THE
LIVING STONES
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'An ecumenical trust seeking to promote contacts between Christian Communities in Britain and those in the Holy Land and neighbouring countries.'
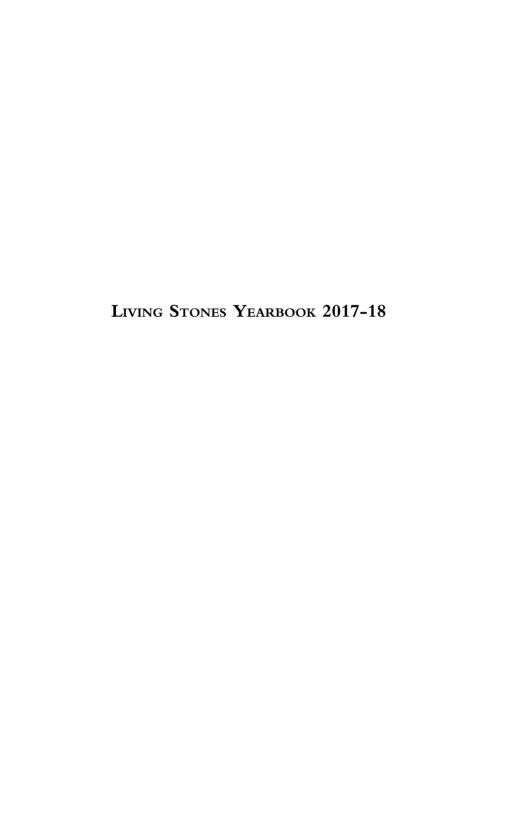
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LIVING STONES YEARBOOK 2017–18

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2017–18

Faith on Trial
Attrition and Politics in the Middle East

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NOTE

It is appreciated that articles derive from authors in a range of disciplines and demonstrate a variety in approach. The spelling of some specialised terms, local place-names and proper names in particular may vary considerably according to the contributor and discipline. These variations, however, should cause no problems to readers.

Submissions for inclusion in the *Yearbook* are welcome and papers for consideration should be sent to editor@livingstonesonline.org.uk. Notes for submission of papers and house style are available upon request from the editor.

EDITORIAL

This edition of the *Living Stones Yearbook* is for 2017-8. This means of course that two years are combined into one. There have been several reasons for this; including and not least has been the constantly changing situation in the Middle East. Furthermore, various changes have and are anticipated in the structure and function of the Living Stones of the Holy Trust which have also been a distraction for the production of the *Yearbook*.

Another factor has been the patchy operation of the deliberations of the Theology Group which has been a regular source of material for the Yearbook. The usual venue for meetings of the group has been at Heythrop College in London, courtesy of the Centre for Eastern Christianity under its director, Anthony O'Mahony. However, we are now witness to the demise of Heythrop as a college within the University of London in which it has played an important part since 1971. Heythrop has in fact existed for over 400 years. It has had a vitally important role with a proud history of eminent scholars, making major contributions to philosophy and theology. For Living Stones the hard work and effort of Anthony and the Centre for Eastern Christianity has been an important source of inspiration, achievement and published material. It has also made an enormous contribution to an appreciation of the subject matter of Eastern Christianity itself and has been instrumental in preparing and training students and scholars in the field.

The general state of flux in the situation of our area of interest is as ever mirrored in the erosion of living stones communities and events in the lands of the Bible. It seems every year we can look back

on more bad times for the region. 2017-18 are very significant times in this respect. The enduring and core problem of Israel/Palestine has seen, among other matters, few actions and policies to serve as a source of encouragement for the future. We should mention the US Embassy move to Jerusalem, Israeli constitutional changes, the ongoing misery of Gaza, the weakness of the West Bank situation and leadership, the US cancellation of payments to UNRWA, new Israeli settlements in the West Bank, and linguistic neologisms so that any criticism of Israel is to be equated with anti-Semitism ... . Iraq and the bleeding of Syria, and US neuroses about Iran and its arc of Shi'a influence, the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Iran means the region is more dangerous than before. Russia seems to be reasserting itself in an imperialist sense whilst the US has no clear plan as to what it wants to do, or whether it should even be involved. Europe is ineffective. We will not even begin to consider 'peripheral' problems such as the Yemen, Qatar, Bahrain, the role of Saudi Arabia, Kurdistan, Turkey, Afghanistan ... .

It seems that the errors of over 200 years of imperial Western policies in the region are being re-presented and relived. And this is happening at a time, on the centenary of the First World War's end, whose armistice treaties marked the beginning of an enduring phase of misery for the lands of the Bible and especially its Christian communities.

Where will the voice of those communities now be heard? Where is the platform to present the views of Living Stones? Are we not all a little ashamed of what has come to pass?

