties acknowledge that at this time they needed each other's support rather than opprobrium. This, it could be argued, testifies to the maturity of ecumenical relations in Australia.

This same maturity was evident in Lutheran–Roman Catholic relations. Just before the next scheduled meeting of the dialogue, the two Church leaders, Dr Lance Steicke, President of the Lutheran Church of Australia, and Archbishop Leonard Faulkner, archbishop of Adelaide, met to consider the implications of the Vatican Statement. Fortunately, at this time, both men were active members of the dialogue, so they agreed to consult the two co-chairs and propose that the issue raised by *Dominus Iesus* be taken up in dialogue.

While the dialogue had done substantial work on the Eucharist, and considered that the results testified to the same eucharistic faith, no extended work had been done on the episcopate, even though it had been raised in the earlier dialogue statement, *Pastor and Priest*. At that time it was noted that one of the difficulties for the Roman Catholic Church in acknowledging the authenticity of ordained ministry in the Lutheran Church 'was that ordained ministry expresses itself fully in the office of the bishop (LG 21), and that standing in the

often for the District (regional) leaders as well. In Australia the Lutheran Church went against this trend to use the title "bishop" when the Canberra Synod in 1990 rejected a proposal to introduce it. District and national leaders are still called "presidents", but in fact function as bishops do in other Lutheran churches. For Australian Lutherans, there is no theological or confessional reason that would prevent the possibility of naming presidents "bishops", and some would even say, of returning to the historical episcopate. A good case can be made in terms of the well-being (*bene esse*) of the Christian community' (42-3).

historic succession belongs to the fullness of the episcopal ministry'.¹ Even at this time *Pastor and Priest* proposed a number of arguments for consideration in relation to this question. The relevant text is worth quoting in full:

The Catholic claim that the full expression of ordained ministry is found in the office of bishop does not rule out the understanding that Lutheran pastors exercise a ministry which carries out functions of the ministry which Christ instituted for his church, that is, of word and sacraments. Catholics have come to understand that other churches and ecclesial communions can be authentic and real manifestations of the church of Christ (even if in Catholic understanding this may not be a complete manifestation). The admission in the *Decree on Ecumenism* 3 that such communions 'can truly engender a life of grace' and 'can aptly give access to the community of salvation', and that 'the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as a means of salvation', would seem open to this interpretation.

If the Roman Catholic Church recognises that the Lutheran Church is a means of salvation and is a true manifestation of the church of Jesus Christ, then there must be a true ministry, since a true manifestation of the church cannot have a false ministry or non-ministry ...²

Interestingly, the official Catholic texts referred to here, and the general line of argument, were also present in *Dominus Iesus*. It stated that 'those who are baptised in these communities are, by baptism, incorporated in Christ and thus are in a certain communion, albeit it imperfect, with the Church. Baptism in fact tends per se toward the full development of life in Christ, through the integral profession of faith, the Eucharist, and full communion in the Church'.³

There are two things worth noting about the respective Lutheran and Roman Catholic readiness to take up the question of episcopal ministry. On the Lutheran side, consensus on the doctrine of justification meant that the Reformation problematic concerning bishops could now be considered in a new light. On the Roman Catholic side the mutual recognition of baptism and the fact of a real but imperfect communion with the Lutheran Church meant that the dialogue about Episcopal Ministry would have as its goal the deepening of the already existing communion between these two

¹ *Pastor and Priest*, 75.1, in *Stages on the Way*, 121.

² *Pastor and Priest*, 76.1, in *Stages on the Way*, 121.

³ *Dominus Iesus*, 17.

churches. This would mean each church clarifying its understanding of episcopal ministry for the other and, in the process, for itself. Communion would be deepened as both churches purified their understanding and practice of episcopal ministry.

The Methodology of the Dialogue

Both these characteristics of the present context meant that the older comparative methodology was not going to be sufficient. It was supplemented with a joint historical study, with the expectation that it would give a new context for the dialogue.

The dialogue began with a word study of the vocabulary around 'oversight', particularly the Greek word *episkope*.¹ This study led to the conclusion that based on the New Testament evidence, ministry in the early church took diverse forms. At the time of the New Testament there was no clear distinction between the *episkopos* (overseer or bishop) and *presbuteros* (elder or presbyter). The role of leadership or oversight was both pastoral and administrative, and included teaching, managing, admonishing, and supporting the mission and life of the church (15).²

The next step in the study was to examine the development of oversight from the early church period until the Reformation. It was noted that from the diversity in the early church a fundamental pattern of oversight emerges from around the second century. Ignatius of Antioch speaks of a threefold office of overseers, presbyters and deacons. At this time the practice of one overseer or bishop in each town or city also begins to emerge.

Through this study the members of the dialogue were able to recognise that there is a basic understanding of the nature of the church that carries this development in ministry, and this was the lived experience of the church as a 'communion'. On the significance of this bond of communion *The Ministry of Oversight* states:

¹ The use of the word *episkope* presented a challenge because each church understood it slightly differently, especially when working out who it referred to. Nevertheless, it was a helpful term to speak of the overarching idea of oversight. This fact was noted by Cardinal Walter Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits: Basic Aspects of Christian faith in Ecumenical Dialogue* (London/New York: Continuum, 2009), p.156, n.28.

² This and all other references in brackets will refer to *The Ministry of Oversight*.

This communion can be described as the bond that united the bishop and the local Christian community, and the bishops among themselves. It was a bond that was maintained and made visible by eucharistic communion and by the sharing of decision-making in councils or synods. In this respect the bishop was always the bishop of a local church within a single town or city. (19)

In these early centuries the link between the bishop and eucharistic communion meant that the office of bishop was understood in sacramental terms. It was only later, in the Middle Ages, that the focus shifted to a juridical or legal understanding. This distinction between a sacramental and a juridical understanding of the church and the bishop is fundamental to appreciating the developments that led to the Reformation.

I need to say something about this distinction. According to the sacramental outlook of the first Christian millennium, the church is a sign of God's saving action in the world. This is most clearly manifest in the celebration of the Eucharist, which creates and sustains ecclesial communion as an effective sign of the communion which is God's plan for the cosmos. The bishop is to be understood within this framework as the effective sign of this communion. He has the task of safeguarding the unity or communion of the church and of promoting it. He does this within the local church where he proclaims the word of God and presides at the Eucharist. He also does it by keeping this local church in communion with the other local churches. The regular meeting of bishops in synod or council will facilitate this communion between churches.

The second Christian millennium developed a more juridical outlook, and focused on questions of power and authority, especially in relation to the Eucharist. Because priests could consecrate the Eucharist, there were new questions about the difference between a bishop and a priest. The answer was soon given in some quarters that this difference was simply a matter of jurisdiction. The result is that rather than seeing the bishop as an effective sign of the communion of the church, he was simply seen as possessing a certain authority beyond that of the priest. In other words, the difference between a priest and a bishop was juridical and not sacramental. This view went hand in hand with a growing understanding of the church as a hierarchical society.

This distinction between a sacramental and a juridical understanding of the church and the bishop is important for both Lutherans and Roman Catholics, and sheds some light on the problematic operating in the sixteenth century that led to calls for reform. In many ways, both the Protestant and the Catholic reformations were attempts to deal with some of the deviations that had developed. Luther's 'aim was not revolution, but renewal of the church in doctrine and life as impelled by the word of God in scripture and preaching, and by the sacraments' (30). He believed that bishops had become too powerful and often corrupt, and he proposed a return to that unity of office testified in the New Testament, namely no distinction between presbyter and bishop. The pastorate thus became the primary location for the exercise of 'oversight', and the office of bishop was seen as unnecessary. This did not mean that bishops were abolished. Indeed, if a local bishop were to join the reform movement he would be welcomed. However, in several places where this did not happen the movement found itself in an emergency situation where the congregation might choose someone from among their number to be the pastor. *The Ministry of Oversight* makes the following important statement about Lutheran intentions at this time and since: 'Looking back over almost five centuries of Lutheran history in respect to the ministry of oversight, it is evident that at the beginning there was no intent to break away from the common tradition in regard to the ordering of ministry' (45).

On the Roman Catholic side the Council of Trent issued a reform decree requiring that bishops were to be resident in their dioceses and be committed to preaching, pastoral oversight and living exemplary moral lives. The Council insisted that ordination was a sacramental rite, and that bishops, priests and deacons were instituted by divine ordinance.

Despite these efforts for reform on the part of both Lutherans and Roman Catholics it is doubtful that there was a satisfactory reformation of the church and its institutions. History reveals, I believe, that no one at that time had the resources to find a way forward through some of the theological confusion that existed.

For the Roman Catholic Church, the most significant reform had to wait until the twentieth century and the Second Vatican Council. The dialogue makes the following important statement about this renewal: 'the reforms of the Second Vatican Council were partly the result of a

long study of the ancient sources. The clear intentions of the bishops at the Council was the renewal of the church's understanding of ministry in the light of the ancient common tradition' (58).

It is important to note that both dialogue partners acknowledged the importance of the common Christian tradition about the ministry of oversight. The intentions of Lutherans in the sixteenth century was not to deviate from it. The intention of the Roman Catholic Church in the twentieth century was to deepen its understanding of this ancient common tradition and to undergo renewal accordingly. The conclusion to this section of the Statement said the following:

Our study thus far shows that the way that the ministry of oversight finds expression in the office of bishop/president has been continually developing in the life of the church. At each stage the church has had to articulate its understanding of the ministry in the light of the gospel. Since the Reformation, however, Lutherans and Roman Catholics have taken separate paths in reflecting on the nature and purpose of episcopal oversight. ... While Lutherans and Roman Catholics hold much in common, it is not surprising that there are basic theological differences between us (59).

The Problem of Divine Institution

These statements represent an important stage in the process of dialogue, because they put the major questions from the Reformation in a new context. Let us consider some of these questions and the way they were handled by the dialogue, beginning with the question of whether episcopacy is of divine institution.

The problem can be expressed this way. Roman Catholics believe that the office of bishops belongs to the faith of the church, and is not simply a matter of good church order. Lutherans, on the other hand, argue that while the pastoral office and the ministry of oversight inherent in it are of divine institution, particular concrete expressions of this are by human arrangement. Thus they say that 'the specific office of president in the Lutheran Church of Australia is regarded as a human arrangement made by the synod of the church' (64).

As the dialogue on this issue progressed certain things became clearer. One concerned what each church meant when we said that something was of divine institution or by human arrangement. It is quite possible that each of them hears something different than what the other intends. This was acknowledged in the following paragraph:

Our dialogue on this issue has suggested that when Lutherans hear Roman Catholics say 'by divine institution' Lutherans understand this in a far narrower sense than that intended by Roman Catholics. Thus Catholics are quite comfortable in acknowledging that the episcopal structure of the church was not fully established until the end of the second century, but it is still by divine institution. Similarly, when Roman Catholics hear Lutherans saying *de iure humano* Catholics understand this to mean far less than Lutherans intend. Lutherans do not mean oversight as such is optional or insignificant or not divinely instituted, but that the ordering of oversight is seen as a task of the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (67).

