

Jesuits in Dialogue

the interreligious dimension

Secretariat for
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Society of Jesus

Encounter at Mar Musa

Jesuits among Muslims

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Encounter at Deir Mar Musa

Thomas Michel, S.J.

The monastery of Deir Mar Musa al-Habashi (St. Moses the Ethiopian), whose origins date back to the 6th Century A.D. and today is home to the Al-Khalil Monastic Community, was the site of the most recent encounter of “Jesuits among Muslims” on 3-10 September 2006. Mar Musa monastery is located in the Syrian Desert about a half-hour drive from the city of Nebek, which is in turn about an hour’s drive north of Damascus.

“Jesuits among Muslims” is an informal group of Jesuits involved in dialogue with Muslims, who have been meeting every 2-3 years since 1980. The General of the Society of Jesus at that time, Fr. Pedro Arrupe, had the idea of bringing together Jesuits trained in Islamic studies so they could exchange ideas, share projects and hopes, discuss difficulties, and encourage one another with their individual initiatives. Most have done specialized studies in some aspect of Islamic studies. Many are in teaching positions or are writing dissertations on themes connected with the religion of Islam, while some have primarily a “pastoral” involvement with Muslims, to whom they relate as friends, colleagues, or neighbors.

The seminar began in Damascus with several meetings with Muslim leaders. The Jesuits were received by the Shaykh Nabeel al-Halbawi, the rector of the Shi’i shrine of Sitti Ruqayyah, and by Shaykh Salah al-Din Kaftaro, director of the Ahmad Kaftaro Islamic Center, with the deans and professors of the center, and also with Shaykhs Husayn al-Mardini and Samir Ubayd. In Nebek, they met the Mufti, Shaykh Yaser al-Hafez and members of the mosque council. The Jesuits then retired to Mar Musa for the remaining days of the seminar.

The papers in this volume were the basic material for study and discussion during the seminar and were revised after the seminar according to the observations of the group. One day featured an “open” session attended, in addition to the Jesuit participants, by members of the Monastic Community of Al-Khalil and local dignitaries. The session featured talks by Christian Troll, S.J., Shaykh Yaser al-Hafez, and Mr. Anwar Wardeh, director of the *Al-Ijtima’iyya* journal, and a response by Sister Huda Faddul of the Mar Musa community. The final day of the seminar included participation in the feast of St. Elian at Mar Elian Monastery in Qaryatayn and a visit to the ancient desert city of Palmyra.

PROGRESSIVE THINKING IN CONTEMPORARY ISLAM

Christian W. Troll, S.J.

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1. Introductory background: Islamic renewal

It seems sensible to start by shedding light on the background context and then to define the broader framework within which the “progressive thinking” in contemporary Islam which we want to discuss is embedded. The movements and trends which are shaping the contemporary Islamic world can be analyzed and assessed in the light of two conflicting forces, namely the notions of authenticity on the one hand and modernity on the other. Such an approach perceives contemporary Islam as being torn between the authenticity in matters of life and doctrine which it derives from its past and the modernity which refers it to a present (and a future) in which Muslims no longer hold the reins of power and are therefore no longer able to control the development of thought.

Islam is centred on a scripture which it holds in faith to be the revelation of God. This scripture, the Qur’an, is believed to be eternal and immutable in form and content and thus to be valid for every place and time, to contain a truth which obtains for ever. Modernity, by contrast, is characterized by the relativity and the progressive nature of all truth. For the modernists there is nothing, spoken or written, which cannot be construed and questioned, which cannot and indeed should not be further refined by the human mind. Islam thus sees itself positioned between the authenticity of a truth – that of the Qur’an as a – so to speak – naked, irrefutable fact – and a modernity whose knowledge in all fields is constantly being reconstructed. Is the solution to be found in modernizing Islam or in Islamizing modernity? It is the task of the Muslims to answer this question.

However appealing this approach may be, it has the disadvantage of not delving below the surface. It contrasts an authenticity which is Muslim with a modernity which is impacting on Islam exclusively from outside. In addition, this approach via the question of an identity under threat from outside is an invitation to either pull up the drawbridges or even – so to speak – go into “exile”. Both alternatives are rejected by a large majority of Muslims. If there is to be a debate between the various tendencies, then it should and must be nourished from elements which are rooted within Islam. It must arise from Islam itself and its inherent tensions. When looking for an appropriate approach, it therefore seems sensible to include the twin notions of the letter and the spirit. The merit here is that the analysis comes from and remains located within Islam itself.

Three main trends seem to be alive and well in the Islamic world. Against the backdrop of a *cultural* Islam there exists an *Islamist* Islam, i.e. an Islam of the letter. In addition there is an Islam *in the process of re-interpretation*: an Islam based on the spirit of the letter.

Cultural Islam (one could also say *traditional* Islam; by contrast, I consider the term “Volksislam”, i.e. “popular Islam” to be highly inappropriate) is understood to be Islam as it is believed, experienced and practised in a given society. It represents a kind of humus which nourishes the entire community, a potential bestowed on all Muslims. A Turkish Muslim, for example, sees himself as Sunni in terms of his understanding of the Qur’an but Hanafi in his interpretation of the law. This does not, however, mean that there do not exist countless tendencies and groupings in Turkish Islam that are little “orthoprax” (i.e. abiding by mainstream formulation of Islamic law): popular Sufi orders, veneration of saints and magic practises on the part of uneducated khojas and persons under their influence, practices which not uncommonly draw on elements of pre-Islamic and extra-Islamic, local and neighboring cultures and are peddled as being Islamic. All these elements, taken together, we refer to as

cultural Islam. This Islam is in close contact with the civilization and milieu to which it belongs. It makes these a Muslim community. In all certainty it contributes to the sense of balance, order and harmony of each individual Muslim. For the individual Muslim it is a reference system, a language, a way of thinking, a code of values and conduct – in a word, the culture of a genuinely extant Muslim society.

Against the backdrop of this cultural Islam, an Islam has emerged which is a strict observant of the *letter*. This Islam is often referred to today as “Islamism”. Present in admittedly various forms, it dates back a long time. Throughout its history it has repeatedly produced tangible regimes and movements whenever a society felt the need to react – usually in order to fend off non-Islamic forces. Not uncommonly it therefore has an inherent tendency towards the radical.

The circumstances which explain the current revival of Islamism are legion. Deep down there is undoubtedly the predominance of the so-called “west”, but at the same time there is the decline of the political power of the Islamic world and the concomitant humiliation of the *umma*. Immediately apparent is a crisis which is simultaneously economic, cultural and political – in other words a development crisis. This crisis is driving a number of groups to mobilize in search of a comprehensive improvement of their situation.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that eradicating the causes of this frustration would automatically lead to the demise of Islamism and ultimately to its integration into “cultural Islam”. After all, anyone who makes the transition from cultural Islam to Islamist Islam is following a certain and systematic dynamic. The doctrines and commandments believed to be Allâh’s revelation are interpreted by the Islamist literally, and the Islamist commits himself to implementing them effectively in the public realm *tels quels*, as they stand, if necessary through political militancy and exceptionally even through terrorism.

Can this Islamic logic of radical loyalty to the letter be explained with more precision? Allâh is the master and the lord. Subordination is his unconditional due. He handed down his Scripture, to which obedience is owed. The Qur’an and the sunna – the exemplary actions and words of Muhammad as recorded in the “healthy” (i.e. reliable) hadiths - are the basic texts and the founding texts. They are to be interpreted literally without excuse or spurious compromise. Religion sets out a code of conduct which has to be followed strictly. The Islamic community is instructed to “enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong” (e.g. Q. 3:104). By virtue of this commandment, Muslims are obliged, in all areas of life, to be active defenders of the good and warriors against evil, with good and evil being defined by the shari’a, itself based on the Qur’an and the sunna and rationally deduced from this basis.

Thus a connection between Islamism and Islam does actually exist. Although they are not identical and should be clearly distinguished from each other, in the eyes of some (and here and there even many) Muslims, Islamism is not an incorrect or misleading Islam but more a complete, perfect Islam. For its adherents, Islamism is not only that which Islam stands for but the truth of Islam to which all must convert.

At the same time, today we see the emergence, more than ever from “cultural Islam” but also, antithetically, from the conscious experience of contemporary Islamism, of an *Islam of re-interpretation* or an *Islam in the process of being re-interpreted*. We call it thus because it undertakes to re-open “the gates of the *ijtihad*” (i.e. the personal striving for fresh interpretations based on the basic and founding scriptures), gates which have been believed to

be more or less locked since the middle of the 10th century. The originality of the *ijtihād* is to be found in the courage to reconsider and reformulate earlier juridical rulings and theological doctrine, prescriptions which seemed to be unambiguously and definitively true for almost a millennium.

What applies to Islamism applies here too: the various tendencies and movements are so numerous that a full classification would only confuse the issue. The defining feature of all these new approaches is that they address themselves to the meaning of the founding scriptures of Islam and try, in cognizance of the risks and hazards inevitably incurred by such an undertaking, to identify the spirit behind the letter.

This “Islam according to the spirit” is today not at the front of the socio-political and socio-religious stage, or at least not in the way that the movements of an Islamist persuasion are. But its efforts are clearly visible and not uncommonly in line with the aims and views of the broader population. Undoubtedly this “Islam according to the spirit” still leaves far too much unsaid and some things even deliberately vague, partly out of fear of aggressive accusations from Islamists and also from the undemocratic potentates who use cultural Islam to preserve the *status quo*. But this “Islam according to the spirit” could ultimately hold the key to the future because it responds flexibly to the challenges of modernity without denying continuity with at least some of the historical understandings of Islam.

Muslims everywhere are today engaged in an internal Islamic debate on Islam. Torn between the traditional practices and ideas of *cultural* Islam on the one hand and the influence and attraction of *Islamist* Islam or the Islam of *re-interpretation* on the other, the devout and educated Muslim has no alternative to asking himself what kind of Islam he wants for his children. Moreover, more and more Muslims find themselves in a transition to a “critical” religion, i.e. a religion which is determined ever less by social milieu and instead is marked increasingly by the independent choice of the individual.

2. Aim and delimitation of the topic. Clarification of terms

Undisputedly therefore the phenomenon just alluded to does exist: a *new* Islamic thinking. But what else does this *newness* entail? It is a contemporary Muslim thinking which sees all manifestations of what we refer to as Islam and Islamic as being subject to *change*, as changing and developing realities. It is therefore not – to emphasize this point – not a thinking which subscribes to the ideology of progress. Indeed, this thinking certainly also embraces the possibility of regression, provisionality and possible errors, in particular with regard to one’s own thinking. As a result it accepts the need for permanent self-criticism and indeed calls for such self-criticism. The new thinking furthermore aims for a deconstruction (*nota bene*: not destruction or demolition) geared to the goal of enabling every Muslim and every honest person “to come closer, free from any form of ideological manipulation, to the truth of the Word of Islam in order then to better appropriate this truth informed by a sound knowledge of the reasoning and background.” (BENZINE. 2004, p. 13)

The progressive thinkers do however conceive of “modernity” in ways significantly different from the approaches of early reformers (of the late 19th and first decades of the 20th century). They are not satisfied with using reason simply as a universal and self-evident criterion but instead see reason as a socially constructed ability and thus as an ability which exists within a variety of practices and different discourses on theory.

They believe: “At the heart of modernity one finds the idea of the individual free to act, free to discover, whose experiments can penetrate the secrets of nature and whose strivings, together with those of others, can contribute to the shaping of a new and better world.” (BENZINE. 2004, p. 17) In other words: the new progressive thinkers see modernity critically and in the style of a distinctive, individual consciousness of freedom.

Nasr Hamid ABU ZAYD wrote in *Al-Ahram* in 2002:

“We need an untrammelled exploration of our religious heritage. This is the first prerequisite for a religious renewal. We must lift the embargo on freedom of thought. The area of the renewal should be unlimited. There is no room for safe doctrinal havens in Islamic teaching, sacrosanct and closed to critical research. Such safe doctrinal havens constrain the process of renewal. They represent censorship, and this has no place in the history of Islamic thinking.” (ABU ZAYD. 2002. See: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2002>).

Such an appeal incorporates the demand for freedom in general and for a social order which allows for such free thinking and does not violently suppress it. It also implies the hardly veiled reproach that those in power repeatedly instrumentalize religion for their own political purposes and are in this respect indeed comparable with Islamic fundamentalists. Open, scholarly criticism of the “religious phenomenon” and the “religious discourse” is new to Muslim societies. Advocates of the new thinking are therefore repeatedly branded as “apostates”. They and their views are unpalatable for the establishment because they concern not only specifically theological issues but also contemporary problems such as relations between the Islamic religion and the state, the interaction between the shari’a and the positive law of modern states (particularly human rights and the emancipation of women), and then of course also very tangible local issues such as the Islamic view of the relation between belief and social justice or the question whether an Islam-specific, firmly defined social system or political system is a component of Islam.

It would however be a major mistake to concur with the reproach repeatedly uttered by the opponents of this new thinking to the effect that the latter is uncritically bound to western criteria and has blindly become addicted to the west and its value system. For this new thinking, modernity does not mean “western modernity”. On the contrary, it defines modernity as – so to speak – the critical light that modern knowledge has generated. The protagonists of progressive thinking thus advocate that when studying Islam and interpreting its scriptures, there is a need for unrestricted and critical account to be taken of the modern social sciences (linguistics, semiotics, comparative religion and not least sociology).

The advocates of progressive thinking do not form a school, nor do they all study the same issues. None the less we can concur with Rachid Benzine: “They are brought together by the fact that in their search for independent insight they want to study the Qur’an, Islamic tradition and Islam in general, always respecting the requirements of university scholarship and making use of the exact methodologies of scientific study.” (BENZINE. 2004., p.18).

Of the many advocates of such thinking, the following are mentioned by way of example: Mohamed Arkoun (Algeria / France); Abdul Karim Soroush (Iran); Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid (Egypt / Netherlands); Abdou Filali-Ansary (Morocco); Abdelmajid Charfi (Tunisia); Farid Esack (South Africa / USA); Ebrahim Moosa (USA); Asghar Ali Engineer (India); Abdullahi an-Naim (Sudan / USA); Amina Wadud (USA); Fatima Mernissi (Morocco); Leila Babès (France); Khaled Abou El Fadl (USA); Nurcholish Madjid (Indonesia); Farish Noor (Malaysia); Ömer Özsoy (Turkey) ...

3. The more recent historical context of progressive thinking

Tajdīd (renewal) and *nahda* (cultural awakening, renaissance) of Islamic thinking developed from the end of the 18th century on during a time when Muslim populations were subject to political and colonial dependence on the west. Political liberation has occurred since then, and Muslims have also had experience of dictatorship and corruption in their own Islamic-dominated societies. Admittedly the dependence of these societies on the west has not been removed entirely but exists today in new forms. In addition, an increasing percentage of Muslims live as minority communities in states with non-Muslim majorities.

Like the Islamists, the advocates of progressive thinking are also to a certain extent the product of democratization and more accessible university education. A few professional theologians may be among them, but their number is small. It is certainly true that the progressive thinkers include relatively more people with a humanities background than the Islamists, whose ranks are known to include a majority of persons with a scientific or technological background. The progressive thinkers are convinced that it is not sufficient to modernize Muslim societies in the fields of science and technology without at the same time probing the corpus of traditional religious interpretations.

Fazlur Rahman, to whom the new thinking under review here owes many decisive ideas, wrote in the epilogue to the second, expanded edition of his book *Islam*, published in 1979: “At the moment Islamic intellectualism is virtually dead, and the Muslim world offers the uninviting spectacle of an enormous intellectual desert with wild troughs within which no thought stirs and a deathly silence prevails, though there is on occasion something which seems to resemble the twitch of a wing. This is the community for whose young generation Muhammad Iqbal beseechingly prayed some four decades ago [beginning of the 1930s]:

*“May Allāh guide your intellect into a [new] storm,
for there is hardly a ripple in the waters of your seas!”*“

Rahman continued:

“Why has the half-century since Iqbal’s death been so sterile? One answer may be this: the Muslim world has been totally occupied over the past 50 years with liberation struggles against western colonialism and thereafter with reconstruction programmes. Though it is also true to say that when people are under enormous pressure and faced with new challenges their creativity attains unusual heights. What kind of reconstruction would result if intellectual reconstruction and spiritual regeneration had no or only a minor role to play in it?” (RAHMAN. 1979, pp. 263-264)

The enormous pressure from new challenges, combined with the recent acceleration of the secularization process in Muslim milieus, societies and states, has become so strong that it has inspired progressive thinkers everywhere. For some, personal experience also played a role: experience of Islamist regimes (such as those of the Mullahs in Iran and the Taliban in Afghanistan) and of the fight by Islamist movements against dictatorial regimes and the latter’s defence of the status quo.

Virtually all progressive thinkers are committed to considering the place of religion in a world which, despite all appearances to the contrary, is becoming increasingly secular. The process of secularization came upon the Islamic world fairly suddenly – overnight, so to speak – without its having undergone an inner maturing process which would have prepared

it for the impact. This process confronts Muslim thinkers with the question: how should religion, i.e. a reality deemed to be immutable, be reconciled with change?

Abdolkarim Soroush (born in 1945) has examined this question for considerable time and with radical scholarship. His answer is this: all the sciences and all fields of knowledge are in a state of ongoing transformation. Changes in one field of science necessarily lead to modifications in other fields, including in Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). Step by step Soroush has developed a “Theory of the extension and contraction of religious knowledge”. Proceeding from this theory he has arrived at the conviction that the boundaries for the development of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) have to be constantly expanded, and that the development process itself also has to take account of developments which have taken place in other religious spheres. (See: SOROUSH. 2002)

In the view of the progressive thinkers, an unprejudiced, fresh reading of the basic scriptures of Islam is the only way of reconciling the core values of Islam with the demands of modernity in all their many variations. Only such a re-interpretation will pave the way for movement in jurisprudence; only thus will it be possible to ensure an adhesion of Islam’s political thinking to democracy and human rights in a spiritually and intellectually coherent manner, and only thus will it ultimately be possible to bring about gender equality – all this with a clear conscience regarding the Qur’an and the sunna and in critical discourse with the critical thinking of modernity.

4. Selected ideas and arguments of the new thinking

It would be beyond the scope of this paper to discuss individually the modern Muslim intellectuals cited above or to track the most important intellectual milestones in this new thinking in a manner which does justice to all. Instead I will present a selection – undoubtedly a somewhat random selection merely for the purpose of illustration – of arguments concerning just a few of the basic questions which seem relevant to our discussion. I emphasize that my selection of authors should not be understood as a kind of pecking order for progressive Muslim thinking as a whole.

4.1. What is Islam? – A civilizational tradition in progress

Ahmet Karamustafa, a lecturer on religion at the University of Washington, examines a fundamental question repeatedly raised by the progressive thinkers, namely: what is the definition of Islam? His portentous answer can be summarized as follows. The term “religion” cannot be applied universally to Islam because of its vagueness and ambiguity. It misleadingly suggests that Islam is an unambiguous and clearly delimited reality. Moreover, Islam cannot be identified with any of the various human cultures, and the diverse cultures which identify themselves as Islamic are all Islamic and cannot be ranked hierarchically on the basis of the amount of Islam they are judged to incorporate. This leaves us with the widely used definition of Islam which proceeds from the prescribed practices known as the “five pillars”. But this definition is likewise unsatisfactory because the only element of these “five pillars” which, on close and critical inspection, is seen to inform the identity of all Muslims is the *shahāda* (i.e. the brief avowal of faith: “There is no deity except Allāh”). Anyone who rejects this is indeed not a Muslim, though it should be said that interpreting the *shahāda* is a matter left to the individual. This definition of Islam based on the *shahāda* has merit only if and to the extent that it is embedded in a civilizational framework. In other words – and this takes us on to the positive formulation of Karamustafa’s thesis: Islam does

indeed have as its core certain key ideas and practices, but what is important is to grasp the dynamic spirit in which these core ideas and practices are constantly negotiated by Muslims in concrete historical contexts. One should not, therefore, reify them in a rigid formula which is both unhistorical and idealistic. In still other words: “Islam is a civilizational project in progress; it is a developing civilizational tradition which constantly releases from its melting pot innumerable alternative societal and cultural blueprints for human life on earth.” (KARAMUSTAFA. 2003, p. 109)

From this perspective of Islam, Karamustafa draws the following conclusions. If Islam is thus perceived as a civilizational project, it presents itself as a dynamic, developing phenomenon which cannot be reified or defined in any way. This insight and reality should be celebrated instead of denied, in unrealistic and utopian fashion, with the Islamist call for the building of “the true Islam” and for the “politico-ideological unification of all Muslims”.

Seen from this angle, it is easier to identify and promote Islam as a truly global tradition, as a tradition which does not need to distance itself from any specific race, language or culture. In other words: by emphasizing the global character of Islam, we are able to value Islam’s transcultural, transethnic and transnational – i.e. humanistic - dimensions.

Moreover: thus seen, Islam is an interactive and inclusive tradition. This tradition takes root in the cultures with which it comes into contact. It reshapes these cultures and reforms them from within in a manner which means that numerous Islamic cultures exist on the globe, all equally Islamic and all equal partners in building and renewing the Islamic civilizational tradition.

4.2. Critical Islam – beyond mere apologetics

One of the most prominent advocates of progressive Islamic thinking now teaching in the United States, Ebrahim Moosa of Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, identifies some characteristic features of progressive thinking by differentially comparing it with the thinking of the Islamic modernists of the 19th and 20th centuries. The latter perceived modernity as their ally and, importantly, they attached high priority to rationality. Reason as a criterion seemed to them to be their best weapon in their dispute with the west. They also deployed this weapon in their fight against all forms of superstition and degraded popular belief. Moreover, they believed that reason as a criterion would make them independent of all external religious authorities, be they in Sufism, theology or jurisprudence. Finally, they believed that by using rational methods they would be able directly to discover for themselves the original Word of the Qur’an.

These thinkers, however, took only scant note of the critical light of modern knowledge which had been developed in the modern humanities. Their ranks included only few intellectuals who were able and willing to apply the insights of critical scholarship in history, literature, sociology and psychology to interpreting the Qur’an and the hadiths, to history, social structures and the understanding of theology and jurisprudence. They were informed by the understandable fear that total acceptance of modernity as a philosophical tradition would dissolve Islam as a belief. At the same time they still held the conviction that pre-modern epistemology with its roots in classical dialectic theology (*‘ilm al-kalām*) and jurisprudence (*fiqh*) could withstand erosion by modernity or was even compatible with the best of modern epistemology. Their intentions here were undoubtedly sound, but there was also naiveté at play insofar as most reformers viewed modernity and its philosophical

heritage as a mere tool to explain and promote the pre-modern tradition and the pre-modern understanding of religion. This shows that they either failed to recognize or completely misread the full implications of modernity.

Ebrahim Moosa cautions that the quest for a new and credible analysis which ventures beyond the positions set out above should avoid making two errors in particular which are characteristic of the modernist literature. The first is reification. This entails reducing and transforming living, subjective experiences and practices to make them fit into a series of concepts, ideas and things. For example, in relation to the earliest phase in the history of the Muslims it is not uncommon for reference to be made to the “spirit of Islam” as if this corresponds as equal to justice, equality and humanism as individual or combined qualities; as if these represent the very nature, the essence of Islam on the basis of which everything else and all that was to come later can be understood. Nothing, however, is presented to show exactly how, whether and, if so, to what degree these ideals were actually manifested in the practices and behaviour of the early Muslims.

Secondly, there is a need to abandon the apologetic attitude which still prevails today. This attitude produces arguments which gloss over or airbrush out certain elements of patriarchal structures, lifestyles and convictions which are sanctioned in the Qur’an and the hadiths. Acting on a false inferiority complex vis-à-vis the present, when confronted with history and its critical understanding, the response of the apologists is to flee. Muslims of this leaning gave little credence to the legitimacy of their own experience of the present and refused to act on this experience as a trigger and justification for innovation, change and adaptation. This reportedly has to do with a pathological belief in the superiority of the past and with the inability of a majority of Muslims to see the present, with its formative roots in the Enlightenment and the modern humanities, as an opportunity for Islam.

4.3. Resisting the authoritarian in the quest for the moral

In his book *Speaking in the Name of God* (ABU EL FADL, 2003), Khaled Abou El-Fadl, a lawyer lecturing at the UCLA School of Law, presents a critical investigation of the ethical foundations of the Islamic legal system wherever this, largely as he suggests, has degenerated into an authoritarian interpretation of the Qur’an and the hadiths – with fatal consequences for sections of Muslim society, in particular women. Abou El-Fadl fears that this authoritarian character bestowed on Islamic jurisprudence by Salafi and Wahhabi theory and practice not only robs Islamic jurisprudence of all integrity and respectability but is also an almost insurmountable hurdle to implementing and developing Islamic law in the modern world. Abou El-Fadl argues that in the light of the apologetic stance of the activists and the paralyzing dogmatism of today’s legal experts, only very little remains of the rich and complex heritage of Islamic jurisprudence. If this jurisprudence now mainly represents a methodology for a consciously religious lifestyle in search of the divine and a process of weighing up and juggling the core values of the shari’a in search of a morality to guide one’s life, then one must accept, Abou El-Fadl says, that this jurisprudence has decayed – even to the point of extinction - over the past three centuries, in a process which was particularly rapid in the second half of the 20th century.

On the impact of Islamic prescriptions on women, Abou El-Fadl draws a particularly devastating conclusion. He directs his criticisms at, *inter alia*, the rulings of the Permanent Council for Scientific Research and Legal Opinions (C.R.L.O.), the official institution in Saudi Arabia mandated with drawing up Islamic legal expertises and a body with powerful

global influence in promoting “Salafabism”, as Abou El-Fadl calls this leaning which combines Salafism with Wahhabism. At issue are rulings such as those which ban a woman from visiting her husband’s grave, from praying aloud, from driving a car, from travelling without a male companion – all based on the argument that such conduct would automatically be an unacceptable temptation to men. These rulings, in Abou El Fadls’ view, are –to put it mildly – morally problematic. If men are so weak and impressionable, why should women have to pay the price for their failings?

Because no legal system operates in a moral vacuum, Abou El-Fadl suggests that Muslims must give serious thought to the ethical concepts which should inform contemporary Islamic law. What is invoked or produced by its legal provisions? If, as is claimed, these provisions have nothing to do with religion but are instead the product of the respective totally patriarchal socio-cultural environment, Abou El-Fadl is totally in agreement, but he thereby assumes a different meaning and arrives at a probably unexpected conclusion: “It would be dishonest to claim that these provisions are not backed up by the Islamic sources because, as set out in this book, they are backed up by a number of traditions and precedents. One could, however, justifiably argue that these provisions are not compliant with Islamic ethics ...“(ABOU EL-FADL. 2003, p. 270)

If Islam is a universal Word, Abou El-Fadl argues, then its discourse on issues of ethics and justice should be intelligible and reasonable beyond the narrow limits of any specific legal culture within a particular cultural environment. He does not defend the idea of introducing a general, universal law, nor is he in favour of abolishing cultural specificity. But to serve Allâh surely means to serve justice, and serving justice necessarily means to stand up for the just, the moral and the humane.

4.4. The need for a drastic reform of Islamic law regarding the right to free self-determination in religious matters while fully respecting the rights of others

A. A. An-Na’im, a scholar originally from Sudan but now living in the United States, considers that he, particularly because he is a Muslim, is not able to accept the law of apostasy as part of Islamic law. If the predominant understanding of apostasy remains valid, a Muslim could be punished if he expresses opinions in a given Islamic country in which those opinions are considered to amount to the offence of apostasy. For example, from certain Sunni perspectives, the opinions of many Shi’ites amount to apostasy, as indeed do the opinions of many Sunni from certain Shi’ite perspectives. If the shari’a law of apostasy were to be applied today, it is indeed possible that Shi’ite Muslims would be condemned to death in a country with a Sunni majority and vice versa. That this is not exaggeration becomes clear from a dispassionate review of history right up to very recent times.

But An-Na’im goes further: as long as the public law of the shari’a is seen as the only form of law which is really valid in the Islamic sense for Islam, it is virtually impossible for the majority of Muslims to contest any of the principles or resist execution of that law, however repulsive and inappropriate they might consider it to be. The shari’a was “constructed” by Muslim legal scholars in the first three centuries, i.e. although the shari’a is derived from the fundamental, divine sources of Islam, Qur’an and *Sunna*, in itself it is not divine for it is the product of human interpretation of those sources. Moreover, this process of constructing the shari’a via human interpretation took place within a specific historical context which was drastically different from the context which prevails today. It should therefore be possible for contemporary Muslims living in today’s historical context to embark on a comparable

process of interpreting the Qur'an and the *Sunna* and thereby develop an alternative public law for Islam which is appropriate for application in our times.