Christian communities, lay and clergy, see their world's dissipating around them. And this is happening throughout the region. The damage is done and those who have fled will not return. Even now some denominations have larger communities in, say the US, than in the lands of their origin. Only an unshakeable faith can sustain those who remain.

This issue opens with the completion of Andrew Ashdown's analysis of the Church of England's attitude of Anglican/Jewish relations in the UK in the light of the Israel/Palestine conflict. This is followed by Duncan Macpherson's study of present and recent Catholic teaching on Christian-Muslim dialogue and then, by the same author, a revision of an earlier paper on 'Jesus the Jew and Jesus the Palestinian?'

Robert Gibbons continues with 'A Pastoral Reflection on Some Issues around Middle Eastern Christianity in the West', an area into which he has a unique insight. Khalid Dinno takes us firmly into a Living Stones community with his paper on 'The Revival of the Syrian Orthodox Christians following The First World War'. Christopher Knollys' paper on Paolo Dall'Oglio SJ and the Community of Deir Mar Musa is a reminder of the ongoing agony of that community and what continues to afflict so much of the region of our interest. Noriko Sato continues the problems of Syria with her paper on 'The Strategies for Survival: Syriac Orthodox Christians prior to and during the Syrian Civil War.' Perhaps some encouragement may be drawn from the courageous example of those involved with the painful problems.

Patricia Morris then takes us to a different area of discussion but one no less significant for the future of all: 'An Exploration of the Philosophical Theology of David Burrell in Dialogue with Islam, in Conversation with Robert Murray and Modern Papal Thought on Ecological Crises'. The volume closes with a short paper by the late Br Ian Latham on Mary in the Qur'an and Islamic tradition.

LWH
November 2018

CONTRIBUTORS

Revd Andrew Ashdown is an Anglican Priest who has been visiting the Middle East for over 30 years. In 2014, he completed a Masters in Abrahamic Religions at Heythrop College, and in 2015, stepped aside from full-time parish ministry to undertake PhD research into Christian-Muslim relations in Syria, through Winchester University, with Anthony O'Mahony as one of his supervisors. His research includes on-going visits to Syria.

Khalid Dinno was born in Mosul, Iraq, Khalid Dinno holds doctorates in engineering, gained at the University of Manchester in 1965, and another in Middle Eastern history, from the University of Toronto in 2015. Dr Dinno publications include *Syrian Orthodox Christians in the Late Ottoman Period and Beyond: Crisis Then Revival*, the first major English-language history of the Syriac Christians in the turbulent late period of the Ottoman Empire, a period that included persecution, schism, genocide, exile, and, finally, renaissance. Dr Dinno is a member of the Syriac Orthodox Church.

Robin Gibbons is one of the two Chaplains for the Greek-Catholic Melkite Church in the UK from 1997; he was monk and priest St Michaels Abbey, Farnborough, 1972-1997. He is Director of Studies for Theology and Religious Studies, Department for Continuing Education, University of Oxford; Faculty Member, Faculty of Theology and Religion Oxford; Alexander Schmemann Professor of Eastern Christianity, Graduate Theological Foundation, Indiana; Ecumenical Canon, Christ Church Cathedral Oxford. He has published numerous

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Christopher Knollys had a professional career for many decades before he undertook postgraduate studies at Heythrop College, University of London, on Christianity and Inter-religious Dialogue. Christopher has had a long association with the Order of St Benedict. His interest in monasticism, catholic theology and interreligious relations lead him to study the life and thought of Fr Paolo Dall'Oglio SJ and Deir Mar Musa community in modern Syria.

Ian Latham, Little Brothers of Jesus (LBJ), studied in France where he became acquainted with the circle of Louis Massignon including Fr Louis Gardet, and lived for many years in Asia and the Middle East. He made a number of special studies on Catholic encounter with Islam, including, 'Christian Prayer' in Catholics and Shi'a in *Dialogue: Studies in Theology and Spiritualit*y, eds A. O'Mahony et al., London, 2004; 'Charles de Foucauld (1898-1916): Silent witness for Jesus in the face of Islam', in *Catholics in Interreligious Dialogue: Studies in Monasticism, Theology and Spirituality*, eds A O'Mahony and Peter Bowe osb, Leominister, 2006; 'The Conversion of Louis Massignon in Mesopotamia in 1908', *Aram: Society for Syro-Mesopotamian Studies*, Vol. 20. (2008). Brother Ian was living in a community of followers of Charles de Foucauld, London, before he died in January 2007.