This allowed the dialogue members to agree that the ministry of oversight was established in the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They were also able to recognise that the action of the Holy Spirit continues in the life of the church, and that the ministry of presidents and bishops is an enduring gift of God to the church.

The Question of Apostolic Succession

The question of apostolic succession was another of the difficult issues that had to be faced. It was at the heart of the critique in *Dominus Iesus*. It was not unrelated to the question of whether or not bishops were divinely instituted.

A helpful way forward was found by making a distinction between a canonical or juridical meaning of apostolic succession, and a spiritual and theological meaning. For the Roman Catholic Church the requirement of apostolic succession for a valid episcopal ministry is determined very clearly in canonical terms: each bishop must be ordained by a bishop assisted by two other bishops, all of whom are members of the college of bishops, and the ordination must be duly authorised by the universal church. Nevertheless, this juridical determination must be informed by the spiritual and theological meaning.

Two points can be made about the theological understanding of apostolic succession. The first is that the succession of bishops exists for the sake of the handing on of the apostolic faith. Here *The Ministry of Oversight* quotes from the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution in Divine Revelation: 'tradition preserves the word of God as it was entrusted to the apostles by Christ our Lord and the Holy Spirit, and transmits it to their successors, so these in turn, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, may faithfully preserve, expound

and disseminate the word by their preaching' (DV, 9). The second point is that this apostolic faith is handed on and received in a local church, so that the continuity of the local church with the apostolic faith is demonstrated as well as the continuity of its bishop with the original apostolic ministry. In this way apostolic succession also demonstrates that the teaching handed on in a local church is the same faith received and handed on in the whole church. In other words, apostolic succession is related to the communion of the church.¹

This developing, shared understanding between Lutherans and Roman Catholics has not yet overcome the juridical problem for Roman Catholics of apostolic succession in the Lutheran Church. However, they were able to acknowledge that 'we both hold as our common objective the continuity of the apostolic faith, which brings about the communion of the church, both local and universal' (92). This section concluded with following statement about ways to move forward:

We are convinced that the process of recognition will take place in stages as our two churches deepen their communion in all aspects of church life. Each church will bring its particular gifts to this process of mutual recognition. On the Roman Catholic side the gifts will include the reminder that the handing on of the apostolic faith is a concrete, historical task, and that communion in the apostolic faith is linked to communion in the church. This amounts to a call for a clearer connection between apostolic succession, apostolic faith and the communion of the church. On the Lutheran side the gifts will include the constant reminder that it is inadequate to describe apostolic succession simply in terms of an unbroken line of bishops, and that the essence of succession is the faithful preaching of the gospel. This amounts to a call for a clearer connection between apostolic succession and the word of God. Lutherans recognise the episcopal ministry in the Roman Catholic Church in the faithful proclamation of the gospel. While the Roman Catholic Church has made a juridical determination that the succession of bishops is lacking in the Lutheran Church, ongoing theological dialogue may determine that the tradition of the faith there is truly and fully in continuity with the faith taught by the apostles, and that the intention of the ministry in the Lutheran Church is to exercise the ministry divinely instituted in the church. Such a

¹ On this point the dialogue relied on the work of Walter Kasper, *Leadership in the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 2003), 114-143.

theological assessment would be the basis for Lutherans and Roman Catholics to address together any outstanding juridical issues. The juridical problem can only be fully addressed from within the context of agreement in the faith (93).

The Question of the Relationship between Lutheran Pastor and Catholic Bishop

The other thorny issue that had to be faced was the relationship between the Lutheran pastor and the Catholic bishop as the locus of episcopal oversight. This was a problem that kept raising its head from time to time as the dialogue progressed. The Catholic members of the dialogue would think that everyone was arriving at a common understanding of the role of presidents and bishops as the persons who exercised oversight, and the Lutherans would say, yes, but the president is before all else a pastor. He exercises oversight because he is a pastor. In other words, the locus of oversight is with the pastorate. The final text of the document expresses it thus:

Lutherans could speak here of a dynamic co-inherence of one office in the other rather than in hierarchical terms. This is not to deny difference or to collapse one into the other. Oversight is essential and belongs to all pastors in their ministry. From this perspective, the Lutheran view is that the office of bishop subsists in the pastoral office. Because of his calling to exercise oversight over a wider region, the bishop is pastor of the pastors and therefore first among equals (121).

On close inspection, there are many similarities between this understanding and the Roman Catholic understanding before the Second Vatican Council. This was noted:

... the Second Vatican Council instituted a major reform of the Roman Catholic understanding of the ministry, bringing it into closer relation to the dominant patristic tradition and the Eastern churches. Before the Council—and indeed in the sixteenth century—one strand of Catholic theology, which has a history that goes all the way back to St Jerome, could hold that the priesthood is the full expression of ordained ministry. In this theology, what was distinctive about the bishop was thought of as simply the new authority (jurisdiction) conferred on him (118).

This historical insight proved helpful to both churches in appreciating the theological understanding that underpins their current practices.

Future Steps and Challenges

The gradual convergence that emerged through this dialogue led to the formulation of a number of steps that can be taken in order to move closer to a recognition of episcopal ministry. These took the form of requests from the Lutheran members of the dialogue to the Catholic members and vice versa, and a challenge from both dialogue teams to their own church.

On the Lutheran side there was a request that Roman Catholics respect the Lutheran 'conviction that God has been with them in their church order and their pastoral ministry'. Presidents in the Lutheran Church, whether regionally or nationally, exercise an office that helps 'preserve and promote the primacy of the gospel of Jesus Christ' (128).

On the Roman Catholic side there was a request that 'Australian Lutherans will come to share more fully with them in a common theology of the bishop in the life of the church'. This will mean more than a change of language from president to bishop, and would 'be part of that on-going reform, embracing in ever deeper ways the ancient common tradition of the church, in which the bishop was seen as sign and agent of communion in a local church' (129).

In the light of all that had been said in the document, the Roman Catholic members expressed a challenge to their own church in this way:

In Roman Catholic theology, there is an understanding that in the life of the church God can offer grace even when institutional structures are seen as inadequate by standards of another time or place. In the light of our new context, that of fundamental agreement on the doctrines of justification and the eucharist, and in the light of our growth towards agreement on oversight and the office of the bishop within the common tradition of the church, Roman Catholic members of the dialogue ask their church authorities to consider that the Spirit of God might be leading them to recognize the authenticity of the Lutheran ministry and of eucharistic celebrations of the Lutheran Church (133).

Similarly, the Lutheran members of the dialogue offered a challenge to their church:

In Lutheran theology, there is an awareness that in the life of the church, the grace of God continues to work effectively wherever the gospel is preached and the sacraments are faithfully administered, even at times when the outward structures of church government and

oversight have been lacking or are flawed. At the same time Lutheran members of the dialogue ask their church to remember that it was not the office of bishop that was at the heart of the Lutheran critique of bishops, but the way that the office was exercised in a particular historical situation. The Augsburg Confession does not call into question the office of bishop. In light of recent agreements with Roman Catholics, the renewal that has taken place in the Catholic Church, and our own history and theology, it is a good time to continue to explore the Lutheran understanding of the role and function of presidents. The Lutheran members also encourage the Lutheran Church of Australia to recognise and uphold the distinctiveness and unifying role of the office of president/bishop, and to build upon, renew and deepen its understanding of the apostolic and catholic nature of the office (134).

Conclusion

The Ministry of Oversight has now been handed over to the churches for consideration, and hopefully, reception. Reception is always a slow process, beginning with a study of the text in order to understand what it says. Some things in the text may find their way quite quickly into the life and practice of the churches. Others may take much longer or may never find their way into church life.

While the experience of the members of the dialogue cannot be replicated throughout their churches, it can be useful to have some understanding of what went on in the dialogue and why it arrived at the point it did. Those who participate in a dialogue like this over a number of years do not simply come to a better understanding of the teaching of their dialogue partner, or even of what underpins their own church's teaching. More significantly, they come to know the faith of their dialogue partner, not as a theoretical thing, but as something that has shaped and continues to shape their lives. Participants in the dialogue come to recognise more clearly where that faith is the same as their own, even if it has different expressions. While no one is called to abandon what is authentic in their faith and its expressions, participation in dialogue allows participants to challenge each other about those areas where aspects of the faith have been distorted or misunderstood, or where practices have developed that do not reflect the gospel as clearly as they could.

In this way, the theological dialogue between Lutherans and Roman Catholics has played an important role for over a quarter of a century

in helping both churches continue the processes of reform and renewal. They can both speak of this process in their own way: Lutherans refer to the Reformation principle of *semper reformanda* (always needing to be reformed), and Roman Catholics call on the language of the Second Vatican Council, *semper purificanda* (always needing to be purified).

CHRISTIAN DIALOG AS SYMPHONIC UNITY: LESSONS ON NON-CONTRASTIVE LANGUAGE-USE FROM THOMAS AQUINAS AND MEISTER ECKHART

Anastasia Christine Wendlinder*

Directed by Cardinal Walter Kasper's metaphor of ecumenism as 'symphonic unity', this article explores the lessons Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart might teach us about engaging diverse voices in Christian dialog. For both medieval theologians, diversity in speech and tradition are necessary to move the believer beyond conventional ways of understanding the relationship between Creator and human creature, manifested by the Church united as the body of Christ in the world. Like the composition of a symphony, a variety of instrumental voices together not only transform ordinary notes into unique sounds and melodies but transform the audience as well.

Without doubt, the lack of unity between and within denominations is one of the most pressing issues for the Christian church today, calling for a radical re-orientation in the way Christians dialog with one another and with the world. Although much progress has been made in ecumenical relations over the last several decades, in the face of so much diversity serious obstacles still need to be overcome before all Christians are able to share in the Eucharist together as the one body of Christ, and even more barriers remain regarding relations with other religions and non-religious people. In this paper I would like to suggest we approach ecumenical dialog from what might be called a 'non-contrastive' perspective, reclaiming the work of Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart. When read non-contrastively their lessons on Christian discourse teach us how diversity may be used to

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create what Walter Kasper calls *symphonic unity*. Expanding upon Kasper's metaphor, symphonic unity is a kind of unity-in-diversity reflecting the unique relationship between God and humanity which is manifested by the church as the living body of Christ, whose mission is to draw the world towards its divine Source and End in God.

The Need For Ecumenical Dialog

Before we get to Aquinas and Eckhart, however, let me first address the urgent need for ecumenical dialog and why a non-contrastive approach may be helpful. A little more than a decade ago, Cardinal Edward Cassidy, then President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, stressed that the lack of unity among Christians discredits the Christian church's mission as a sacrament of unity in the world and of communion with God.¹ Transformative dialog between Christian communities as well as between different religions is essential for the very survival of humanity, who exists 'on the fringe of absence'.² In accord with Jesus Christ, and as the body of Christ, the Christian church must be a sign and an instrument of God's presence, compassion and salvation in the world. The goal of Christian dialog is not simply to create pleasant conversation, but to strive to represent—that is to re-presence—God in the world as the living body of Christ, sacramentally drawing others into communion. Therefore, in our ecumenical endeavors we must neither gloss over differences in the interest of uniformity nor settle on 'agreeing to disagree', for these positions fail to truly express the unity necessary for imaging God. To put this another way: uniformity in thought, speech and practice veils God's limitless presence throughout creation while, on the other hand, diversity without common ground fosters division and prevents progress towards authentic unity. In either case, the Christian church would not be a faithful expression of the God in whom we profess to believe and strive to image.