"It is my conviction as a Muslim", An-Na'im writes, "that the public law of the shari'a does not represent the law of Islam which contemporary Muslims are mandated to implement in fulfilment of their religious duty." (AN-NA'IM. 1996, p. 187) He proposes a reform of the methodology which reflects the "evolutionary principle" and other fundamental ideas of his mentor, Mahmoud Mohamed Taha. But, An-Na'im cautions, "irrespective of whether this particular methodology is accepted or rejected by contemporary Muslims, there can be no doubt that a drastic reform of the public law of the shari'a is necessary." (Op. cit., p. 186)

5. The fundamental challenge: a hermeneutic reading of the Qur'an

The progressive - or "new" - thinkers of contemporary Islam remind us time and again that the Qur'an is a scripture for all people, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The Qur'an speaks to all people, and reading this scripture and hearing it read aloud is intended to be a challenging experience and an invitation to believe. Moreover, as M. Arkoun emphasizes, insofar as the Qur'an, especially today, is "*invoked by millions of believers to legitimize their behaviour, to support their struggles, to justify their aspirations, to nourish their hopes, to strengthen them in their beliefs, to endorse collective identities in the face of the uniforming forces of the industrial civilization*" (ARKOUN.1982, p. 1), understanding much of our world presupposes an adequate understanding of the Qur'an. The Qur'an is and remains one of the scriptures which inform the memory and the imagination of humanity.

The progressive thinkers are now consciously addressing the issues which arise for the Qur'an from contemporary insights and the academic discourse. How, some of them are asking, can one really gain access to, and grasp, a scripture which is so complex, a scripture which bears witness to a portrayal of the world and a sensitivity which in some respects is so radically different from ours? Their response to this challenge is to apply the historico-critical method, which aims to bridge the time gap between the reader and listener of today and a scripture dating back to the 7th century. The historico-critical method tries to place the text into the context within which it was written. It sees the Qur'an as a part of history. It is the Word of Allâh, but the Word has a historical dimension, the historical dimension of its "incarnation" in text form (the nature and structure of the text), as R. Bezine describes it. This existence in text form allowed the discourse to develop a network (*maillage*) structure (composed of words, statements, oracles, which came, so to speak, into the heart and from the tongue of the Prophet), and then to take the form of a script which subsequently became a scripture. (See: BENZINE. 2004, p. 278)

Seen in this light, therefore, Allâh introduced his Word into a human language and culture. People then collected "the Word" and reproduced it in a bound volume of pages, the *mushaf*, which is known to have been the product of a collective endeavour. According to this new view, the Qur'an therefore does indeed speak of eternal truths, but it conveys them in the forms of a particular and non-universalizable culture, namely that of the Arabs of the Hejaz of the 7th and 8th centuries.

Others strive to understand how the scripture functions, how it "speaks", given that this divine discourse in "human language" presents itself as a corpus of texts. A corpus of words and sentences which rhetoric interweaves and binds together. The Qur'an is thus simultaneously a literary masterpiece, an ethical and symbolic discourse, and a chronicle, but

it is also very much a discourse of parables and fables, and sometimes, though in relatively little detail, it is a legal code. Various literary styles can therefore be found in the Qur'an, each depending on the message which it seeks to convey.

Today, a proper reading and understanding of the Qur'an also calls for the application of the principles of scholarship in linguistics and literature. A number of new thinkers have focused on this aspect, particularly the Egyptian literature scholar Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (born in 1943), who currently lectures at Leiden in the Netherlands. Of all the methodologies available to literary scholarship, the rhetorical and narrative analyses in particular allow the believer to take the text of the Qur'an in its definitive version and apply the necessary updating. The literary forms of the Qur'an are important, for they provide information on how the text as it stands was "used" within the context of its appearances, its "coming down" as the Qur'an itself terms it, and what functions it fulfilled. Sometimes a teaching function predominates, sometimes a function of cult and ritual, elsewhere it is "only" the "exquisite" word of Allâh which is audible. Literary style is the key to discovering which particular momentary concern any given passage sought to address.

However, whether in the case of the Qur'an or of any other text, understanding the Qur'an requires more than an understanding of the backdrop for the text (the anthropology, archaeology, epigraphy, political, social and cultural history of the environment in which the text is embedded), and more than an understanding of its literary structure (its vocabulary, grammar, styles, and its links with the languages which preceded and surround the text). Reading and understanding a text must likewise not be reduced to knowledge of the history of the formation of the text. The meaning of the text is to be discovered primarily via a combination of all the above, of all that we find around the text, within the text and in the reading – and thus in the reader of the text. Because if it is true that a text which remains unread exists in just the same way as a text which is read, it is indeed the reading or the hearing of the written word which breathes life into that text.

The hermeneutic studies thus reveal the polysemous character of the Qur'an, because the act of reading is itself – so to speak – the producer of the knowledge and the meaning. Reading or hearing read aloud is indeed first and foremost the activity of the reader or the listener. There can be no reading/hearing without a reader/listener. The meaning of a text is to be found primarily in the reader/listener. To deconstruct a text in order to see how it "works" is fascinating and interesting. But such a "mechanical" approach is not adequate to grasp the meaning of that text. A text is enlightening for the reader or listener only when it, or at least a part or an aspect of it, coincides with what the reader or listener has himself experienced. The reader/listener is the person who, little by little, identifies the threads through the fabric of the text which give him a taste of it.

From the above it follows that no approach to the Qur'an – or any other comparable text – exists, or only through the prism of a particular culture, the culture of the reader/listener. Any understanding, even the most profound, always remains shackled to the imperfect character of the reading, the prejudice (or bias) which every reader has. Any reading is a re-reading, a *re-lecture*, i.e. a reading within a situation, a contextual reading. Seen from this perspective, there are no methods which might enable one to draw the only, the "objective" meaning of any given text. The Qur'an cannot be reduced to a single perspective, that via which it is read. There is no reading which is the only accurate one and valid in perpetuity.

6. Some concluding remarks

6.1. Historico-critical method and religious belief

For progressive Muslim thinking, academic scholarship and literary analysis are not in conflict with a devout, religious approach to the Qur'an. Indeed – as the thinkers themselves say – academic analysis perfects and enriches the latter and provides them with an intellectually reliable basis. Academically researched information on the texts does not in itself provide an adequate religious understanding of the revealed Word. It seeks to and indeed can, however, help to ensure that the meaning and thus the true religious significance of the text for today is understood and given the appropriate weight within the revealed Word as a whole.

By highlighting the symbolic and mythical dimension in the discourse on the Qur'an, the progressive thinkers are emphasizing just how much the Qur'an represents an eternal truth. There is no religious culture without myths. Mythical history symbolizes what we are today and where we are going. The Qur'an is of enduring significance because it tells stories which tell the believer his own stories. Not every event reported in the Qur'an has in itself a significance which extends beyond the time when it occurred. But these events as narrated in the Qur'an can be related time and again to life today and tomorrow, both individual and collective.

6.2. The new critical methodology and its significance for genuine spirituality

When we speak here of an adequate, new methodology for interpreting the Qur'an, this not only has significance for the epistemological and thus intellectual aspect but we are also touching on the rank of belief and devoutness in Islamic theology and Muslim religious thinking. Indeed, there exists a kind of attitude and, corresponding to it, an exegetic method which subordinates understanding the text of the Qur'an as such not only to the hadiths but practically even to the deductions of the legal and doctrinal codifications and which thus causes the believer to confine himself in his appreciation of the text to that which is strictly useful. When this occurs, his appreciation does not extend beyond applying the text to the legal and doctrinal issues which currently stand as being in need of resolution. The greatest danger here is that this type of appreciation engenders an attitude to the Qur'an which is geared in a certain way only to its usefulness. This mentality leads to a "narrow" belief. Muslims of this mentality become aware in the Qur'an only of the utilitarian and superficial aspects.

The particular feature of a belief which is formed within the matrix of this mentality and methodology is that it is inspired by a sense of unassailability and repetition, in other words that it remains untouched by the internal vacillations of the believer, by the believer's questions and doubts and also by his desire for a personal spiritual path. Here, the dynamics of the faith come to a halt at the primary and superficial necessities. Everything beyond these will be perceived as temptations which should best be repressed. With such a perspective, the faith concentrates on that which is certain and on the calmness bestowed by repetition of that which has been prescribed in the past. In the event of a crisis this leads to two consequences: indifference or violence. Indifference in those whose weakness of conviction has made them incapable of responsibly making any genuine effort; violence in those who believe that the zenith of devoutness is to display a stubborn determination to defend the literal meaning of

the prescriptions as well as the shape of established systemic relations – whatever form the actual manifestation of this endeavour to preserve and defend these may take.

The exegetic method, which is the choice of the other viewpoint, proceeds critically and historically and can thus restore to the revealed Word the vitality of its language, its symbols and, by extension, its spiritual and intellectual power. This probably creates space for a different style of belief, one which is founded on a sense of assuredness allowing the belief to remain open-minded to questions and contestations, one which is proud of the breadth of the mission of the Qur'an, and one which is confident that this breadth can inspire in the believer an enhanced sense of humility and openness to others, whoever these may be and however they may define themselves.

This exegetical view and method has emerged in modern times because of a gradual evolution which has taken place in Islamic thinking. It is informed by the human and social sciences, by the questions which these raise and by the changes which these have to address. It suggests creative forces which a contemporary Moroccan Sufi sums up in the following brief statement: "As far as the text is concerned, the ongoing revelation of the Qur'an (*tanjīm*) has indeed attained its goal. This is not the case, however, with regard to its meaning." (Cited in: ENNAIFER. 1998, p. 105)

6.3. "Who speaks in God's name?" The question of consensus and doctrinal authority

Some three years ago, at a discussion event bringing together Muslim and Christian thinkers to explore the subject of "Building bridges", which was organized by the Archbishop of Canterbury and held at Lambeth Palace in London, Prince El Hassan Bin Talal of Jordan publicly expressed the following view: if in the next few years Sunni Islam fails to find the ways and means of speaking with one voice on important issues of faith and the practice thereof (i.e. including the shari'a), then it has virtually no chance of long-term survival as a religion in the modern world.

Whether or not this is the case, two questions – explicit or implicit – are the constant companions of progressive thinkers in contemporary Islam. The first is: "How does God speak?" and the second is: "Who speaks on God's behalf?" All those who by a process of random selection have expressed their views in this paper –with the exception of Abou El-Fadl – have addressed themselves primarily to aspects of the first question. The views presented here of progressive Islamic thinking, however, today inescapably invoke the second question more than ever before: "Who speaks on God's behalf?" For as soon as the relatively unambiguous basis of the Qur'an in its literal interpretation or in the interpretation given to it in the first two centuries is no longer seen as sacrosanct and definitive and departs in the direction of a personal interpretation of the spirit of its letter - whatever this direction may be and irrespective of how it is justified - , instantaneously the question arises as to the legitimation of such a new and continuously new interpretation. At the same time it would be difficult not to hear another question, that of the yardstick and criteria to be applied for a true understanding of the Qur'an and, by extension, the revealed Word of Allāh in our times.

Moreover, seeing Islam as a societal and political phenomenon raises the perennially new question of consensus (*ijmā'*). Does the Islamic community have a theologically substantiated doctrine, a theological "ummatology", so to speak, and what role is it expected to play - and how in practical terms – in the matter of determining the will of Allāh in questions of faith and ethics as they apply to today and to defend these determinations with authority? After all,

is it not the case that those who defend the classical ideas on the authority of the Prophet and the Word of Allâh which he revealed on the one hand and those who radically call that authority into question on the other are, in the final analysis, arguing for the right to claim for themselves the authority of the Prophet and the scriptures through which the Word of Allâh is revealed? Or have I, as a mere observer of the internal Islamic debate, in raising these questions missed the point?

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A PECULIAR KIND OF CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM DIALOGUE: AMERICAN PROTESTANT FUNDAMENTALISM CREATIONISM IN MUSLIM CONSERVATIVE TURKEY

Jean-Marc Balhan, S.J.

1. Darwin and its reception

1.1. Darwin and its theory

The publication by Charles Darwin (1809-1882) of his famous book *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* in 1859 spread quickly among scientists the idea that species are not fixed but that they gradually change and give birth finally to new species (that is the idea that there is an “evolution” or rather a “descent with modification” as Darwin said). However the hypothesis that he suggested to explain the cause of these transformations (variation and natural selection: that is the “theory” of evolution), was not accepted in the 19th Century by the majority of the scientists, because Darwin lacked a proper theory of heredity. It is only in the 1910’s, with the rediscovery of Mendel’s theory of heredity and mutation, then in the 1920’s, with the birth of the genetics of populations and finally in the 1940’s, in what is called the “modern synthesis”, that “natural selection” is rehabilitated. In recent years new theories have been accepted which complement the traditional Darwinian theory of evolution without replacing it (for example Stephen Gould’s “punctuated equilibrium”). Although there is scientific debate today around the relative frequency and importance of each of these modes of speciation, none of this debate concerns the actual existence or non-existence of evolutionary change.

The scientific model of evolution as such, presents no moral, religious, ideological, economic or political agenda. It is only concerned with the question of how forms of life can be transformed in other forms of life. However scientists do not work in ivory towers and the making of a scientific model is obviously influenced by the local context as much as it influences it. It is easily understandable why 19th Century Victorian England was a place well suited to Darwin’s discoveries and to the spread of its theory as well as it is easily understandable why this theory and the disputes around it have been used to promote different agendas in the different places where it spread (fight against religion, fight against old elite, reform of society through social Darwinism, etc.).

1.2. Reception of Darwin in pre-1980 Turkey

In Turkey, in the end of the Ottoman Empire, evolution theory entered mainly through Haeckel and Büchner’s biological materialism, and for this reason was opposed by the majority of Muslim intellectuals (even though some modernists tried to show that evolution was compatible with Islam and was even discovered by Muslim thinkers in the Middle Ages). This controversy was part of the debate and conflicts taking place on the occasion of the modernization of the Empire between the old elite and the new one educated in the positivist spirit of the time. That new elite won the power after the Young Turk revolution in 1908 and Atatürk continued in that spirit when he took the power in 1923. Atatürk who in 1922, was saying to a group of teachers: “A social life dominated by irrational, non useful and harmful beliefs is doomed to paralysis. We have to start purging minds and society from their sources... Our guide in education and in social and political life will be science. Progress is

too difficult or even impossible for nations that insist to preserve their traditions and their beliefs which lack rational basis.” You’ll easily understand that there were not many debates on these issues in the beginning of the Republic, under the autocratic regime of Atatürk and of his successor.

However some people tried to have their voices heard. I think particularly of Said Nursi (1878-1960) who, in his writings fought a great deal against scientific materialism and tried to show that science and religion did not oppose each other but that on the contrary science put in evidence the marvels of the Universe and therefore the greatness of their creator, in a natural theology perspective well developed in the Koran, but not necessarily welcoming to Darwin’s theses... People gathered around his writings and he was exiled many times by the government. But after the democratization of Turkey in the 1950’s and more especially after the liberalization of the country in the 1980’s, his movement expanded a lot and is now, in its diversity, the most powerful Muslim movement in Turkey, gathering millions of people.

Indeed, after the 1950’s, Turkey started progressively to become more democratic, giving birth to plenty of political currents, from the extreme left to the extreme right which in the end almost provoked a civil war in the 1970’s. Darwin himself was translated for the first time in Turkish in the end of the 1960’s and was published by Sol Yayınları (that is “Left Editing House”) with a short commentary saying that Darwin put an end to religion...

After the 1980 coup which re-established social peace, Turgüt Özal started to liberalize the country, which gave plenty of opportunities to the religious currents repressed so far and to the new Anatolian elite, to express themselves at the economical, political, social, and religious level. The Nursi movement expanded hugely through media and foundations, and a new version of it lead by Fethullah Gülen (1938 -) entered in all sectors of the society (banking, education, medias) and specialized in the presentation of what is supposed to be a “modern” version of Islam, working for peace and inter-religious dialogue.

In the same time a new Turkish-Islamic synthesis born in the 1970’s, which had added the Muslim character to the Turkish national identity, had spread in nationalist circles and in the army too. This was also influential in suggesting that an indoctrination based on nationalism and Islam would be a good means to fight against socialism and communism considered as dangerous for the country.

All this was reflected in national education, through changes operated in the teaching of history, through the incorporation of religious education in all classes, and through the mention of creationism in biology textbooks from 1985 onwards, a creationism directly imported from the US, with some slight adaptations due to its new Islamic character... How did that happen?

2. The birth of “scientific” creationism in America¹

The religious movement that we know under the name of fundamentalism was born in 19th Century America as reaction of Evangelical Protestantism to social changes, to new religious ideas and to Darwinism. Fundamentalists considered these new facts as attacks against the Bible and they thought that they provoked the decline of traditional values. Just after the First

¹ Our main source for the history of creationism/Intelligent Design in America presented in this paper is Lenny Flank, *Deception by Design: The Intelligent Design Movement in America*, at <http://www.talkreason.org/articles/deception.cfm>

World War, Fundamentalists imputed the detachment vis-à-vis traditional moral values to the theory of evolution, and they started, particularly in the South, to promulgate laws forbidding the teaching of this theory in public schools. Between the 1920's and the beginning of the 1960's anti-evolutionism had a pervasive influence on biology teaching in public schools. Most often textbooks avoided the topic and did not even mention Darwin's name.

The United States was shocked in 1957, when the Soviet Union launched the Sputnik satellite. In response, US government officials started to confront the state of science education, including the biological sciences, and instituted a crash program to improve American science education. One of these new programs was the Biological Sciences Curriculum Study, begun in 1959, to produce new up-to-date biology textbooks. Written by professional scientists in their fields, the BSCS texts prominently featured evolutionary theory as the foundation of all the biological sciences. Within a few years, nearly half the high schools in the country were using these biology textbooks, despite the fact that anti-evolution laws were still on the books in a number of states.

In the beginning of the 1960's, we see once again among fundamentalists a preoccupation concerning the loss of traditional values and the fear that society would become more and more secularized. The fundamentalist movement becomes then more active. The number of its members increases, as well as its political influence. They insist on the literal interpretation of the bible and of Genesis as the only source of knowledge on the origin.

In the same time, in the 1960's the so-called "monkey laws" (laws forbidding the teaching of evolution in public schools in different states of the Union) are brought before courts in Tennessee and Arkansas. The law was eventually ruled unconstitutional in 1967 in Tennessee, but not in Arkansas. So when the Arkansas Supreme Court upheld the law, appeal was made to the US Supreme Court, which ruled in 1968 that all state monkey laws were unconstitutional, on the grounds that they served to establish a state-supported religion and eroded the separation of church and state (First Amendment of American Constitution).

The creation "science" movement was a response to these Court decisions. The Institute for Creation Research (ICR), in California, was formed in 1970 by a group of anti evolutionists including Henry Morris and Duane Gish, with money from several fundamentalist church groups. It became quickly the largest anti-evolution organization in the US. Creationists from the ICR wanted, in effect, to turn the clock back to 1925, when the teaching of evolution was illegal and that of the Biblical story of origins was mandated by law. Henry Morris is saying: "A key purpose of the ICR is to bring the field of education -- and then our whole world insofar as possible -- back to the foundational truth of special creation and primeval history as revealed first in Genesis and further emphasized throughout the Bible." (Morris, *Back to Genesis*, July 1995)

The creationists cited several reasons why they believe creationism should be taught in the public schools, and one of these was that it encouraged belief in a personal Deity and thus encouraged a "Christian lifestyle": "There is no greater stimulus to responsible behaviour and earnest effort, as well as honesty and consideration for others, than the awareness that there may well be a personal Creator to whom one must give account." (Morris, *Scientific Creationism*, 1974, p. 14)

However, since the Supreme Court had now prohibited as unconstitutional the teaching of religious doctrines in the public schools, creationists were no longer able to make these

religiously-based arguments in court, and instead had to resort to a new strategy – arguing that (1) creationism is science, not religion(2) evolution is religion, not science. As Morris summarizes, “Since creationism can be discussed effectively as a scientific model, and since evolution is fundamentally a religious philosophy rather than a science, it is clearly unsound educational practice and even unconstitutional for evolution to be taught and promoted in the public schools to the exclusion or detriment of special creation. . . . Creationist children and parents are thereby denied ‘equal protection of its laws’ and the state has, to all intents and purposes, made a law establishing the religion of evolutionary humanism in its schools.” (Morris, *Scientific Creationism*, 1974, p. 14) Therefore, in response to the Supreme Court decisions, the creationist movement made the strategic decision to downplay the religious aspects of creationism, and to argue that creationism could be supported solely through scientific evidence, without any reference to God or the Bible. Thus was born “creation science”.

By 1980, creation “science”, with financial support from the Religious Right and political support from the Reaganite right wing of the Republican Party, reached the pinnacle of its power. During the 1980 Presidential campaign, Ronald Reagan told an audience, concerning evolution, “Well, it’s a theory, it is a scientific theory only, and it has in recent years been challenged in the world of science and is not yet believed in the scientific community to be as infallible as it was once believed.” And so, finding the time appropriate, American creationists started once again to challenge the Constitution. The first test came in 1981 in Arkansas.

In 1981, the state of Arkansas passed a law, mandating that “creation science” be given equal time in public schools with evolution: “Public schools within this State shall give balanced treatment to creation-science and to evolution-science . . . Creation-science is an alternative scientific model of origins and can be presented from a strictly scientific standpoint without any religious doctrine just as evolution-science can, because there are scientists who conclude that scientific data best support creation-science and because scientific evidences and inferences have been presented for creation-science.”(Act 590, Arkansas Legislature, 1981). The Bill was signed into law on March 19, 1981. On May 27, 1981, the American Civil Liberty Union (ACLU) filed suit on behalf of a number of plaintiffs to have the law declared unconstitutional on church/state grounds. The plaintiffs, who included a dozen or so clergymen of differing denominations (Catholic, Methodist, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Jews), argued that creation “science” was nothing more than fundamentalist Biblical literalism pretending to be science. Creationists from the Creation Research Society and the Institute for Creation Research argued to the court that their viewpoint was a scientific model and not based at all on religion. The Judge, after listening to both sides, was unconvinced by the creationists’ arguments, and ruled that creation “science” was not a science, but was merely an attempt to introduce religious beliefs into the public school system, and was therefore unconstitutional. The creationists, however, were unbowed. As the state representative who sponsored the law told the newspapers, “If we lose, it won’t matter that much. If the law is unconstitutional, it’ll be because of something in the language that’s wrong So we’ll just change the wording and try again with another bill . . . We got a lot of time. Eventually we’ll get one that is constitutional.” (*Washington Post*, 07.12.81).

After Arkansas came Louisiana. The Louisiana State Legislature passed a “Balanced Treatment bill” mandating equal classroom time for “creation science” and “evolution science”. Once again the ACLU filed a suit, citing the Arkansas decision and arguing that no facts disputed the religious nature of creationism and therefore the law was manifestly

unconstitutional. The court agreed. Then creationists appealed to the US Supreme court, which in June 1987 ruled against the creationists. The Court ruled that the “Balanced Treatment bill” was unconstitutional, because it was specifically intended to advance a particular religion. At the same time, however, it held that “teaching a variety of scientific theories about the origins of humankind to school children might be validly done with the clear secular intent of enhancing the effectiveness of science instruction.” That ruling prompted a new strategy among the creationists based on “change the wording and try again”. That is how the “Intelligent Design Movement” came to be born. But this is another story. We’ll have a look on it later.

Now let us see the influence of that first kind of American “scientific” creationism in Turkey.

3. The transfer of American “scientific” creationism to Turkey²

3.1. Creationism in Education

As I said in the introduction, the beginning of the liberalization of Turkey by Turgüt Özal in the 1980’s was also an occasion for a cultural revolution which took place as well in education: introduction of a course of “Religion and Ethics” in all classes, incorporation of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis in History courses and the sneaking of creationism in biology textbooks.

The 1983 *Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı* (State Planning Organization) report on national culture policy had included attacks against Darwin, making him an apostle of materialism saying : « Among the ideologies which reduce human being to nature and which deny human being any spiritual superiority, we find Darwinism. This biology hypothesis declares that human being comes from monkey and affirms that the mechanisms of nature find their conclusion with the last step of evolution, from monkey to human being”.

Acts and Facts, a magazine published by ICR, describes in its December 1992 issue a creationist conference which took place in Istanbul in October of that year and in which Henry Morris and Duane Gish explained how in the middle of the 1980’s, Vehbi Dinçerler, the then Turkish minister of education, had called the ICR: “He wanted to eliminate the secular-based, evolution-only teaching dominant in their schools and replace it with a curriculum teaching the two models... As a result, several ICR books which dealt with the scientific evidence for creation were translated into Turkish and distributed to all Turkey’s public school teachers.” Morris had also been acquainted to Turkey thanks to the researches for Noah’s Ark on Mount Ararat, in Eastern Turkey...

In 1985, Vehbi Dinçerler, asked Adem Tatlı, a biology teacher, to prepare an extensive *Report on the Theory of Evolution*. In the preface of one of his books (*Evrin İflas Eden Teori*, İstanbul: Bedir Yayınevi, 1990), Tatlı recalls this comment of his to the Minister: “Darwinism, along with Marxism and Freudism, constitutes the basis of materialist philosophy. Your opposition to evolution theory may, I fear, lose you your position.” The Minister’s answer is said to be: “I feel the spiritual responsibility of 15 million children of the nation on my shoulders. The faith of our youth is shaken by the one-sided presentation of

² On this topic see Taner Edis, “Islamic Creationism in Turkey”, *Creation/Evolution*, 34:1 (1994) and from the same author, “Cloning Creationism in Turkey”, *RNCSE* 19 (6): 30-35, 1999, available on internet.

such a theory. For the truth of this matter to be understood and be set in its proper course, let not only one, but a thousand Vehbi positions be sacrificed.”

This is what Vehbi Dinçler says in the foreword to this Report:

“... This hypothesis has caused extensive controversy in the world and in Turkey in the past two hundred years. It is the case that:

- It has not been possible for the theory to acquire law status until this day.
- Opposing research and arguments intended to refute the theory have progressed beyond efforts to prove the theory.

- Arguments and research to develop alternate theories continues.

... Experience has shown that discussion of the theory at this level [primary and secondary school] has been divisive, misleading, undermining of trust in science or even having effects of implying an idea of conflict between science and religious opinions. In these aspects, these discussions have at the least not been of use to anyone.

And furthermore, that it would not be objective nor scientific to exclude contrary opinions to “a theory that has not been able to become a law for 120 years” from textbooks, has been an issue that even our common citizens have given close attention to.

The following report advocates the inclusion in the curriculum of the shortcomings of this theory and opposing opinions...”

And the report itself repeats the arguments of American creationists, as it can be seen in its summary:

“Summary of the Report on the Theory of Evolution:

- According to Darwinism or the theory of evolution in its general meaning, a living creature has been formed by chance from non living material, the various life forms of today have descended from that, and finally humans have come from monkeys. Is there credible evidence for these claims? There is nothing but interpretations and guesswork.
- Taking this into account, evolutionists proposed Neo-Darwinism. But it has been seen that this was not very different than its predecessor and has not been able to solve the problems.
- The evidence that evolutionists propose for evolution; mutation, embryologic evidence and vestigial organs, has been discovered to be without a serious basis.
- With both higher and lower organisms, fossil material demonstrating descent relations that evolutionists claim is nonexistent, as expressed by evolutionists themselves.
- It has been exposed by publications in this field that materials claimed to be related to human ancestors have been structured on fraud and speculation, and that no trustworthy fossil is in existence.
- The one-sided and insistent defence, in spite of all these shortcomings, of the theory of evolution, is understood by efforts to use the theory for materialist philosophy, as explained by scientists who are authorities in this field themselves.

- To present this theory, whose incomplete and inconsistent aspects have been demonstrated by a large majority of scientists who are authorities about evolution, as a law, is at least not in keeping with the ideas of objective science.
- It is our conviction that, in textbooks, it is necessary to provide all of the evidence in favour of and against the theory of evolution, and to leave the decision to the reader, in order for our youth to gain the habit of objective and scientific thinking.”

His sources are “scientific creationist” books, old biology textbooks or outdated scientific articles, and his author of reference is Duane Gish!

This is how scientific creationism has started being presented as an alternative hypothesis in school textbooks. It will be thrown out of them after the 1998 so-called “soft coup”. And this mobilized in that time all those who did not want creationism to be out of the school curriculum, Virtue Party deputies in Parliament and the Science Research Foundation.

3.2. The Science Research Foundation (Bilim ve Arastirma Vakfı : BAV) and Response of the Scientific Community.

In the meantime the Science Research Foundation had appeared. Founded in 1991 by Adnan Oktar (1956 -) who uses “Harun Yahya” as a pen name, this foundation has published so far more than one hundred books full of pictures, very attractive and a bit “flashy”, translated in many languages (similar to their best seller *Evolution Deceit*) that they distributed even through the intermediary of daily newspaper (*Akit, Zaman*). All this is reflected in their many internet websites. It has also organized as plenty of conferences to spread “scientific” creationism and fight against the theory of evolution, with the help of the ICR.

The arguments presented both in the conferences and the books are very similar to theirs, with some differences however. Their most striking divergence is BAV’s omission of flood geology (ICR’s signature doctrine) on which the Qur’an is vaguer than the Bible. Indeed, in Islam there is no history of salvation: God sends messengers and prophets, but the stories are told just for the example and their chronology is not important. Therefore the geological scale does not interest the Muslims very much. Another interesting difference from ICR emerges when BAV explains how the theory of evolution is the result of a godless conspiracy by Masons (who serve as a symbol personifying the Enlightenment culture that helped to erode traditional religiosity) and the Jews (anti-Semitism is common among political Islamists; Harun Yahya is also the author of a book entitled *The Holocaust Hoax*, which borrows much from well-known American holocaust-deniers).