Duncan Macpherson is a Permanent Deacon in the Diocese of Westminster and was a visiting Senior Research Fellow at St Mary's University, College, Twickenham, where he lectured in Theology from I967 to 2000. A Doctor of Ministry in Preaching, his publications

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Patricia Morris is a research student at the Lincoln Theological Institute, University of Manchester with the Hedley Lucas Studentship. She is working on the question of ecology in Judaism, Christianity and Islam exploring David Burrell's comparative theology model for interfaith dialogue in the context of eco-theology. Patricia has completed her BA in Pastoral Mission and an MA in Contemporary Ethics from Heythrop College, University of London.

Noriko Sato, Pukyong National University, South Korea. Noriko Sato is Professor of Anthropology at Pukyong National University, South Korea. She took up a position of RAI (Royal Anthropological Institute) Fellow in Anthropology and taught at Durham University. She undertakes research on Syriac Orthodox Christian communities and identities of disparate communities as well as that on Japanese activities outside of Japan.

AN EXPLORATION OF ISSUES SURROUNDING ANGLICAN/JEWISH RELATIONS IN THE UK IN THE LIGHT OF THE ISRAEL/PALESTINE CONFLICT (2)⋆

Andrew Ashdown

PART 2
CHRISTIAN AND JEWISH PROPHETIC RESPONSES TO THE ISRAEL/PALESTINE DEBATE

In Part 1 of this essay, I offered a historical description of Jewish/ Christian relations, particularly as they relate to the Anglican context, and explored key themes in Judaism that influence that relationship.

In this part of the essay, I will reflect on the historical presence of the Anglican Church in Israel/Palestine, along with its theological focus on issues of Justice, and its ambiguous relationship to Zionism, particularly Christian Zionism. I will consider some of the Palestinian Christian responses found in the work of Sabeel Jerusalem, the Kairos document of 2009, and the Palestinian Lutheran theologian Mitri Raheb, each of which have influenced the UK Anglican Church's engagement with the issue, and will reflect on the response of Jewish theologians to the issue, amongst them Marc Ellis and Mark Braverman. Finally, I will consider whether the thought of these and other figures such as Emmanuel Levinas, Martin Buber, David Bohm, and Hans Gadamer, might offer positive paths of dialogue and resolution. My hope in the essay is to go beyond the 'facts on the ground' into a reflection that might offer the possibility of dialogue and progress.

Christian responses to Israel

Any Christian response on the State of Israel to Jews, for whom Israel represents a theological God-given entity, is fraught with complexity. This has been particularly true of the experience of the Church of England in recent years, which whilst standing up for issues of justice in the Holy Land alongside Palestinian Christian sisters and brothers, including a small but significant indigenous Anglican community, has had to recognise that Christians were at least complicit in the events of the Holocaust, and has occasionally had to contend with the accusation of anti-semitism, which is commonly made towards those who express solidarity with the Palestinian cause. James Parkes (1896-1981), an Anglican clergyman who was a pioneer between the two world wars in developing Christian-Jewish relations, was one of the first in modern times to recognise both the continuity of Judaism in the Holy Land, and also the injustices that had been done to the Palestinians.[1]

Following the Second World War, the significance of the Second Vatican Council's '*Nostra Aetate*' is hard to overstate, not just for the Roman Catholic Church, but for all mainstream denominations.[2] Recognising the anti-semitism implicit in some of the Church's history, teaching, scriptures, and theology, the Council urged a new attitude towards both Muslims and Jews, inviting Christians to 'forget the past' and make every effort to 'achieve mutual understanding', in order 'to preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values'.[3] The Council urged understanding and appreciation between Christians and people of other faiths. It rejected the belief that Jews were 'rejected' or 'cursed'; and condemned persecution of any form, reminding the Church of God's universal love and grace for all.

It was in the same spirit, and in the context of the growing numbers of different faith communities in Britain, that the Lambeth Conference of 1988 produced a document entitled: 'Jews, Christians and Muslims: the Way of Dialogue', which proposed three 'ways' of dialogue and reconciliation: the way of understanding; the way of affirmation; and the

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1 Inter-Faith Consultative Group of the Archbishop's Council, *Sharing one Hope? The Church of England and Christian-Jewish Relations*, Church House Publishing; London, 2001, p. 32.
2 Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate*. Published on 28 October 1965.
3 Inter-Faith Consultative Group of the Archbishop's Council, *Sharing one Hope?*, p. 32.