Cardinal Walter Kasper, President Emeritus of the Council, echoes his predecessor. Kasper writes, 'Church division is ... antithetical to the

¹ See Edward Cassidy, 'Ecumenical Education and Formation: An Urgent Need for Further Progress in Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations,' in *Ecumenism: Present Realities and Future Prospects*, ed. Lawrence Cunningham (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997).

² *Ibid.* 53.

essential nature of the church; it is a sin before God and a scandal to the world.” Kasper also recognizes the need for transformative engagement between Christians. According to Kasper, the type of unity resulting from Christian dialog has nothing to do with uniformity, but rather embraces diversity, allowing differences to enrich, enliven and transform everything within the church and throughout the world. Authentic unity, for Kasper, is ‘symphonic’.²

Although Kasper does not expand upon this metaphor in his essay, “Credo Unam Sanctam Ecclesiam”—The Relationship Between the Catholic and the Protestant Principles in Fundamental Ecclesiology,³ I find his use of the term ‘symphonic’ compelling, because it leads to imagining the type of language-use Christians need to develop for transformative dialog. In fact, dialog and symphony are comparable in many ways; music might in some ways itself be considered a kind of language, and the type of language that is communicated through symphony is not only dialogic, but in some cases perhaps even narrative—creating a kind of ‘story’ made up of many voices moving through ebbs and flows to a climactic finale. Furthermore, a symphony creates unity through diversity by transforming familiar notes into unique harmonies and movements that open audiences to new possibilities in ways no single note could do. The culmination of a symphony is a breaking through ordinary sound to something unexpected and unique where the listener, the orchestra and the music become one with each other in a moment of harmonic identity.

This analogy could be applied to ecumenical dialog: in order to be symphonic, the voices and expressions of the many Christian denominations and faith traditions must engage in transforming conversations where, as the different voices move from dissonance to harmony, the Christian church (as orchestra) and the Christian story (as composition) become one with each other to disclose a radically new possibility expressed as the body of Christ. The body of Christ, at once familiar in its humanity and yet transcendent in its imaging of

¹ Walter Kasper, “Credo Unam Sanctam Ecclesiam”—The Relationship Between the Catholic and the Protestant Principles in Fundamental Ecclesiology, in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism*, ed. Paul Murray (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 82.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid. 78-88.

the divine, presents a radically new way of being. If the Christian church is to work sacramentally as both a sign and an instrument of Jesus Christ in the world, it must make itself present in a transformed way that discloses humanity as it is intended to be in its divine imaging, and it must draw others towards itself in the same way that in a symphony the orchestra, the music and the audience are drawn to become one.

Non-Contrastive Conversation

In order to move beyond discord to the type of symphonic unity Kasper envisions—one that transforms through diversity—I propose that Christian language-use must be ‘non-contrastive’, to borrow Kathryn Tanner’s expression.¹ Tanner employs this term to explain how we might more properly speak about the relationship between the human creature and God as its divine Creator, and she refers to Thomas Aquinas as a pre-eminent example of this type of discourse. However, before turning to Aquinas, we need to understand what non-contrastive language is, and how it properly adheres to the rules of Christian language-use implicated in Scripture and explicitly established by the early church.

By ‘non-contrastive’ Tanner means language-use that neither opposes creation with the divine nor collapses them together.² This concept may be very helpful to us in thinking about ecumenical dialog as symphonic, because at the root of our question about how the Christian church *in all its diversity* can manifest itself as the *one* Body of Christ lies the chronic difficulty of properly articulating the relationship between the one Creator and the many creatures, and more specifically, between the *divine* Creator and *human* creatures. According to Christian doctrine, in Jesus Christ both human and divine exist in perfect harmony—fully, unconfusedly and inseparably united. If the Christian church is to effectively be the body of Christ in and for the world, this divine-human relationship must be made manifest by it.

Non-contrastive language must be differentiated from contrastive language. While *non-contrastive* language seeks to articulate a

¹ Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988).

² *Ibid.* 28.

profound intimacy between Creator and human creature while preserving God's uniqueness, *contrastive* language tends to emphasize either divine agency or human autonomy. This contrast, in effect, gives the impression that the divine and human exist in a relation of opposition or discord; consequently, humanity can never be seen to authentically image God, who divinely creates and rules all things directly and freely. Since that which has no autonomy cannot act in freedom, humanity cannot image freedom and, therefore, cannot image God. Thus, from a contrastive perspective, the church can, at best, only manifest Jesus Christ in his humanity, and our imaging of him would be a cheap facsimile to be replaced by the *real* Christ at his second coming.

Furthermore, contrastive speech that subjugates creatures obscures the limitlessness of God's presence to all things, thus portraying a distant Creator who is at best only reflected in those things normally considered 'superior', like the physically powerful or conventionally beautiful. In terms of humanity, from this perspective God can only be represented by a limited number, or type, of persons. While contrastive language intends to emphasize God's transcendence, it ultimately leads towards uniformity and collapses God with the world, for it implies God is best communicated only by particular imagery, specifically the exalted. Ironically this denigrates God as Creator of *all things*. According to Tanner, 'a contrastive definition [of the divine] is not radical enough to allow a *direct* creative involvement of God with the world *in its entirety*.'¹ Thus, the Christian church in its entirety cannot be seen as a real sacrament—that is, an instrument of God's self-communication—but only as a faint sign distorted by its diversity.

Christian dialog since the Reformation seems to have fallen into contrastive discord, traditionally following denominational lines which are often described in terms of so-called 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' principles, respectively.² The Protestant principle

¹ Ibid. 45-6.

² See, for example, Avery Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). In chapter 8, 'Catholic and Protestant: Contrary or Complementary?' Dulles contrasts the 'Catholic Principle', which stresses the mediation of God through creation, with Paul Tillich's 'Protestant Principle', critiquing it as overly-stressing God's transcendence; however Dulles sees the Protestant and Catholic principles as *potentially* mutually critical corrections.

emphasizes God's sovereign power over creation while the Catholic principle stresses human self-determination.

As Tanner puts it:

From the time of the Reformation, the Christian church itself has been divided along lines that suppose a similar either/or option between a traditional account of divine agency and the affirmation of free, active creatures. ... Protestant voices, for example, charge Roman Catholic theology with sinfully elevating the powers of the creature at the expense of God's sovereignty. ... Roman Catholic critics, on the other hand, accuse Protestant theologians of emphasizing the sovereignty of divine agency to the extent of denigrating the creature and its capacities given by God through nature or grace.¹

Although Cardinal Kasper, following the thought of the late Cardinal Avery Dulles, acknowledges that we have, to some extent, moved from an 'either-or' to a 'both-and' understanding of these principles, there is still an unbridgeable dichotomy that continues to challenge Christian relations and create tension in Christian dialog. For Dulles the Protestant and Catholic Principles provide mutually critical correctives that in time should lead to a convergence in faith traditions; his concern, and hope, was that such convergence preserves the identity of each.² Kasper expands upon Dulles by identifying the *sacramental*—in other words, the mediating role that creation plays in relating God in the world, as characteristic of the Catholic Principle, and the *prophetic*—that is, the critical corrective emphasizing divine transcendence over human symbols, as characteristic of the Protestant Principle. For Kasper, we have arrived at a decisive point in ecumenical dialog wherein these two complementary principles must not exist simply in juxtaposition with each other, but as an 'exchange of gifts' that moves towards internal renewal and transformation.³

According to Tanner, the real problem in Christian conversation is not the dichotomy between Catholic and Protestant Principles, but rather that we have forgotten the non-contrastive rules for talking about God set up by the early church.⁴ The Trinitarian structuring of the Creed and the Christological formula of the Hypostatic Union are

¹ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 2-3.

² Dulles, *Catholicity of the Church*, 165-6.

³ See Kasper, "Credo Unam Sanctum Ecclesiam", 85-6.

⁴ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 50.

preminent examples of such linguistic precepts, or ‘rules for linguistic practice’.¹

To understand how these doctrines provide us with linguistic rules that are non-contrastive we must think about them in their original historical contexts. The statement about God as Creator of *all things seen and unseen* in the first article of the Nicene Creed, for example, was meant to draw us away from the Gnostic concept of the divine that clearly separates God from creation and, in effect, sets them in opposition to each other. To remedy this, the first article provides clear direction for speaking about the God of Christianity, that is, the Creator of Genesis who makes the physical as well as the spiritual in a manner that is direct, intentional and personal. This non-contrastive directive allows us to then discuss how Jesus Christ can be the fully human and fully divine savior without contradiction, and, further, how through the Holy Spirit humanity participates in and moves towards divine unity. Unlike the Gnostic concept contrasting the divine and the created, for Christianity the divine is not to be articulated in opposition to the created but rather as its Source and End. Anything that is said about the Creator-human creature relationship in the Christian context—whether it concerns prayer, doctrine or practice—must be consistent with this non-contrastive rule.²

In this light Tanner considers how the great scholastics struggled with this task, paying particular attention to Thomas Aquinas. She takes the perspective that Aquinas uses Aristotelian metaphysics linguistically to articulate the Creator-creature relationship in terms of cause and effect, thus setting up the relationship non-contrastively. In reference to God’s creative acts, natural causality is discarded in favor of rational or deliberate agency, which allows us to talk about how God creates directly, freely *and diversely*. At the same time, by distinguishing between God’s will and the content of the effects willed, creation—that is, the effects of God’s agency—does have a necessary relation with what God wills as ‘pre-existing’, so to speak, in

¹ Ibid.

² Tanner’s suggestion regarding ecumenical dialog is that we ‘keep ... conclusions in constant correspondence with the evidence at hand, make an in-depth and exhaustive investigation of the manner in which theological statements are actually used.’ Ibid. 52.

God's conception.¹ However, this relation is not one of opposition since the effects do not compete with the cause but issue from it.

Tanner's brief analysis of Aquinas hints at how it might be possible for Christian dialog to move beyond the dichotomy caused by the so-called Catholic and Protestant Principles towards a more synthetic and creative unity in line with Kasper's metaphor. Aquinas, following the early church's rules for talking about the Creator God of Scripture as direct, intentional and personal, gives us a specific vocabulary of 'agency' and 'effect' that avoids the pitfalls of opposing the divine and human or over-emphasizing one to the deprecation of the other. I would like to add another medieval voice, Meister Eckhart, whose theology, when read non-contrastively, follows upon Aquinas but goes even further in proposing a radical identity between God and humanity that preserves God's uniqueness without separating creature from Creator. For Eckhart, neither God's sovereignty nor human agency need be sacrificed, because human agency is not only a reflection, but a manifestation, of God's creative power and presence in the world.