Creationism in the mass media then produced a reaction from Turkish academics. Previously there had been scattered and ineffective resistance to the inroads creationism was making at the high-school level; the latest high-profile wave of creationism appears to have prompted defenders of evolution to attempt a stronger response. Shortly after the BAV conferences, the Turkish Academy of Sciences (TUBA) condemned creationist efforts, warning that certain interests were continuing a war against the secular system and free and modern education. Declaring that evolution was a vital, well-confirmed part of modern science, TUBA pointed out that creationism was spread by Christian groups but had “been completely rejected in scientifically advanced countries” (TUBA 1999). A commission, including some TUBA members, was formed to combat creationism publicly.

Then the Islamist newspaper *Akit* reacted in December 1999 by publishing names addresses and photographs of all those who signed TUBA's declaration, describing them as Maoists, suggesting that they had acted against Islam and inviting in a subtle way to violence. BAV did the same by describing those scientists as communists, separatists and Maoists (PKK, the Kurdish separatist movement, is inspired by Marxism which, for Harun Yahya is the fruit of Darwinism!). Scientists then filed a court case against BAV, that they won in 1999.

After the case and the change of government which took place at the same time, Harun Yahya's books started to lose their prominent places in bookshops, and the media stopped speaking about evolution theory till 2005. It is in that time that the debate started again with *Radikal* and *Zaman* newspapers, the heralds of both positions.

But to understand what happened then, we have to come back to the US, once again !

4. Intelligent Design: creationism with another name

4.1. Birth of the movement

The predominant modern use of the term "Intelligent Design" began after the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in 1987 that creationism is unconstitutional in public school science curricula.

In 1980, the Foundation for Thought and Ethics (FTE), a non profit organization is established in Texas for the purpose of "promoting and publishing textbooks presenting a Christian perspective". Their first project was the publication of a book "showing the scientific evidence for creation". That book, edited by Charles Thaxton, was in the process of preparation during the Louisiana legal proceedings, and the original draft mentioned the word "creationism" prominently. After the Supreme Court decision making it illegal to teach creationism however, FTE edited all the references to "creationism" and "creator" to refer to "intelligent design" and "intelligent designer" instead. The first draft (1983) had been called *Creation Biology* (1983); later in 1987, the authors settled on the final title, *Of Pandas and People*, which is the foundational book of the Intelligent Design movement. That book was actively promoted for public school use by creationists, starting in Alabama in 1989 and continuing throughout the 1990's. After 2000, *Pandas* activity largely died down (the last edition having been published in 1993), but in 2004 the school board in Dover, Pennsylvania accepted an anonymous donation of 50 copies of the *Pandas* book, now 11 years old. The board subsequently passed a policy mandating the teaching of ID, attracting national media attention. We'll come to that later. Because we have to speak now about those who made Intelligent Design a powerful neo-creationist movement.

In 1987, the same year that the Supreme Court struck down creation "science", Phillip Johnson, a law professor recently converted, read Michael Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, a book where he found his purpose in life, he says. In 1991, Johnson published his first book, *Darwin on Trial*, which lead to the formation of the Intelligent Design Movement: in 1992, a group of scientists and philosophers who were influenced by Johnson's book met at Southern Methodist University, which brought together Johnson, William Dembski (a mathematician and theologian), Michael Behe (a biochemist), Stephen Meyer (a geophysicist), and Paul Nelson (a creationist with a PhD in philosophy). They have formed

the core of the ID movement till nowadays. The main argument of the movement is to show that life is so complex that it cannot but have been produced by an “intelligent designer” who is not necessarily God: he could be any kind of being, even an extra terrestrial (example of the monument of Mount Rushmore)! They published books presenting their main arguments and they were quite successful in bringing intelligent design to public attention. But it is in 1996 that the movement reached its maturity, with the foundation of the Centre for the Renewal of Science and Culture inside of the conservative Seattle think tank called Discovery Institute, with grants from wealthy fundamentalists and Christian political groups. After the Centre was established, one of its first tasks was to organize the movement and to make it ready for political and legal action.

4.2. The battle in court

In July 2004, an “anonymous donation” of 50 copies of the intelligent design textbook *Of Pandas and People*, was made to the Dover School District, Pennsylvania, for use as a “supplemental text” in classrooms. In October 2004, the full School Board voted to amend the district’s curriculum to include intelligent design “theory”. The amended curriculum guide read, “Students will be made aware of gaps/problems in Darwin’s Theory and of other theories of evolution including, but not limited to, Intelligent Design. The Origin of Life is not taught.” The Board, meanwhile, wrote up a brief “statement” to be announced in each biology class, which reads:

“The Pennsylvania Academic Standards require students to learn about Darwin’s Theory of Evolution and eventually to take a standardized test of which evolution is a part. Because Darwin’s Theory is a theory, it continues to be tested as new evidence is discovered. The Theory is not a fact. Gaps in the Theory exist for which there is no evidence. A theory is defined as a well-tested explanation that unifies a broad range of observations. Intelligent Design is an explanation of the origin of life that differs from Darwin’s view. The reference book, *Of Pandas and People*, is available for students who might be interested in gaining an understanding of what Intelligent Design actually involves. With respect to any theory, students are encouraged to keep an open mind. The school leaves the discussion of the Origins of Life to individual students and their families. As a Standards-driven district, class instruction focuses upon preparing students to achieve proficiency on Standards-based assessments.”

In December, eleven parents contacted the ACLU in Pennsylvania, which filed a lawsuit on their behalf charging the district with violating church/state provisions by teaching the religious doctrine of Intelligent Design “theory”. The ACLU was joined by Americans United for Separation of Church and State in the suit, and advice and assistance was also offered by the National Centre for Science Education, a national non-profit group that opposes efforts to weaken science education with creationism or intelligent design. The Thomas More Law Centre, in turn, immediately offered to defend the Board for free. That Centre had been founded in 1999 to “defend the religious freedom of Christian” and from the beginning, sought out a fight with the ACLU about evolution, which they found eventually in Pennsylvania. As for the Discovery Institute, it was lukewarm about the case right from the beginning, and was particularly wary since the Dover board members had made so many public religious comments.

In May 2005, the FTE filed a motion to join the case on the grounds that it had an economic interest in the *Pandas* but the judge rejected it. However the testimony that was given in support of the motion revolved around the *Of Pandas and People* book, and it turned out to be central to the trial, because it was the discovery of the early drafts of that book which proved undeniably that *Pandas* had begun as a creationist textbook. Then an internal document of the Discovery Institute exposing its “Wedge” strategy, which was not supposed to have been made public, showed the religious goal in the promotion of ID. Therefore, in conclusion of all this, in its ruling in December 2005, the judge concluded that ID was not science and had nothing scientific to offer: it was a religious view, a mere re-labelling of creationism, rehashed in an attempt to get around the Supreme Court’s ruling.

4.3. “Teach the controversy” strategy

However, prior to this trial, prominent ID proponents, gradually shifted to another strategy called the “Teach the Controversy” strategy. That is they had realized that mandates requiring the teaching of intelligent design were unlikely to survive challenges based on the First Amendment of the constitution. Thus, the Discovery Institute repositioned itself. Institute Fellows reasoned that once the “fact” that a controversy indeed exists had been established in the public’s mind, then the reintroduction of intelligent design into public school criteria would be much less controversial later. As a measure of their success in this effort, on 1 August 2005, during a round-table interview with reporters from five Texas newspapers, President Bush said that he believes schools should discuss intelligent design alongside evolution when teaching students about the origin of life. Bush declined to go into detail on his personal views of the origin of life, but advocated the *Teach the Controversy* approach: “I think that part of education is to expose people to different schools of thought... you’re asking me whether or not people ought to be exposed to different ideas, the answer is yes.”

4.4. The Kansas evolution hearings

A last story is worth telling, because we find in it a direct link with Turkey: the “Kansas Evolution Hearings”.

In 2004 the creationists gained a majority on the Kansas State Board of Education. In June, this Board established a 25-member science writing committee to revise the science standards. Eight of these committee members (“the Minority”) were creationists selected by the creationist Board members. In December 2004 the Minority submitted a Minority report directly to the Board (bypassing standard writing committee procedures) that contained a mixture of anti-evolutionary claims from the Intelligent Design movement. The Minority was represented by two managing directors of the Intelligent Design Network, a non profit organization started some years before to promote ID.

In January a series of four public forums on the standards began. These forums, held throughout the state, allowed members of the public the opportunity to give short statements to members of the writing committee. But the ID advocates were not happy with the results. Their representative wrote to the Discovery Institute saying: “One thing is obvious. This [the public forums process] is not the proper process for deciding this issue. Focused hearings from experts are desperately needed to cut through the misinformation, ridicule and half truths.” Thus the idea for the “science hearings” was born. The science community refused to play, but in April, 2005 a local pro-science lawyer agreed to represent mainstream science at the hearings. He announced that he would not be defending science nor calling scientists to

testify, but would rather attempt to bring out the real political, educational, legal and theological issues involved in the situation. Then 24 witnesses were gathered to testify in support of the Minority proposal. This happened from 5 to 7 May 2005. You know already some of them like Charles Thaxton (editor of *Pandas*), Stephen Meyer or Michael Behe (Fathers of the ID Movement). But there was a Turk as well, Mustafa Akyol, and that was a good opportunity to show that ID was not linked to a particular religion... We'll come back to this in a few minutes.

All this ID literature and debate in America, George Bush's declaration, the Pennsylvanian case, without forgetting the unfortunate article of Cardinal Schönborn in the *New York Times* (07.07.05), all this started to spread ID outside of America and touched Europe... and Turkey in the end of last year as many publications have witnessed. European history being quite different from that of America on that issue, the question is obviously less burning (cf. *Science* 11.08.06), even if creationist movements have already started campaigns, especially in Britain, Germany and the Netherlands. But in Turkey, it restarted the debate.

5. Intelligent Design comes to Turkey

In the beginning of the 2000's, evolution theory was not a hot topic anymore. However in Parliament, the Konya deputy of the Saadet Partisi Lütü Yalman asked that evolution theory be removed from school textbooks. Wishing an answer from Metin Bostancıoğlu, the then Education minister, he asked whether the ministry of National Education should have evolution theory been taught and why, and continued saying: "In many states of the US, evolution theory has been declared non-scientific and has been taken back from school curriculum. Therefore why, in Turkey is this theory taught as a scientific one? Can't we take it back from school curriculum? When will we announce that evolution theory is not scientific?"

But the time had not yet come. However, in the end of 2004 AKP (Muslim conservative party) comes to power with 34% of the vote. And in 2005 we start again to hear about evolution theory in the context of what is happening in the US, in popular newspapers but especially in *Radikal* (new-Atatürkists' newspaper) and in *Zaman* and *Aksyon* (publications linked to Fethüllah Gülen). The last ones put in evidence the growing influence of ID in the US and ask that it find a place in Turkey as well. For example, *Aksyon* (01.08.05) asked why TÜBİTAK (Scientific and Technological Research Council, a public agency founded in 1963 in charge of coordinating scientific research in Turkey) did not promote researches on the creation of the universe by God, and criticized this institution. *Radikal*, on the contrary explains how "scientifically advanced countries", as well as the Vatican or American courts are opposed to ID. These two tendencies mobilize intellectuals to write on these questions: *Zaman* gives the word to people like Johnson, and *Radikal* to Turkish or foreign scientists.

5.1. Mustafa Akyol and the Gülen movement

Let us come back now to Mustafa Akyol, a member of the Gülen movement and the most prominent Turkish defender of ID. Mustafa Akyol (1972-) is the son of a famous editorialist of *Milliyet* and a freelance writer himself, writing in Turkish as in American newspapers, and giving lectures in the US, Britain and Turkey on creationist issues. He had been a disciple of Harun Yahya in the past and probably worked for him in the writing of some of his books on evolution. A member of the Fethüllah Gülen movement, he is now the director the Intercultural Dialogue Platform based in Istanbul. In October 2005, he has also been made a

member of the board of Directors of the ID Network. Concerning the topic which interests us (Harmony Building between Christians and Muslims), this is what he wrote in his article “Why Muslims should support Intelligent Design” published in 2004 on *Islam on Line* (www.islamonline.net).

“Our common faith in God is so important that God commands Muslims to make a call for alliance to Christians and Jews, the People of the Book (Scripture): [Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to an agreement between us and you: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God] (Al-`Imran 3:64). Based on this Qur’anic vision, we can confidently conclude that Muslims should cooperate with faithful Christians and Jews in matters that are important to each of these three monotheistic faiths.

And what can be more important than the case against materialism, the modern denial of God? Interestingly, Said Nursi, in the 1950s, foresaw an alliance between Islam and Christianity against materialism. He prophetically wrote, “A tyrannical current born of naturalist and materialist philosophy will gradually gain strength and spread at the end of time, reaching such a degree that it denies God. ... Although defeated before the atheistic current while separate, Christianity and Islam will have the ability to defeat and rout it as a result of their alliance” (Nursi, Letters, 77-78).

Half a century after Nursi, the stage for that alliance is set. Intellectual Muslims, fed up with the pathological anti-Western hatred of the radicals who defame Islam by their violent acts, are seeking the right way to express and stand for their faith and identity in the modern world. Intellectual Christians have already found that way. They encountered materialism before we did, because it grew right in the heart of Christendom. They have been standing against it for several decades. And recently they have initiated a bold movement—a “wedge” as they call it—to split the foundations of materialism. This “wedge” is the code name for the Intelligent Design Movement, formed in the early 1990s by Christian scientists and intellectuals...

[Explanations on the history and the aims of the movement follow].

... Intelligent Design (ID) is a term that implies creation. The universe and life are not products of blind forces of nature, ID holds, but show evidence that they were designed by intelligence. The ID Movement has deliberately chosen not to specify the identity of the Designer. Through science you can demonstrate convincingly that there is a designer, but you can’t go further without invoking theology. Everybody has the right to believe in a Designer according his own theology. What makes the movement effective is its emphasis on solid scientific evidence. This non-theological nature of the ID Movement also makes it inter-religious. Whether you are a Christian, Jew, Muslim, or any other kind of theist, you can identify with the movement. This movement defines the particular paradigm of science we would like to have, and it is science that defines society in the long run.

Muslims should also note the great similarity between the arguments of the Intelligent Design Movement and Islamic sources. Hundreds of verses in the Qur’an call people to examine the natural world and see in it the evidence of God. Great Islamic scholars like Ghazali wrote large volumes about design in animals, plants, and the human body. What Intelligent Design theorists like Behe or Dembski do

today is to refine the same argument with the findings of modern science. In short, Intelligent Design is not alien to Islam. It is very much our cause, and we should do everything we can to support it.

5.2. Creationism in education

The time had come now to advance creationism at the political level as well. And the quarrels about school curriculum start again. In the biology program of the 8th year of primary school, paragraphs about evolution theory have been removed by the ministry of education because, according to Alaadin Dinçer, the president of Eğitim Sen (labour organization), evolution theory is not understandable by pupils of the primary school. So in the biology textbook, we'll find a sentence like: "Thinkers like Farabi and Ibn Sina defend the ideas that change inside of a species is limited and that there is no passing from one species to another". In December of the same year, five teachers of a primary school in Mersin were dismissed for having taught evolution.

After all this, 700 academics signed a petition asking that any reference to creationism be removed from school textbooks. This petition was presented by the *Üniversite Konseyleri Derneği* to the ministry of education. This organization had the project to write books and to organize conferences on this topic, what it did already last may with a symposium called: "Evolution, Science and Education".

Here is the text of the petition. We find in it the ideological accents of the Atatürkist elites who like to introduce themselves as enlightened and progressive, speaking of the others as obscurantist and reactionary...

"These last weeks the concept of evolution has come back to the agenda. After the complaints of an imam and of a local authority in Mersin, five teachers have been dismissed because they explained evolution theory to their pupils. In the same time, in secondary schools and in universities, an ideological fight supported by authorities opposed to enlightened and progressive thought has been felt. In the same way, last year in Ankara, a teacher who explained during class the Darwinian theory of evolution to his students has been the object of investigations under the pretext that he created problems in the brain of his students. Disputes concerning evolution are the object of an obscure scenario whose actors are the AKP and reactionary circles. AKP, since the time it came into power till nowadays, made steps to prevent the teaching of evolution theory. The contents related to evolution theory have been decreased and the teaching of the belief in creation in biology classes has become an aim. Finally, in the beginning of the academic year 2005-2006, paragraphs related to the concept of evolution have been taken out of science textbooks and creationism has been presented in a unilateral way.

The fact that evolution theory has become the target of a reactionary power has not been limited to Turkey. American administration has taken evolution theory back from school curriculum in many states. The anti-evolutionist discourse of fundamentalist Christian communities who have links with American administration gives the basic arguments of the movements opposed to evolution theory in Turkey. Despite of that, evolution theory is largely accepted in biology and in the other sciences. Every day experimental works enlarge the area of influence of evolution theory. This fight started against evolution theory is the result of obscurantist and

medieval thoughts. This fight started by taking as a target evolution theory and reaches now the point of refusal of scientific thought. We, scientists, who are working so that Turkey arrive at enlightenment think that this picture has to change quickly.

In conclusion we say that:

- Investigations opened against all those who teach evolution theory in their classes and against our colleagues who have been put aside for this reason should be stopped.
- An end should be put to AKP and ministry of education decisions taken against the teaching of evolution theory.
- Education should be purified from non scientific elements and should be founded on the application of a school curriculum favourable to science and enlightenment.

Radikal (21.02.06) summarized this petition and mentioned that this organization would file a case before the courts if it was not accepted by the minister. Some days after, in the same newspaper, Mustafa Akyol answered that it was this organization which was medieval by suggesting opening a case, victimizing the creationists and comparing them to Galilee, under censure. And against those saying that ID is not scientific, he took the example of Nemrut Dağı: these statues did not appear there by chance: somebody sculpted them (a translation for Turks of Michael Behe's example of the sculptures of American presidents on Mount Rushmore who had been "designed" and did not appear there by chance).

How did Hüseyin Çelik, the minister of education position himself in this debate? In a reception given by European ambassadors last March, he answered to journalists (*Radikal* 05.03.06): "There are many theories about creation, among them, the theory of evolution. Is explaining evolution theory to children without explaining others, a scientific attitude?" He then continues saying that all theories should be mentioned in school textbooks: "It is not correct to teach the children fixed thoughts. This is dogmatic. People who complain, if they want to show a scientific attitude, should be preoccupied by the diversity and plurality of all meanings. The school curriculum has been prepared by scientists. To present opposed opinions one beside the other, to present in the same chapter opposed opinions is the most scientific approach." A beautiful example of the "Teach the controversy" strategy!



Participants.

Front row: Krispurwana, Michel, Dall'Oglio, Troll.

Back row: Haughey, Pachkov, Balhan, Jackson, Körner, Roborgh, Madigan.

MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE IN DIFFICULT TIMES

Daniel A Madigan, S.J.

These are difficult times for dialogue. An increasing number of voices, including many Jesuit voices, skeptical about, or even hostile to, Muslim-Christian dialogue are being raised on both sides, and there seems a real risk that many of the gains of recent decades will be lost in this hardening of positions. In this article I would like to examine some of the factors in this increasing polarization and propose ways of interpreting Muslim-Christian relationships that might offer more hope.

SINGULAR AND PLURAL

I deliberately use the plural “relationships” because one of the characteristics of the current negative discourse is that it tends to use the singular “Islam” rather than the plural “Muslims” and thus tends to ignore the extraordinary variety of views and types of people represented in the Muslim community. The skeptics are right to think that it is difficult, if not impossible, to dialogue with Islam – not just about religion, but about anything at all. That is because Islam is to a large extent an abstraction. There are many Islams – many ways of being Muslim in this world. Indeed, there are many ways of living one’s willing submission to God even within a particular Muslim-majority culture. This is stating no more than the obvious, yet it is a fact that seems to escape so many skeptical commentators. A moment’s reflection on the Christian parallel would make it clear to them. Can one dialogue with Christianity? Is Christianity able to speak? And if not, who really speaks for it? Even within the Catholic Church, which has a unique authority structure, there is not uniformity of opinion, not even on some serious moral questions. When Pope John Paul II stood resolutely against the death penalty or the Bush doctrine of pre-emptive war, for example, not a few of his fellow bishops and many others quietly but nonetheless publicly distanced themselves from his positions, dismissing them as “prudential judgements” rather than authoritative teachings.

The fact that it is difficult to dialogue with “Islam” does not mean, however, that the same difficulty applies to Muslims. They are anything but an abstraction. They are actual people, and like all people they are individuals of very different types, with varying political and religious opinions, of many different cultures and experiences.

Again the skeptics raise their voices to lament that there is no common doctrinal magisterium among Muslims and that we can only dialogue with individuals or with groups who cannot represent the whole. This is a profoundly unjust criticism. The Catholic Church, and to a lesser extent the Orthodox Churches, are the only religious bodies in the world to have such a structure of authority. No other religion has developed structures of this kind, and it is not clear that they ever will. Still, we carry on dialogue, for example, with Jews and with Buddhists, even though this involves dealing with individuals and select groups who can neither claim to speak for all their fellow believers, nor enter into binding agreements on their behalf. Why, then, should we disqualify Muslims on these grounds?

Looked at from the other side, members of other religious traditions are usually glad to find an authoritative interlocutor in the Catholic Church. However, they also often discover that on a local and individual level the authoritative central policy is either not known or not respected. Dialogue does not take place between religions, but between believers, and so it is of necessity a complex and often untidy process. It rarely results in neatly drafted agreements

and shared resolutions. It is the long, patient work of creating relationships and transforming hearts.

The injustice done to Muslims in dismissing them as dialogue partners because they do not have a central authority structure goes hand in hand with another injustice – one that Muslims also tend to perpetrate against Christians – that is, disqualifying the positive voices as being unrepresentative, or worse, as being disingenuous. Negative, aggressive, prejudiced voices are not hard to find in these polarized and conflictual times, and they have a wide media audience only too ready to give them credence, and to believe that they represent the truth about their religion. More moderate, less antagonistic voices are not only ignored; they are often accused of bad faith and duplicity, of hiding or denying the truth about their respective religions. Instead of encouraging those who find in their religious traditions the grounds for peaceful mutual respect, the skeptics dismiss their interpretations as false, and quote Qur’ân or Bible against them.

TEXT AND INTERPRETATION

This is easily done, of course. It is simple enough to quote other traditions’ scriptures against them, but it shows a profound ignorance of the way scriptures actually function in a faith tradition. Take, for example, the Christian scriptures. Here are some lines from the Psalms, the book which forms backbone of Christian and Jewish daily worship: “O daughter of Babylon, you devastator! A blessing on the one who treats you as you have treated us. A blessing on him who takes your babies and dashes them against the rocks!” (Ps. 137:8-9) “The righteous will rejoice when they see vengeance done; they will bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked.” (Ps. 58:10) We cannot deny the presence of these verses in our scripture and worship, yet we do not think of them as in any way defining the Christian attitude to enemies. Nor would Jews think that they are bound by God’s command to slaughter those who change religion, not just individuals but whole cities, their cattle included (Deut. 13:6-15). Moses had led the way in this at the time of the incident of the golden calf: “He said to them, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, “Gird on your sword, each of you! Go back and forth from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill your brother, your friend, and your neighbor” (Ex. 32:27). Even the New Testament is not without verses open to a violent interpretation: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household” (Mt. 10:34-6). “If you have no sword, sell your cloak and buy one” (Lk. 22:36).

The point of quoting these texts is not to claim that Christianity and Judaism are inherently violent religions, but rather to offer proof that scriptures that apparently justify and at times even glorify violence do not necessarily make for a violent religion. Christians and Jews have ways of reading their scriptures that allow them to maintain the sacredness of those texts without at the same time considering large parts of them normative for behavior or attitudes. Muslims have traditionally used similar methods of interpretation. It is simply false to say that Muslims cannot or do not interpret the Qur’ân. First there is the obvious linguistic issue: the vast majority of Muslims do not know Arabic and therefore depend for their reading on dictionaries, commentaries and translations – all of which are forms and instruments of interpretation. Even among Arab Muslims, very few are at home with the vocabulary and style of Qur’ânic Arabic, and so they rely on interpretations and glosses to understand it.

Second, it is clear philosophically that any reading of a text, even for someone who knows the language, is not simply the re-acquisition of the author's original thought, but that it is in itself an interpretive activity. The decision that a particular verse is relevant to a certain question or situation is a further act of interpretation. A major element in Qur'anic interpretation has always been to try to understand the context in which the verse was revealed, and therefore its applicability or otherwise to various questions of law and ethics. Since the Qur'ân itself rarely indicates the context of its logia, and never in a precise manner, the tradition has felt free to propose multiple contexts even for a single verse. This opens the possibility of multiple interpretations.

Third, the Qur'ân itself indicates that it requires interpretation, distinguishing among the different types of verses it contains: "It is He who has sent down to you the scripture, some of whose verses are decisive — they are the essence (*umm*, lit. 'mother') of the scripture — and others whose meanings are not straightforward" (Q 3:7). In this famously controversial passage the Qur'ân distinguishes between those verses that are considered *muhkamât* (defined, fixed, firm, decisive, straightforward) and those that are *mutashâbihât* (lit. 'resembling one another' possibly meaning doubtful, ambiguous, allegorical or metaphorical). Since the Qur'ân does not specify which verses are which, this pair of terms has been interpreted in many different ways.³ It is the *muhkamât* that are said to constitute the essence or substance of the scripture. Qur'anic commentators often understand this to mean that such verses lay down the principles of Islam; they contain the basics of creed and law; they outline all the duties, punishments and commandments that are essential to the religion. The *muhkamât* are sometimes thought to be the abrogating verses because they remain firm and fixed whereas the *mutashâbihât*, although they *resemble* the others, are in fact without legal force due to their having been abrogated. Other commentators would distinguish between the *muhkamât*, those verses that can stand alone and so require little or no interpretation, and the *mutashâbihât*, those that can only be fully understood in relationship to other verses treating the same or related matters.

This important verse goes on to explain the danger of interpretation – that people with dishonest motives deliberately choose to interpret the less straightforward verses of the Qur'ân in a way that will divide the community. The interpretation (*ta'wîl*) of these verses is not open to all, the verse tells us. Certainly God knows the true meaning, but it may also be known by scholars. That depends on how we read and punctuate the verse, and Muslim commentators have done so in differing ways. It could be translated as "No one knows its interpretation except God. And those who are well-grounded in knowledge say, We believe in all of it ..." Or we might read it "No one knows its interpretation except God and those who are well-grounded in knowledge. They say, We believe in all of it ..." The Arabic original allows both possibilities. Thus the verse that speaks about the possibility and risk of interpreting the Qur'ân itself contains various points that require, and have historically received, considerable interpretive attention.

It is true that many Muslims will themselves deny that they are interpreting the Qur'ân when they read and apply it. To them it may seem straightforward and univocal. Yet they are in fact interpreting it, as becomes clear to them when they encounter another Muslim with a different "straightforward" reading. What the Islamic tradition wants to avoid, and justly so,

³ An enlightening survey of the way these terms were used and understood in medieval Muslim exegesis is given in Leah Kinberg, "*Muhkamât* and *Mutashâbihât* (Koran 3/7): Implication of a Koranic Pair of Terms in Medieval Exegesis," *Arabica* 35 (1988): 143–72. See also Michel Lagarde, "De l'Ambiguïté (*mutashâbih*) dans le Coran: tentatives d'explication des exégètes musulmans," *Quaderni di studi arabi* 3 (1985): 45–62.

is what we might call “interpreting away” the Qur’ân – that is, reading it in such a way as to avoid its authoritative claim on the believer and to empty it of any real significance as scripture.

Thus, both in fact and by tradition Muslims do indeed interpret their scriptures. It seems to me a nonsense, then, for non-Muslims to tell Muslims that, since they believe the Qur’ân to be a revealed text rather than simply an inspired text, therefore they cannot interpret it. This mistake is gaining more and more currency these days in Church circles. Worse still, we sometimes reject Muslim interpretations and offer our own more literal reading as authoritative – that is, we claim that what we are proposing is what the Qur’ân “really” says. That word “really” suggests that we believe a text has a single, objectively verifiable meaning. Yet when texts speak, they speak to particular people in particular circumstances. The Qur’ân’s meaning, as Wilfred Cantwell Smith has pointed out, is the history of its meanings.⁴ That is true in both an internal and an external sense. First, the Qur’ân reflects the history of its own development over the more than twenty years of its address to a varied audience. Second, since the time of its canonization it has been read by a very diverse community of faith in widely different historical contexts.

If a twenty-first century Western Muslim tells us that the words “There is no compulsion in religion” (Q 2:256) mean that the Qur’ân defends religious freedom, why would we want to deny her interpretation? Yet that is what is frequently done. Preference is given to those who would interpret that verse in a narrower sense, or who would claim that it has been abrogated by other less accommodating verses. It may be true that, historically speaking, most of those who have offered formal interpretations of this verse had little conception of religious liberty, which is, after all, a very modern idea only recently accepted even in the Catholic Church. However, the weight of that history—whether Catholic or Muslim—does not necessarily condemn us to simply repeat it.

Contemporary questions of religious liberty, the secular state, public and private religion are elements of a discussion that must go on among Muslims. It cannot be pre-judged by Christians. One might have expected Christians to have encouraged Muslims who are trying to find a way of living their Islam that is fully compatible with life in a modern pluralist environment. The skeptics, however, often privilege more medieval voices in order to deny any possibility of change and dialogue. The effect of all this is to increase the polarization that already characterizes Muslim-Christian relations.