way of sharing. This document recognised the development of historical and theological insights that challenged some of the approaches the Church had taken in the past towards Jews and Muslims, and that all three faiths share some commonalities of hope, understanding and goal as far as 'God's Kingdom' on earth is concerned. Emerging from this Lambeth Conference was the establishment of an Inter-faith Consultative Group set up in order to establish a 'common approach' to people of other faiths. Involving ecumenical representatives of the different faiths, agreement was hard to reach, particularly on issues of mission. It was not until 2001, that the group was able to publish the document: 'Sharing one Hope? The Church of England and Christian-Jewish relations. A contribution to a continuing debate.' Even then, this document was published on the basis that it 'has no authority other than that of an occasional paper published to summarise the issues, to encourage discussion, and to suggest ways of promoting good practice within the Church of England.'[4]

Since then, matters have become even more complex. As the situation in Israel/Palestine has deteriorated, with two intifadas, a number of major Israeli campaigns against Gaza and Hamas in Lebanon, and the ever-increasing growth of Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories with all that that entails, the Church of England has sought to maintain channels of communication and trust with both the British Jewish community, and to be supportive of the indigenous Anglican community in the Holy Land. In 2008, the Woolf Institute of Abrahamic Faiths in Cambridge, produced a report for the 2008 Lambeth Conference to aid in their reflections: 'Children of Zion: Jewish and Christian Perspectives on the Holy Land'. In 2011, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster convened a conference at Lambeth Palace especially to support the Christian communities in the Holy Land. And in 2012, the Anglican Network for Inter-faith Concerns produced the Report: 'Land of Promise? An Anglican Exploration of Christian attitudes to the Holy Land, with special reference to "Christian Zionism"'. In the same year (2012) at the General Synod of the Church of England, a motion was passed to support EAPPI (the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel), which had been set up by the World

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4   Inter-Faith Consultative Group of the Archbishop's Council, *Sharing one Hope?*, p. 37.

Council of Churches in 2003, and also other peace and reconciliation organisations such as the 'Parents Circle Families Forum'. This caused considerable tension between the Church of England and the Jewish community. All these initiatives sought to inform and enhance dialogue and debate in an increasingly complex and difficult situation in which there are clearly issues of justice on both sides. Most recently, the silencing at the behest of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, of one of the world's leading experts on Christian Zionism, Stephen Sizer, an Anglican priest and world-renowned speaker and writer on Israel/Palestine, for allegedly posting anti-semitic material on social networks has highlighted the profound sensitivity of this subject. As a result, at the time of writing, the Council for Christians and Jews (CCJ) is compiling a report on what constitutes anti-semitism, in order to clarify what represents acceptable analysis of this subject.

The issue of Israel/Palestine is clearly complex. There are contradictory narratives of the history of the land, depending on whose history one is telling. (Even Jewish historians are divided in their presentation of the history of the last century). There are opposing claims to the land that are rooted in the history of millennia. And indisputably, the land is holy to all three of the Abrahamic faiths. As previously discussed, there is a profound attachment to Israel for Jews, much more so since the horrific events of the Holocaust. But equally, there are Palestinian citizens, both Muslim and Christian, who have lived in the land and nurtured it for generations, but whose lands and rights are being unjustly denied.

What is certain is that the current realities of Israel/Palestine lead to a cycle of violence and hatred that is both dangerous and unacceptable, and is damaging relationships between people of faith, not just in Israel/Palestine, but wherever Jews, Christians and Muslims live together. Increasingly, members of these communities themselves are challenging Jews and Christians to go beyond the physical realities and historical traumas. On 14 August, 2014, Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu wrote in the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz*: 'My plea to the people of Israel is to see beyond the moment, to see beyond the anger at feeling perpetually under siege, to see a world in which Israel and Palestine can co-exist—a world in which mutual dignity and respect reign ….Nelson Mandela famously said that South Africans would not feel free until Palestinians were free. He might have added that the liberation

of Palestine will liberate Israel, too.'[5]

Significant theological reflection has originated over the past thirty years from within the Palestinian Christian community itself, and this has profoundly influenced the Christian understanding of the Israel/ Palestine context. Emerging in part from the Anglican Church in Jerusalem, it has also influenced Jewish-Christian relations in the UK. Being situated between Catholicism and Orthodoxy, and more radical Protestants, Anglicans and Lutherans in the Holy Land have been well placed to be ecumenically active, and to speak from a 'middle ground'

In the early 1980s, Revd Canon Naim Ateek, an Anglican priest at St. George's Anglican Cathedral, Jerusalem, began to reflect in his Sunday sermons on a biblical response to the political realities prevailing in Israel/Palestine, and afterwards to gather members of the congregation, whether indigenous or visitors, for discussion. As I attended one of these post-service discussions as a student in 1982, the sense of excitement and theological engagement that was felt amongst those present was tangible and deeply memorable. Using the Anglican principle of interpreting scripture in the light of tradition and reason, and recognising, as the 2012 Anglican report 'Land of Promise?' later put it, that 'Christian communities in the Holy Land … know that their biblically mandated vocation is to make peace, to work for justice and to seek reconciliation', Ateek sought to understand the Church's role in fulfilling that vocation in the Israel/Palestine context.[6] In this, he was greatly influenced by the example of Liberation Theology, a theology rooted in peoples' experience—not just a 're-interpretation of Western theology, but an "irruption" of God, active and living among the poor'.[7]