Read non-contrastively, Aquinas and Eckhart offer complementary and challenging models of how we can speak about the divine and human without falling into the type of 'either-or' language that tends to create an unbridgeable gap between denominations. I further propose that both of these medieval theologians move beyond non-contrastive language-use, in Tanner's use of the term, to the symphonic, in other words, the transformative narrative.² The ultimate goal of ecumenical dialog is not merely for Christianity to find its own unified voice, but rather to create a harmony, a unity-in-diversity, through which the church instrumentally draws humanity into communion with itself and with God. Therefore, the type of

¹ 'The distinction between will and content willed allows Thomas to say at the same time that the effects of God's agency do have a necessary relation with what God wills. The created effects of God's will have a necessary relation with the content of the conception God inclines his will to enact.' Ibid. 73.

² See my work in 'Beyond Analogy: Articulating the Transcendence and Immanence of God According to Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart' where I develop this non-contrastive approach in great detail. [PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2004, directed by David Burrell and Joseph Wawrykow.] A non-contrastive application to ecumenical dialog is introduced in the concluding chapter; here in this paper I am further exploring its potential.

speech in which Christians engage must create non-contrastive narratives that move from the cacophony of diverse voices to harmony, and finally to dynamic identity. Such narratives can, in fact, be found in Aquinas and Eckhart, albeit in very different forms, and they provide valuable lessons that may assist the efforts of contemporary Christian dialog.

The Lessons of Aquinas and Eckhart

To begin with we must ask the question of whether anything written in and for the Middle Ages on Christian speech can be relevant today for Christian dialog, given the vastly different cultural and political contexts with which we are currently faced. After all, before the Reformation, there was no ‘Catholic’ versus ‘Protestant’ distinction to worry about. It would be hundreds of years before the Western church would be split between Rome and the Reformers, and into the various Protestant denominations. Complicating our current situation still more is the emerging so-called ‘non-denominational’ churches; it seems as though, unlike the medievals, we now must contend with innumerable Christian voices—some engaged in polite conversation, others in direct competition.

But we must not forget that by the thirteenth century the Christian church had already split between the East and the West, presenting two distinct traditions. And one need only look at any of Aquinas’ or Eckhart’s works to see that they both employ a great diversity of voices, not only from the East and West—ranging, for example, from St. John Damascene to St. Augustine—but also non-Christian theologians such as Avicenna and Maimonides. Plurality of thought and experience is not only presumed by these scholars, it is integral to their methodology. Far from being an impediment to unity for Aquinas and Eckhart, diversity is an instrument of enlightenment, transformation and, ultimately, identity with the divine Source and End.

Secondly, we should compare the goal of ecumenical dialog with Aquinas and Eckhart, and here too we find some useful correlation. Barely a generation apart from each other, both theologians belonged to the Dominican order, otherwise known as the Order of Preachers. According to M. Michèle Mulchahey, it was not preaching ‘right doctrine’ to sway heretics that gave St Dominic and his followers their

real reason for being, but the 'salvation of souls'.¹ For Aquinas and Eckhart, salvation is the re-unification, in fact, the self-identification, of the human creature with God who is its Source and End. The goal of Christian speech is to detach believers from false concepts of God and move towards expressions of the God who was physically embodied in Jesus Christ. For Eckhart especially, emulating Jesus Christ conforms, informs and transforms one to him such that, in becoming like Jesus Christ one self-identifies with and even 'gives birth' to God in the world, drawing all things to fulfillment in their Source and End. Is this not the very ambition of ecumenism?

So, having established that there is, indeed, precedent for learning from these medievals, I would like to turn now to their specific lessons on non-contrastive language-use, and how they develop symphonic narratives that might be adapted to contemporary Christian dialog.

It is unfortunate, I think, that Aquinas is often read as a philosopher rather than as a theologian, and worse yet, that certain 'conclusions' are extracted from his work without consideration of the process leading up to or the subsequent implications that follow. This approach to Aquinas is misleading because it obscures the symphonic narrative he composes in order to lead his audiences to enlightenment.

A great example is Aquinas' famous 'five ways' or 'proofs' of God's existence found in the second question of his *Summa theologiae*. Philosophers such as Anthony Kenny point out that as proofs for the existence of God Aquinas' five ways are philosophically weak because, as cosmological arguments, they presume the very conclusion they attempt to prove: in order to show God as creator of the universe, the universe is described such that it is a creation of God.²

Kenny presumes that proving the existence of God is Aquinas' main intent. But over the last several decades a growing number of theologians, while conceding that *as philosophical proofs* these arguments *are* weak, assert that when viewed together and in progression, the five ways serve a more theological purpose. It is not

¹ M. Michèle Mulchahey, *First the Bow is Bent in Study: Dominican Education Before 1350* (Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1998), 4-5.

² Anthony Kenny, *The Five Ways: St. Thomas Aquinas' Proofs of God's Existence* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 1.

the god of philosophy that interests Aquinas, but the Creator God of Scripture. Victor Preller, for example, insists that the arguments presented by Aquinas in the five ways must be radically re-read in light of the ensuing questions concerning the manner of God's existence as Creator,¹ an interpretation supported by W.J. Hankey, who proposes the five ways provide a road-map for how Aquinas is going to proceed to do this.²

A non-contrastive reading of the five ways not only validates this thesis, but reveals the symphonic pattern Aquinas orchestrates to move his audiences towards an epiphany about the Creator-human creature relationship. As he develops the next series of questions considering such divine features as God's perfection, goodness, immutability and eternal and infinite existence, Aquinas progressively extends and adapts the pattern he introduced in his five ways, instrumentally arranging a variety of diverse theological and philosophical voices in lively discourse. By the time we reach the end of the first movement which culminates in Aquinas' presentation of 'analogy', the familiar, safe narrative we anticipated—about a deity perfect in transcendence and providential care—has given way to something unexpected and, perhaps, a bit risqué: the hint of a Creator so intimately present to its creation that upon reaching the close of one's earthly journey, the believer becomes self-identified with its Divine Source. In question twelve, for example, Aquinas contends that 'the blessed ... possess God as present, ... and possessing him, they enjoy him as the ultimate fulfillment of desire.'³

This revelation, however, is only a prelude to a second movement, where Aquinas will lead us to an even more startling discovery about the potency of the divine-human relationship, likening it to the mutual indwelling of two lovers: 'the lover is cognitively present in the person loved,' Aquinas writes, for '... he is not satisfied with a surface knowledge, but strives for personal insight into everything about him, and penetrates into his very soul.'⁴ Something more profound than the relatively benign concept of beatification, describing the happy state

¹ Victor Preller, *Divine Science and the Science of God* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967), 68.

² W.J. Hankey, *God in Himself: Aquinas' Doctrine of God as Expounded in the Summa Theologiae* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 73.

³ *Summa theologia*, 1.12.7 [hereafter *Sth*].

⁴ *Sth* 1a.2ae.2-3.

of the blessed departed, is hinted at in question twelve and later will be exposed as divinization, the transformation of the believer into the divine image originally conceived by God for humanity.¹

As potentially dangerous as this sounds to the Western Christian ear, from a non-contrastive perspective the idea of divinization, or 'deification', is completely orthodox and follows the linguistic rules for Christian speech that were put forth by the early church and which are directed by the Scriptural narrative itself. Aquinas very carefully sets this pattern in his five ways and progressively unfolds the implications of the Christian concept of God in the discussion that follows it. The God of Christianity is the direct, intentional and personal Creator of all things; furthermore, humanity is originally created in the divine image, issues forth in freedom and is intended to return in fulfillment to this divine image.

It might be helpful to see how Aquinas orchestrates this linguistic break-through, because even today the tendency to cling to one-sided concepts of God keeps denominations from coming together in manifesting itself as the body of Christ.

Aquinas' first way presents God as the unmoved mover, in line with the God of philosophy. But because the unmoved mover lacks a direct, intentional and personal relationship to creatures, Aquinas slightly modifies this concept by introducing the vocabulary of 'act' and 'potency' subtly re-positioning the relation of the Creator, who as unmoved mover must be fully actualized, to creatures, who, as not actualized, have the potential to move towards their source. Later, in question three on God's simplicity, the implications of this will begin to slowly unfold. For the Creator any potential would be a weakness, but for the creature potential is positive, because it has an inbuilt goal to be reached: its own actualization.

The second way, by articulating God in terms of efficient cause and creatures as effects, decreases the remote transcendence the unmoved mover has to creatures and steps towards the immanence of the Christian God. The non-contrastive implications introduced here will be drawn out in questions four through six on God's goodness and perfection: effects bear a resemblance to their cause. The third way, on God's necessary being, corrects the problem of the Creator's

¹ See, for example, the work of A.N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

immediacy to creatures left unresolved by the unmoved mover and efficient cause; this will bear fruit in questions seven through eight on God's limitlessness: as necessary being, God is always everywhere in all things. God's presence to every creature is more immediate and intimate than any two creatures are to each other; in fact God is closer to a creature than is its own breath.¹

With the third way Aquinas has now positioned the concept of God as a Creator whose distinct existence is one of transcendence-in-immanence—not a transcendence over creatures, but a unique mode of being such that, by being outside of the categories shared by creatures, the Creator is immediately and profoundly present to them. In his fourth and fifth ways, Aquinas implies how creatures image God and find their end in their divine source. Likeness of creatures to their Creator must be found within the diversity of creation, because all things proceed from a common origin. Since no one type of creature could suffice to represent the abundant goodness and perfection of God, diversity among creatures is essential. Furthermore, the imaging of God found in creatures does not just fall in their multiplicity, but in their inter-relationality as well, since, as question eleven recaps, God has no specific 'body' creatures cannot image God solely by their physical forms. The manner in which creatures resemble God is through their whole existence—not just the 'what' of their existence, but the 'how' and the 'why' of their existence. Aquinas indicates this in two ways: first with respect to how creatures relate to each other within and between the categories of being, and second, with respect to the end to which each creature is directed. This ultimate imaging is established in the fifth way. Creatures resemble their cause by virtue of their divine end to which they are purposefully designed. Later in his *Summa*, this divine telos for the human creature will be revealed as a 'mutual indwelling of love' between God and human.

It is this vision of the radical self-identification the human believer has with its Divine Source and End for which Aquinas' whole symphony is orchestrated. He accomplishes this task by presenting the familiar 'notes' of Christianity: God exists, God is the Creator, God is Good, God is eternal, God is infinite, etc.; but through the diverse

¹ See Thomas Gilby's appendix 12 in the Blackfriars' translation of the *Summa theologiae* (New York and London: Blackfriars in conjunction with McGraw-Hill, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964), 215.

voices conversing on the implications of this type of God, all of our conventional presuppositions about Creator and creature are uprooted, reversed and put into a new order until a novel possibility emerges about this dynamic relationship.