THE CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS?

The authority often appealed to in order to defend the idea that this polarization is a permanent and unavoidable facet of our world is Samuel P. Huntington. The idea of the “clash of civilizations” first enunciated thirteen years ago by Huntington, has become a commonplace of conventional wisdom.⁵ Yet most people have only a vague notion of the theory, and know little of the caveats and qualifications that his article carried. Huntington has lamented that so many people had entirely ignored the question mark in the title, and have presumed that he was predicting or describing such a clash rather than posing the question of whether “civilization” might be a more helpful interpretive category than “nation-

⁴ Wilfred C. Smith, “The True Meaning of Scripture: An Empirical Historian’s Nonreductionist Interpretation of the Qur’ân,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 11(1980): 504.

⁵ Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” in *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993.

state” for understanding global politics after the Cold War.⁶ There is not space here to deal comprehensively with this important work—especially with the fuller treatment he gave in his book three years later. However, it is important to address some opinions that claim to be based on Huntington, but which are an over-simplification and a misunderstanding of his positions.

The people of different civilizations, Huntington tells us, have different views on the relations between God and humanity, individual and group, citizen and state, parents and children, husband and wife. They also have differing views of the relative importance of rights and responsibilities, liberty and authority, equality and hierarchy. These civilizational differences are real, fundamental and enduring, more so than ideological or political differences. However, Huntington also notes that differences are not the same as conflicts; and even if differences become a source of conflict, those conflicts are not necessarily violent.⁷ This is an extremely important point, often overlooked. The message most commentators have taken from Huntington (or from reports about him) is that we are condemned to a future of increasingly violent conflict between irreducibly different civilizational blocs. Although he discusses nine major civilizations, many think of his theory as applying basically to two blocs—Islam and the West.

Huntington’s project is not, as some of those who appeal to him would have it, to offer some apocalyptic vision of the violent, Hobbesian future that awaits us. He rather wants to identify the likely sites, causes, and aggravating factors of future conflicts in order to understand and perhaps avoid them, or at least to aid in their resolution. He did recommend in his article that the West try to maintain its military and economic power to protect its interests in the face of other competing interests,⁸ but he does not advocate what some of his acolytes do—a West closed in on itself and armed against an inimical, largely Muslim, world.

Though he is often invoked by the skeptics as offering a social scientist’s empirical proof of the futility of dialogue, here and there in Huntington’s work we find some key insights which could contribute substantially to the development of dialogue.

“People can and do redefine their identities,” Huntington reminds us, “and, as a result, the composition and boundaries of civilizations change.”⁹ It is often forgotten that civilizations are dynamic, and so are not simply rigid masses that will inevitably collide with one another until one or another shatters. Our nightmare of ceaseless conflict seems to presume that anyone who bears the title Muslim belongs to a different, irreducibly other, civilization. Yet actual experience gives the lie to such essentializing discourse, and leaves us unconvinced that many of the world’s 1.2 billion Muslims actually belong to the Islamic civilization of our fears. If the puritanical and fanatical Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan’s warlords and Taliban belong to it, then how can an urbane and thoughtful British professor, or a skilful and compassionate Malaysian doctor be said to belong to the same “civilization”? Huntington’s valuable observations about the ways in which people identify themselves with civilizations must not be allowed to obscure the fact that identity is more complex than simply identification with one group. If the potential for conflict between civilizations that

⁶ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 13.

⁷ Huntington, “Clash?” 25.

⁸ Huntington, “Clash?” 49.

⁹ Huntington, “Clash?” 24.

makes dialogue indispensable, it is the flexibility and dynamism of civilizational identities that renders dialogue possible and offers hope of success.

THE GRAMMAR OF DIALOGUE

Huntington defines a civilization with admirable simplicity when he writes, “Civilizations are the biggest ‘we’ within which we feel culturally at home as distinguished from all the other ‘thems’ out there.” Here he has put his finger on a key issue for dialogue—our grammar, the way in which we use the first-person-plural: we, us, our. There are three basic ways of constructing our ‘we’. The first relies on an excluded third-person: ‘our’ identity is, in a sense, negative and probably unstable because it relies more on the fact that ‘we’ are not ‘them’, than on anything we might positively have in common. The second is a constructed ‘we’ that fails to recognize the diversity of ‘you’. ‘You’ are not recognized in your particularity and difference but are reduced to just another example of ‘me’. Such a grammar does not recognize, and so ultimately does not permit, difference. Each of these constructed first-person plurals is inimical to real dialogue, either by absolutizing otherness, assuring us that it can never be overcome, or by disregarding it, failing to acknowledge and respect uniqueness.

The third grammar of the first-person plural is quite different. From personal experience we know that our personal identity is constituted by multiple belongings. Each ‘I’ belongs contemporaneously to many different ‘we’s’: to particular friendships and relationships, to family, to nation, to religion, church, class, language group, etc. We recognize that human maturity consists in the ability to negotiate this multiple belonging without losing a coherent sense of self. We also recognize that our identity is not threatened, but rather enriched and expanded by developing new relationships, learning new languages and exploring unfamiliar cultures. At the personal level we shape and construct the self through dialogue and in relationship; we do not first construct a self-contained identity and only then enter into relationships. This is no less true at the level of religious communities. The Christian identity was formed initially in dialogue with the various religious strands of Second-Temple Judaism and with Hellenistic culture; and it has continued to interact with other ‘selves’, shaping its theology and proclamation—which are its self-understanding—in conversation with interlocutors such as Aristotelian philosophy, Renaissance humanism, the Enlightenment, atheism, and Marxism. For most of Western Christian theology Islam has been, if at all, only a minor interlocutor. In the Eastern Churches slightly more attention has been paid to it, yet relatively little theological progress has been made in after the first few centuries. As a religious vision which emerged as a critique of the Christianity and Judaism of its day, and which proposes a radical re-reading of the Abrahamic, Judaic, Christian tradition that had developed in biblical and post-biblical literature and practice, the faith of Muslims has a very particular claim on the theological attention of Christians and Jews. This is especially true now that we are increasingly in contact with one another.

In dialogue, therefore, the task is to construct a new first-person plural, one neither based simply on the rejection of ‘them’, nor on a too-easy affirmation of similarity, but rather on a preparedness to question and to be questioned. This new ‘we’ is built only gradually and with sustained commitment. Our Muslim students in Rome sense a strong link with their Catholic, Orthodox and Hindu companions; they develop friendships with their Jewish professors. Gradually a new ‘we’ is created that does not cancel difference but learns to live it richly.

What emerges from dialogue is not a negotiated settlement of differences which eventually creates a single faith and a single culture. Huntington is surely right to maintain that the idea

of a universal civilization is untenable.¹⁰ He has little comfort to offer those who believe that Western civilization is destined to become universal. Indeed, he is less than sanguine about the very possibility that it will survive in the long term—not because it is under attack from outside, but because it is crumbling from the inside. Even if it succeeds in dealing with its internal weaknesses, Western civilization, he argues, is particular and is not generalizable, at least not without domination based on violence and oppression. Huntington calls not for a world-civilization, but for a world of civilizations in dialogue. Quoting Lester Pearson writing in the 1950's, he agrees that we are moving into:

an age when different civilizations will have to learn to live side by side in peaceful interchange, learning from each other, studying each other's history and ideals and art and culture, mutually enriching each other's lives. The alternative in this overcrowded little world is misunderstanding, tension, clash and catastrophe.¹¹

HISTORY AND DESTINY

Huntington is certainly skilled in analyzing history, especially recent history. Yet he does not see history as destiny, and this is a most important distinction. Even if it might be true that relations between Muslims and the West have often been conflictual, that does not mean they are forever condemned to being so. Huntington's analysis, while scarcely optimistic, is certainly not fatalistic. His work is a call for dialogue, not a dismissal of it in favour of dogged defensiveness. The question we face in dialogue is not primarily what Christians have been, but what we intend to be in the future, not what Muslims have been but what they want to be.

A weakness in his analysis, and a point in which his predictions have not proven true in the ten years since his book-length treatment of the theme, is the question of intra-civilizational conflicts. He claims that conflicts within civilizations will tend to be less violent and less intractable.¹² Yet such has not been the experience of recent decades or even centuries. Huntington passes over with a single vague reference¹³ the genocidal rage that devastated Rwanda in 1994, and which saw an estimated 800,000 people massacred in a matter of weeks, for the most part by their fellow Christians. He obviously had nothing to say about the longstanding civil war that has cost an estimated 4 millions lives in Congo since 1998. Going further back, we need to recognize the long history of warfare in Christian Europe, whose internal conflicts in the last century twice embroiled the whole world in war. Similarly among Muslims there is a long and continuing history of internecine warfare—much more extensive and bloody, it might be argued, than the conflicts with non-Muslims. In our own time it is easily verifiable that the number of Muslims killed by their co-religionists in Iraq, Pakistan and Sudan is much greater than the number of victims of the attacks in New York, London, Madrid and Bombay. The history of the Muslim community, no less than of the West, has been marked by internal struggles that taken altogether dwarf the wars against other civilizational blocs.

This is a key element to recall in dialogue, because an honest encounter must be based on a realistic self-image. There is always a gap, sometimes a very large one, between the ideals we

¹⁰ Huntington, *Clash*, 301-321.

¹¹ Lester Pearson, *Democracy in World Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 83-84, quoted by Huntington, *Clash*, 301-321.

¹² Huntington, "Clash?", 38.

¹³ Huntington, *Clash*, 28.

profess and the reality we manage to live – between the vision we have of society and the actual state of our cities and countries. Many attempts at Muslim-Christian dialogue founder at precisely this point – each partner has a strong tendency to compare his own ideals with the reality of the other. The result is that each assumes the moral high-ground, and with a sense of superiority speaks down to the other. We claim to be speaking the truth, and so we are, but only about the failures of the other party, not about our own. The frustrating and dispiriting result is what has sometimes been described as a “dialogue of the deaf.”

Huntington cannot be much help to us here, except in his realistic presentation of the internal problems of Western civilization. He is proposing not a specifically Christian approach to the current world situation, but rather a pragmatic political and cultural solution. Christians do not enter into dialogue simply on pragmatic grounds, calculating the risks to be run and the advantages to be had. To be in dialogue with the world in which we live is an integral part of our being Church. “La Chiesa si fa colloquio,” wrote Pope Paul VI in *Ecclesiam Suam* (#67), “The Church makes itself conversation.”¹⁴ To enter into such honest dialogue requires great humility, and such humility is always risky, because it can easily be misinterpreted as weakness. Yet this is a risk we cannot avoid, since we are followers of the Christ who made himself “humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross” (Phl 2:8). There is no other choice for Christians in dialogue but to trust that the way of the humble Christ is the way to the truth.¹⁵

An element of great complexity in the question of dialogue is that the very Christians who have for centuries had the closest contact with Muslims have been living in a minority situation, and find themselves very often politically, and sometimes also socially and economically, disadvantaged. It is all too easy for Western Christians to speak about openness and dialogue, but such openness is much more difficult in a situation where one’s survival is at stake. These are people who live on what Huntington calls the fault-lines between civilizations, and who therefore are more likely to be in a situation of conflict, even if it is not always or even often violent. Those who, on the one hand, have the greatest opportunities for dialogue, and perhaps also language and culture in common with Muslims, on the other hand, also run the greatest risk of losing further ground politically and socially because of the attitudes that are required of a Christian in dialogue. The local churches in Muslim majority countries have a most demanding and unenviable vocation. Their situations are very diverse and it is important to recognize the particularities of their positions: Algeria is not Pakistan; Indonesia is not Lebanon.

It is also important to recognize that the bitter experience of, for example, Middle Eastern Christians is not simply generalizable to Europe. Arab Christians can speak with authority about their experience of living as minorities and the difficulties that that may involve, and their experience is not to be denied. However, they are not necessarily the best guides for those who have to develop relations with Muslims in Europe, North America or Australia. Their heightened experience of conflict at the civilizational fault-lines is not a reliable basis for developing a new and constructive relationship between Muslims and Christians in the heartland of Western civilization.

¹⁴ The English translation is much weaker: “The Church has something to communicate”(ES 65). For some reason the paragraphs are numbered differently in the English version. Other references here are to that version.

¹⁵ Again Paul VI puts this elegantly, “Our dialogue must be accompanied by that meekness which Christ bade us learn from Himself: “Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart.” ... Our dialogue ... makes no demands. It is peaceful, has no use for extreme methods, is patient under contradiction and inclines towards generosity.” (ES 81)

Each country will have its own particular issues in dialogue depending on many factors: for example, the cultural background and sophistication of the Muslim immigrants; the history of Muslim immigration and the social and economic integration of successive generations; the political context and also the religious make-up of the country. A dialogue relationship in New York will probably be very different from what it would be in Amsterdam. It will be different again in Marseille or Sydney. Within each of those cities the relationships will vary with much more personal factors about the people involved.

RECIPROCITY?

We have begun to hear much more in recent times about reciprocity as an important principle in Muslim-Christian dialogue. This seems to me a very dubious development which requires clarification. There is a world of difference between reciprocity as a condition for dialogue, and reciprocity as a hoped-for outcome of dialogue. However, the distinction tends to be blurred especially in press reporting of Vatican policy, but also among some theologians.

Reciprocity is not a Christian value. Gratuity is. The teaching of Jesus could not be more explicit on this subject:

You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. Rather, if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? (Mt. 5:39–47)

We give without hope of return and we open our tables especially to those who will not repay our hospitality (Lk 14:12–14). There is absolutely no question of setting conditions to our dialogue with others. If we were to do so, we would be betraying our faith, not defending it. Of course we hope that our openness and honesty will be reciprocated, but if it is not, still we persevere. Pope Paul VI taught in *Ecclesiam Suam* that we begin dialogue not by talking but rather by listening: “Before speaking, we must take great care to *listen* not only to what men say, but more especially to what they have it in their hearts to say” (ES 87). Even if we are not listened to, we continue to listen with infinite patience.

Talk of reciprocity is common not only in what we might think of specifically as dialogue but also in relation to laws, rights and freedoms. There are many calls in Europe to restrict the rights of Muslim citizens and immigrants until full and equal rights are accorded to Christians in Muslim majority countries – Saudi Arabia is the case usually cited because it is the most flagrant violator of the rights and freedoms of non-Muslims. Some commentators have wanted to see in the Holy See’s recent references to reciprocity a concern and a demand for reciprocal rights as a condition of further dialogue, and an encouragement for Western governments to use Muslim citizens’ rights and freedoms as leverage to achieve reforms.

Such a strategy can be reconciled neither with the Gospel, nor with explicit Catholic teaching about the basis of religious freedom in the dignity of each person. We must accord equal

rights and freedoms to Muslims in the West, even if such recognition is not reciprocated by the governments of Muslim-majority countries. We may not repay one wrong with another. If we were serious about our concern for the fate of the oppressed, then we might refuse to trade with oppressor countries – refuse, for example, to sell arms ¹⁶ or to buy oil from Saudi Arabia until it reforms its laws to recognize the human rights of non-Muslims. This would require more sacrifice than most are prepared to make, and so we propose to force the poor Muslim citizen or immigrant to pay the price. This is tantamount to hostage-taking: we will oppress ‘theirs’ until they stop oppressing ‘ours.’ Most of these Muslims have come to live in Western countries precisely because they do not accept the laws, customs and regimes of their own countries. In any case their fate is of little concern to the likes of the Saudi royal family.

IS THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE DEAD?

None of this is to suggest that the correct Christian attitude is one of supine acquiescence in the injustices perpetrated by dictatorial regimes. The voice we are obliged to raise against injustice will, however, have more force and coherence if it speaks not only for our fellow Christians, but for all the oppressed. And it will be more convincing if it is even-handed in denouncing wrong not only abroad but at home as well.

A sound case can be made for the idea that justice and peace, rather than theology and doctrine, should be the central focus of our dialogue with Muslims, especially in situations of conflict. However, we may find that it is a more demanding dialogue than we expected. While the injustices and acts of violence perpetrated by Muslims are regularly identified and reported, Christians are inclined to distance themselves from the failures and injustices of the West, because we claim that religion and politics are separate. Such sleight-of-hand will not be convincing in an honest dialogue, and we will be forced to admit first the failure of the Christian message successfully to shape the West’s economic and political vision, and second the acquiescence of avowedly Christian politicians and business people in the injustices attributable to Western policies.

It seems to be this kind of dialogue about justice and politics that people have in mind when they speak of a shift in the Holy See’s policy away from theological dialogue with Muslims towards a dialogue of cultures or civilizations. Four observations need to be made about this, albeit briefly. First, such a dialogue cannot simply be an opportunity to denounce Muslim injustices and discuss the means of redressing them. It will be much more demanding for the Christian side than some might expect. Second, if it is a dialogue of culture or civilization, then who will be able to speak with any authority? Do the proponents of this change of approach imagine that the Holy See can speak for the West? Third, most of the formal dialogues undertaken with Muslims by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue were already on themes that would be considered cultural rather than theological. For example, in the annual dialogues with Al-Azhar University, themes have included religious extremism, the war in Iraq, the necessity for self-criticism in religions, and the dangers of stereotyping and generalization. From the Muslim side there has often been an explicit option to avoid theological issues lest the dialogue seem to be a negotiation to arrive at a common position on disputed doctrines. So, if indeed there has been a change of policy – and it is far from clear that there has been – it will merely reflect rather than affect long-standing practice by both parties. Contrary to commonly held opinion, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious

¹⁶ On July 22, 2006, for example, the Bush administration announced a \$6 billion arms sale to Saudi Arabia.

Dialogue continues its work and has not been absorbed by the Council for Culture with which it shares a President.

The fourth observation is more serious. I have long argued that the term “interreligious dialogue” often gives rise to misunderstandings: first that dialogue takes place between religions; in fact, only people can dialogue. For this reason I prefer to speak of the dialogue of believers. The second misunderstanding it causes is that these dialoguing believers should be talking about religion. On the contrary, we should be talking about what is really on our minds; and more often than not this will be questions of justice, of human rights, of public policy, of world affairs, or more local practical issues. However, there is in Catholic circles an increasingly skeptical voice being raised against the possibility or value of any real theological dialogue with Muslims, and this skepticism needs to be addressed.

There has been no lack of frustrations and disappointments in attempts by Muslims and Christians to engage in serious theological dialogue, and there are certainly many elements that make it particularly difficult. Not least of these is that Islam began in part as a critique of Christianity, and so Muslims often find difficulty in moving beyond the rather peculiar presentation of Christianity found in the Qur’ân, and its condemnation of important elements of Christian faith, even though they seem scarcely understood. To understand the parallel case for a Christian, imagine a Pharisee wanting to enter into dialogue with us. The figure of the Pharisee is very negative in the New Testament – synonymous with oppressive legalism and hypocrisy – and the teaching of Jesus as well as the letters of Paul seem to us to be the definitive word about Pharisees and their religiosity. Therefore, it would be extremely difficult to enter into that kind of dialogue with real openness – indeed some people find dialogue with Jews difficult for just that reason.

These attempts at theological dialogue are made more difficult by the fact that very often the Christian participants have studied Islam, often in great depth, whereas still relatively few Muslims have made a serious theological study of Christianity. The resulting lack of balance in the dialogue is very disappointing. However, we cannot afford to let disappointment lead to despair. Those who would argue that Muslim-Christian theological dialogue is impossible must logically prove that it has never taken place at all. Anecdotal evidence of their own disappointments is proof not of the impossibility of such a dialogue, but only of its difficulty. Those who, like myself, would maintain that it is indeed possible, have logically only to show that it has taken place at least once. Anecdotal evidence is in this case sufficient to demonstrate the feasibility of such an encounter. It has been my privilege in recent years of teaching to take part from time to time in what I would consider a truly theological dialogue. The context has been academic, yet the involvement has been more than simply intellectual. Theological dialogue takes place when, as a first step, we have been able to take one another seriously as believers, as people who are listening for the Word of God, who believe that God is working to guide them to the truth.

The second essential element in this dialogue is the ability to use the theological language, methods and authorities of the other tradition, to feel the weight of the other tradition’s theological questions and so to engage with the other on his or her home ground. This requires not only sustained study, but also a kind of mutual hospitality – a preparedness to help someone who does not belong to my tradition make herself “at home” in my theological conversation. Hospitality is at its best when both host and guest are sensitive enough to one another to be able to share the same space with delight. To carry further the metaphor of hospitality, much of our experience as Christians has been that Muslims have barged into our

theological “home” uninvited, complained about the decoration, reorganized the furniture, and even claimed ownership! The Jews might want to say the same of Christians. However, there are Muslims who are making great efforts to enter seriously into this relationship of mutual theological hospitality. This is not the time to abandon the effort on our part, and so settle for being theological strangers to one another.

If our faith and, hence, our theology are precious to us, then we cannot rule out theological dialogue with Muslims. Indeed, we need that dialogue because, if anything is clear from the persistence of Islam, it is that we have not yet found a convincing way to express and proclaim our Christian faith to that substantial percentage of the world’s population who already believe in the one God of Abraham. I would identify four particular areas where an attention to the Muslim questioning of Christian theology is beneficial for refining and sharpening that theology: trinity, Christology, sin and redemption, and the theology of revelation. These are all areas in which there is much to be gained from taking seriously Muslim perplexity about our doctrines or about the language in which we express them. We do this not in order to find a compromise – our theological “home” is not for sale or lease – but rather to find a more satisfying, perhaps even more convincing, expression of them. These key Christian doctrines are not simply theological hurdles for testing our faith, nor for maintaining the distinctions between religions. They have a central role in our relationship with the divine, and so for a Dialogue is never merely a strategy or a pragmatic calculation of advantages to be had. It is an integral part of the mission of the Christian community to foster love, unity and peace among people (*ES* 94). As such, it is an act of love. And like every act of love it is costly, therefore not for the fainthearted. As Jesuits in these difficult times for dialogue I propose that we can see our role in terms to faith, hope and love.

It is important that we make sure that the relationship of Muslims and Christians is not simply reduced to a geo-political one, but that the element of our common faith in the the one God remain central in the discourse. The Church’s approach has an increasing tendency to mirror the pragmatic socio-political calculations of politicians, and we pride ourselves on not being naïve or do-gooder. Yet how does that fit with the voice of the Gospel—the countercultural and politically naïve message of a God who risked all for love?

Faith is inseparable from justice, and so we are called to focus on justice in several ways. First to work against the injustice that reduces all Muslims to a single category, treating all with suspicion, fear and hatred simply because of their religious affiliation. Second it is to help people recognize that the anger which fuels today’s violence derives not from a theological position but from the perception of the injustice suffered by so many in a world dominated by Western economies and controlled by Western geo-political interests. Muslim anger derives not so much from belonging, but rather from not belonging, and not seeing how they ever will belong.

The temptation to lose hope in these times is perhaps greater than ever, and it is here we are called to give signal service. We can offer hope because of our experience. So much of the world that fears and loathes Muslims has never had a Muslim friend, perhaps never even spoken to a Muslim. Of course, we have a role to play with our expertise in helping people understand the complexities of the current world situation, and in offering more thoughtful and nuanced account of our relations. However, far more important is the irreplaceable hope we can offer because of our experience of friendship. When we speak in defence of Muslims or with hope for the possibilities of dialogue, many voices dismiss us as out of touch with reality. Yet in our friendships we have touched the reality that matters.

As St Paul reminds us so eloquently, love is the only basis for any discourse worthy of the name Christian. As more and more Christians, Jesuits included, allow themselves to speak in the harshest and most dismissive terms of Muslims and their faith, it takes courage to stand against that tide expressing love and calling others to speak and act with love.

Let us allow Paul VI the final word: “Today, every day, should see a renewal of our dialogue. We, rather than those to whom it is directed, should take the initiative.” (*ES 77*)



FINDING THE WAY TO BE MUSLIM AND INDONESIAN

Note on Islam and the dialogue of religions in Indonesia

Telesphorus Krispurwana Cahyadi, S.J.

**“When I travel to Syria and Iraq I feel that I see Islam’s past,
But when I travel to Indonesia, I feel that I see its future”
(An Iraqi Intellectual, cited by Robert W. Hefner)**

Although Indonesia is the biggest Islamic country in population, it does not have a great role and influence at the international field as representative of the Islamic voice, and the Indonesian leader doesn’t have a significant position among the leaders from Islamic countries. In our critical situation today many Indonesian Muslims want to make a greater contribution to the world as the moderate and tolerance face of Islam. Some leaders from Western countries also want to support “another face and reality of Islam” of Indonesia as counterpart to the Islam of Middle East. That face has been described as the face of the smiling Islam. When Tony Blair or George Bush visited Indonesia and met with some Islamic leaders, they wanted to give a signal about that. Indonesia in the late 1990s was one of the most important centers of Muslim reform in the world, writes Robert Hefner from Boston University¹. However, Indonesia is still busy with its domestic problems, so that it is still not ready to join the play in the international sphere, and sectarian violence and political tensions overshadow that achievement.

For many years Indonesia was known as a tolerant and harmonious country, and Islam in Indonesia was portrayed as moderate. Politically Indonesia opted for a secular, although theistic, state system, while maintaining a clear separation between religion and state, so that in spite of a greater presence of Islamic values and symbols in public and social space, the Indonesian elite in far more conservative in its Islamic pronouncements than its neighbor, Malaysia².

Thus, we are shocked when hear and see the tensions between Christians and Muslims, especially in Maluku and Poso, Central Celebes, or news about the burnt and damaged Church in Indonesia, and especially the suicide bomb attacks in Bali and Java. Has the tolerant Indonesia come to an end, and now begins the new face of intolerant and inharmonious Indonesia?

Indonesia gives us not a single reality; there are some variant faces of Islam. We can find there the various Islamic voices and trends of thought arisen to express different religious positions. Correctly, there is some fundamentalist group, such as FPI (*Front Pembela Islam: The Movement for Defending Islam*) or MMI (*Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia*), and also underground groups who support terrorist actions from Malaysian Ashari and Nordin Noor,

¹Hefner, Robert, “Muslim Democrats and Islamist Violence in Post-Soeharto Indonesia”, in Hefner, Robert W. (ed.), *Remaking Muslim Politics: Pluralism, Contestation, Democratization*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 2005, 273

²Abu-Rabi, Ibrahim, “Christian-Muslim Relations in the Twenty Century: Lesson from Indonesia”, in *Islamochristiana* vol. 24, 1998

that are believed to be linked to Al-Qaida. They want that Indonesia be turned into an 'Islamic State' and declare Islam as the state religion because of the reality of the great majority of Muslims in Indonesia, approximately 88 %. In addition, they want to more Islamic symbols used in public and Islamic norms applied at the national and regional laws, and they want that Muslims fill all government positions, whereas in fact some important and strategic positions in the government are held by non-Muslims. Communalism is increasing; the need to implement the *Shari'a* and to reject the secular-state ideology grows. They want to ignore the Indonesian motto, *Bhineka Tunggal Ika*, unity in diversity.

However, many researches and polls say that most Indonesians refuse the Islamic state-ideology in Indonesia. They acknowledge the reality of pluralism in cultures and religions of Indonesia, and some of them think that some groups who want to make Indonesian Islam like an Islam in the Middle East behind the movement of the Islamization of Indonesian politic. They see that Indonesian Muslims are different from Arab Muslims, "We are Muslims but not Arab, and Islam is not identical to Arabian culture of life", they say. The Middle East tradition is alien to Indonesia. Moreover, they want to introduce and promote a moderate and tolerant Islam. It happened because of the influence of the Sufism, Islamic mysticism, mainly among the Javanese Muslims³.

The relationship the Indonesian Muslims to the Middle East is quite complicated. Politically relations between the Indonesian governments with Middle East countries is not so close, although the influence of religion and politics from the Middle East is not something new. We should put behind it the political reality at the time of presidency of Soeharto, because for long time he made a political and economic orientation to the West and also he, except in his last years of leadership, didn't trust Islam with social and political power, and showed his worry about Islamic politics as a threat to the state. He gave some restrictions to the religious activity of Muslims, especially to those who reject the secular ideology of Indonesia. There were some clashes between the Islamic voices and movements with the government, because of that restriction, prejudice from the state, but also because of some movements from some Islamic leaders or ulama, Islamic scholar or cleric, who refuse to accept the secular-nationalistic ideology of state. That Islamic fundamentalism movements influence from Middle East, especially from Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and Wahhabi-Salafi ideas from Saudi Arabia⁴. We must take note also that most of the leaders of the radical and fundamentalist groups are of Arab (and Yemen) origin and push for a literal interpretation of

³Mark R. Woodward wrote a good study about that in his book, *Islam in Java*, Tucson, The University of Arizona Press, 1989 and also Lukens-Bull, Ronald, *A Peaceful Jihad: Negotiating identity and modernity in Muslim Java*, Hampshire, Palgrave, 2005

⁴Eliraz, Giora, *Islam in Indonesia: Modernism, Radicalism and the Middle East Dimension*, Brighton, Sussex Academic Press, 2004, 37-66. He mentions three influential fundamentalist thinkers in Indonesia: Sayyid Qutb, Hasan al-Banna, and Abul-A'la al-Mawdudi. He mentions also, that the Indonesian *Hajj* pilgrims were exposed to Wahhabi puritanism and militancy, and also pan-Islamic sentiments. The independence movements against Dutch colonialism were one of the main grounds of the rising militancy and puritanical Islam. The influence of the Salafi-Wahhabi teachings on the most popular fundamentalist Indonesian group, Laskar Jihad, can be found in Sirozi, Muhammad, "The Intellectual Roots of Islamic Radicalism in Indonesia", in *The Muslim World* vol. 95, January 2005. International Center for Islam and Pluralism at his research in 2004 also noted the thinker Ibn Taimiyya that influenced the radical mindset of Indonesian Muslims.