In 1989 Ateek published some of the results of these reflections in his first book *Justice and only Justice: A Palestinian theology of Liberation*. In it, Ateek explores what it means to be Palestinian and Christian, and how his experience of dispossession at the hands of the State of Israel relates to biblical narrative and interpretation—and how that

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5 Desmond Tutu, *My plea to the people of Israel: Liberate yourselves by liberating Palestine* in Ha'aretz Website: http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/1.610687 14 August 2014 (Accessed 3 March 2015).
6 Anglican Communion Network for Inter Faith Concerns, *Land of Promise? An Anglican Exploration of Christian attitudes to the Holy Land, with special reference to 'Christian Zionism'*, The Anglican Consultative Council: London; 2012, 7.29. p. 62.
7 Samuel J Kuruvilla, *Radical Christianity in Palestine and Israel. Liberation and Theology in the Middle* East, I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd; 2013, London. New York, p. 66.

interpretation continues to be used by many Jews and Christians to justify the actions of the State of Israel. How could the Bible be used to justify injustice and occupation? How could the aspirations of the Jewish scriptures be reconciled with current realities? What does 'Covenant' or 'the land' mean? What biblical paradigm can speak to the Palestinian people? Ateek was adamant that the Exodus paradigm could not be applied to the Palestinian situation, since the exodus that Jews celebrate, had meant slavery, subjugation and dispossession for those already living in the land. For Ateek, the parallels with the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 were raw. Therefore, taking a Palestinian perspective, Ateek explored the Jewish traditions of justice and compassion, and the prophetic imperative in the face of conflict, concluding that the Christian vocation in this context is to reclaim the Bible; to be a voice for the voiceless, crying and working for justice, but doing so with a spirit of mercy, compassion and reconciliation. Since its founding, 'Sabeel' has succeeded in bringing these questions to the attention of Christians worldwide, and has organised well-attended International Conferences in Jerusalem, Europe and North America to explore these issues.

The Tantur Ecumenical Institute outside Bethlehem had been opened in 1971, but with its international staff and focus, local Christians had felt 'increasingly ill-at-ease' there.[8] Consequently, a group led by Dr Geries Sa'ed Khoury set up the Al-Liqa Centre in Bethlehem, which focussed on dialogue and understanding between Christians and Muslims in Palestine, and soon developed a 'contextualised theology that took into consideration the existence, needs and cultural aspirations of the Muslim and Christian communities of Israel–Palestine–Jordan'.[9] As Al-Liqa's contextual dialogue was developing, Ateek founded the 'Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre' in Jerusalem, whose role remains both theological, and in advocacy with the Church in the West. The first Palestinian Liberation Theology Conference, organised by 'Sabeel', was held at Tantur in 1990. At the heart of these developments lay the questions of how and whether the theology behind Zionist aspirations and much biblical interpretation can be reconciled with the experience of occupation and dispossession that are in part a consequence. A strength of Sabeel, given the diversity of

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8   Samuel J Kuruvilla, *Radical Christianity in Palestine and Israel*, p. 76.
9   Samuel J Kuruvilla, *Radical Christianity in Palestine and Israel*, p. 77.

the Holy Land's Christian denominations, has been its ecumenical dimension, and, given the shared experience of Christians vis à vis Israel with Palestinian Muslims, its inclusion of interfaith dialogue as a priority. Sabeel International Conferences have followed every other year, attended by hundreds of Church leaders and theologians from around the world. In July 2000, Sabeel published the Jerusalem Sabeel Document which 'outlined the principles that were required for a just peace in Israel–Palestine'.[10] It saw the return of all occupied territories as a moral imperative upon the Israeli Government, and the importance of Jerusalem as an 'open city' for Israelis, Palestinians and international visitors. In the years following, Sabeel was instrumental in political advocacy, and advocacy of human rights in the Israel/Palestine context. The Sabeel International Conference in Jerusalem in 2004, was particularly controversial, taking as it did the title 'Challenging Christian Zionism'. Illustrative of the wider sensitivity of this issue, there was considerable disappointment amongst all involved, particularly the indigenous Church leaders, when the Archbishop of Canterbury, who had agreed to be one of the keynote speakers, withdrew from the Conference just weeks beforehand, sending one of his staff to deliver his lecture.