Those engaged in ecumenical dialog may learn from Aquinas' pedagogy of delving deeply into and uprooting the presuppositions about the Creator-human creature relationship lying at the heart of Christian speech. I will say more about this presently, but our non-contrastive symphony is not yet complete. For a third movement to this symphony, and one that is somewhat more advanced, we should turn to Meister Eckhart, who, having dutifully learned Aquinas' composition, goes on to his own improvisation: in other words, he puts the non-contrastive theme he learned from Aquinas into creative practice.

While Eckhart does not give us a highly organized composition laying out a progressive narrative as does Aquinas, in order to achieve the same end Eckhart creates unique medleys based on Aquinas' non-contrastive strategy that are specially designed for his various audiences. Each of Eckhart's medleys are conducted by what scholars such as Bernard McGinn, Susanne Kobele and Alois Haas have called, 'master' or, better named, 'exploding' metaphors.¹ These are terms—such as 'indistinction', 'ground', and 'nothingness'—that lack any specific creaturely features but are common to all. From a non-contrastive perspective, these terms can be used multi-valently to refer both to creatures and to God without creating an opposition between them, thus 'exploding' through conventional expectations of the Creator-creature relationship and raising dynamic possibilities of being and becoming.

In his Latin Sermon on the Holy Trinity, for example, Eckhart asserts that God is distinct from creatures by virtue of being completely indistinct in nature. In other words, God is distinctly unique in indistinctness. Eckhart asserts that, because 'existence is from God alone, and he alone is existence ... no being can be counted alongside

¹ Bernard McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart: The Man from Whom God Hid Nothing* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 2001), 37-39, 210.

God.¹ Creatures, on the other hand, are not indistinct in their created natures; rather as created they are distinct in being ‘this’ or ‘that’ thing. But because they issue forth from God in their distinctness, in their diverse ways they are reflections of their Creator. Apart from this type of distinctness, however, creatures are indistinct as they exist in God and are identified with their Source. Thus the master metaphor of ‘indistinctness’ provides the grounds for the uniqueness of the Creator as well as the identity of creatures with their source. Trinitarian language is used here as a narrative for this non-contrastive relationship: all things are from the Father as their material cause, through the Son as their efficient cause, and in the Holy Spirit as their final cause. Eckhart’s Sermon on the Trinity echoes Aquinas’ lesson of the five ways.

In his exegesis on the Gospel of John, Eckhart similarly employs a master metaphor to break-through the conventional interpretation of ‘adopted son-ship’—that is, the belief that through Christ, we become adopted sons of God. This doctrine is often used to preserve the ontological distinction of Jesus Christ as the natural Son of God, in contrast to other humans who can only become adopted sons of God. For Eckhart, this contrastive interpretation is misleading and fails to express the profound intimacy of God to humanity as well as the transformative power of Christ. Rather, for Eckhart, to be ‘adopted’ as God’s son is to become identified with Christ and thus, indistinct with God just as Jesus Christ was indistinct in the divine nature. Eckhart writes:

It would be of little value for me that ‘the Word was made flesh’ for man in Christ as a person distinct from me unless he was also made flesh in me personally so that I too might be God’s son. ... [T]hrough the fact that ‘he dwelt among us’, he gives us his name and perfects us ‘so that we are called *and truly are* God’s sons.’²

¹ Eckhart’s ‘Sermon on the Holy Trinity’ is taken from Bernard McGinn, Frank Tobin and Elvira Borgstadt, trans. *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher*, Classics of Western Spirituality series (New York: Paulist Press, 1986).

² Meister Eckhart’s ‘Commentary on the Gospel of John’ is from Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn, trans. *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, Classics of Western Spirituality series (New York: Paulist Press, 1981).

Appealing to Paul, he concludes, 'We are being transformed into the same image [as Jesus Christ].'¹ By this assertion Eckhart is following perfectly the non-contrastive rules for Christian speech about God as direct, intimate and personal Creator.

For his German audiences, Eckhart switches to the master metaphor of 'ground,' which he links to the human creature's 'soul'. He writes, 'The Father gives his Son birth in the soul in the same way as he gives him birth in eternity and not otherwise: and I say more: He gives me birth—me, his son and the same son.'² Here Eckhart breaks his audience out of their comfort zone to extend the birth of the Word in the soul to the divine nature itself. Yet, he is careful to observe the non-contrastive rules of Christian orthodoxy by preserving the correct analogical order: the soul receives and identifies with the uncreated Son of God because it is ordered to it, not because it is of itself uncreated; the human creature must have the capacity to receive, respond to and identify with the divine if it is to manifest it rather than just to reflect it like an image in a mirror. When Eckhart declares that there is no distinction whatever between the soul in giving birth to the Word and the divine nature, he means that no distinction exists between God and the soul that can be compared to any kind of distinction found among creatures.

But no matter how outrageous and seemingly unorthodox Eckhart's claims are, his intent is thoroughly consistent with the Christian vocation of leading others to God. Since, for Christians Jesus Christ is the primordial sign and instrument of the intimate union between God and humanity, in order to carry on his mission the Christian church must be the body of Christ in the world. Both Aquinas and Eckhart perceive that in order for this goal to be accomplished believers must become detached from false and misleading concepts that compromise the Creator's unique and profound intimacy to creation. Clinging to distorted notions of the divine and of the Creator-creature relationship hinders believers from acting in accordance to the divine end for which humanity is ordained.

¹ Ibid.

² This is from Eckhart's German sermon on Wis. 5:16, 'The just will live forever,' in Colledge and McGinn, *Meister Eckhart: Essential Sermons*.

Conclusion

It seems that we have stretched far back into history to make the connection between Kasper's vision of symphonic unity and Christian dialog. But those engaged in the goal of ecumenism have much to gain from Aquinas and Eckhart. For both theologians, *learning* to speak properly about God as Creator in relation to creatures is essential to becoming detached from misguided concepts and envisioning new possibilities for imaging God as the body of Christ. Through his systematic and progressive uncovering, uprooting and reordering of conventional presumptions about the Creator-creature relationship, Aquinas teaches us to pay careful attention to what we are presupposing when we speak to each other about our doctrines and practices. His method of arranging a multitude of diverse voices into harmonic discourse shows diversity not to be a hindrance to conversation, but an advantage—and a necessity—for we learn as much about our own presumptions and misperceptions as we do about others, leading us to self-enlightenment and mutual transformation.¹ Just as diversity in creation images God and manifests the unity of Creator and creature, so too can the diversity of Christian voices in dialog.

The value and precondition of diversity in manifesting the body of Christ and as a sign and an instrument of communion is not lost on Eckhart. He writes:

But God has not made humanity's salvation depend on any such particular way of life. What is peculiar to one way of life is not found in another; but it is God who has endowed all holy practices with the power of fulfillment.... [O]ne good thing is not in opposition to another. It is not possible for everyone to live alike, or for all ... to

¹ In his introduction to *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, cited above, Paul Murray writes, "[T]oo often in the ecumenical context, the default instinct is to lead with some such question as: "What do our various others first need to learn from us if we are to get ecumenically serious and make any real progress?" The better question, however, should be, "What can we learn, or receive, with integrity from our various others in order to facilitate our own growth together into deepened communion in Christ and the Spirit?"

follow one single way of life ... One ought indeed to imitate our Lord ... but each of us ought *in our own ways* to imitate him.¹

However, for Eckhart, the diverse ways in which we are called to express Jesus Christ do not simply stand in juxtaposition with each other, but *inclusively* disclose the radical identification humanity shares with God and unending possibilities for manifesting the body of Christ in every place and time.

Through the master metaphors he uses to explode through *conventional* interpretations of Christian doctrine that actually obscure the profound unity between Creator and creature, Eckhart teaches us to be bold—and to be totally self-giving—in our dialog, not to hold back and wait to see if something has already been said or done, for to manifest the body of Christ in the world means to give birth to God in our own unique ways and to recognize and to proclaim wherever God is being brought to birth in others (non-Christian as well as Christian). Together Aquinas and Eckhart show us how to look for and to create new theological symphonies relevant to our times, just as they did for theirs. Metaphysics was the language of Christian theology in the Middle Ages; however, it is not the only, or even primary, language of Christianity today. Whatever language is employed in the ecumenical endeavor to create symphonic unity—for instance, be it the language of social justice, pastoral care, liturgy, feminist or eco-theology—as long as conversation partners abide by the non-contrastive rules for Christian discourse, they will not violate Christian orthodoxy but bring new and transformed life to the church and, ultimately, to the world.²

¹ This is from 'Counsel 17' of Eckhart's German *Counsels on Discernment*, taken from Colledge and McGinn, *Meister Eckhart: Essential Sermons*.

² Ilia Delio's 2009 plenary address to the College Theology Society, 'Godhead or God Ahead: Rethinking the Trinity in Light of Emergence,' may be a good example of employing the language of science (particularly regarding evolution) in order to create a new and relevant theological symphony.

REPORTS & EVENTS

'ONE TEACHER': DOCTRINAL AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

This year saw the publication of the English translation¹ of the Groupe des Dombes report on doctrinal authority in the Church, first published in 2005 as 'Un seul Maître': L'autorité doctrinale dans l'Eglise. In the contributions which follow, two members of the Group introduce and recommend the report.

* * *

Christianne Méroz^{*}

Context

The formulation of the Groupe des Dombes document, *Un seul maître: L'autorité doctrinale dans l'Eglise*, which has recently appeared in English translation, first saw the light at the end of the twentieth century, and came out in 2005.

This theme was chosen at a time when the Catholic church was experiencing considerable tension, as a result of doctrinal positions which many Catholics found hard to accept (cf. 224, 225)², while for their part, the churches of the Reform were tending to relativise every form of doctrinal authority.

In this context, the Group saw the signing of the Joint Lutheran-Catholic Declaration on Justification by Faith (1999) as something of a springtime for the Church.

¹ "One teacher": doctrinal authority in the church, Le Groupe des Dombes, trans. Catherine E. Clifford, Eerdmans, 2010.

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² Numbers in brackets refer to paragraphs in the Report.

The statement that 'a fundamental consensus on the central matter of salvation in Christ can bear a certain number of differences in expression without harm to communion in faith, and can convert church-dividing differences into complementary ones' (19, footnote) encouraged and heartened the Group to tackle a question which is both difficult and very sensitive. Talking about authority, whether in the Church or elsewhere, cannot fail to arouse emotions, and even passions.

Let us recall that the Groupe des Dombes is composed uniquely of Catholic and Protestant Christians, all western and all French-speaking. Since 1999 it includes some female members. This constituency means that its deliberations naturally assume a certain francophone complexion. So it is always a joy for the group to see one of its documents translated into another language! In ecumenism, the boundaries can never stretch far enough ...

The document

In a short introduction, the document underlines the importance of not confusing doctrinal authority with the institutional forms in which it has been exercised throughout history. First, three forms of the exercise of authority are identified:

1. the authority of God, found in the individual conscience,
2. the authority of Scripture, handed on through tradition, and
3. the authority of institutions, that is, the episcopal magisterium for Catholics and synodal authority for Protestants.