Islam. For them religion is divine, it can not be criticized; they do not want to use reason on the life of faith, so the tradition and teachings can not re-evaluated.

But on another side, as noted by anthropologist Ronald Lukens-Bull, the *pesantren* people, Islamic boarding schools from the tradition of *Nahdlatul Ulama*, the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia, are distrustful of the Wahhabi movement of Arabic world as well as the approach of Khomeini in particular because of its de-emphasis on classical learning and texts⁵. Fundamentalism is not only selective about modernism, but also about religion; they reject some opinions, approaches and traditions. Fundamentalism then splits the religion itself, because they tend to excommunicate the other, who do not belong their group or do not accept their teachings. For that reason fundamentalism as borrowed from Middle East is refused by many Indonesian Muslims, they represent only a tiny proportion of the Muslim population in Indonesia. For many Indonesians, Islamic fundamentalism is only a potential source of social fragmentation and unrest.

In this paper, I want to describe the reality of Islam in Indonesia, on their way to be considering tolerant and moderate Islam among some fundamentalist movements. This paper is prepared for the meeting about the dialogue with Islam, from Catholic side, so the perspective and interest of dialogue of religions between Christianity and Islam is the basic intention of this paper.

The question about the Islamic identity

The Islam in Indonesia is typical. We know the famous categories of Clifford Gertz: *santri*, the orthodox Muslims; *abangan*, syncretist or nominal Muslims; *priyayi*: the bureaucrats or traditional aristocracy, as the typical face of Indonesian Islam. Many criticize that categorization, but as a portrait, it says something existent. Thus, we can understand when one says that many Indonesian Muslims are only superficially Islamized. They are generally less cut off from their roots in indigenous traditions⁶. Islam as a religion is not playing an important role in society, as the scholars observed. However, another opinion says that Islam in Indonesia is a part of the society building and living, in its interaction and inculturation with local cultures and traditions. These opinions want to portray the process of self-identification for the Muslims in the context of the reality of Indonesian society. When we go into that problematic, we must know that Pancasila, the Indonesian ideology, plays an important role at this affair. The debate about that ideology is still unfinished after 60 years his independence, especially among the Muslims.

The historians who study Indonesia, especially the field of the multi-religious context of Indonesia, must enter the (old but always new) problematic about the first pillars of Indonesian ideology, Pancasila. It is formulated as the belief in the one and only God (*Ketuhanan Yang Mahaesa*). However, in the history, at the debate before the independence in 1945 to formulate the national ideology, there was another formulation, known as Piagam Jakarta (Jakarta Charter): Belief in the one and only God with the obligation to perform the *Shari'ah* for their followers. That extended formulation was deleted because of the consideration and awareness of the reality of pluralism of Indonesia, and as the recognition of the reality that Muslims and Non-Muslims fought together side by side for the independence.

⁵Lukens-Bull, Ronald, *A Peaceful Jihad: Negotiating identity and modernity in Muslim Java*, Hampshire, Palgrave, 2005, 81. 127-132

⁶Duran, Khalid, "Muslims and Non-Muslims" in Swidler, Leonard, 1992, 104-105

However, in the history until now, some Islamic groups force the state to take and legalize that Jakarta charter. The reason behind that proposition is the reality of the majority of Islam in Indonesia.

For that portrait, we will know the ways of thinking in some Islamic leaders and intellectuals, except those of pluralist or moderate views. The first is proportionality. They think about the proportion of the population, so that all of the deliberations and decision, social, political and economical, are based on the argumentation and consideration of the proportion of the population. That means, the interest of the Muslims would be put at the first consideration. In the 1990s, the Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI: Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia) put its main goal as proportionalism in government and the economy. The central demand was that the state had to do more to bring Muslim representation in government, the military, and business into line with Muslim numbers in society as a whole. They put their main emphasis on Christianity, since for them the Christians, although less than 10% of population, has long been disproportionately represented at the social, economic, and political life⁷.

At least two ideas are at play here: *dhimmi*-status and harmony. The dialogues and cooperation between the religions as promoted by the government started from proportionality viewpoint. It put harmony, stability and the prevention of conflicts as its first goal⁸. The *dhimmi* we can know from the history of Islam, and we will not speak about that. However, about harmony, we can say that harmony means more as living in separate spheres, in which one would not enter the other area or territory, geographically and socially. It means living together but in separateness and not penetrating each other. In this perception it is unacceptable that one who belong to one religion, should comes to those who have another religion and proclaim his faith. The Christian missionary activities or Muslim *da'wa* should only be directed at deepening the faith of adherents of one's own religion. The Indonesian government declared the decree about that, and the Christian Churches openly refused to receive it, because it is against the missionary characteristic of the Church.

This is the strategy of the *status quo*, says Karel Steenbrink from Leiden, Holland. It recognizes the various religions formally, and restrains, discourages or even totally bans missionary or proselytizing propagation of one religion versus another. Dialogue from this point of view puts harmony, stability and the prevention of conflicts as its first goal. Not doctrinal differences, but their wish and capability to live together are to be discussed in the dialogue⁹. Living together means living in non-intervention to others and also not talking about or touching sensitive subjects, such as religious or ethnic differences. These principles at the time of Soeharto are called the principle of the harmony.

The conversions to Christianity injure many Muslims. They condemn then charity works of the church, the Christian schools and hospitals, as instruments of Christianization movements. We can speak from the category of the freedom of religions about that, but for some *ulama* the right categories are those of Islamic territory and non-Islamic territory. They base that on the traditional concept of *dar al-Islam* (territory of peace) and *dar al-harb*

⁷Hefner, Robert, 2000, 140-143

⁸Steenbrink, Karel, "Patterns of Muslim-Christian Dialogue in Indonesia, 1965-1998", in Waardenburg, Jacques, *Muslim-Christian Perceptions of Dialogue Today*, Leuven, Peeters, 2000, 82

⁹Steenbrink, Karel, in Waardenburg, 2002, 82

(territory of war/enemy). Indonesia with great majority of Muslims is called the territory of *dar al-islam*, and it will be rightly *dar al-islam* if Indonesia governs by the *shari'ah*¹⁰. The fundamentalist sees the symptoms of the modern *jahiliyya* of the modern culture and the leniently practice of religion among many Indonesian Muslims, so they give much to *takfir*, excommunicating them from their Islamic community.

Nevertheless, at the time of Dutch colonization according to principle '*divide et impera*', the government divided the territory also with the principle of religious territory, so there is the territory of Protestants, Catholics, Hindus or Muslims. In principle, the missionaries from other religions had no permission to proclaim their religious teaching in another territory. Then the missionary activities is interpreted as the activities directed at deepening the faith of the followers their own believers, or teach the religious teachings or invite the conversions the non-believers but not to the believers from another religions, especially Islam. Nevertheless, in practice and some cases, then, the right of conversion put only as the conversion to Islam and not from Islam to other religions. They acknowledge the right of the majority but reject the same right of the minority, not because of the principle of majority-minority but more from the perception of Indonesia as Islamic land, so that the principle of *dhimmi* plays as the rule. That position goes more by the fundamentalists as proportionality.

Fundamentalism is, as we can say, an unfamiliar position in syncretist Indonesian culture. Fundamentalism is also unfamiliar in harmonious Indonesian tradition and secular, although theistic, national ideology. We remember the speech of Munawar Sjadzali, (former) Indonesian Minister on religious affair in response to the Pope's address during his pastoral visit in Indonesia, 1989, "It is true that the Muslim in Indonesia is a majority. However, for us, there is no majority and minority. We are all sons and daughters of Indonesia who have the human right to adhere religion according to one's own conviction"¹¹.

Pancasila keeps the multifaith and multicultural composition of society, since pluralism is an important element for the progress and modernization of society. However, for the some Muslim leaders there are problems when the minority of Christians, who have comparatively better education and have better social-economical conditions. Complaint, and sometimes suspicion, find on the international network of the Catholic Church, as they think, that network have social, political and religious agenda.

¹⁰In the case of suicide in Indonesia, there is some discussion, whether Indonesia belongs to the *dar al-harb* so that suicide or bomb attacks are legitimate for the jihad for Islam? However, Indonesian Vice President, Jusuf Kalla and some Islamic clerics said that Indonesia differs from Palestine as *dar al-Islam*, so that suicide or terror attacks, are not legitimate. Terrorist attacks should considered haram (religiously forbidden) because Indonesia is not in a state of war against Islam. Din Syamsudin, the hard-liner thinker from Muhammadiyah, stated the jihad is only valid in war zones like Palestine, not in Indonesia. At as the case of the Maluku conflict, the chief commander of Laskar Jihad, Ja'far Umar Thalib dubbed Christians as *hisb al-Shaytan*, Party of Satan, to justify their jihad against Christians, due to the widespread of the global conspiracy against Islam: see for example, Eliraz, Giora, 2004, 71-73; Islamic Terrorism in Indonesia: Jihad Misunderstood? In www.qantara.de; also the research from International Center for Islam and Pluralism (ICIP) Jakarta at 2004 about the Islam and Peace Building in Indonesia.

¹¹Abu-Rabi, Ibrahim, "John Paul II and Islam", in Sherwin, Bryon & Harold Kasimow (eds.), 1999, 189

However, the increased Islamic radicalism in Indonesia goes with the need and awareness of the problematic of identity. For some their Muslim identity is considered as part of their region, ethnic or as well national identity. Many syncretistic Muslims, also among the urban middle class, have become pious and observant in their Islamic belief, because they consider itself as Muslims more then before. One reason for that fact is the seeking the spiritual and moral grip from the middle class Muslims in the midst of materialism and secularism of the modern culture. There are then the growing Islamic-oriented activities and an intensified studying of Islam. The phenomenon of fundamentalism grows up mutually with that awareness of Muslim identity. They are the revivalists, who want to revitalization the society due to the Muslim doctrine¹². That awareness increases also with the use of modern media communication. The fundamentalist ideas spread including the use of modern technology and have the potential of inspiring radical fundamentalist perceptions, as one of the consequence.

Fundamentalism rises also as the reaction and in many cases dislike or adversary against Christians is belong also to that problematic, besides the feeling of the rivalry with them¹³. Moreover, the conflict of religions and ethnic become one of the images of the Indonesian society. This reality of conflict of religions in Indonesia is recorded in media as the new phenomenon of Indonesia. But some noted that that tensions between Muslims and Christians are growing since the early 1960s, especially after Soeharto got the political power in his 'New Order' regime, and at that time the Christian Churches waked up their growing awareness of their social responsibilities, and Soeharto marginalized the Muslim social-political groups, as he described them as the force of 'extreme right'¹⁴. This controversy is almost exclusively religious motivated, though envy against the wealthy Chinese minority plays a role just as much as fear of the disproportionate influence in public affairs of a Christian minority which is ahead in education¹⁵. Christianity is an opponent and threat for the Muslims, these consideration increase among many Muslims, who then they spread the interpretation of jihad, against the Christian in Maluku and then also in Poso¹⁶, and in cases of the protest against the church building we can find also in Java, also in Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, and at the bomb attacks in Bali and Jakarta, jihad against the West.

The Laskar Jihad in Maluku portrayed its jihad against the Christians as a form of *da'wa* aimed at building an ideal Islamic society. They even demonstrated the integration between *jihad* and *da'wa* by establishing a civilian infrastructure for local Muslims¹⁷. The separatism conflict in some parts of the country exploited the religious matters, in the fact of the underdeveloped Muslims among the others. But as the case of Maluku conflict, they failed to use the local conflict to bolster any substantial support within the mainstream Muslim

¹² Abu-Rabi, Ibrahim, in *Islamochristiana* vol. 24, 1998

¹³ see for example analysis in Lukens-Bull, Ronald, 2005, 122-126

¹⁴ Schumann, Olaf, "Christian-Muslim Encounter in Indonesia", in Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck & Wadi Z. Haddad (eds.), *Christian-Muslims Encounters*, Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 1995, 290-292; Hefner, Robert, in Hefner, Robert W. (ed.), 2005, 276-279

¹⁵ Duran, Khalid, "Muslims and Non-Muslims" in Swidler, Leonard, *Muslims in Dialogue: the Evolution of Dialogue*, Lampeter, Edwin Mellen, 1992, 105

¹⁶ At the case of conflict in Maluku, it is known that the Laskar Jihad, the group who fosters Jihad against Christianity, claimed to receive seven fatwas (legal or authoritative opinion) issued by seven different muftis, six from Saudi Arabia and one from Yemen: Eliraz, Giora, *Islam in Indonesia: modernism, radicalism, and the Middle East dimension*, Brighton, Sussex Academic Press, 2004, 30.

¹⁷ Eliraz, Giora, 2004, 30-31

community, who has not proved responsive to the attempt to play ancient views of Christian as a threat and enemy, and that condemnation supported by the Islamist wing at the inner circle of the government¹⁸.

To examine that situation we must know about the changing social-political constellation, together with the occurrences of Islamic resurgence across Indonesia at the end Era of Soeharto. Soeharto turned then to the conservative Islam for the benefit of his power. Then tensions or clashes occurred between moderate and pro-democracy movements, also from the Muslims, and ultra-conservative Islamists, some of which have the direct ties to military hardliners¹⁹. Communalism increases at the time of the pro-sectarian policy of the government, and Soeharto played the religious card in the late 1980s or early 1990s presidency. Before that, Soeharto used the national ideology Pancasila as the unifying principle for all religions to work together in development. He did it to reduce the potential tensions among the religions and stabilizing his power. Then, he used Islam as his power card after conflicting with secular-nationalist and Christian elite among the military, due to the corruption and abuse of power by his family and his circle at last years of his governance. Clashes between Islam and Christianity increased significantly during the last eight years of the government of Soeharto²⁰. Robert Hefner writes:

“In the first years of the New Order (Soeharto era), the most prominent victims of this power politics were organized Muslim groups, especially those associated with the Muslim parties of the Soekarno era. The restrictions and harassments to which these organizations were subjected convinced a generation of Western experts that Soeharto and his advisers were fervent Javanists opposed to Islam. When, in the late 1980s, power considerations dictated a change in policy, however, the Soeharto regime quickly reversed course, courting conservative Muslims and leaving its Javanist and non-Muslim friends high and dry”²¹.

Exactly how the idea of Islamic politics came to be found also in the debate in Indonesian history, but they can handle it in political disputes with the nationalist and Christians. However, after the 1990s those movements easily raised to the separatism and communalism interest groups, because of the inconsistent religious policy, because of the insistent demands of unchecked power and his failure to grasp the nature of socio-religious forces. Soeharto then used the sentiments of the fundamentalist group against West opinion on democracy and human rights to criticize the Western as well as to the pro-democracy movements in Indonesia. He used Islam to encounter the pro-democracy movements that started to challenge his power. The Christians condemned then as the main supporters of this pro-democracy movements²².

¹⁸Eliraz, Giora, 2004, 65-75

¹⁹Hefner, Robert, in Hefner, Robert W. (ed.), 2005, 276-278

²⁰Magnis-Suseno, Franz, “Islam’s Contribution to a Pluralistic Indonesia”, in ICIP Journal vol. 1, no2., 2004

²¹Hefner, Robert, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 2000, 71

²²For example the brochure “Konspirasi Menggulingkan Soeharto” (The Conspiracy to overthrow Soeharto) by one Islamist group KISDI at the last years of the Soeharto’ presidency and at the early of the economic crisis in Indonesia painted a picture of the international conspiracy against Soeharto: Jewish-Jesuit-America-Chinese, which supported by CIA, Mossad, Vatican and overseas Chinese: Hefner, Robert, 2000, 201-207

Tensions increased also at the time of the presidency of Abdurrahman Wahid, one of the leading figures among Indonesian Muslims, because the conservative Muslims didn't agree with his pluralistic and democratic vision, and they were behind the movement to make him step down. However, at the election, they failed to gain many votes, only 16%. Most of the voters rejected any kind of link between Islam and politics, and rejected the idea of an Islamic state and the Islamization of Indonesian society, and two biggest and most influential and respected Muslim organizations have declared that the shari'a is not fitting for Indonesia. The parliament then declined the proposal from Islamic parties to implement the *shari'a* for the Indonesian Muslims by amending the constitution²³. In addition, it can be seen that Indonesia after Soeharto, on the one hand gives hopes for the democracy and reform, but on the other, gives fertile ground for radicalism. The Post-Soeharto era provides sufficient freedom for the radical Islamic group to organize themselves, consolidate their power and play roles at the society²⁴.

They see that the bankruptcy and crisis of the society happened due to the failure or untruth in the principles of Islamic belief. They impose the radical orientation in belief and practice of religion, at the context of the tendency of the weak of faith the Indonesian Muslims, so that they easily receive the West culture, non-Islamic culture. The crises can be solved by the reformation of the way of life based on the *shari'a*. They analyze the cause the crisis of Indonesia is the moral-religious crisis of the Indonesian, due to the faithless of the nation. They interpret the teaching about *jihad* in their perspectives and interests, assume everything outside themselves as inimical, especially the values and ideas from the West or non-Muslims, mainly secularism, and democracy²⁵. *Jihad* is the most misunderstood teaching in Islam. In the cases of the bomb attacks in Indonesia, they used the terminology of *jihad* as an attack or the self-defense against the West, because Islam is the victim.

Although Islamic piety has increased in recent years, there has been no increase in the number of radical Muslims. The vast majority of Indonesian Muslims remain tolerant and inclusive. However, despite its relatively small size, Islamic radicalism poses a danger because it may co-opt the moderate majority in the absence of effective counter measures, and the failure of the government to response the radicalism. The government and security officers make quick response on the separatists or human right and democracy protests, but slow and failure to react to the radical Muslims, or to the gangsters syndicates who adopted the Islam as ideology, because of the sensitive matter of religion and also due to the conflicting views and interests among the security and political elites. The government and the security officials react slowly also to the social disintegrative with religious motive tendencies. The religious issues are very sensitive, so that one cannot easily counter it.

²³Eliraz, Giora, 2004, 67-70

²⁴Sirozi, Muhammad, "The Intellectual Roots of Islamic radicalism in Indonesia", in *The Muslim World* vol. 95, January 2005. At the end of his article, he quotes one opinion, that the fundamentalist in Indonesia is just small groups, so to put to much emphasis on them will potentially look down the majority, and it is counter productive to the fight against radicalism.

²⁵Democracy is a human creation, and shari'a is God's creation, so the Muslims must struggle for the shari'a and not for democracy, say some fundamentalist in Indonesia: see the research from International Center for Islam and Pluralism, "Islam and Peace Building in Indonesia: The analysis of radical movements and their implication for security development prospects" (2004).

Politics is really the main root of the rise of fundamentalism in Indonesia, as also they believe in the conspiracy theory of the West, Jews and Christians, against Muslims around the world, in the spirit of western imperialism. This perception is part from the past memory of colonialism, which tells also that the missionary activities backed up by western conquerors. They think the progressive ideas on Islam as a secularization of the core teachings of Islam, which come from the conspiracy of the enemy of Muslims to weaken the Islam.

The risk is still present. Economic crisis, high degree of the unemployment, the extreme level of the social economic gap, widespread of the corruption, the government failure to enforce the law and the escalation of the inter-ethnic or inter-sectarian tensions and conflicts establish an appropriate setting for the emergence of the radical fundamentalism. Islamic radicalism is born in the condition of politics, economics and social-cultural affairs which, according to the members of the radical groups, back the Muslims into the corner of the society. They feel being treated unfairly, therefore they are not only a religious phenomenon, but also political. Although they remain a small minority, the radicals cause much trouble for the dominant majority, disturbing the pluralist and democratic life of society, and creating violence and terror to achieve its ends. They sent many young people to study at the Middle East, hoping for the greater fundamentalist voices after them coming back to Indonesia. Their attitude in violence physically or through expressions such as declaring instruction to judge other, also the fellow Muslims, as apostates, unbelievers or polytheistic people is the reason to be worried with the presence of radical Islam in Indonesia. The radicals and fundamentalists are worried not only about the non-Muslims but also about the other Muslims²⁶.

They struggle also in the parliamentary process to force the *shari'a* or norms according to the proportionality concept of the society. For example, at 2002 the House of Representatives passed the National Education System bill, which states, among other things, that each student has the right to receive religious instruction by teachers of the same faith. That bill was rejected strongly by the Christians, which viewed the bill as a state intervention into private religious affairs and into private schools. That case grows up because of the worries of the Muslim leaders on many young Muslims studying at Christian schools or universities. After that, they want also to pass the Health system with the same intention. The Congress of Muslims in Indonesia in 2005 recommended soundly the *shari'a*, as the way and solution to overcome the problems of the nation, mostly for the Muslims.

They fight also for their fundamentalism idea through the Ulama Council. On 2005 the Indonesian Ulama Council issued a *fatwa* (edict) condemned the pluralism and secularism and the interreligious prayers. For them pluralism, secularism and liberalism are considered to be in opposition to Islam, so that prohibited (*haram*) for the Muslims, also the interreligious prayer among people of the different religions. In addition, that Ulama Council called the Ahmadiyah is apostates. Those edicts damage the pluralistic idea of the Indonesian society, and protested by many Muslims. They believe that those edicts are considered to condemn the liberal, pluralistic and progressive ideas and movements among Muslims, as then some fundamentalist used that edicts to attack the pluralists and progressiveness.

²⁶The Economist on his special report about Indonesia, December 11, 2004, wrote, "In Java, according to a recent United Nations study, violent religious clashes most commonly occur not between Christians and Muslims, nor between traditional and orthodox Muslims, but among traditional Muslims who suspect one another of practicing black magic".

The awareness of pluralistic identity

Some belief that fundamentalism will evolve into a real political option in Indonesia in front of the counter movements against that fundamentalist religious ideology. The vast majority, however devout, remain remarkably tolerant. The increasing religiosity of many Indonesian Muslims is not a problem in itself. The problem is then not the prevalence of radical views, but the ineffectiveness of the authorities in preventing extremists from putting their ideas into practice. The authorities are doing little to strengthen the moderate voices and discourage extremists. That may, in an analysis in *The Economist*, be partly because both Islam and Indonesian culture attach great importance to harmony and consensus. The memory of Mr. Soeharto's brutal suppression of Muslim activism also makes today's politicians more reluctant to take hard line. However, the biggest factor may be plain inexperience²⁷.

Islam in Indonesia, and I think at around the world, are facing the challenge how to cope with the modern plurality. Muslims in Indonesia have been recognized for a long as having plural faces. In Indonesian history they reacted to the fact of religious pluralism, due to the existence of the non-Muslims, but also the differences among the Indonesian Muslims itself in practicing their religion, in their cultural context and characteristics. The traditionally cultural pluralism now is challenged by the modern cultural of pluralism at the stream of the globalization. Nevertheless, the modern challenges are confronted often with prejudice or suspicion as the negative tendencies against the tradition and religious moral values.

That challenges face Indonesia to support the majority of the moderate Islam. The moderate Muslims themselves confront the phenomenon of radicalism at two levels. First, the abuse and manipulation of certain Islamic doctrines to justify radicalism and terrorism, because of the literal interpretation of Islam. Second, the use of violence and terrorism, which undoubtedly runs contrary to Islam²⁸. However, the progressive and moderate lines of Islam in Indonesia have a long history. We cannot forget the names of Mukti Ali and Munawir Sjadzali, two ministers of the religious affairs, who supported the comparative theology and Islamic studies at Western countries. Thanked to their initiatives, so that spreads the openness to the modern or contextual interpretation of Islam, and grows the young Muslim intellectuals, who based their intellectual discourse on the pluralistic circumstance of Indonesia. We will see some of them.

John L. Esposito, the founding director of the center for Muslim-Christian Understanding of Georgetown University took Abdurrahman Wahid, who advocates a progressive, inclusive, democratic, pluralistic and tolerant Islam, as the example of the voice of the reform of Islam in Indonesia. For Esposito, Abdurrahman Wahid has staunchly opposed those who reassert Islam's role in politics and has warned of the dangers of Islamic fundamentalism, and he espouses a reformist intellectual synthesis and social agenda that distinguishes between unchanging religious doctrines or laws and those that can be altered to accommodate social change. Rejecting legal-formalism or fundamentalism as an aberration and a major obstacle to Islamic reform and to Islam's response to global change, Wahid has spent his life promoting the development of a multifaceted Muslim identity and a dynamic Islamic tradition capable of responding to the realities of modern life. At the Indonesian context it means for Wahid (well known in Indonesia as Gus Dur), as a state in which religion and

²⁷*The Economist*, December 11, 2004, on his special report about Indonesia.

²⁸Azyumardi Azra, "Contemporary Islamic Militant Movements: Challenges to Democracy in Indonesia", in *ICIP Journal*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2005

politic are separate, a society where a Muslim and a non-Muslim are the same. John Esposito calls it as the face of the cosmopolitan Islam at the realities of the global diversity. Hence, he advocates not a (re-) Islamization of Indonesia, but Indonesianization or contextualization of Islam. Islam must be then reinterpreted or reformulated in order to be responsive to the demands of the modern life²⁹. Gus Dur fought for it for long time, although faced many pressure and opponent, especially from the Soeharto alliance, and then from the fundamentalist Islam, during his presidency and after³⁰.

However, we can take also another name: Nurcholish Madjid (d. 2005), who was known for his slogan in the 1970s: "Islam Yes, Islamic party no." He represented a new genre of Muslim scholarship that combined Qur'an-inspired commentary with practical political analysis and social theory. According to him through such way, Indonesia can get away from the polarization between traditionalist Muslims and secular nationalists. He refused the idea of an Islamic state, because there is no Qur'anic injunction for an Islamic state. He then promoted for the commitment to reason in a process of the finding the truth, the absolutely Truth, that is Allah. Therefore, that he calls for an open and inclusive Islam³¹. He criticized then the tendency in Indonesia, giving more importance to quantity then quality. Islam need, as maintained by him, to enter to the liberating process, freeing oneself from traditional values and seeking values, which are oriented toward the future. This process is needed because the umma, because of its own historical growth, is no longer capable of distinguishing those that are transcendental from those that are temporal, so that it has lost the spirit of *ijtihad*. It needs the freedom of thought and open attitudes. Therefore, there is no need to be afraid of the changes, freeing him from the reactionary attitude and closed mentality³².

Islam in Indonesia, as at Southeast Asia, takes on the search of the developing a new and cohesive 'Islamic renaissance', bringing the idea that Islam could play in being functional to social and economic development³³. They develop with strong commitments to the local tradition as well as to the modernity, reflect a diversity of local relevance and use some generalized visions of Islam, in response and in opposition to fundamentalism. That renaissance forces for the intellectual emergence of the Muslims.

They face the problematic of how to make an Islamic modernity, to deal with the basic tension between an Indonesian world-view (*wawasan kebangsaan*) and an Islamic world-view (*wawasan keislaman*). Some young Indonesian Muslims try to find a way to make Islam more responsive to the needs of the local, temporal and modern circumstances of Indonesia, argue for the new theological approach, to be fitting with the contemporary situations of Indonesian society. This new way of approach was aimed to be an alternative to what they regarded as the overly formalist, legalist, scripturalist orientation that characterized many Muslim thinkers and activists. For them, although Islam does not acknowledge the separation between the sacred domain and the profane, the two domains can, and indeed must, be

²⁹Esposito, John, *Makers of Contemporary Islam*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2001, 199-216; Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2002, 139-141.

³⁰Hefner, Robert, 2000, 167-174

³¹Hefner, Robert, 2000, 113-119

³²Majid, Nurcholish, "The Necessity of Renewing Islamic Thought", in Kurzman, Charles (ed.), *Liberal Islam*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 1998, 284-289

³³Stauth, Georg, *Politics and Cultures of Islamization in Southeast Asia*, Bijlefeld, Transcript, 2002, 13-42

differentiated. Islam movements should become not political but cultural movements³⁴. We can find easily then some ideas about reactualization or indigenization of Islam, liberal Islam, neo-modernism, cultural Islam, or contextual *ijtihad*. Nevertheless, we must give notes, that that movement is considered an elitist phenomenon, have important position but among the intellectual circles, though influencing many young Muslims intellectuals. They give just small impact, and do not have influence at the grassroots levels. Moreover, something their approach in the public with their views shocked some, so they received counter reactions from many.

We can then take three examples, which have strong reactions from the other Muslims. One is the publication of the book “*Fiqh lintas agama*” (the *fiqh* beyond the border of religion)³⁵. In this book some young intellectual Muslims, most of them students of Nurcholish Madjid, want to renew the Islamic law (*fiqh*) in the new context of the multi-faith society. *Fiqh* written in Islamic history at the time of conflicts and tensions with the non-Muslims. Islam needs today the new *fiqh*, they propose. The main teachings of Islam are non-sectarian and non-communalistic. Then they used the concept of *hanif*, as the way of Abraham, and Islam as the way of the submission to God. From that then they urge the fellow-Muslims to take the way of dialogue and collaboration for the building the society.