Particularly influential in the United Kingdom was Sabeel's call for the Church's Divestment from all companies whose products and services were used in ways that supported or sustained the illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories. When the World Council of Churches in 2005 issued a call to member Churches to 'give serious consideration' to withdrawing financial investments from Israel, it received vigorous criticism from Jewish and Christian pro-Zionist groups.[11] And when the Church of England, at the request of the Anglican Bishop Riah Abu El-Assal and Naim Ateek, decided at its General Synod in February 2006 to consider divestment from companies whose services benefited the State of Israel's occupation in the Palestinian territories, (particularly at the time from Caterpillar, whose bulldozers are involved in the destruction of Palestinian homes and properties), the move was strongly condemned by the then Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, forcing a partial retraction by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

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10 Samuel J Kuruvilla, *Radical Christianity in Palestine and Israel*, p. 152.
11 Samuel J Kuruvilla, *Radical Christianity in Palestine and Israel*, p. 186.

Other indigenous Christian leaders who have been instrumental in presenting the Palestinian narrative include Melkite Archbishop Elias Chacour. His autobiographical works: 'Blood Brothers', and 'We belong to the Land', published in 1984 and 1991 respectively, have been read all over the world. Like that of most Palestinians, his story covers the traumas of exile and occupation, but is also a story of hope. Chacour has devoted his life to a ministry of reconciliation amongst and between Israeli and Palestinian Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities; to seeking to build up the educational opportunities of both Israelis and Palestinians in Galilee; and to sharing in dialogue with any individuals or groups who visit him. The autobiography of Anglican Bishop Riah Abu El-Assal, entitled *Caught In-Between* (published in 1999) also highlighted for a foreign audience how the establishment of the State of Israel resulted in an 'identity crisis for him as well as many other Palestinian Christians, as all Palestinians were identified with ancient Israel's enemies,' and so encouraged the development of an indigenous theology to which Palestinian Christians could relate.[12]

So what did this theology entail? Ateek views the whole Bible from a non-violent Christ-centred liberation theology perspective. In the Hebrew Scriptures, he identifies three main strands: nationalist; Torah-oriented; and prophetic. The first clearly speaks to the Zionist enterprise, and is used by it to justify the State and its policies. The second 'Torah-oriented' strand is non-violence based, but though it has enabled the Jewish community to survive two thousand years of persecution, it has a tendency to encourage isolationism. The third strand is that which Ateek feels best relates to the Christian narrative and reflects Jesus' approach—that of the prophetic. In identifying the prophetic as the key strand in the Jewish scriptures, Ateek found a deeply influential ally in the Jewish theologian, Marc Ellis, whose contributions we shall explore further shortly. Ateek also regards many Jewish theologies of 'election' as implicitly racist. He appeals to the universality of the prophets, particularly Amos and Jonah. This universality he finds much more present in the New Testament; particularly in the teachings and parables of Jesus, and his encounters with Gentiles. This inclusivity is therefore the strand on which he bases his Palestinian theology of liberation.

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12 Samuel J Kuruvilla, *Radical Christianity in Palestine and Israel*, p. 93.

Ateek also contends with the Zionist theology of the land. He writes: 'Since the conflict in this part of the Middle East revolves around the issue of the land—and since God and the Bible have been used to justify the theft of the land—it is important to continue to study the Bible to discover if God and the Bible are indeed a party to such injustice'.[13] Far from being narrow and restrictive as both Jewish and evangelical Christian theologies of the land propose, Ateek sees the land as representing the whole earth, which is the Lord's. The whole world is holy. None of the key covenant moments with Abraham or Moses he notes took place in the borders of the Holy Land. When however, the people are placed in a particular piece of land, that residency has responsibilities and consequences. Their presence in the land is dependent upon their obedience to God, but when they are disobedient to God's laws, their obsession with the land and their sin in dealing with others in the land has disastrous consequences.

Another Palestinian Christian theologian influential in western Christian theological thinking on Israel/Palestine is Mitri Raheb who, alongside Gideon Levy, won the Olaf Palme Prize for Peace in 2015. Raheb is the Lutheran minister in Bethlehem. Like Ateek, he was of Greek Orthodox descent, but his grandfather had been inspired by the Palestinian Protestant tradition's early Arab nationalist aspirations. Raheb was involved in the Al–Liqa Theological Centre in Bethlehem in its early days, and shared Ateek's concern at the way 'Israeli politics and Christian Zionism had hijacked Christian theology in the west'.[14] Indeed, the way the bible is taught to Christians in the west naturally evokes Zionist sympathies. Palestinian Christians regard themselves as the descendants of the early Jewish Christians, but this is ignored by Christians beyond Palestine, many of whom are ignorant of even the existence of the Palestinian Christian community, whose two thousand year old history is often disregarded in the west's approach to Israel. Hence, Raheb, rather than focus on liberation theology which he believed was 'too bound to Western political thought', has developed a contextual theology for Palestinian Christians.[15]

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13 Naim Stefan Ateek, *A Palestinian Cry for Reconciliation*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll NY, 2008, p. 57.
14 Samuel J Kuruvilla, *Radical Christianity in Palestine and Israel*, p. 194.
15 Samuel J Kuruvilla, *Radical Christianity in Palestine and Israel*, p. 198.