What history says

Adopting a method already tried and tested in previous documents, the authors paint a rich historical tableau stretching from the Church Fathers to our own time. At the end of the journey, the reader is faced with two diverging paths. The way of Reform, having radically put in question the magisterial and hierarchical functioning of doctrinal authority in the Church, then establishes Scripture, no less radically, as the primary authority, along with the spiritual freedom of the Christian individual and community. The other way, that of the Catholic Church, has in reaction continued to reinforce the process of centralisation, begun in previous centuries.

Though we inherit a broken and fractured history, let us still not forget, as the document emphasises, that 'behind these obvious divergences we discover a Christian consensus that is not to be

minimised' (228). Together we hold in common something valuable, as it were a precious tunic. Our different ways of wearing it, and the rents we have caused, have certainly not diminished its beauty, or its value! It is impossible to overstate the power of hope embodied in the title of this document: One teacher!

What Scripture says

The survey of the synoptic gospels and of the Johannine and Pauline writings forcefully underlines that the authority received by Jesus from his Father is 'that of proclaiming the Kingdom of God, the mystery of which is revealed in the coherence between Jesus' words and acts of liberation, healing, and forgiveness' (306).

Equally evident is the importance of the authority of Scripture with reference to the First Testament and to the people and disciples, men and women, who surround Jesus. The latter represent the different ways in which authority can be exercised, be it personal, collegial or in community; but always an authority which, mirroring the master's, is bound to teach, heal, and show compassion; a gospel authority which never dominates or condemns, but raises up, accompanies, and restores in the human being the very image of God, so often disfigured by the accidents of existence.

In portraying the disciples at work, the gospel texts do not hide the extent to which the exercise of authority is a delicate operation which does not happen without tensions and crises. Or without pain.

Doing teshuva

For the salt to regain its taste, and the Church and Christians their credibility, above all today when the paedophile acts of priests have cast a dark cloud over the Catholic Church, each and every one of us must, from the lowest to the highest, embody a better and clearer congruence between the evangelical message and our actions; nor must we be afraid to recognise our failings and imperfections, and our resistance to the radicalism of the Gospel. The world does not expect us to be perfect, but to be 'holy', that is, animated by a profound compassion. 'Be merciful, as my father is merciful!' (Luke 6:6). Today however the world also expects us to be humble enough to acknowledge our sins and those of our Church authorities.

To commit to this path, which has to be the Gospel path, the only way is conversion, in Hebrew, *teshuva*! A 180 degree turnround which

reorientates us back in line with the divine plan for being human ... being in the world, but not of it!

And the only way to do this is to live the present moment as the messianic time inaugurated by Jesus, dead and risen again; to be men and women walking with their eyes and hearts open, and preparing this new time in their very lives.

An anonymous prophet, the second Isaiah, was quick to explain to exiled men and women, hopeless and humiliated, how God acts when the world is going badly: 'See, I am doing a new deed, even now it comes to light; can you not see it?' (Is. 43:19)

So let us not fear to be witnesses of hope, in season and out of season, to cherish and protect those seeds of a new life, be they never so tiny, fragile and disturbing, which are even now coming to light! Let us dare to commit to the radicalism of the Gospel in following the one teacher.

As regards doctrinal authority, *teshuva* has to be 'a conversion to the service of the Lord himself, brought about through the creative, sustaining, and directive activity of the Spirit' (427).

The authors next recommend a series of conversions for Catholic and Protestant Churches. This chapter lends itself particularly to a group exercise which will be all the more rewarding if its members come from different Churches. For such an exercise the method of differentiated consensus would be most useful and enriching, not only in seeking out areas of convergence, but also as a means to personal self-awareness. How many prejudices would then simply vanish ... (cf.486)

This is a rich document whose very richness might be off-putting, which is why reading it together with the possible assistance of some theologians, lay and or clerical, may help initially.

Whether read in a group or by oneself, this document will open the door to a better understanding of how doctrinal authority has been understood and lived out through the centuries in the Catholic Church and in the Churches originating in the Reformation. In suggesting ways to transform our divergences, it calls us to a different outlook, to overcome our personal and ecclesial fears so as to rediscover ourselves together at his feet, listening to the 'one teacher'.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I would like to add some more personal comments.

I well recall the enthusiasm which animated our group when we chose our theme of doctrinal authority and began to think about it. We had the vivid impression that the time was right for a word which would enable Christians, both Catholic and Protestant, to relocate this problematic in the light and teaching of the Gospel.

When the book appeared, the eyes of the Catholic Church, and indeed of all Christendom, more or less, were turned towards Rome. We were in fact going through a difficult, end of a reign period, exacerbated by John Paul II's illness, and that now seems to me to have been inauspicious for the reception of the book and of its message. In my view the book did not receive the attention we had hoped for.

Today, that is still my impression. This book has not yet really penetrated our churches. Some specialists have got to know it; but too many of the faithful are unaware that an important tool is available which could open new doors in proclaiming the Gospel, and enable them to progress from a study of doctrinal authority to finding out how it might be put into practice today in our various churches.

How striking also to see the document's English translation appear at another difficult time. Every day we see that Christians' confidence in authority has been severely shaken by scandals affecting in particular the Catholic Church, though I think we may say that the whole Church has been affected.

And so I wonder, and pose the question, has this translation not arrived at an opportune moment?

For my part, I hope that it may stimulate English-speaking Christians to develop this reflection into one which is not afraid to tackle how authority is exercised in the Church today. This work has been done previously, at least in part, but today's circumstances are different. It now seems to me very important that this step be initiated by the faithful, by those men and women who have little or no voice.

This document is offered as a substantial and stimulating basis for such an undertaking. At the 1999 European Synod of Bishops, Cardinal Martini expressed the hope that the top of the ecclesial pyramid would deal with a number of sensitive issues. I fear that, were we to do the same today, our patience would be sorely tried, and the results less than satisfactory (cf. 460).

In this time of change, we often say that authority is in crisis. Of course, it is. But has that not always been the case?

In creating humanity in his own image, God wished it to be free. That is why, from the first chapters of the Bible, authority presented, if not a problem, at least a question; a question which runs through the whole of Scripture, appears from the first moments of the Church, and endures till our own day.

I believe it has to be so. But this tension and these crises between authority and freedom do not necessarily have to be experienced as destabilising factors, or be divisive. They can provide an opportunity for finding new ways, new forms of living authority. In a word, they can be fruitful.

And they will be, it seems to me, to the extent that we will agree to acknowledge the ambiguity inherent in the relationship between the concepts of authority and freedom. For it is at the heart of this difficult relationship that a 'differentiated consensus' may emerge which will favour a better exercise of the service of authority in our Churches.

Today, in Europe, the churches are emptying, and at the same time we can see an ever increasing thirst for spirituality. This state of affairs poses this urgent question: how to hand on the faith and the Gospel message to our contemporaries so as to quench that thirst?

As for ecumenism, the post-confessional climate which grows ever stronger is tending to cloud its importance. For many young people, and even not so young, belonging to a Church no longer defines one's identity, or inspires a way of thinking, seeing, or living. They have jumped over the wall and no longer fear to find sustenance in other currents of spirituality to enrich and enliven their interior lives. They seek whatever will give them life.

So should we still speak of ecumenism, albeit in a much wider sense? Or must we see there a much more radical change brought about by our cultural melting pot and the present ease of access to strong and varied spiritual experiences, often very gratifying? Perhaps it is too soon to answer that question.

But let us be in no doubt that, in such a context, Christians will dare to speak and act in the Gospel, in response to this need. And if in the depths of every human being there is the search for a presence, let us not forget that, by the way we live, we can awaken people to Christ!

To exercise both 'imagination and obedience' (Dorothee Sölle) and to take an active part in the changes that our time expects from the Church, I would like to see the recent appearance of the English translation as a fresh start for this document of the Groupe des Dombes; an opportunity to be seized, since it will expose this text to other cultural worlds, different investigations, and other discoveries.

I have just learnt in the newsletter of the Benedictine monks of the Holy Cross monastery in Ireland about the setting up of an Inter-Church Forum where Christians of all denominations will meet to form a link between the Churches and civil society; and I cannot resist making a suggestion ... what better study material could such a forum have than our Dombes text, to facilitate a reflection on the exercise of authority in the Church!

The presence of the Risen One opens unexpected paths! Will we dare to sit down at the feet of the 'one teacher', and together allow ourselves to be interrogated by his words?

* * *

Bernard Sesboüé sj^{*}

Why choose such a theme, at once challenging and seemingly so far removed from our immediate concerns? Because it concerns a crucial point in the ecumenical dialogue, which affects the very validity of the numerous texts of agreement or convergence, already worked out in disputed doctrinal areas by still divided Churches. What is the use of claiming an 'agreement' if we do not really agree, either amongst ourselves or between each other, on the authority we will attribute to what has been concluded? But it cannot suffice to make this attribution case by case, as long as our convictions about the nature, role and function of authority in the Church separate us. In facing this crucial issue, the Groupe des Dombes realised it had a mountain to climb.

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As usual, there were other factors which helped us settle on this question. There is a crisis of authority in our societies; and likewise in the Churches. Moreover, our differences force us to recognize that Churches have, in the course of history, 'followed very different, if not divergent paths' (8). But the official signing by the Catholic Church and by the Lutheran Federation of the Joint Declaration on Justification must be seen as a most hopeful sign of the joint exercise of doctrinal authority.

Following the method, tried and tested by the Group in its preceding studies, the text develops in four stages, over five chapters.

1. Two lengthy chapters relate what history teaches us about the various faces of doctrinal authority through the ages, from the ancient and medieval Church up to the Reformation and the crisis of authority, characteristic of the modern age. This overview, shared up to that point, then diverges: from the Protestant side, the document sets out the major parameters dictated by the principle of a return to Scripture as the ultimate norm (*norma normans*) for the formulation of faith, along with a conviction of the 'ambivalence' of all human authority; and on the Catholic side we see a major doctrinal centralization in the shape of the 'living magisterium' from the Council of Trent to Vatican I and the dual definition of the primacy of papal jurisdiction and of papal infallibility, while Vatican II redefined the relationship between Scripture and Tradition, as well as the magisterium's responsibility.

2. The next task was to confront this history with the witness of Scripture, tradition's touchstone, to establish to what extent the latter 'authorises' the exercise of authority in the Church. As with the document on the Virgin Mary, we did not here attempt an exegetical analysis, but instead put forward a biblical theology based on an exegesis which is both scientifically sound and pays due regard to the diversity of 'models' and traditions. Our main concern was to show the devolution, the *handing on* of an authority which is first and foremost the sovereign authority of Christ alone (cf. Matt. 7:28-9; 8:8-9; 13:54; 21:23) and as such unique, to his disciples, who will always be the *trustees* and guardians of another's authority (cf. Matt. 10:1; 18:17-8). From the synoptics, the account moves on to Acts, that is, it traces the movement from Christ's authority to that of the apostles (Acts 1:8, 1:22) and their collegial expression thereof (Acts 15). The Acts then

pass from the figure of Peter to that of Paul (Acts 9:15; 18; 26:16), and we study the three moments of this work. The Johannine writings are not forgotten. The canon is itself an example of 'differentiated consensus'.