Another example is the effort of Siti Musdah Mulia against polygamy and the enforcement the wearing jilbab in some regions. For long time, there was a feminist reform among the Muslims in Indonesia. Nevertheless, as can be imagined, there is great division and tensions between radical and moderate or progressive, Islamic views of women. As director of religious research and social affairs at the Ministry of Religions Affairs she completed the legal draft of the law, that allowed interfaith marriages, gave the right of a woman to divorce her husband and criticized the practice of wearing headscarf (*jilbab*) - although she uses it - and the polygamy, which cause anger among the ulama and especially the fundamentalists. She holds that some Islamic laws, which regulated by the some local government are very discriminative towards women, or are not sensitive to women’s aspirations and interests. She promotes justice and gender equality from the perspective of Islam. For her, the spirit of Islam lies in its liberating ethics reflected in its concept of *tauhid*³⁶.

The last example I take is that of Ulil Abshar-Abdalla, the most popular young Indonesian Muslim intellectual. He is popular due to his popular writings at the newspaper in popular language, but also because of his blood was allowed to shed as said by the fundamentalist. His main concern is the revitalizing the understanding of Islam, which begins with the inter-textual interpretation of the God’s revelation in the Qur’an: go beyond the text, he says. The Qur’an could not put as a merely isolated text from the context at the time of revelation, and as the word of revelation, Qur’an could not also position as an isolated text from our context

³⁴Eliraz, Giora, 2004, 78-89

³⁵Mun’im A. Sirry (ed.), *Fiqh Lintas Agama: Membangun Masyarakat Inklusif-Pluralis*, Jakarta, Paramadina, 2004. Habib Rizieq, the chief of the FPI (: The Front to defense of Islam) is called that book as the book of infidel, because they agree with the teachings of the other religions.

³⁶Musdah Mulia, “Draft Islamic Law Code Reflects Response of Muslim Women” in *The Jakarta Post* October 28, 2004

today³⁷. Islam needs the reformation, he said many times. For him that approach help the new awareness for the Muslims to make dialog with the others and with the modern world. His main concern is to contextualize Islam in the pluralistic Indonesian context. Muslims must discern between their basic teachings of Islam and Arabic culture at the body of Islam, so that Islam can be inculturated at every cultures and context of realities. That is the approach to find the way against dogmatism and against the injustice. Dogmatism and injustice is the enemy of Islam, he said³⁸.

The development of Islamic culture in Indonesia is very much the result of a dialogue between the universal values of Islam and the cultural characteristic of the Indonesian society. At the purpose of that dialogue, the pluralist Indonesian Muslims see even the relevance of national ideology of Pancasila, the ideology that put the multi-faith and multi-cultural characteristic of the nation as its main and important element of the progress and modernization of the country.

The challenge on dialogue

Christians are often anxious to make a dialogue with Muslims, because they think always about the conservative tendency of Islam with their movement for *shari'a*, which they believe would be discriminated or oppressed the minorities. Muslims are also afraid to make dialogue with Christians, because they have suspicion that behind the way of the friendship and gesture for dialogue from the Christians existing the motive for evangelization, makes the Muslims be christened. The past experience at the time of colonialism forms that prejudgment among the Muslims, and the today's experience on Islamic brotherhood movement and the resurgence awareness on the identity of Muslims with his social and political implication shape the anxiety of the Christians for the interreligious dialogue with Muslims. We can find its phenomenon in Indonesia. However, this phenomenon, as we already saw, was created by many factors.

The non-Muslims are worried about the presence of radical Islam, which tends to get bigger, in Indonesia. However, the present situation arises from complex social, economic, political and cultural causes. It cannot be simplified just to a conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims, although we cannot refuse the growing suspicions and prejudices between religious communities, so that the conflicts can be easily provoked. Correctly, relations between Christians and Muslims are complicated by many different demographic, political, economy, social, historical and ethic factors. The Christians in Indonesia are from Flores, Maluku, Batak, Daya, Papua, Chinese, Manado, and some Javanese ethnic groups. In many places although the Muslims control the political system, the Christians are in a generally stronger in economic and social position. It can raise tensions in relationships. It is the source of the social envy, as the people say about it. In addition, we can say that the root of conflict and radicalism are not pure religious.

The conflict of religions in Indonesia is influenced more by the armed or paramilitary is tendencies among Muslims and Christians that increased at the end of the military

³⁷Ulil Abshar-Abdalla, "Menyegarkan kembali pemahaman Islam" in *Kompas* November 18, 2002; Ulil Abshar-Abdalla, "Avoiding Bibliolatry: the importance of Revitalizing the Understanding of Islam", in www.islamlib.com

³⁸Ulil Abshar-Abdalla, "Die göttliche Offenbarung ist lebendig. Neue Anregungen zum Verständnis des Islams", im *Südostasien* Jg 19, Nr. 4, 2003

dictatorship of Soeharto. That is political problems and tensions, than religious conflict. Therefore, we can find easily some comments about the conflicts especially in Poso, Maluku, they says the main problem is in Jakarta and not in Poso or Maluku. However, we cannot deny the religious frictions as one of the main rationale at those conflicts. The bishop of Ambon, Maluku in many times pointed his finger out on the military officers in Jakarta behind the conflicts between Christian and Islam in his area. Some believe that radical groups have been engineered by certain army generals, and as most believe by the Cendana family and Soeharto's circles. We cannot prove it conclusively, but it becomes big and spreading issues due to the report from local Christian leaders³⁹.

The sentiments against the Christians, due to the growing number of conversions to Christianity⁴⁰ and the better social position at the society, because of the better education and social-economic condition, raise mainly since the middle 1960s. However, those sentiments during the early years of Soeharto era could be restrained, but the exploded since the last years of his regime until now. Moreover, the Muslim leadership was caught off guard by this rapid Christian advance⁴¹. Another reason is the phenomenon of the two greatest newspapers in Indonesia, which belong to the Chinese-Christian affiliation groups, and the reality that Christian schools, universities and hospitals are considered as the good, or the best, at their cities. The issue of proselytizing or Christianization in social and charity work of the Church spread among the Muslims, also at the time of tsunami in Sumatra or earthquakes in other areas. They blame the aids from Western countries used also as the Christianization movements.

Department of religious affairs declared in 1978 a decree that banned missionary activities among citizens who already professed religion. Christian Churches were the main target from this decree. But the Christians protested, because many Javanese, especially, are Muslim in name only and not practicing it, and mainly because the missionary activities is the one of the main characteristics of the mission and life of the Church. That decree was then a year later strengthened by the joint decision of the Department of Religious and Home Affairs making more restrictions on the religious activities of minorities. Those cases could be coinciding with the vandalism against the churches in Indonesia. In the 21 years of the Soekarno' era two churches were damaged (0,008 per month), at Soeharto's (32 years) 456 churches destroyed (1,2 per month), in the short time of Habibie, 17 months, 156 churches were damaged (9,2 per month) and in the presidency of Abdurrahman Wahid (21 months) there were 232 churches destroyed⁴². The Muslims think they are the victims because of the domination and superiority of Christianity, and some proclaim that the Christians slaughtered

³⁹Theodor Kampschule vom Missio Germany at his report writes, "Christians reported that soldiers took part in the fighting on the side of the Muslims. ... His (President Abdurrahman Wahid -red.) order that the Jihad militias should be prevented from leaving Java was ignored by senior figures in the army and the police". See Kampschule, Theodor, *Human Rights in Indonesia: Religious Freedom and Violence*, Aachen, Missio, 2002, 13-16

⁴⁰Human rights report from the US Department of State 2003 quoted one source from the Catholic officials that approximately 10.000 Muslims convert to Catholicism each year.

⁴¹Hefner, Robert, 2000, 107-108. He calculates that over the next two decades after 1960s the number of Christians in Java increased by another two million, a rate three to four times that of simple population growth.

⁴²I take the data from the research of ICIP, and also from Kampschulte, Theodor, *Human Rights in Indonesia: Religious Freedom and Violence*, Aachen, Missio, 2002 ... I don't have data at the time of Megawati and Indonesian president today, Susilo Bambang Yudoyono.

Muslims, consequently the attacks the Christians is an obligation for them. Those accidents took place not spontaneously, but clearly well planned, preceded by the distribution of pamphlets about Christianization and the calling to get the action against it and against the church buildings.

We can take then a note from Azyumardi Azra, one of a noted Indonesian Muslim thinker, who analyzes the causes of the conflicts between Christians and Muslims in Indonesia. He lists some factors: circulation of publications containing either plans for religious expansions or materials considered to be wrong or blasphemous; aggressive expansion of religious propaganda; use of houses or construction of new buildings for religious worship in the location where people of other faith live: in Muslim surroundings; adoption and implementation of certain government regulations which are considered to be religious propaganda or to be discriminatory against certain religion; public presents of religious rituals and celebrations; mutual suspicion relating to the intended role of the other religion⁴³. To understand that analysis we can not deny that the Pentecostalism and evangelical movements with its offensive fundamentalist thought, which is spreading in many cities, make the tensions and prejudice to the Christians increase.

Mahmoud Ayoub noted Pope John Paul II gave an address to the meeting of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences in Bandung, Indonesia in 1990 about the commitment to evangelization. He wrote that the Muslims around the world believe that Indonesia, the largest Muslims country, is a prime target of this evangelization⁴⁴. Whether true or not, for Ibrahim Abu-Rabi, John Paul II saw in Indonesia the model of freedom of religion in an Islamic environment. The Pope according to him seems to support the spirit of Pancasila, and to be saying that the right of the Christian community in Muslim countries can be best served in the contact of the democracy and deepening understanding of each other's faith. In addition, Indonesia is one of the examples⁴⁵.

Correctly, we can affirm that religious freedom, including the right to change the religion according to one's own conscience, has been maintained in Indonesia. Christians are fundamentally free to practice their religion. There are officially no laws or regulations that fundamentally discriminate against religious minorities. However, in reality the campaign is progressively growing to position Muslims in the important posts, and there are some restrictions on religious activities of non-Muslims. The Indonesian Bishops Conference⁴⁶ asked rhetorical at some of its messages or pastoral notes in recent years: will the face of the plurality of cultures and religions in Indonesia be ended; is the unity of the nation still important, do all believe in the equality of right and responsibility as the citizen of the nation, why some attacked and condemned us because of our religions? Can we say that religious tolerance is only something, which moves on the surface or superficially? In its Easter message in 2001 KWI examined that for many years Indonesians lived in pseudo peace, also among religions, because of the fearful living under the ideology of stability and security at

⁴³Banawiratma, Johannes B., "Interreligious Relationship in Indonesia", in Bertsch, Ludwig u.a. (Hrsg.), *Viele Wege - ein Ziel: Herausforderungen im Dialog der Religionen und Kulturen*, Freiburg, Herder, 2006, 276

⁴⁴Ayoub, Mahmoud, "Pope John Paul II on Islam", in Sherwin, Bryon & Harold Kasimow (eds.), *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue*, Maryknoll, Orbis, 1999, 179-180

⁴⁵Abu-Rabi, Ibrahim, "John Paul II and Islam", in Sherwin, Bryon & Harold Kasimow (eds.), *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue*, Maryknoll, Orbis, 1999, 188-191

⁴⁶I will use the Indonesian acronym KWI (Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia.)

the time of military dictatorship of Soeharto. After his falls, the real face of the Indonesian society reveals tensions and conflicts among ethnic groups, religions, and the groups of political, social or economical interest.

In its 1997 Lenten message, the Indonesian Bishop's Conference wrote that sometimes Indonesian Catholics feel insecure and fear the loss of the practice of freedom to worship. For that condition, we can understand when the Christians ask about their future in Indonesia. That form of the freedom of religion is under threat for the militant and fundamentalist groups of Muslims. The Christians ask about their future because the government and police seem not to react or give protection to them.

The Church takes as a priority the need to intensify the dialogue with the moderate majority of the Muslims in order to promote the public awareness opposing the violation of human rights. The Church itself has the good relationship with many Islamic groups. These explain why many young Muslims are prepared to help guard Church buildings, mainly during the Christmas and Eastern Feasts. At the bomb attacks on some Churches at Christmas Eve 2000, some young Muslims killed or injured. These give an example for the fundamentalists that every attack on the Christians will injure or kill the other Muslims, because at every case, also economically and socially, the Muslims were more the victim than the Christians of those attacks.

In that situation the KWI strengthens, the Catholics are not afraid, be not hate but love the others, they quoted then Rom 12,14, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them". We can remember then one of the famous remarks of the late Anthony de Mello, that sometimes that is easier for religion to make its followers to hate than to love others. That is also the question from Indonesian Bishop's Conference, but they ask the Catholics to learn always from the love and compassion of Jesus Christ. All faithfully are called to spread and proclaim the seed of love and refusing the violence. The practice of religions in Indonesia, says the KWI, still at the ritual and symbolic level: they worship God ritually and exercise the norms of religion, but this custom does not influence daily life, because there is still corruption, injustice and immoral conduct, living in hatred or violence, and emphasizing self-interest or the interest of one's primordial group. The number of the religious buildings in Indonesia is growing up and they are always full at the time of the worship, but the piety and humility could not easily be found.

In its message after the 2001 meeting of KWI, the bishops spoke about the issue of *shari'a*. They said that the *shari'a* is against the vision and goal of the state, and the nation ideology of Pancasila, as formulated by the founding fathers of the Republic. Every attempt to change it means an effort to replace the character of the Nation, as pluralist society, and a threat for the religious freedom for the minority non-Islam. Indonesia is not a religion state. They warned also that the misuse of religion could be easily happened when there are no separation between religion and state, because violence, discrimination, or tyranny of religious power would be easily took place. With this remark the Indonesian Bishop's Conference, assert the opinion of the Catholic Church against every movement to realize the *shari'a*, as already found in many regions, and as urge by some Islamic Parties or groups for performing it in all regions of Indonesia, mainly the regions that Muslims are big majority. The Bishops speaks then about the tendency of communalism

The more Indonesia succeeds in stabilizing her democracy and building a democratic culture and economic development, the more we can see that Indonesian Islam will be more an active

and stabilizing factor for pluralism in Indonesia. It needs also an evaluation of modernist cultures, modern values, also in the name of democracy, of what is anti-religious or morally decadent.

The issue of violence is still relevant. In its 2004 message, KWI addressed the phenomenon of the culture of violence in the Indonesian society, also in religious institutions. For the battle against the culture of violence, the Indonesian Cardinal together with the leaders of the two biggest Islamic organizations Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah and also the leaders of Confucianism, Buddhism and Hinduism have joined together in a moral movement. The first action was the action against the Iraq war, as an open movement in order that some Muslims do not interpret the war as the war of religions: Christianity against Islam. Mainly they publicly condemn the misuse of religions for terrorism and violence. Authentic religion does not advocate terrorism or violence, but seeks to promote the way of unity and peace for the whole community, that is one of their commitments. Two of their important movements were their visit to conflict area of Maluku and their open rejection of *shari'a* for the Indonesian society. After that, the spreading initiative for *jihād* and *shari'a* is slowly but undoubtedly abating until today⁴⁷. We cannot find easily public opinion about that, and the strong views to reject them are increasing in public.

The struggle for justice. Theology in Indonesia is much inspired by the theology of liberation. The context of the poverty gives the reason for the development of the liberative reflection. The Church itself gives witness of faith in its social and charity works. Among the progressive Muslim thinkers, also urge the need of the implementation of social agenda, democracy and equality before the law as the main agenda of the Islam in Indonesia. At the field of interreligious dialogue the Church based on *Nostra Aetate* that speaks about the mutual understanding and work together in protecting and promoting social justice, good moral as well as peace and freedom for the benefit of all. The Indonesian Church stresses this decree as the motivation and calling to collaborate mainly with the Muslims in building the Indonesian society.

For that purpose the Indonesian Bishops' Conference in 2004 wrote a Pastoral Note entitled, "Public civility: towards a new habitus of the nation: Social justice for all", and then became the main theme for the National Meeting of the Indonesian Catholic Church in 2005. The Indonesian bishops considered that the problematic of interreligious dialogue place at the public domain and powers. They recommended then the new way of thinking and act to renew the public domain (state, market and community) as the condition for the reformation of the society. The balancing power of the state, market and community is needed, so that corruption, violence and ecological destruction could be prevented. What we need is the new culture, the alternative culture, or the counter culture in front of the dominant culture of corruption, materialism, injustice and violence, says the Bishops.

That culture can be growing and spreading when begins from the basic communities. So then, KWI at the National Meeting of the Indonesian Catholic Church 2005 called the participants more for the lay and young people. The ratio of the participants was at the balance 50% men and 50% women, and 60% delegations from every diocese were under 40 years old. First, they reflected what the meaning of the faith of the incarnated Son of God at the context of

⁴⁷Magnis-Suseno, Franz, "Christen und Muslime in Indonesien. Perspektiven für das 21. Jahrhundert", in *Zur Debatte* 7/2004

Indonesia. That faith encourages the faithful to renew life and society. A new *habitus* for a new public civility is the program of the Catholic Church of Indonesia.

Implementing that program, the Church put her action first at the basic level, the level of family life and basic human/Christian communities. In addition, she stress then the education and charity works of the Church as the means for spreading that new cultures. She considers also that that way could proceed by working together with everybody who has good will, especially the Muslims. The Catholics could not work alone, she is a small companionship, and be parting of the society. The Indonesian Church is a community that seeks a path of integral human development in the context of religious harmony and tolerance, offering and receiving much within a complex cultural milieu. That approach took by the KWI after considering the reality that in the midst of conflicts commonly the relationships between the Muslims and Christians, mainly at the grassroot level or at the basic communities are fine. In addition, at the moment of conflict in many places at the places of that tension, the relations, especially among Christians and traditionalist Muslim organization, Nahdlatul Ulama went well. The leaders from both communities knew that the provocations from outside area, under the patronage of some elites, inflamed those conflicts. Building the relationship be better is the important way to refuse the provocation and to protect the local society from infiltration.

The Christians know well that the great majority of Indonesian Muslims want to live in the pluralism characteristic of the Indonesia. They want, together with non-Muslims, to struggle for the democracy, justice, peace and humanity for the Indonesian society. They know that fundamentalism or radicalism do not give solutions for crises of the society but will produce another crisis for the country. Most Indonesian Muslims believe that the pluralist and humane understanding of Islam will give the real answer. They struggle for that, and the Church wants to support them firmly. That is the main way and field of the interreligious dialogue in Indonesia.

The dogmatic issues, such as the questions about the divinity of Jesus or the Trinity are not the main and first issues on agenda of dialogue in Indonesia. However, we believe that the open interreligious relationship will develop the open und solid theology, above all the theology of religions. That is the theology, in which people will not think only textually, but also contextually: to interpret the teaching of faith in text in dialogue with the concrete life, and to find the message of faith in the context of daily life in dialogue with the text of the teaching of faith. However, the theological dialogue is not ready to make intensive when the problematic and dialogical collaboration on life together and social problems are not yet good developed.

Then at the context of the Indonesian society, the Catholic still emphasize the dialogue of life and dialogue of social works. That is the basic condition for the other level of dialogue: the dialogue of spiritual experience and of theological exchange. Living together in open and neighborly spirit, in the struggle together for the justice and peace, for the common moral values as citizen of the nation in the pluralistic context of cultures, ethnics and religions are the main and basic target.

WHAT IS THE TASK OF THE READER?

The Text and the Context in Islahi's Qur'an commentary: *Tadabbur-i-Qur'an*

Herman Roborgh S.J.

Islahi was born in north India in 1906 and graduated from the *madrasat al-islah* in Azamgarh – hence the name “Islahi”. He started his career as a journalist but decided to devote his time to study under the guidance of Maulana Farahi. From 1925 until Farahi's death five years later, Islahi lived in close association with Farahi and mastered the latter's approach to the Qur'an. After Farahi's death, Islahi started teaching at *madrasat al islah* and published a monthly journal, *Al Islah*.

In 1940, 'Abu 'l-'ala Mawdudi founded the *Jama'at-i-islami*, a religious-political organization. Islahi joined the *Jama'at* and eventually became one of its key members. However, in the 1950s, serious differences arose within the *Jama'at* and Islahi left the organization. By this time, Islahi was living in Pakistan.

Since leaving the *Jama'at*, Islahi began work on a commentary on the Qur'an (*Tadabbur-i-Qur'an*), which developed and applied the insights of his teacher, Farahi. After the completion of *Tadabbur* in 1980, Islahi established a study circle where he gave instruction on the Qur'an and Hadith according to the Farahi-Islahi approach. Islahi died in Lahore in 1997.

Tadabbur-i-Qur'an consists of nine volumes in Urdu and presents the argument that the Qur'an is thematically and structurally coherent. Islahi calls this *nazm al qur'an*. He divides the Surahs into seven Surah Groups and finds a theme or central idea ('*umud*') for each of these Surah Groups. In the light of this theme, Islahi proceeds to describe the context and to understand the meaning of each of the Surahs. He concludes that the Qur'an has one basic message, which refers to the decline (*ma'zul*) of the People of the Book and the ascendancy of the Muslim community (*mansub-i-amanat*). According to this message, which he finds repeated in many places in the Qur'an (for example, cf. verse 103 of Surah *Al A'raf*), the mandate to uphold the law of religion and of justice that was given to the People of the Book has now been transferred to the Muslim community. (Cf. verses 8, verses 33-34 and verse 42 of Surah *Al Maidah*). Henceforward, it is the religious and political responsibility of the Muslims to bear witness to the truth and to establish justice on earth.

A good example of the way Islahi establishes *nazm al quran* is the way he analyzes Surah Group Three, which consists of 15 Surahs. Islahi identifies a verse in almost each of these Surahs that links up with the main theme ('*umud*') concerning the victory of the Muslims and the humiliating defeat of their opponents. Islahi's articulation of this theme is usually based on a particular understanding of one or two key words of the particular verse.

Besides *nazm al qur'an*, Islahi mentions two other internal principles of interpretation: the study of language and parallel texts (*nazair*). Moreover, the six external principles of interpretation are as follows: *sunnah* of the Prophet, *hadith*, occasions of revelation, former Scriptures, history of the Arabic people and former Qur'an commentaries.

Islahi demonstrates *nazm al qur'an* by using certain words that bring out the internal context of the Qur'an itself (*qarina, siyaq o sabaq, siyaq-i-kalam*). These terms describe the context in the narrow sense of the word, namely, the environment of meaning that emerges from the interconnectedness of the verses themselves.

Islahi does not depend on the traditional *asbab al nuzul* (occasions of revelation) because he finds the context within the text of the Qur'an itself. However, he frequently draws on the culture and history of the people living at the time of revelation to illustrate the context. He also quotes from the Bible to provide details of narratives that the Qur'an relates only in brief. Further, he draws on books of history and the *sirat* literature to clarify many points.

The time and situation in which a verse was revealed (*mauqa' o mahal dalil hai*) as well as its background (*pas manzar*) indicate the meaning of the verse. Without resorting to the occasions of revelation (*asbab al nuzul*), Islahi tries to describe the historical, cultural, social and political environment into which the Qur'an was revealed. His approach to the interpretation of the Qur'an is thus a novel one but it depends largely on intuition.

The following three examples illustrate how Islahi uses the external context to understand the meaning of a verse or a group of verses:

1. The punishment of Pharaoh's sorcerers.
2. The rebuke of the Prophet's wives.
3. The victory of the Muslims in Mecca.

1. The Punishment of Pharaoh's Sorcerers

Islahi explains the extreme punishment meted out to the sorcerers in terms of the political nature of the crime committed. As verse 71 of Surah *Ta Ha* says:

I shall most certainly cut off your hands and feet in great numbers, because of (your) perverseness, and I shall most certainly crucify you in great numbers on trunks of palm-trees. The sorcerers had challenged the political authority of Pharaoh's government and so their crime was treason and not simply a decision to become believers. Islahi explains that Pharaoh had to deal with such a crime harshly in order to establish his authority as ruler. This is one example Islahi uses to show that the Qur'an has a political message.

2. The Rebuke of the Prophet's Wives

According to Islahi, verses 28-34 of Surah *Al Ahzab* are not an expression of censure for the Prophet's wives. These verses must be understood in the light of the corrupt customs in society at that time when the hypocrites were bent on spreading scandal in the community to discredit the believers. Besides, some women in the community were urging the wives of the Prophet to abandon the simplicity of their lifestyle. Islahi says the verse proclaims the end of that corrupt society and establishes the sincerity of the Prophet's wives. Islahi uses passages like this to stress the reform that Islam brought.

3. The Victory of the Muslims in Mecca

Islahi interprets several verses relating to the struggle between the early Muslim community at Medina and the pagans of Mecca and sees these verses as a prophecy of the gradual conquest of all Arabia by the Muslims. By giving a specific, material connotation to the

word for “the earth” (*al ard*) in verse 44 of Surah *Al Anbiya*, Islahi says the verse refers to the actual, physical victory by the Muslims over Mecca:

Have they never yet seen how We visit the earth (with Our punishment), gradually depriving it of all that is best thereon?

The same word for “the earth” appears in verse 41 of Surah *Ar Ra’d* and Islahi says it refers to the region around Mecca. Again, in verse 60 of Surah *Al Isra*:

And lo! We said unto thee, (O Prophet): “Behold, thy Sustainer encompasses all mankind (within His knowledge and might).

Islahi says these words refer to the gradual conquest of Mecca by the Muslims. Islam took on the responsibilities of political power.

Conclusions:

Islahi remains a textualist because he is concerned with the “original meaning” (*ibtidai mafhum*) of the text based on the correct understanding of the context (*sahih mauqa’ o mahal*), as it was perceived by those who first heard it. He implies that this one correct meaning will remain valid for all times and places.

His textualism is also evident from his concern for the abstract and the literal meaning of words and sentences with reference to the context in the narrow sense of the word. Moreover, he prefers to find the meaning of words in the Qur’an by showing how the same word or phrase is used in parallel texts (*nazair*), which seems to be the approach that the traditional commentaries called “interpreting the Qur’an by the Qur’an”.

However, Islahi also shows a tendency towards contextualism by his constant reference to the specific, external situation in which the Qur’an was revealed. He views this context in the light of the central idea or theme (*‘umud*) of the Surah Group. Islahi is involved in a circular way of interpreting the Qur’an by showing how the theme clarifies the context and how the context illustrates and supports the theme.

As author of *Tadabbur-i-Qur’an*, Islahi depends on his own assumptions, perceptions and insights to formulate the basic idea or theme (*‘umud*) of the Surahs. However, he does not manage to involve the readers of his commentary in the process of interpretation. Even though he occasionally refers to the need to reconsider the meaning of a word in the light of the changed circumstances of the present world, Islahi is more concerned to convince his readers of his own conclusions than to invite them to ponder over (*tadabbur*) the meaning of the Qur’an for themselves – according to their own situation and context.

Discussion Session after the talk:

Three questions were posed:

1. What is your main criticism of Islahi?
2. What are your criteria for criticizing Islahi?
3. What has this study of Islahi’s work done for you as a person?

The three paragraphs that follow provide a brief answer to each of these questions.

As regards the first question, my main criticism of Islahi is that he imposes his own formulation of the theme on each Surah and on each of the seven Surah Groups of the Qur’an. Some of the themes that Islahi suggests are very general and some are more specific.

Islahi asks the reader to understand every verse in the light of the theme that Islahi proposes for each Surah. This hampers the freedom of the reader to discover the more universal meaning of the Qur'an in the changing circumstances of the world.

In the Preface that Islahi wrote for his commentary, he outlined the various principles of interpretation he would use. I have examined how Islahi has made use of these principles of interpretation in his commentary. My criteria for criticizing Islahi are thus the tools that Islahi himself provides. Did he use these tools consistently and effectively? On the contrary, did any of these tools of interpretation become an obstacle for discovering the meaning of the Qur'an?

The study of Islahi's commentary has given me a deeper knowledge of and appreciation for the Qur'an. This in-depth study has opened up the problems connected with understanding this text today. In particular, my study of Islahi's commentary has given me an insight into the way many Muslims of the sub-continent, who read this kind of commentary, obtain their knowledge of the Qur'an and it has made me aware of the differences that exist among them about the meaning of the Qur'an. I have become aware that the Qur'an is much more than these commentaries can ever express.



THE JESUIT TASKS IN MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

Felix Körner, S.J.

Three preliminary remarks:

- (i) Meetings of Jesuits are possibilities for discernment in community. I use this possibility with gratitude.
- (ii) I claim that my list of “Jesuit tasks in Muslim–Christian dialogue” is exhaustive. This is not arrogance but a request. If you think I have left out a task, explain me what it is and why it should be on the list.
- (iii) Much of interreligious reflection and theology of religions is useless for me because I do not know what exactly people are talking about. It is simply too general. Just like this last sentence. In order not to commit the same mistake again I will from now on, at least in this contribution, tell you exactly of what, rather, of whom I am thinking when I propose my

Five Theses:

1. Meryem Çiçek

Meryem is a 60 year old Armenian Apostolic widow with two children, who are well integrated into our multi-denominational community in Ankara. Meryem has started to work as the Ankara Catholic Church’s receptionist. I was recently present when she explained our chapel to a group of Muslim visitors. She said: “Here is the book—you know, it’s like the Koran. And here is the altar—it is pretty much the mihrab. And here is Mother Mary, whom Muslims also revere. You can light a candle in front of her.” I was quite amused about what I heard. Meryem was explaining Christianity as another form of Islam. The Turkish textbooks of religious education do precisely this.