In his recent book, *Faith in the Face of Empire*, Raheb makes a vigorous critique of the 2500 year history of occupation in the land of Palestine, and points out that it is the history, theology and thinking of outside empires that have moulded current realities in the land of Israel/Palestine. Raheb points out however, that all the historical analyses of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict tend to begin with the nineteenth century and therefore lack the historic depth of the centuries, failing to see the current conflict as part of an ongoing pattern. This historic disconnect, says Raheb, leads to false political analyses, for which the Palestinians are paying a high price.[16] This is also partly why there are two narratives: that of those outside the experience of empire; and that of the indigenous people of the land who have been, and continue to be, victims of empire. Raheb notes that the history of the people of the land has always been intertwined with that of other indigenous inhabitants of the region, and in the past centuries with the Muslim community. Indeed, the survival of the Christian Arab community has been related to their non-confrontational relationship with the other Arabs in the region. In this context, Raheb reminds us that Jesus presents a paradigm of liberation and a cry for justice, and challenges the Church to remember that 'one cannot understand the Gospel if they are disconnected from their original context, which is Palestine'—and its whole history, not just that of the past century.[17]

As Christians we are called to be harbingers of the Kingdom. To resist occupation and violence is not to react with violence. Rather 'resistance requires faith', and faith 'is nothing less than developing the bold vision of a new reality and mobilizing the needed resources to make it happen', whilst at the same time 'restoring a sense of community across ideological differences and geographical barriers'.[18] In seeking to do this Raheb, like Chacour, has been instrumental in building and supporting Christian educational institutions in Palestine to share this vision. His theology has sought to have practical outcomes rooted in the lives and aspirations of the indigenous Christian community, and in partnership with their Muslim compatriots. Part of this has been the creation in 1995 of the 'Diyar Consortium' at the International Center

16 Mitri Raheb, *Faith in the Face of Empire. The Bible through Palestinian Eyes*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll NY, 2014, p. 10.
17 Mitri Raheb, *Faith in the Face of Empire*, p. 97.
18 Mitri Raheb, *Faith in the Face of Empire*, p. 102-103.

of Bethlehem, whose mission, working with the whole Palestinian community in projects that are contextual and holistic, is 'to build a country, stone by stone; to empower a community, person by person; to create institutions that give life in abundance'.[19]

British theologians have recently been at the forefront of challenging prevailing Christian Zionist theology. The Vincentian priest, Michael Prior, in his ground-breaking work *The Bible and Colonialism: A Moral Critique*[20] and in subsequent works until his sudden death in 2004, examined how the Old Testament has been used in Israel-Palestine, as well as in other contexts throughout recent history to justify injustice and oppression, even ethnic cleansing. Professor Nur Masalha, a colleague of Michael Prior's, has also written much on the conquest and 'militarist land traditions' in the Hebrew Bible, and how these have been instrumental in justifying Israel's actions since its establishment in 1948. Mention has been made of Anglican priest, Stephen Sizer, whose life-long study and critique of the roots, theology and history of Christian Zionism, has cost him considerably from those who have labelled such study 'anti-semitic'.

Another initiative of the Palestinian Christian community that has continued to cause considerable debate was the publication in 2009 of the 'Kairos Document—A Moment of Truth'.[21] Inspired by the 'Kairos' document that had rallied the worldwide Christian community against Apartheid in South Africa in 1985, leading Palestinian Christians of different denominations, in the light of years of oppression, displacement and suffering, called upon the international community to stand against injustice; to work for a just peace; and to challenge theologies that justify the continuing perpetration of crimes and dispossession against a particular people. The cry was made in frustration at the inaction of the worldwide community, including the Church's silence in the face of the suffering of the Palestinian Christian community. But it was also rooted in 'faith, hope and love', as a call to Israelis and Palestinians; Jews, Christians and Muslims, seeing 'the face of God in each one of God's creatures', to acknowledge the political realities, and in a spirit

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19 Mitri Raheb, *http://www.diyar-consortium.org/?TemplateId=info&PageId=1&MenuId =2&Lang=1* (Accessed: 6 March 2015).
20 Michael Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism: A Moral Critique*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 1997.
21 Kairos Palestine, *A Moment of Truth. A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering*, Kairos Palestine, Bethlehem, Palestine, 2009.