This authority is received in a triple devolution. Jesus receives his authority from the Father, with a view to his mission. He remains present to his Church and maintains his authority over it, but no longer exercises it as he did prior to Easter: he has handed it on to his disciples. He gives it, without giving it up, as a stewardship from the one Master. It is handed on first to those who knew Jesus, and then to others, like Paul. The authority of the apostolic Church is, in its turn, handed on to the post-apostolic Church. With each devolution, the authority retains the form of service.

3. We next venture to make some doctrinal proposals, on the basis of what unites us, and of what separates us. Up to this point the document has been doing 'anamnesis' in a joint effort of remembering. From this point, the Group proposes and commits to a 'therapy' of reconciliation, in three steps. It first underlines that all recognise the same reference points for doctrinal authority in the Church: scripture, confessions of faith, conciliar and disciplinary decisions, liturgy and catechesis; and this doctrinal authority takes shape in *communities*, in *persons* and in *institutional structures*. In all of this we may speak of 'differentiated consensus'. But we end up with the *paradox* that our divergences are not located *alongside* these reference points, but *at their heart*. The various reference points are viewed as interrelating in ways which are quite different, even divergent. The first divergence concerns the Church. The second, even more fundamental, bears on what authority can be vested in human persons. The Catholic Church allows that a faithful authority comprising an element of infallibility should have been given to men who remain sinners. Churches of the Reformation consider that *simul justus et peccator* is eminently applicable to those holding authority in the Church, as to the whole Christian people.

Only a movement of conversion wrought on itself *by each Church* and in sight of the other Churches can get us over this mountain we have to climb. The conversion must be both doctrinal and institutional. This will need a long and sustained effort. To proceed from Justification to Church—that is the step we have to take on the basis of the Joint Lutheran-Catholic Declaration on Justification.

4. There is the doctrinal realm; and there is the realm of life. Doctrinal rapprochement must lead to new, concrete achievements, which in turn will change the doctrinal problematic. The final chapter sets out concrete ways for the Churches to commit themselves to various reforms and conversions, without waiting till we are completely over our mountain. Many things are possible right now, if we have the will. The Group addresses the Churches, on point after contentious point. It is not possible to sum them all up; they are numerous, if not exhaustive. If the suggested programme were put into effect, even in part, if it animated how Churches really behaved, it would surely lead to concrete progress, as well as contributing to a change of mind in how we evaluate the doctrinal elements which still separate us. A new outlook, revealed through the gift of the Spirit, would lead us to convert present divergences into reconciled differences.

Being able to say all that together, in a spirit of goodwill with no trace of recrimination, already constitutes an immense progress. The expression 'differentiated consensus' certainly shows the way forward. But the adjective must not overwhelm the substantive. As things stand, we do not all agree on what can or should remain 'differentiated'. Where some see legitimate difference, others discern divergence. If areas of consensus have also turned out to be areas of disagreement, the reverse has also proved to be the case. Out of our areas of disagreement, first identified and then transformed, we must work to produce a new consensus.

THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS: THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE MIDDLE EAST

*'Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and one soul'
(Acts 4:32)*

+ **Antoine Audo sj***

The special synod for the Catholic bishops of the Middle East was held in Rome from 10 to 24 October last. It was for everyone a time of grace and hope. I am happy to convey some echoes of it in the following account.

To give you some idea of the atmosphere of the Synod, I will begin by saying that, as good Orientals, we had a sense of pride—we were proud to be in Rome, welcomed by the Holy Father who is doing everything in his power to respond to the challenges which face us: emigration, wars, poverty, religious extremism, lack of freedom, etc. Pope Benedict XVI's presence, attentive and listening, was in itself an important factor in the Synod.

Moreover, the presence of representatives of the Roman curia and of bishops' conferences held us to broaden our horizons, to get out of our fears and commit ourselves with faith and determination to the service of our Churches and our countries. The grace of being in communion around Peter and this sense of the Church's universality enabled us to avoid overdramatizing our task, or becoming discouraged. We did not hide from our difficulties. We faced up to them, together determined to find solutions. Such an assembly helps us Eastern Churches to leave behind ideological, generalising discourse, and gives us the courage to speak in truth.

Speaking freely, supported by a definite procedure, allowed all to express themselves in a context of strict rules. Many bishops found the Synod to be a privileged moment, teaching us to express ourselves freely and to listen respectfully.

The various procedures included: written contribution; three minute open contributions, in the afternoon and at the end of the day; workshops preparing the Propositions; and the information

* For a note on Mgr Audo, see p.29 above.

Commission. All these means of expression made us work both individually and in groups and helped us to link up with each other.

To this one should add the particular roles of President, general secretary, coordinator and reporter. All this created a dynamic of communion, allowing everyone the chance to speak for themselves.

More than one participant observed that, for the first time, the Arabic language was being accorded a place of honour in the Vatican. During the Synod it was in fact considered the official language, which encouraged some bishops to ask that official documents of the Church should be translated and published in Arabic.

Let me end my introduction by drawing your attention to the importance of the presence of fraternal delegates from other Churches. They were at least ten in number. On the Catholic side, as on theirs, one felt a deep joy and a conviction that we were following paths which lead to unity. All the fraternal delegates thanked the Pope for calling the Synod and expressed their profound respect for the charge invested in him. Most were present from start to finish, signifying their interest in the Synod and their committed involvement.

By contrast, the participation of the two Muslims, one Sunni and one Shia, and of Rabbi David Rosen, were limited to their contributions to the assembled Synod.

One and all, these delegates expressed their appreciation for this atmosphere of freedom, diversity, and of listening to each other.

In all humility, it must be acknowledged that today only the Pope could bring together such diverse individuals, in an assembly where they could speak freely, without fear and in truth.

1. Communion and Witness

Such was the Synod's subtitle. Indeed, we may say that many of the Synod fathers' interventions focused on this aspect of unity, first between different Catholic rites, within each country, and then in the whole of the Middle East. Being in a state of communion with other Christians, so as to speak credibly and convincingly in our societies, this means witnessing to our faith which seeks to express, here and now, the love of Jesus.

Difficulties and crises affect most of the countries of the Middle East: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the war in Iraq, the increasing power of Iran and of Turkey, confessional divisions between Sunnis

and Shias, and with Kurds seeking an autonomous country. In the face of all this, Christians feel increasingly threatened, as if they had lost their place in their own country. To defend themselves, so as to survive, the Churches tend to attach themselves to a particular ethnic, confessional and ritual group. Unfortunately, this constriction of identity disposes people to emigrate. All this is due in part to various totalitarian, ideological currents, and to certain fanatical tendencies within Islam.

In this context, a spirituality of communion, rooted in the person of Christ, may allow each Church to be itself in its liturgical and patristic tradition, at the same time opening itself in a spirit of welcome for the other, and of dialogue.

Whether it concerns liturgical reform in the spirit of Vatican II, lay or priestly formation, ecumenism or dialogue with Islam—a dual concern was always in our minds, namely, the desire both to remain rooted within a particular Eastern and Christian tradition, and at the same time to work with others for the common good.

This call for communion at different levels, in the Church and in society, was backed up by a second call, for the *personal dimension of faith*, which requires a genuine dialogue between faith and reason, which is alas not encouraged by our educational systems. Thus, many interventions and propositions emphasised the need for personal knowledge of the Word of God and of the content of faith, centred on the person of Christ. In other words, we wish to escape from a confessional, ritual faith which risks imprisoning the faithful in ignorance, and in spiritual and moral mediocrity.

By underlining this personal aspect of the Christian faith, by which we enter into an intimate relationship with God, mediated by the mystery of the Incarnation, we render a service of immense value to the societies in which Providence has placed us. For the Christian cannot be satisfied with wordy religiousness which dispenses him from seeking the free, personal word which comes to him from the Gospel, and which enables him to establish authentic and sincere relationships with the other.

Along the same lines, many interventions insisted on the duty of Eastern Churches to rediscover their *missionary spirit*. The Synod launches an appeal to Eastern Christians to rediscover a belief in their missionary vocation, in their own countries, and in the universal Church.

Pope Benedict, in his closing homily of the Synod in St Peter's, reminded the bishops of the three demands which he drew from the Synod:

- for a Church of communion, both within each *sui iuris* Church, and between the Catholic Churches and other Christians, within the ecumenical dialogue;
- then, to believe that peace is possible;
- and finally, to rediscover the missionary spirit.

Before turning to questions about our relationships with Islam and Judaism, which very many Synod fathers raised, let us say a word about some administrative matters, seemingly a novelty in the Middle-Eastern context.

Proposition 7 requests that an auditing system be introduced into administering Church accounts and property. Certain bishops and parish priests in our patriarchal societies believe themselves to be above any such oversight. Such a directive can help us towards greater transparency, more rigorous procedures and mutual trust.

Next, proposition 22 demands the introduction of social security and retirement for clergy and religious, male and female, and for the families of married priests.

It seems to me that these two propositions will help us towards greater trust between laity and clergy, and more respect for priests and religious.

2. Relations with Islam and Judaism

Concerning our relationships with Islam and Judaism, I believe that we witnessed to our Christian faith regarding these two religions, in a manner that was neither complacent or provocative.

The general tone of the Synod neither over-dramatised the difficulties surrounding Middle-Eastern Christians, or expressed unreserved ideological approval for any of the regimes concerned.

We are aware of the difficulties. No sooner home, then we witnessed the attack on a Baghdad Church. This act of violence profoundly disturbs us.

We wanted to say to Muslims that we share a common history, rich in human values and spirituality, and that we wish to continue with them along this road, promoting a new humanism. For that, we need to work with governments so as to foster within our culture the notions of civil state, of citizenship, and of human dignity.

Some fathers put forward the expression 'positive laicity', used by President Sarkozy and Pope Benedict. Others found this term implied a *separation* between Religion and State, which Muslims reject, and therefore preferred to emphasize the distinction between the two domains, political and religious.

Témoignages

- An Egyptian bishop: 'We are not in conflict with Muslims. Rather, we wish to say to them that our common concern is to defend the sacred character of the world, so that human values do not get changed into mere technical projects.'
- A bishop from South Lebanon, in the heartlands of Shia and of Hezbollah: 'We wish to express our fraternal and friendly relations with Muslims, rather than make big theoretical statements about Islam.'
- The bishop of Algiers: 'We live out a spirituality of encounter and presence amongst Muslims, rather than an aggressive proselytism.'

With regard to Judaism, we gave expression to two convictions that it pleases neither Jews or Muslims much to hear. We said that we share the Holy Scriptures with the Jews, which gives us access to a field of dialogue and to mutual knowledge. The Israeli-Arab conflict should not prevent us from reading the Old Testament or from entering into dialogue with believing Jews.

Equally, the Synod demanded the implementation of United Nations decisions regarding the Israeli-Arab conflict, calling both parties to mutual recognition and to peace. Adopting this position, the Synod fathers were in complete accord with Vatican directives.

What do we expect from Europe and its Christians?