The first task Jesuits have in interreligious dialogue is to help Christians in their ‘lay discussions’. This is the most frequent level of dialogue, although it strangely does not feature in the Church’s reflections on dialogue. When the visitors, lead by Meryem, were still pausing in front of Mother Mary, I asked whether I might add something, which they accepted. I said: “When you publish a baby picture of Prime Minister Erdoğan, he is likely to sue you. And a baby Muhammad in the newspaper may have even more severe consequences. But why is it not ridiculous to show Jesus as a baby?” One of the visiting women said “Saflık!” (purity!). I continued: “Recently I discovered how the atmosphere in our house changed when we had a new born canary bird. And I remember my brother, who spoke a totally different language when his first child was born. Children change us because they are weak. Jesus’ power is that power of the weak which changes our hearts.”

Here is my first thesis:

We have to provide theology for the lay discussions. These discussions need

- *touching formula which express the core of Christianity*
- *not win*
- *personal testimony.*

2. Mehmet Paçacı

Mehmet is one to the most promising Koran exegetes of Turkey in that he has, in addition to his standard theological and tafsîr formation, academic experience with New Testament

scholarship and hermeneutical philosophy. For Turkey, Mehmet was one of the heads of 'Islamic Modernism', as the Ankara school of theology used to characterise itself. In my doctoral thesis I spoke of an hermeneutical revisionism—and I suggested that a theologian of Mehmet's quality should lead his exegetical thinking on to systematic revisions. I do not really think that these two impulses of mine—"revisionism" and the call for fundamental theology—were vital in it, but: In the last couple of years Mehmet Paçacı has turned. His turn may not be 180°, because one much more probable influence than my own on Mehmet is Hans-Georg Gadamer. He was important for the old, the Modernis Paçacı already. The new Mehmet Paçacı simply seems to take more seriously than before Gadamer's call for a "rehabilitation of the tradition". Paçacı now makes three points.

- a. He declares exegesis as a purely technical discipline, whose research will always end in a descriptive sentence of the type 'What the Koran says in the passage referred to this and that situation and, then, meant this and that.'
- b. Modernism has been obsessed with exegesis. It was a "textualism", an unnecessary, indeed fatal import from Europe, i.e. from Reformation.
- c. Islam must be put back into its classical role as producer of norms for people; and Islam does this only through kelâm (kalām) and fıkıh (fiqh).

In thinkers like Mehmet Paçacı we can already find plenty of fruits of patient and professional dialogue, ventured by men like Tom Michel, Christian Troll and Dan Madigan. Paçacı's interest in Western methodology *and* his criticism of it owes much to his Catholic contacts. Our Muslim-Christian task is here to search together—which has an element of learning from each other—how to tackle the present life questions.

Mehmet is seriously pleading for a re-introduction of the Ottoman millet system, and in dialogues with him—both private, in his office, or in Munich, where we recently organized a meeting through Eugen Biser foundation—I cannot say that I already have a solution which I only need to convey to him. Christian views on post national state power are still to be clarified.

Here is my second thesis:

We have to support the formation of theologians and other opinion leaders within Islam, so that they can

- *get top quality tools and resources*
- *find an authentic synthesis for scientific and spiritual lives*
- *transport their ideas into their own identities and communities.*

3. Çağrı Can

Çağrı is 23 and has just graduated from an Open University course in economics. He has been a member of an American-Turkish evangelical group, which baptized him 3 months after their first contact. Now, for the last one and a half years he has been interested in—and in sincere contact with—Catholicism. He is one of our catechumens. (Of course, we will not re-baptize him, but he will undergo the at least three years of training like anyone else from a non-Christian background who wants to be a Catholic Christian in Turkey.) A theologically rather promising reflection needs to be set in here. We are dealing with a large religious entity that has come about after the centuries in which Christianity defined its canon and basic theological terminology. We are dealing with a religious entity which shares a lot with us – it is in serious deviation, because it does not accept the sacramental authority of the Church.

I have deliberately formulated the last sentences ambiguously. I wanted you to think I was talking about Islam. But I am talking about evangelical Protestantism. I do not intend to mislead you - I only want to invite you to take Evangelicalism as a help for casting a fresh look on our task as a presence among Muslims. I took Çağrı to World Youth Day 2005 in Cologne. The feeling of World Church with its identity markers plus the non-pompous reflectiveness of Benedict XVI as well as the thoroughly Ignatian pre-programme [‘magis’], prepared by young Jesuits in Germany, have changed Çağrı’s life. Therefore, here is my third thesis.

We have to live and make liveable for others a clearly recognizable Catholicity, not as the appeal of the crowd and seductive pseudo-liturgy. But, rather, in the Ignatian sense of mystical experience: The individual creature put before the Creator to be transformed into the body of the mission of Christ.—I think this also means that we need to open a church in the centre of Ankara so as to be able to witness Catholic spiritualities and mentalities.

4. Hansjörg Schmid

Dr. Schmid works for the Stuttgart Catholic Academy, which has a focus on Muslim-Christian understanding. Mr. Schmid prepares meetings of Muslim and Christian thinkers. When preparing a new academy conference he sometimes asks me whether I have new Muslim intellectuals to recommend for the respective subject they are preparing. This brings me to my fourth thesis:

We have to feed our knowledge of Muslims and their Islam into our Western societies, in order to:

- *promote mutual understanding and its intellectual processing for a development of our self-understandings.*
- *provide discernment services for our home Churches in Islam related questions.*

5. Alper

The largest department of philosophy in Turkey—that of the state run English language *Middle East Technical University* (METU)—has invited me to start teaching philosophical anthropology from September 21 onwards. The university knows that I am a Jesuit. Since classes haven’t started, I do not know my students yet. I can only extrapolate from a sociology student of the same university who taught me Turkish a couple of years ago, Alper. METU is not a very Muslim place at all. But I won’t hide the religious inspiration of what I’ll say, though I will clearly and only teach philosophy. What I’ll in fact do is present a view of what it is to be human, in the light of a series of crucial concepts of German anthropological philosophy. A person (!) has a job. That is not only work, it is *Beruf* (profession). *Beruf* actually means vocation. It was Martin Luther who claimed that not only the religious has a *Beruf* but every person in their worldly work, too. That implies a striking change of perspective. Your work is what you individually are called to do. But only when it is taken in the Ignatian sense, it reaches its punch line. You can be incorporated into the mission of Christ, that is human and Divine work as sacramentally intertwined. So, an anthropological philosophical reflection on “Beruf” is the source for rediscovering the value of your job and life. Thus, here is the fifth and last thesis.

We have to demonstrate the plausibility of the Christian treasures even to those whom we do not expect to find their ways to baptism.

Let me sum up. Our five tasks are

- theology for lay discussion
- resourcing Muslim opinion leaders
- Ignatian catechesis
- discernment for the Church
- sharing the treasures.

All other tasks I cannot but see as a waste of time. Maybe, however, you convince me of something else.

Concluding remark: Considerations by Jean-Marc Balhan, Dan Madigan and Christian Troll from the discussion after the talk are already included in this text.

THE VOCATION TO LOVE ISLAM OF THE MONASTIC COMMUNITY OF AL-KHALIL

Paolo Dall'Oglio S.J.

Presentation

The Community of Deir Mar Musa is really happy to welcome the Jesuits involved in Islamic Studies and who have come for this meeting. As a matter of fact this Community owes much to the Jesuits. The obvious reason is that the founder is a Jesuit, but some deeper reasons can be found. In fact, I, Paolo, entered the Society of Jesus after the 32nd General Congregation in which the missiological word of “inculturation” was the new way of seeing the evangelical mission for the Jesuits, but in the end also for the Church. When, during the Ignatian month, I felt a strong call to offer my Jesuit life for the “Islamic Mission”, this meant immediately a process of inculturation. It is not necessary to show historically how this new word corresponds to an important aspect of the Jesuit missionary attitude, especially in the First Society (16th/18th century).

I was still only 23 years old when I met Father Kolvenbach at the airport in Beirut where I started my Arabic and Islamic Studies in 1977. Inculturation in the Islamic context there was nearly impossible: Oriental Christians live in their own cultural contexts and both communities (Muslim and Christian) have developed a way to keep their identity “waterproof” and protect their sense of belonging. The style of the colonial *mission civilisatrice* is associated with rationalizations like “you have to carry the Cross of always being seen as a foreigner”. Nevertheless, I started to forbid myself to think other than in Arabic and I was very much helped by the Oriental Prayer of the Heart. I tried to keep up my inculturation effort even during my studies in Naples and Rome. I truly had a marvelous “honeymoon” year with Islam in 1980/1981 in Damascus, living in the mosques and dancing with the Sufis. It was in August, 1982, as a theological student that I met Deir Mar Musa. I was not fitting easily into my Jesuit life. I had big hopes and big needs for personal and common religious life, together with this desire of deep inculturation both in the Islamic context and the Christian oriental one. How was I to put all this together? How to put together life and “scholastic knowledge”? How to have celebration together with reflection?

In July 2006, after a long process of experiments and attempts and failures and fights, the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith gave a *nulla osta* for the approval of the Tipicon (Constitution) of Deir Mar Musa and Statutes of a Monastic Confederation of Al-Khalil (Abraham, the friend of God). In this text, the role of the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius is particularly underlined and it is said that the Director of the Spiritual Exercise for the novices will be a monk or nun of the Community, who has perfected his practice at the school of expert members of the Society of Jesus and who has known and loved the spirituality of the Christian East. This is not the right place to publish the Constitution of Deir Mar Musa, although it is a community entirely and spiritually committed to the service of Islamic/Christian harmony building. The Ignatian source of the spirituality of this Community is as important as the Charles de Foucauld - Massignon source, the Fathers of Desert experience and the Sufi Islamic influence.

I think it is suitable to present the parts of this document that express this vocation of the Community in relationship to Islam. More commentary will come, especially if this Community flourishes. The final thing I want to note is that after 30 years of effort at

inculturation in the Islamic context, I no longer see it as a kind of cultural change of skin that is performed in a set period of time and is then finished. I go deeper with the Church in reflecting on the theological value of the Islamic community. I often tend to define Islam as an “eschatological preparation”. I see the providential aspect of this staying/lasting of the communities, Church and Islam. So when I practice inculturation it is no longer trying to absorb the other community in mine, but rather the effort to deepen the practice of a constitutive element of my being a disciple of Jesus and I see some “Muslims understanding it, perhaps simply in the name of love: “He loves us.” Deir Mar Musa, the fifteen centuries old monastery, is a theatre of the Oriental Christian/Islamic relationship.

You will find here a translation from Italian (the original text is in Arabic) that Mary Campbell and Myra Capulong have prepared on those sections that deal with our vocation of this kind of dialogue with Islam. You will find in bold type the passages that directly concern the vocation of the Community in the Islamic World. The hope is that with the enormous joy I felt to have under the same roof my Jesuit companions and my Deir Mar Musa brothers and sisters, I can here offer something of our reflection already fully engaged in a very demanding effort of dialogue with the Catholic Church Authorities, so that “if we run, we do not run in vain”.

**Translation of parts of the “Tipicon” of the Monastery
of Saint Moses the Abyssinian (Deir Mar Musa Al-Habashi, Nebek, Syria)
The Statutes of the Monastic Confederation of Al-Khalil (the Friend of God)
Revised on the Feast of the Assumption, 2006**

INTRODUCTION

1. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the one God, Amen.

We begin here to write the Tipicon of the monastic life of St. Moses the Abyssinian at Nebek, Syria, and of the Monasteries in confederation with it or dependent on it, on the basis of the Code of the Canons of the Oriental Churches in order to facilitate the harmonization between the common and particular ecclesiastic legislation and also in order to underline the agreement between the legislation and this particular charism.

The particular vocation of the Monastery of St. Moses the Abyssinian and of the Monastic Confederation of al-Khalil (the Friend of God) presents three priorities:

- the contemplative life according to the Syriac tradition and with a spiritual commitment in the ambit of the Middle East Christian and Arab/Islamic context,
- the commitment to manual work following the example of the family of Nazareth,
- **Abrahamic hospitality.**

The text of this Tipicon has already been preceded by two attempts drawn up in 1997 and entitled respectively: “Draft of the Tipicon of the monastic community of the Monastery of St. Moses the Abyssinian” and “Rule of Monastic Life in the Monastery of St. Moses the Abyssinian”. (This was based on the first text drawn up at the request of His Eminence Cardinal Achille Silvestrini, then prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, in preparation for the 1994 Synod of Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Consecrated Life.)

In these two texts there was an exact description of the vocation of the Monastery and the organization of its life, but without taking into explicit and direct consideration the organization of the text of the Code of the Canons of the Oriental Churches. For this reason, these texts were not officially accepted by the Local Ecclesiastic Authority as a tipicon regulating the life of the Monastery of St. Moses the Abyssinian. However, the then Syrian Catholic Archbishop of Homs, Hama and Nebek, His Ex. Mons. Moussa Daoud, gave his spoken consent to the Community living temporarily according to the text of the “Rule of Monastic Life in the Monastery of St. Moses the Abyssinian”, while the text of the “Project of Tipicon of the Monastic Community of the Monastery of St. Moses the Abyssinian” remains an important directory for the monastic life of the Monastery, particularly for the formation of novices.

The effective canon of these two texts has been considered finished since the Church approved this “Tipicon of the Monastery of St. Moses the Abyssinian, Comprising the Statutes of the Monastic Confederation of al-Khalil”. Those former texts remain important for knowing the evolution of the foundation of the Monastery and for the spiritual instruction of its members.

This new text is also drawn up as from the Code of the Canons of the Oriental Churches in total simplicity and with the desire of facilitating the task of the ecclesiastic Authority as well as the desire of the monastic Community of St. Moses the Abyssinian to live their vocation in a truly ecclesial way. This is even more appropriate given the repeated request of this very Reverend and our Father the Patriarch Moussa Daoud, the very Eminent Cardinal Prefect of

the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, to order our Tipicon according to the Code of the Canons of the Oriental Churches.

This text was later revised by the monastic Community based on the authoritative Observations proposed by the Congregation for the Oriental Churches on 5 April 2004, and proposed to the Holy See in the month of September 2004, in sight of the approval of this new form of consecrated life, according to Canon 571 of the CCEO.

This text has been corrected on the base of the authoritative Observations of the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith communicated to Father Paolo Dall'Oglio in a letter of 16 February 2006. This letter communicates the “generally positive opinion”, formulated by the Observations and it urged the inclusion of other necessary amendments. This was done on 6 May 2006. The authorization (*nihil obstat*) of the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith was communicated on 28 July 2006, with the request for two last clarifications. These were offered by the Monastery to the Congregation of Oriental Churches on 15 August 2006 with a request for approval of the Apostolic See.

3. Whoever enters into the novitiate with the aim of being consecrated as monk or nun in the Monastic Community of St. Moses the Abyssinian accepts the doctrine of the Catholic Church and commits himself to obedience. This does not impede him but rather pushes him to participate in the ecumenical movement, in the spirit of humble service, to foster the re-composition of the union of Christians, in mutual respect of spiritual freedom and commendable pluriformity, arriving at full communion in the universal Catholic Church. Also for one who is not Catholic in origin, this consecration and full union with the Catholic Church does not prevent him from reinforcing his esteem and charity with the Church that gave birth to him as a believer. In fact, religious consecration encourages him to deepen this relationship with discretion, without doubling or confusing, and certainly without any type of public comment (publicity) that could wound his origin or demonstrate a rejection of it.

In fact, by virtue of deepening their Faith in the Universal Church and their roots in the noble traditions of various churches, especially those of the Orient, the monks and nuns of the Monastery of St. Moses the Abyssinian constitute their way of practicing ecclesial communion, a seed in the unity which is neither far away nor impossible. They express this communion, as a community and as individuals, with sincerity in the Catholic Church, in pledge and sign of unity, in active waiting for the reestablishment of full communion among all Christians. Thus, also canonically, every member of the monastic Community of St. Moses the Abyssinian, whether of Catholic origin or not, belongs to the Catholic Church.

On this basis, this Community, eager to assist the Petrine diaconal ministry of unity and the aspiration of all Christians towards this, is called to live the ecumenical dimension as an essential in its identity.

4. The particular charism of the Monastic Community of St. Moses the Abyssinian is based on certain elements which constitute a strong symbolic unity for us who have been called to this type of monastic life; for the Churches with which we live, the societies in which we live and the Universal Church through which we live. The Monastery of St. Moses the Abyssinian is an important symbol of the Oriental Churches, which have always, in the desert monasteries, found the sources of evangelic spiritual renewals, in the example of the people of Moses of Sinai, in the traces of the Desert Fathers of Egypt and Palestine and on the basis of the teachings of the Syrian saints, Ephrem and Isaac.

In addition to the importance of the desert monastery in the Oriental Church down through the centuries, since the Islamic Religion became widespread (and even since its appearance) the symbology of monastic, especially the hermitic life, has had an important and direct impact on the formation of Muslim spirituality and the Sufi tradition, receiving also the consideration and recognition (also legal) of the entire Muslim Community. In addition to this important element, we have been called to follow the tracks of the Oriental Saints who knew how to offer a perfect Christian witness, on the basis of the Scriptures and the teaching of the Fathers, in a spirit of service and the practice of respect and charity in the Muslim context over fourteen centuries.

There are also the Saints of every Church whom the Holy Spirit has drawn to the desire to offer themselves with Christ for the Muslims. We remember amongst them St. Francis of Assisi and St. Ignatius of Loyola. In this way, we are aware that the vocation that characterizes us is built on this renewal of the religious life, especially in the Muslim context, which the Holy Spirit made real in the life of Charles de Foucauld. Our vocation is also rooted in intellectual and spiritual deepening, serious dialogue, the knowledge and wisdom of Louis Massignon, based on the inculturation of his and our Christian faith in the language, civilization and spiritual experience of those countries and peoples.

All this led Massignon and our sister Mary Kahil to found the fraternity of the Badaliya for male and female disciples of Jesus, especially oriental, consecrated to show the love of Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, to the Muslim people and to Islam. Thus, there is no doubt that the great change of the Church in opening to other religions and especially to Islam as an Abrahamic religion, which took place at the Second Vatican Council, and which has been followed up with great success and depth since, with the participation of all the Churches and followers of other religions, has been a strong basis and a dynamic motor for our particular vocation. We have seen its highest sign in the visit of Pope John Paul II to the Great Ummayyad Mosque in Damascus on 6 May 2001. We have seen the efficacious apostolic seal in the special blessing of His Holiness given on the following day to the Monastic Community of the Monastery of St. Moses the Abyssinian (cf. the “Explicative Note” following the text of this Tipicon.)

5. “Approval of new forms of consecrated life is reserved only to the Apostolic See; but eparchial Patriarchs and Bishops take care to discern the new gifts of consecrated life entrusted by the Holy Spirit to the Church and assist the promoters to express their intentions better and to safeguard them with adequate canons” (Can. 571 of the Code of Canons of the Oriental Churches). The Monastic Community of St. Moses the Abyssinian was founded during the last years on the base of the ecclesial spiritual wisdom evident in this canon of CCOE. The Syrian Catholic Patriarchs of Antioch and the Archbishops of Homs, Hama and Nebek directly responsible for the Monastery, have worked for the rehabilitation of the ruins of the Monastery of St. Moses the Abyssinian since the 1980s, discerning novelty in the form of the religious life of this Monastery. Thus they also encouraged the founder of the monastery, with the first monks and nuns, to express their propositions in the best possible ways.

The type of religious life of the Monastery of St. Moses the Abyssinian and of the Monastic Confederation of Khalil needs a direct confirmation from the Holy See. It is in fact new

inasmuch as it brings together in one single monastic community monks and nuns of different Churches *sui iuris*.

First Canon:

The religious state is a stable way of living together in an institute approved by the Church, in which faithful Christians, following Christ more nearly as the Master and Example of Holiness, under the action of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated with a new and special title, by the public vows of obedience, chastity and poverty, to be observed under a legitimate Superior according to the statutes; they renounce the world and dedicate themselves totally to the pursuit of the perfection of charity, in service of the Kingdom of God, for the edification of the Church and the salvation of the world, as signs that foretell the heavenly glory. (Can. 410 of CCEO).

Second Canon:

“The name monastery is given to a religious house in which the members aspire to evangelic perfection, observing the rules and the traditions of monastic life.” (Can. 433 of CCEO 1) In addition, the monastic life at the Monastery of St. Moses the Abyssinian is characterized by three priorities and one horizon:

The first priority is the contemplative life. This refers to a contemplative life according to our Syriac tradition and with a spiritual commitment in the ambit of our Middle Eastern Christian and Arab Islamic context. It is a contemplative life both individual and common, characterized by the simplicity that we find in the ancient Fathers of the deserts and nearer to us in **Father Charles de Foucauld**. There is also always the Virgin of Nazareth, Mary, Mother of the Word, our first and great teacher of the spiritual, contemplative life.

The second priority is the commitment to manual work, following the high example of the family of Nazareth, which constitutes a decisive anthropological project which succeeds in uniting the human person in his being body and spirit, responsible to the material world and to the society of the horizons of the Kingdom.

The third priority is **Abrahamic hospitality**, which has been practiced by monks in every epoch: hospitality made of service, charity and forgiveness, hospitality of wisdom and spiritual direction, hospitality of a common table and of silence, hospitality of receiving the other in his richness and in his need, his particular charisma and his spiritual thirst.

The horizon is established in our particular consecration to the love of Jesus the Redeemer for Muslims as persons and for the Muslim world in this *Umma* (Community). This fact leads us to offer our life that the spiritual yeast may be so effectively present in Muslim society, according to the spirit of discernment, of hope and of charity capable of transforming the suffering of yesterday and today in a foundation for mutual understanding and mutual love in reciprocal consideration and respect. This love of Christ for Muslim men and women is an authentic aspect of His love for the entire humanity and needs to be realized according to the hymn to Love of St. Paul (1 Cor. 13) and the teaching of the sixth chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke. On the other hand, the practice of charity does not exclude the recognition of the rights of the person and of human groups nor does it exclude the defense of minorities. On the contrary, this gives to the rights their ultimate aim and evangelic methodology for their safeguard.

from the Fourth Canon:

On the foundation of this catholic dependence the Community can with sincerity be formed in its ecumenical horizons, with full equilibrium and harmony, prophesying of days of Unity to come, not only for the visible Church but also for **all the children of Abraham** and for the one human family through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

from the Thirteenth Canon:

First article: All the members of the monastic Community, and each one of them, superior or subordinate, should observe in a perfect and faithful way the vow of consecration to God in this oriental monastic way, in chastity, poverty, and obedience and thus also in the contemplative life, manual work and **hospitality as a way of specially offering themselves to express the love of the Lord Jesus for Muslims and their Muslim world**. It must never be forgotten that this love is particular because of a vocation that springs from the heart of Christ who loves in a particular way the people of every religion, culture and social community. If there exists in the Gospel any preferential love, it is for the poor, the small and the marginalized; also in this we are fully committed. Every member of this Community keeps always in mind as the source of his spirituality this Tipicon, together with legislative and spiritual texts which express the particularity of this vocation and this charisma. (Cf. Can. 426 of CCEO)

Seventh article: **The particular identity of the Community of al-Khalil, in relation to the Muslim world, is obedient to the vision of the Church of Vatican Council II and of the successive magisterial teaching. The theological research in this field, so delicate and decisive in our epoch, is certainly one amongst those which are particular to our Community. This theological task is always united to the contemplative inspiration and to the practice of dialogue of spirituality, of common social commitment and of dialogue of life, all of which characterize our experience.**

It must always be clear, especially to the Superiors of Monasteries and to the President of the Confederation, that the theological opinions of the members cannot form a common teaching of this Community unless, afterwards, their conformity to the Teaching of the Church is checked. It remains the duty of the Superiors and of the members to practice charitable and careful respect for the different opinions, evangelic correction, and discernment in the spirit of reciprocal openness and shared hope. Always mindful of charity, it is a duty to correct in a brotherly way, and sometimes also firmly those members who assume, particularly concerning the inter-religious question, attitudes in contrast to the Teaching of the Church. This is both for their own spiritual good and also to safeguard the transparency of the evangelic testimony of the monastic community.

from the Fourteenth Canon:

Twelfth article:

Third comma: The clerics of the Monastery should have acquired an authentic oriental liturgical sensibility, both theoretical and practical, under the guidance of recognized experts. They should also develop a profound ecumenical sensibility rooted in patristic theology, in knowledge of the steps made by the Ecumenical Movement and in Catholic doctrine. **So also they should have acquired an adequate knowledge of the Muslim world in the context of**

which they practice their ecclesial ministry. The formation of future clerics should also take into great consideration the spiritual theology and missiology for the practice of ordained ministry in their particular framework of the monastic Community of Khalil.

Fourth comma: The clerics of the Monastery will not neglect the permanent/constant formation nor the importance of the acquisition of these sciences which are strictly connected to the charisma of this Community and of the exercise of Priesthood both internally and in relation to guests and visitors. (Cf. Can. 372 of CCEO)

from the Twenty-fourth Canon:

Tenth article:

First comma: Amongst the duties of the Superior of the independent Monastery, there is also the duty of taking care of the **Fraternity of al-Khalil, formed by friends of the Monastery who live in the world and who become members in order to share, each according to his own charisma and condition, the spirituality of our monastic Community.** He gives his agreement to the election of the coordinator of the said Fraternity. And so also, if necessary, he instructs them, with the agreement of his council, to dissolve this Fraternity.

Second comma: It is the duty of the Superior of the independent Monastery **to accompany spiritually those persons who have become aware of being called by God to participate, according to their charisma and condition, in the spirituality of the Community of al-Khalil.** He can delegate this responsibility to a member of the monastic Community or to the Superior of a dependent Monastery, whether affiliated or subsidiary.

from the Thirty-fourth Canon:

It is very important that assemblies are held, at least once a year, which bring together the monastic Community, or at least a certain number of monks and nuns nominated by the Superior **with persons who share with the monastic Community some of its spiritual aims and who, in one way or another, are connected to the life of the Monastery** and the Superior will invite them with the agreement of his council. This will happen in order to study the reality of the Monastery and its context, and to gather opinions and offer proposals for improving or reinforcing the situation.

from the Thirty-fifth Canon:

First article: The adhesion to one of the Monasteries of the Confederation presupposes that the person is led by the Holy Spirit, that he knows himself to be a sinner pardoned through the blood of Christ, a poor wretch who the Spirit has taken to the mountains of solitude so that he might hear the appeal/call in secret and meditate on the Word of God and obtain freedom through the evangelical law and the logic of gratuitousness. He asks to be sanctified in humility and is desirous to put all his natural and spiritual charisma in service of the Kingdom. **He aspires to the total consecration to God for his love and for love of every human person, and in a particular way, he wants to join through the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, and of Abraham, “father of believers,” for Islam and Muslims, also for whom Christ was sacrificed, for their redemption and salvation.** It is he who by

the power of his resurrection allows all who so desire to adhere to this monastic way in a position to offer himself to it trusting only in God.

from the Fifty-first Canon:

Fourth article: At the appropriate moment the one who is standing for the monastic consecration will say: “I, a pardoned sinner, vow myself, in perpetual manner to the Father, the Son and to the Holy Spirit, One True God, with the monastic consecration in the Monastery (and here the Monastery is named), (and when there will be more than one independent Monastery, he will add: “and in the monastic Confederation of al- Khalil”) in chastity, poverty, and evangelic obedience, in the life of prayer, manual work and hospitality of guests, **and I commit myself with this Community and according to its charisma to the mission of the Church to the service of the Muslim world until the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven**”. (Cf. Can. 462 of CCEO)

from the Sixty-fourth Canon:

Sixth article: All will have a great devotion to the Cross of the Savior raised up in the church of the Monastery. They will praise the custom of carrying the cross on their neck or tattooed, according to the ordinary practices of the local Christians. Whenever discreet charity and missionary discernment - not human timidity, tepidity of faith, secular behavior or fear of martyrdom - so advise, and **especially in a Muslim environment**, not to show the Cross on their dress, substituting it or not with another Christian sign, they will remember to have been called to a union ever more perfect with Christ humble and suffering servant for the redemption of every person. Every decision in this regard will be taken by the ordinary synaxis.

from the Eighty-sixth Canon:

The monks and nuns of the Confederation of al-Khalil offer themselves, for the very fact of monastic consecration and **impelled by love** to martyrdom in all its forms: martyrdom of tiredness, of illness, of failure, the martyrdom of their dear ones and family as martyrdom of blood and the martyrdom of obedience and patience. Each one realizes this perfect offer every day, thanking God for the grace of participation in the suffering of Christ in the horizon of the light of eternal life.

from the Eighty-seventh Canon:

First article: The members of the monastic community who die in the monastery in the hope of eternal life, are buried in the cemetery of the Monastery, in the way suited to our particular vocation and according to what is known of the wishes of the dead person.

“Note of Explication” on the Particular Vocation of the Monastic Community in the Muslim World

What follows is a reflection on texts from Church Teaching which in the Spirit we consider constitutional for our particular vocation in the Muslim World. The choices clearly do not intend to flaunt the integrity of the texts nor of the Catholic doctrine contained therein.