Peace in the Middle East is the best remedy for preventing Christian emigration, said Pope Benedict in his opening homily to the Synod.

Christians are called to make peace between Muslims and Jews. For that, we have to speak in truth to the two religions.

BOOK REVIEWS

Reshaping Ecumenical Theology: The Church Made Whole? Paul Avis (London: T.&T. Clark International, 2010), 209 pages, including index of names.

In the opening lines of his preface Paul Avis notes a general agreement that the ecumenical movement needs to start doing things differently. It has to be said that the agreement he refers to comes out of a variety of analyses of the situation. Some are saying the movement has no future—and there are those who might sound relieved to hear it. Others are saying that the movement is in crisis, as if it has been doing things badly and needs to mend its ways. Others speak of it being at a turning point. That is less upsetting. A turning point gives a movement new direction, but continues the impetus that has carried it to where it is. It is not a giving up, nor even a turning back, such as might be required in a crisis. Knowing the difference between crisis and turning point is important, not only for those actively engaged in ecumenism, but particularly for the recruitment of new, younger people to the movement. There is a troubling level of unconcern and even resistance to ecumenical activity afflicting young Church people. The ageing body of active ecumenists is not being noticeably rejuvenated.

Avis does not use much of the language of crisis or agonize too much about the causes of our present unease. His book gives much more the feel of ecumenism being at a turning point. His thinking is grounded on a Gospel certainty that the ecumenical imperative is integral to Christian life. There is no going back, even to basics, in this book, and not much righting of wrongs. What is being proposed is a course correction. The new direction being proposed is still a journey towards unity in the one Church of Christ. The movement being envisaged is still energized by and carries with it the achievements of the past half-century and more. The fact that quite a few of the book's chapters are presented as re-workings of papers written at different times over the past twenty years is a welcome sign that the originality of the book has more continuity than break to it.

What the book proposes is a sharpening and re-directing of vision about the goal of ecumenical activity and a review of the steps that have been and still need to be taken in moving towards it. Unity is

looked at, no longer as a simple undifferentiated oneness, but as inevitably holding within itself the reality of diversity. The title of the first theme-setting chapter is 'The Church—Unity and Multiplicity'. The very ecumenical search for unity is understood to have given rise to an appreciation of the place diversity must have in it, when the unity being pursued is that of the Church of Christ. Members of many churches have discovered in ecumenical activity a more profound sense, including a critical reassessment, of the identity of their own Church; they have realized that the unity they seek must be a unity that incorporates the distinctiveness of their own tradition. This sharper view of unity can be expressed in phrases like 'differentiated consensus' (93ff), 'full visible communion' (rather than 'full visible unity') and 'united not absorbed' (200). What is so valuable about this book is the thorough analysis of what these tags might stand for. It is done in chapters on The Hermeneutics of Unity, Towards a Deeper Reception of 'Reception', Confessionalism or a Confessing Church?, Episcopacy: Focus of Unity or Cause of Division, Building and Breaking Communion, Ethics and Communion: The New Frontier of Ecumenism. Apart from the real theological depth at which the issues are discussed it is particularly valuable to have them dealt with in relation to the variety of documents that have emerged from ecumenical dialogues and agreements of recent years. The familiarity of Avis with these documents, his participation in the making of some of them, and his role as General Secretary of the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity gives real weight to his analysis.

Paul Avis writes as an Anglican. He can be taken as modelling the way ecumenical theology should be done—not in some kind of supposed neutral space of unity but in fidelity to the 'confessional' diversity (pace the reservation Avis has about attributing 'confessionality' to Anglicanism) out of which unity is to be fashioned. He faces the current conflicts within the Anglican Communion on the ordination of women, homosexuality and ministry, same sex unions. More interestingly he does this in the context of a deeper explanation of the dialectic between the Protestant and Catholic strains within Anglicanism. Being made aware of these issues and their ramifications can help Christians of other confessional traditions to situate themselves in relation to Anglicans. Avis claims that present-day Anglicanism is reaching a balance between the Protestant and Catholic strains, and he finds this reflected in the major ecumenical

agreements that Anglicanism has reached in recent years. Those of us who know Anglicanism mainly through the ARCIC processes and texts might have a feeling that Avis is more comfortable with the Anglicanism that is embodied in agreements with Lutherans and Methodists and Evangelicals generally, than in those with Catholics. He is able to point to the unhelpful roadblocks put in the way of the search for unity by some recent Vatican documents—notably *Christus Dominus*. He clearly finds the standard Catholic view of unity too monolithic and authoritarian to measure up to the kind of differentiated consensus, which he sees as the true and realistic goal of ecumenism.

There is little doubt that one of the major challenges facing ecumenical theologians, and in special way those of the Roman Catholic Church, is the working out of a contemporary understanding of ‘catholic’ that would do full justice to what the Creeds mean by the term. They will, however, always want to relate the term to the other three credal attributes of the Church—that it is one, holy, and apostolic in its catholicity. In doing so they will not be able to avoid the issues associated with the term authority. It is a term that appears rarely in this book of Paul Avis; and without it various issues about decision-making in the community of believers are not much brought to light. But they surely have to be for the well-being of ecumenical theology. Some way will have to be found to translate the biblical ‘binding and loosing’ into the structures and practices of the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ.

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Criteria of Discernment in Interreligious Dialogue, ed. Catherine Cornille (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2009), xix + 283 pages.

This book makes a valuable contribution to the discussion on relations between religions by offering a selection of the religions’ own approaches to approaching their religious ‘others’. This allows us to observe the development of what the editor calls ‘confessional criteria’ (xi) for dialogue, with the obvious corollary that the reader is enabled to place these criteria themselves in an interrelationship. Gavin D’Costa warns that it is counterproductive to impose modernity on traditional materials (70), but then, in the words of David Burrell, ‘once the idol of pure reason has been shattered ... we will also find

that we can employ the skills learned in one tradition to follow reasoning in another' (97). Indeed, one of the striking features of the book is that all the authors base their arguments on what Mustafa Abu-Sway refers to as authentic, representative sources rather than those that are popular or politically correct (122-123).

The book is organised on conventional lines, first giving examples from the so-called Semitic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) followed by the Indic traditions (Hinduism, Buddhism). This is perfectly acceptable, but it reminds us how much further work is yet to be done on eliciting comparable criteria from the vast array of what are sometimes referred to as Primal or Indigenous traditions, with which the 'great' traditions have always interacted. By the same token, the wide range of opinion within each major tradition cannot be represented here, but the chosen examples are distinctive and stimulating. Jonathan Magonet argues that questioning one's own assumptions is characteristic of Jewish approaches. 'With a father-figure God, one can have a good fight; with a suffering "son", a very different set of psychological expectations are evoked' (10). His co-religionist David M. Elcott, by contrast, drawing on the work of Irving Greenberg, outlines a 'principled pluralist Judaism' (26) and comes closest to employing a modern liberal frame of reference to the tradition. Yet both stress the role of time and memory in Jewish thinking, for 'history is the language of Jewish theology' (Elcott, 30) and 'time as spiritually full of meaning and purpose is another criterion for "authentic religion" that Jews would expect to find amongst other faiths' (Magonet, 17). Thus the question of authenticity is raised early in the book along with the problem of the wider applicability of one's own criteria. As Joseph Lumbard warns later, Christians tend to evaluate Muhammad christologically, while Muslims view Incarnation and Trinity as erroneous Muslim doctrines (144), and so *mutatis mutandis* in other cases.

Christian readers will be impatient that the enormous variety of theologies of religions in Protestantism is represented by the sole contribution of Reinhold Bernhardt, who develops the 'material principles' of transcendence, freedom, agape and responsibility as the minimum standards for interreligious relations. From a Catholic perspective, Gavin D'Costa performs a detailed exegesis of Vatican documents to show that, although Vatican II is silent on the salvific efficacy of the religions, John Paul II developed its teaching to the

point where the Spirit can be discerned not just in the consciences of other believers but in their traditions themselves. David Burrell, taking a somewhat different tack, bases dialogue on 'a proper understanding of what one another *means*, leaving tactfully aside why each believes their revelation to be *true*' (93), a stance which may not satisfy all participants in dialogue.

The process of *relecture* and re-interpretation of authoritative texts is most clearly represented in the contributions from Muslim authors. Asma Afsaruddin pays close attention to key passages from the *Qur'an*, while Mustafa Abu-Sway suggests the possibility of reconciling the stories in Old Testament and *Qur'an* to demonstrate a seamless continuity between the prophets and the Prophet. For him a test case of 'ecumenical *jihad*' would be the treatment of the Palestinians (141-142). A similar methodology is applied by the two Hindu contributors, perhaps to the surprise of those who see Hinduism as a tolerant, vaguely liberal tradition. Both Anantanand Rambachan and Deepak Sarma leave no doubt that for orthodox Hindus ultimate truth is to be found only in the Vedas. For the former, *advaita* or non-duality and the non-contradictedness it grounds is the 'crucial test of truth' (159), while for the latter Madhva is a closed exclusive commentarial tradition which rejects all plurality. He concludes: 'I showed that for Madhva, religions outside of the Vedanta commentarial fold have no truth whatsoever and are valued only as living examples of proverbial "straw men" for Madhva students' (202).

Perhaps the most promising criteria for dialogue come from the Buddhist contributors, though it should be emphasised that two of the authors are Western representatives of Tibetan lineages and the third is in the Pure Land tradition of Shinran, leaving out the considerable advances made by philosophers inspired by Zen and the stubbornly sectarian elements of Theravada (John Makransky comments on some of these other facets of Buddhism at the end of his article). John Makransky develops the very traditional concept of 'skilful means' (*kausalya-upaya*) as a way of cutting through the illusions which hinder dialogue to the extent that religious people cling to them, including 'any constructs of "creator God"' (218). In this way, the Buddha's technique of re-interpreting others' worldviews in order to show the true path through them can be adapted to the demands of contemporary dialogue. Judith Simmer-Brown reconstructs the Dalai

Lama's re-appropriation of the Tibetan *Ri-me* or 'without bias' tradition of resolving sectarian tensions in 'constructive competition' (243). Finally, Mark Unno outlines Shinran's principle of 'true entrusting' (*shinjin*) as 'itself the unfolding of other power, the awakening of infinite light as one's deepest truest reality' (259). He complements this with an account of his experiences in teaching comparative religion, inviting students to "'try on" different religious perspectives' (264) so that they can reach insight indirectly through the 'other'.

Catherine Cornille, not for the first time, has done us a service by juxtaposing these at times very similar approaches from very different traditions. The resulting picture will not satisfy those who argue for a radical pluralism in studies of religion; at best, most perspectives could be labelled mutually inclusive and some would have to be called exclusivist. The value of the collection lies in the authenticity of the standpoints: none advocates a facile liberalism or an abstract pluralism. The book makes a strong case for what has come to be called comparative theology; it also opens up the prospect of a future collaborative theology once representatives of the various traditions learn to appropriate one another's criteria for dialogue and use them to solve the problems they all face together. Lecturers in religious studies, theologians of religions and philosophers of dialogue will all find the book extremely useful.

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