First, we take inspiration from the declaration *Nostra Aetate* on the relations of the Church with non-Christian religions. “The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions (...) The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men (2).” Referring specifically to Muslims, after recalling the adoration of the one God, the submission of Abraham, the veneration of Jesus, the honoring of Mary, the waiting for the Day of Judgment, the esteem for moral and cultural life, the text concludes: “Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Muslims, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom. Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Muslims, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom (3).” “We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God (5).”

Even more important, if possible, is the text about Muslims in the *Lumen Gentium* in the framework of the mystical ecclesiology taught by the Council. The Monastic Community of al-Khalil truly wishes to place itself in the perspective of “Christ, the light of nations” and “eagerly desires to bring the light of Christ to all men, a light brightly visible on the countenance of the Church (1)”. The Spirit introduces us into the “free and hidden plan of the wisdom and goodness of the Eternal Father” and calls us to the Holy Church which “at the end of time will gloriously achieve completion, when, as is read in the Fathers, all the just, from Adam and ‘from Abel, the just one, to the last of the elect’ will be gathered together with the Father in the universal Church (2)”. In Christ, the image of the invisible God, God wanted to concentrate all things. Christ inaugurated on earth the kingdom of heaven and the Church, that is the kingdom of Christ already present in mystery, grows visibly in the world by the action of God. By the blood and water that gushed from the side of Christ who, in his being raised up, draws all to him, and through the ecclesial celebration of the Eucharist in which the work of our salvation is renewed, “all men are called to this union with Christ, who is the light of the world, from whom we go forth, through whom we live, and toward whom our whole life strains (3)”. “Just as Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and persecution, so the Church is called to follow the same route that it might communicate the fruits of salvation to men (8).” The Church “by the power of the risen Lord is given strength that it might, in patience and in love, overcome its sorrows and its challenges, both within itself and from without, and that it might reveal to the world, faithfully though darkly, the mystery of its Lord until, in the end, it will be manifested in full light (8)”. “At all times and in every race God has given welcome to whosoever fears Him and does what is right. (...) So it is that this messianic people, although it does not actually include all men, and at times may look like a small flock, is nonetheless a lasting and sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race

(9).” “All men are called to be part of this catholic unity of the people of God which in promoting universal peace presages it. And there belong to or are related to it in various ways, the Catholic faithful, all who believe in Christ, and indeed the whole of mankind, for all men are called by the grace of God to salvation (13).” “Finally, those who have not yet received the Gospel are related in various ways to the people of God. In the first place we must recall the people to whom the testament and the promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh. On account of their fathers this people remains most dear to God, for God does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues. But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place amongst these there are the Muslims, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind (16).” The missionary Church, “through her work, whatever good is in the minds and hearts of men, whatever good lies latent in the religious practices and cultures of diverse peoples, is not only saved from destruction but is also cleansed, raised up and perfected unto the glory of God, the confusion of the devil and the happiness of man. The obligation of spreading the faith is imposed on every disciple of Christ, according to his state. (...) In this way the Church both prays and labors in order that the entire world may become the People of God, the Body of the Lord and the Temple of the Holy Spirit, and that in Christ, the Head of all, all honor and glory may be rendered to the Creator and Father of the Universe (17)”.

The Council Fathers, in the conclusion of the constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, express themselves in this way: “We think cordially too of all who acknowledge God, and who preserve in their traditions precious elements of religion and humanity. We want frank conversation to compel us all to receive the impulses of the Spirit faithfully and to act on them energetically. (...) Since God the Father is the origin and purpose of all men, we are all called to be brothers. Therefore, if we have been summoned to the same destiny, human and divine, we can and we should work together without violence and deceit in order to build up the world in genuine peace (92).”

Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, number 53, tells us of the proclamation: “It is also addressed to the immense sections of mankind who practice non-Christian religions. The Church respects and esteems these non Christian religions because they are the living expression of the soul of vast groups of people. They carry within them the echo of thousands of years of searching for God, a quest which is incomplete but often made with great sincerity and righteousness of heart. They possess an impressive patrimony of deeply religious texts. They have taught generations of people how to pray. They are all impregnated with innumerable ‘seeds of the Word’ and can constitute a true ‘preparation for the Gospel’.”

It is spiritually clear to the Monastic Community of al-Khalil that its charism for Christian/Islamic dialogue and for the inculturation of faith in the Muslim world is inseparable in fact from the evangelizing mission of the Church and participates dynamically in it. “Therefore though God in ways known to Himself can lead those inculpably ignorant of the Gospel to find that faith without which it is impossible to please Him (Heb. 11:6), yet a necessity lies upon the Church (1 Cor. 9:16), and at the same time a sacred duty, to preach the Gospel. And hence missionary activity today as always retains its power and necessity.” (*Lumen Gentium* 7). Underlining the importance of this phrase: “in ways known to Himself”, the Declaration *Dominus Iesus*, of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith encourages, number 21, the commitment of theologians: “Theologians are seeking to understand this question more fully. Their work is to be encouraged, since it is certainly useful for understanding better God’s salvific plan and the ways in which it is accomplished.” We wish,

not only intellectually but in a vital, contemplative, relational and evangelic attitude, to commit ourselves to explore with prudence and humility, obedience of faith and true spirit of the Church, these divine ways. It is in fact through these same mysterious ways that the Church will be able to experience the final harmony between evangelization and dialogue. Certainly this commitment, which we understand as profoundly Catholic and to be lived in the spirit of communion, must be practiced in a concrete and continuous relation with the local Church, the Patriarchal See and the Holy See.

On various occasions, the Church Teaching has underlined the charisma of the religious life, in particular the contemplative life, and even more especially the oriental monastic life, as far as evangelization, inter-religious dialogue and inculturation are concerned. “Indeed it can be said that monasticism in antiquity, and at various times in subsequent ages too, has been the privileged means for the evangelization of the peoples.” (*Oriente Lumen*, 14)

In the post-synod apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, Pope John Paul II says, at number 51: “The Church entrusts to communities of consecrated life the particular task of spreading the spirituality of communion (.....and they) are signs that dialogue is always possible and that communion can bring differences into harmony.” At number 76, we find: “The specific contribution of consecrated persons, both men and women, is first of all the witness of a life given totally to God and to their brothers and sisters, in imitation of the Savior who, out of love for humanity, made himself a servant.” The missionary drive *ad gentes* “is felt above all by the members of Institutes, whether of the contemplative or the active life, consecrated persons, in fact, have the task of making present even among non-Christians Christ who is chaste, poor, obedient, prayerful and missionary (77).” “It should be emphasized that in countries where non-Christian religions are firmly established, the presence of the consecrated life is of great importance, whether through its educational, charitable and cultural activities, or through the witness of the contemplative life (78).” “In the context of missionary activity, the process of inculturation and interreligious dialogue have a role to play. (...) However, it should not be forgotten that in many ancient cultures religious expression is so deeply ingrained that religion often represents the transcendent dimension of the culture itself. In this case, true inculturation necessarily entails a serious and open inter-religious dialogue which is not in opposition to the mission *ad gentes* and does not dispense with evangelization (79).” All number 102 is consecrated to the role of consecrated life: “(...) the freedom of spirit proper to the consecrated life will favor that ‘dialogue of life’ which embodies a basic model of mission and of the proclamation of Christ’s Gospel”.

Again, in the post-synod Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, the Pope assures us, saying: “I repeat how important it is to revitalize prayer and contemplation in the process of dialogue. Men and women in the consecrated life can contribute very significantly to inter-religious dialogue by witnessing to the vitality of the great Christian traditions of asceticism and mysticism (31).”

In the post-synod apostolic Exhortation “*A new Hope for Lebanon*”, the Pope, taking up again the Apostolic Letter *Oriente Lumen*, says: “The monasteries can become prophetic places, in which ‘the creation becomes the praise of God and the precept of charity lived out in a concrete way becomes the ideal of human cohabitation, and where the human being seeks God without barriers or impediments, becoming a reference for all, carrying them in his heart and helping them to seek God’. (...) Monks will be, as they were in the past, guides and spiritual masters, and their monasteries places of ecumenical and inter-religious encounters (57).” Thus for us, the chapter of inter-religious dialogue is fundamental, especially with Islam: “I invite them to consider their inclusion in the Arab culture, to which they have contributed a lot, as a

privileged opportunity to conduct, in harmony with other Christians of the Arab countries, an authentic and profound dialogue with the believers of Islam (93).”

The dimension of dialogue of the Community of al-Khalil will be open to universality and especially to the fraternity between all the sons of Abraham, in order to bring about the overcoming and the refusal of the logic of violence. Pope John Paul II is our teacher also here in many interventions. In the Holy Mass on the occasion of the XXXV Day of Peace, he told us that his appeal was directed especially to those who believe in God, in particular “the three Abrahamic religions”, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and he reminded us that the voice of blood cries out to God from this land, the blood of brothers against brothers, who refer to the same “Patriarch Abraham”, sons, like every man, of the same Heavenly Father.

We should apply a devout and continuous attention to the listening to the Spirit of God. “The Pope recognizes explicitly the operating presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the members of other religious traditions, as when he affirms in *Redemptor hominis* that ‘their firm belief’ is ‘also the effect of the Spirit of truth operating beyond the visible borders of the mystical body (RH 63)’. In his encyclical *Dominum et vivificantem* the Pope goes further and affirms the universal action of the Holy Spirit in the world before the economy of the Gospel to which this action was directed, and he speaks of this same universal action of the Spirit, today, also outside the visible Body of the Church.” (“Dialog and Proclamation” 1991)

The declaration *Dominus Iesus* of the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith is an important and authoritative Church teaching document, decisive concerning the ecumenical dimension as well as the commitment to inter-religious dialogue of our Community. That Declaration has been, since its publication, the subject of a fruitful series of community reflections and a gracious occasion for listening, in filial devotion and theological obedience of judgment. The study of this Declaration is today part of the formation of members of the Community. It is understood as a stimulus to unify faithfulness and courage in our commitment: faithfulness to the objectivity of the dictate of the Catholic Christian faith and courage to open oneself to the action of Christ and of the Holy Spirit also outside the limits of the visible Church, in the constantly ecclesial perspective of the Kingdom of God.

Our effort of inculturation must be devoid of every indifferentism and nihilist relativism, and so also from every equivocal and superficial syncretism. Our loving of the Muslims is directed by the discernment of that ray of truth which illuminates all men within sight of the whole, entire truth. Our presence for the Muslim world, to which the love of Christ sends us, does not result in a double ‘belonging’ of faith. It is instead our unconditional belonging to the mystery of Christ and the Church his bride that results in the depth of our commitment to dialogue.

Pope John Paul II, with his prophetic initiative in the interreligious Prayer for Peace at Assisi, appears to have indicated St. Francis in some way as a patron of dialogue and in particular with Islam. The saint, in the *Regola non bollata* indicates to the brothers two ways of living spiritually among Muslims: “One way is that they make neither disputes nor arguments, but are in submission to every human creature on account of God and confess to be Christian. The other way is that when they see that it pleases the Lord, they announce the word of God.” Our hope and our experience in the daily practice of respectful and all-embracing hospitality is that being open to the neighbor (which finds in inculturation its dimension of faith and in dialogue its natural field of expression) and the form of evangelization more in keeping with the meekness and humility of the Divine Master join together in a unique communion.

The Muslims consider themselves, through their faith in the prophecy of Muhammad, to be descendants of Ismail and inheritors of the blessings obtained for them by the intercession of the holy patriarch Abraham. St. John of Damascus called them Hagarenes and Ishmaelites. And again: “We call them Saracens as discarded by Sara according to what was said by Hagar to the angel: ‘Sara has driven me away, stripped of everything’.” (John of Damascus, *La centesima eresia l’Islam*, Milan 1997, pp. 33-34). Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini states: “The story we have heard, drawn from the most ancient book of the Scriptures, the book of Genesis, speaks to us about a son of Abraham that was not a founder of the Hebrew people, as Isaac was to be, but certain blessings of God were reserved equally for him: ‘I will make also the son of the servant a great nation, because he is your progeny’, God promises Abraham. At the end of the story he tells us: ‘God was with the child.’”

The real events of this Ismail and his sons remain obscure in the history of the second and first millennia before Christ, but it is clear that the biblical reference belongs to some Bedouin tribe living around the Arab peninsula. From that tribe, many centuries later, Muhammad had to be born, the Prophet of Islam. Today at a time when the Arab world has assumed an enormous importance on the international scene and in part also in our country, we cannot forget that ancient blessing which shows the paternal providence of God for all his sons.” (*Noi e l’Islam*, Milan 1990). Cardinal Kasper, in the same prospective of reconciliation, reminds us: “Moreover, neither Hagar nor Ismail were repudiated by God, who made of them ‘a great nation’.” (*Antisemitismo una piaga da guarirne*, L’Osservatore Romano 7.09.2003).

Our monastic life in the Muslim world is to be lived in a prophetic and eschatological dimension, aimed at the realization of the promise made to Abraham of which the Virgin Mary sang in the Magnificat as already having been achieved. The book of Genesis gives a glimpse of this eschatological reconciliation in the presence together of Isaac and Ismail at the tomb of the Patriarch. (cf. Gen. 25, 9). It is in this final perspective of persons and of the cosmos that we understand the trusting presage of Pope Gregory VII to the Sultan Al-Nasir in 1076: “We pray with our hearts and in words that, after a long life down here, the same God receives you in the bosom of the beatitude of the Holy Patriarch Abraham.” (Pont. Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds that Unite Us*, Vatican City, 1994, p. 4).

Great attention is given by the Community of Al-Khalil to the pastoral letters of the Catholic Oriental Patriarchs together with other documents expressed by the Catholic Hierarchy, also jointly with the Pastors of other Christian Churches, in Muslim countries. These texts, as for example the letter of Catholic Patriarchs of 1992, *The Christian Presence in the Orient*, and that of 1994, *Together in front of God for the Good of the Person and of Society*, are often the argument of the monastic catechisms and they nourish our prayer and our praxis.

In conclusion, it is right to present ourselves to Mary, to whom we entrust our vocation, and this with the words of Pope John Paul II in the Mosque of Damascus: “In the course of the path of life, towards the celestial destiny, Christians feel the nearness of Mary, Mother of Jesus, and also Islam pays homage to Mary and hails her as ‘chosen amongst all women of the world’. (Qur’an III, 42). The Virgin of Nazareth, Lady of Saydnaya, has taught us that God protects the humble and ‘has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts’. (Lk.1, 51). May the hearts of Christians and of Muslims turn, one towards the other, with feelings of fraternity and friendship, so that the Omnipotent One may bless us with the peace that only Heaven can give. To the One Merciful God, may there be praise and glory with out end. Amen.”

PATNA'S EXPOSURE TO ISLAM PROGRAMME

Paul Jackson, S.J.

For many years all Jesuits studying for the priesthood in India did their course of Theology either at J.D.V. in Pune or at St. Mary's College, Kurseong. In 1971 St Mary's moved to Delhi and became 'Vidyajyoti.' In the seventies discussions about the need for a more inculturated form of theological training, granted the diversity of India, led to the establishment of regional theologates. Nevertheless, the importance of the Church's catholic dimension, as well as the national presence of both the Church and the Society in India, could not be overlooked. The upshot of all this was that students normally spend their first two years of theological studies in a regional theologate and the third year at a national centre. Patna's regional theologate began in Bettiah; soon shifted to the military cantonment at Danapur, some thirteen kilometres west of Patna; and finally to Khaspur, about six kilometres further west from Danapur. The students go to Vidyajyoti, the national centre in Delhi, for their third year of theological studies.

Patna itself is the capital of the state of Bihar in North India. Bihar has a population of 83,000,000, of whom 14,000,000 are Muslims. Christians number fewer than 100,000 and, apart from a few tribal people and a sprinkling of Sikhs and Jains, the bulk of the remaining population follow one form or other of the Hindu religion. Muslims arrived in Bihar in the wake of a swashbuckling general, Bakhtiyar Khalji, who swept through the southern portion of the state during the period of 1198-1201, before moving on to Bengal and then Assam. It is of interest to note that, although Muslim conquest of the southern portion of Bihar – i.e. south of the Ganges River – preceded that of the northern portion by well over a century, eight of the nine districts which currently have the largest percentage of Muslims lie to the north of the Ganges.

In 1983, when the regional theologate was established in Danapur, the Dean requested me to give a course on Islam to the first-year students of Theology. Clear guidelines were laid down as to the method to be followed: it had to be based on an exposure programme. The basic methodology has remained unchanged. The first step involves putting the students into pairs that are complementary in nature and are compatible. People who know them well, usually their superior and dean of studies, attend to this task. If there is an odd number then they ensure that the person left over can cope by himself and he is sent to a place close to Patna, usually Phulwari Sharif. It should be mentioned that the students have already had some sort of introductory course on Islam during their philosophical studies. For a number of years those who studied in either the Patna or Hazaribag Juniorate would have had a three-day course on Islam.

Preparation from my side involved visiting the towns where the students were due to be sent. One town – Bihar Sharif – has been selected every single year. Others have been selected from time to time. An effort has been made to choose towns with important Muslim populations and institutions. Over the years, in addition to some students who were sent to Patna City, Darbhanga, Muzaffarpur, Sitamarhi, Siwan, Ara, Bihar Sharif, Munger, Bhagalpur, Nawada, Masaurhi, Aurangabad, Gaya and Phulwari Sharif have been the towns selected for the programme. My task has been to go to these towns and, first of all, secure accommodation for the students. Normally they stay at the parish. This helps as a means of involving the priests, some of whom are Jesuits, while the others are diocesan. The ideal is for the students to meet people from various classes of Muslim society. Hence the first call is

made to any important madrasas in the town. All the towns chosen have madrasas. I ask to speak to the Principal. When we meet I introduce myself. (It should be mentioned that the conversations are all in Urdu.) I tell them I am a Christian priest and belong to a religious order called the Society of Jesus. The next step is to tell them about my years of research at the Khuda Bakhsh Library in Patna on Bihar's greatest Muslim saint, Sharafuddin Maneri. While only some people have heard of me, all have heard of Maneri, popularly known as 'Makhdum Sahib.' After a brief discussion I then inquire if it would be possible to send two young men who are studying to become Christian priests in order to learn about Islam. After seeking some clarifications they agree. I then tell them when they are coming, usually in a week or two's time. It is worth stressing that my work on Maneri is like a key that opens Muslim doors in Bihar.

The next step is to visit a Sufi *dargah* or *mazar* and speak to the Shah Sahib or *khadim*, whoever happens to be around. Again the same ritual is repeated, but the response is even warmer, because everyone associated with any Sufi shrine in Bihar has the highest regard for Maneri.

The third group consists of middle class Muslims. The approach to them is through the school, run by religious sisters, Jesuits or diocesan priests. Contact is made through the principal with some Muslim teachers and arrangements are made for the students to meet some of the Muslim students.

The fourth group consists of poor Muslims. Some of the English-medium schools have evening schools for poor neighbourhood children. In Muzaffarpur and Gaya, for example, they are mostly Muslims, and contact with poor Muslims is made through these children. Another way to contact poor Muslims is through priests or sisters who are engaged in some social work among them. In this way, four classes of Muslims are covered.

A few days before the programme is due to commence I have a session with the students. They receive typed sheets of paper which contain three types of material: (1) practical instructions for each group about how to reach the parish where they will stay, where and who their contact persons are, and so on; (2) general instructions for all about how to go about meeting people; and (3) a long list of possible questions for the students to choose from or even add to. The basic principle about contacts is that I have arranged initial contacts for all of them, but they are expected to make some further contacts themselves. They are instructed to write down details such as the names of people during their sessions, but the interviews themselves are to be written up each evening. One very clear instruction is that they are not to argue. They can ask questions, seek clarifications, agree or disagree with something that is said, but not get involved in arguments. I tell the students that the first Jesuits at Akbar's court won all the battles but lost the war because of their unshakable confidence in the efficacy of the combination of criticizing Islam and employing reason to argue their own case. The first approach produces nothing but antagonism, while the second presupposes that Christian faith is the fruit of a syllogism, not a gift from God, as affirmed by Jesus: "Blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven." (Mt. 16:17)

Over the years the students have had many interesting discussions but have been faithful in observing this injunction. The very fact that they are students means that they can easily admit their lack of knowledge in certain areas. Another benefit is that, because they are students, people feel free to ask questions about their own faith and way of life. Thus the

initial information-seeking situation often turns into a dialogue session. Some 200 students have been involved in twenty-three of these courses.

The students head off to their various destinations on a Monday morning and return on the Wednesday of the following week. Thursday, Friday and Saturday mornings are then utilized for sharing and reflection. Each student not only has an opportunity to share his experience, knowledge gained as well as personal reflections, he also has an opportunity to listen to what his fellow-students have to say. Thus each person is in a position to judge for himself what the Muslims of Bihar are like on the basis of personal experience. When the sharing has been completed we reflect together on what we have learned. According to the constraints of time I then deal with a few important issues that have emerged. The students then have to write a paper on their experience and reflections.

What is the attitude of the students towards this programme? Before it begins, most have the chance of being briefed by the second-year students who had been to the town assigned to them the previous year. This is an important source of information and a real morale booster for those students who have had little or no personal experience of Muslims. This seems a strange observation in a country with 140,000,000 Muslims. For those with personal experience, however, no morale booster is necessary. They have no hang-ups about meeting Muslims. Nevertheless for all of them it is an adventure, and even the hardiest have a certain amount of trepidation in their hearts as they set out to meet a whole new set of people.

What is their mood on their return? The overriding emotion experienced by them on their return is a sense of achievement. They had set out to carry out a difficult task and they had achieved what they had intended. What had boosted their confidence was the heartwarming hospitality all of them had received. As they asked people from the four groups various questions they received largely uniform answers, but some questions elicited a wide spectrum of answers, e.g., on the destiny of non-Muslims. Answers to this question ranged from an eternity in hell to attaining paradise provided they believed in God and worked for the good of others. Very often the students themselves would begin their sharing with an open acknowledgement that it had been a transformative experience for them. This was particularly true for those who had previously had no real personal experience of Muslims.

After some years the thought of publishing some of these accounts in *Salaam* occurred to me. This is a quarterly magazine brought out by the Islamic Studies Association, Flat no 302, R-1, Hauz Khas, New Delhi 110 016, India. The magazine is currently in its 27th volume. Subsequent quotations will give the year of publication followed by the page number. It will be instructive to read what some of the students have had to say about the experiential dimension of the programme. The very first account appears in vol. 10, 1989. Usually the account appears a year or two after the actual experience. The person involved in this first account actually stayed as a guest at a madrasa in Munger. His account begins thus:

It is a common belief that experiential knowledge leaves a more lasting impression on the human mind than knowledge gained through books or lectures. Experience, by influencing first the heart and only then the mind, changes one's attitudes.

At my home in Mangalore, until I was sixteen years of age, I had had no direct experience of a Muslim community. Brought up in an orthodox Mangalorian Catholic family I was indoctrinated by my parents, relatives and neighbors – practically all Christians – in the traditional approach to other religions. I was given the impression

that Muslims were cruel – only Muslims slaughtered cows in Mangalore – and that they cheat in business and are therefore not to be trusted. The stories of Tipu Sultan’s persecution of Christians and the cunningness and cruelty of some of the Muslim rulers in India – at least the way we were taught – supported my belief imbibed from my elders at home. (1989: 69)

The first paragraph expresses succinctly the principle on which the exposure programme was based. The second shows how the prejudices of the immediate family circle – experiential – lay the foundation for a biased interpretation of history – gleaned from books and biased teachers. Summing up his experience the students had this to say:

Whether I acquired a lot of knowledge of Islam was not the result that I was looking for, but I felt close to a community which earlier had hardly any place in my life. This attitudinal change was possible only by this lived experience with Muslims. I can certainly say that today I can trust Muslims and relate to them as a friend. Even the archconservative Maulanas are open to friendship and dialogue. (Listening to each other and avoiding arguments to prove one’s point is certainly a virtue in this context.) (1989: 70)

These words bear witness to the transformative potential of this exposure programme. Another student from the same batch was sent to Phulwari Sharif. As the top scholars happened to be away at the time he met a number of poor Muslims, as the following indicates:

I asked, ‘Who is a true Muslim’ of a group of young day labourers. While answering they pointed towards the church and convent at Phulwari Sharif. They indicated the school assembly and said: “See how lovingly those sisters take care of those children! And the Father there sends wheat and other foodstuffs to places affected by any natural calamity. Those people are true Muslims.” I was wondering at the openness with which they shared their views on Islam. They did not know that I was from the mission. For them a true Muslim is the one who does good to his fellow human beings. Such a person will surely go to paradise. (1989:110)

In passing it may be mentioned that the poor, in general, agree with the notion that those who do good to others will surely go to paradise. This particular student now happens to be the provincial of the Patna Province of the Society of Jesus. He is originally from Kerala.

The situation in Bihar in October 1989 was extremely tense due to riots in Bhagalpur in which many Muslims lost their lives. Ripple effects were felt around the state. The two students who were slated to go to Munger, which is situated close to Bhagalpur, were given an alternative option. One accepted it, while the other volunteered to go. The situation in the madrasa in Munger, which is near Bhagalpur, was extremely tense. An all-night vigil was set up to repulse any attack. In this situation the student was advised not to stay, as he would not be in a position to learn about Islam. He returned to Patna and was sent to another locality. One student was in Phulwari Sharif where tension was running high. He wrote:

My home in Bettiah is surrounded by Muslims. I have a number of very good Muslim friends. In spite of a very friendly atmosphere one thought lingers on in our minds: Muslims are fundamentalists. With this background I went to Phulwari Sharif for my experience of Islam programme. The first two or three days were really tense because

of the Ram Shilanyas procession. The Muslims and the Hindus were all tense. They did not know what would happen on 3rd November, the day the Hindus were supposed to have their procession. After talking with the ordinary people I felt that these people did not want to fight. Some of the Muslims told me that the 3rd was a Friday and they would go for their prayer. After prayer, however, they did not intend opening their shops. In this way they would not be there to hear anti-Muslim slogans or be tempted to retaliate. If they were attacked, however, they were prepared to defend themselves. Thanks be to God everything went off peacefully! (1990:90)

This account captures accurately a situation that has been replicated periodically throughout the state of Bihar. The reference to a procession is significant. Many disturbances have broken out on the occasion of the Ram Naami procession, during which weapons are carried and a bellicose posture is exhibited. The following account is quite revealing:

I used to think that Muslims were fanatics, unpatriotic, narrow-minded, dirty and so on. Even when I used to take part in “Insani Ekta Muhim’s” peace rallies and dharnas, I had no sympathy for the Muslims. I did not consider them as human beings. I rarely thought that they contributed anything to nation building. This was the mental framework with which I went to Bihar Sharif for a close academic encounter with Muslims. The town is very sensitive as the Muslims and Hindus are equally strong in number and earlier there had been riots. (1995:31)

At the end of his account of his time in Bihar Sharif, this young man from Kerala had this to say:

I consider the Muslims as my brothers and sisters and feel sorry for the times I failed to treat them as human beings. (1995:34)

Another young man from Kerala wrote about his experience in a truly remarkable manner. His words deserve to be quoted at length.

Nothing worthwhile in life is sudden. This is especially true of personal transformation and attitudinal changes. Yet it happens at a moment least expected to the one who is mindful and lets things take their natural course. The Islam Experience was one of this kind. The whole experience was an exercise in love, an experience of homecoming; home not as a place but as an attitude. It is the ability to feel at home with ourselves and with others. Hence, the most important of all endeavours in life, I think, is to come home. Ultimately it is a redemptive act as well, for sin originates when we are unable to feel at home anywhere, when we are separated by the walls of prejudices and unfounded fears...

‘What do I offer to my Muslim friends as I meet them,’ was the question which was hounding me at the eve of my journey to Darbhanga. This, however, triggered off a process of soul searching within me, a struggle with myself, to overcome my lack of understanding and prejudice against Muslims. It revealed that all was not well with me. The immediate impression was somewhat negative. Islam had always painted a dull picture in my mind. It seemed static and stagnant, opposing new ways of thinking and acting. I saw in it a frightening uniformity and intolerance to people who dared to go beyond the traditional ways of interpreting Scripture and tradition. Above all the status of women in Islam appeared unsatisfactory...

I desired and prepared for a mutually transforming encounter, a spontaneous, open and genuine dialogue. I was prepared to meet my Muslim friends at their own wells, asking for a drink, to bring home the truth that there is a God's way, that we need to transcend our own imperfect ways to worship the Lord of the universe and of human beings in truth and spirit. (1999:100-101)

Seven days flew by as swiftly as thought. But those few dozen hours and people initiated a process of transformation within myself. They have freed me from 'the exile,' the exile of not being at home with a section of humanity. It primarily means not fully belonging to myself and to God. In this sense I had the foretaste of homecoming. They mediated God to me, my ultimate belonging.

Belonging, then, is very much associated with the awareness of who I am, and who I am called to be. The Islam experience has led me to the threshold of this great awareness. And today I feel more secure and free to move out beyond the safe confines of who I am and where I am, to open myself and to be confronted by revelation, to know that the God of my prayer is the same as the God of my neighbour. It ultimately means allowing the God within me to find God within people. I am convinced that, on my own, I could never do this.

This is the precious gift I received during this experience. I do not claim to be free from all sorts of prejudices, but to possess the openness and courage to be at 'their wells, to ask for a drink.' (1999:105)

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