of repentance and reconciliation, to act to transform them. The most controversial element in this report was the call to peaceful resistance, and particularly the cry for economic divestment and boycott of all Israeli individuals and companies that profit from the occupation.[22] Sadly, the Church of England General Synod, under pressure yet again from British Jews who were highly critical of the Document, was unable to endorse it on these grounds. And yet the proposals within the document represent a completely non-violent and many would argue justifiable response to injustice. It would seem to those standing in solidarity with Palestinian peaceful aspirations that those who endorse Israeli policies oppose any resolution at all that seeks to change the status quo. Meanwhile, the Church, extremely sensitive to and afraid of any suggestion of 'anti-semitism', experiences opposition at even the slightest criticism of the State of Israel, and therefore finds it very difficult to undertake any form of corporate advocacy. It has to be asked whether this reluctance is consistent with the Christian imperative of standing up for justice and peace and alongside the poor and oppressed.

However, an increasing number of Christians are challenging this reluctance. The Bethlehem Bible College's International Conferences entitled 'Christ at the Checkpoint', have brought together evangelicals from all over the world to address these issues, and an increasing number of Christians are taking note.

Jewish contributions to the Israel–Palestine debate

With the turn of the 'Arab Spring' into an 'Arab winter', and with interfaith relations under increasing stress from on-going conflicts within the Middle East, the issue of Israel/Palestine continues to be fraught. Some would argue that the failure to resolve the conflict over past decades, and the consistent support that Israel has received from the West, has contributed to the deepening crisis in the region. Meanwhile, anti-semitic incidents have increased across Europe, as have anti-Muslim hate incidents. This has led to an even deeper entrenchment of protectionism and defensiveness from Jews vis-à-vis Israel. However, there are many different voices. Rabbi Laura Janner-Klausner, Leader

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22 Kairos Palestine, *A Moment of Truth*, pp 12-14.

of Reform Judaism in Britain, was keen to emphasise to me the variety of Jewish attitudes towards Israel that prevail amongst British Jewry. Indeed, there are some for whom Israel bears little relevance, other than offering a sense of corporate identity, and it is in that context that some offer solidarity, whilst being critical of some of the policies and actions of the Israeli government. Indeed, when asked what theological paradigms might enable a more harmonious discourse between Jews and Christians on the subject of Israel/Palestine, Rabbi Laura vigorously denied that it was a theological issue at all. Rather, she said, it is a matter of identity that is crucial to the Jewish people.[23] This may indeed be one of the difficulties in Christian-Jewish discourse on the subject—that Christians tend to see and discuss the Land and Covenant in theological terms that are open to debate, whilst many post-Holocaust Jews are more concerned about the political survival and corporate identity that Israel represents, and either see their theological claims as a 'given', or as of little relevance to more immediate political priorities.

There are however Jewish historians and theologians who challenge the prevailing Jewish narrative. The first Jewish historian to present a different narrative was Israel Shahak (1933-2001), a Polish Holocaust survivor. Arriving in Israel in 1945, he was 'distressed by the way it (Jewish rabbinical law), was applied towards non-Jews, namely the Palestinian citizens'.[24] Shahak challenged the prevailing narrative in the creation of the State of Israel, that Jews were the 'hapless victims of a Christian anti-semitism', and sought to acknowledge the Jewish participation in the exploitation of the indigenous oppressed peasants (Palestinians) in the land, which he declared was an outcome of 'Judaism's separateness and sense of superiority'.[25] Shahak echoed the views of Yeshayahu Liebowitz,(1903-1994) a respected religious Jew who emigrated to Palestine in 1935, and who participated in the early Zionist religious and political enterprise. Liebowitz felt that in the State of Israel, 'Zionism had become more sacred than Jewish and humanist values'.[26] Much later he stated that the Six Days War in 1967 was a turning point when 'we switched from the moral task of establishing a nation state that protects the Jewish people to an immoral colonial

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23 Interview with Rabbi Laura Janner-Klausner in London, October 2014.
24 Ilan Pappé, *The Idea of Israel. A History of Power and Knowledge*, Verso, London, New York, 2014, p. 72.
25 Ilan Pappé, *The Idea of Israel*, p. 74.
26 Ilan Pappé, *The Idea of Israel*, p. 80.

state, an empire ruling over others'.[27] It wasn't until the 1980s and 1990s that Israel's 'new historians' who challenged the prevailing narrative began to have a significant influence upon public opinion as regards the formation and history of the State of Israel. These include Ilan Pappé, Benny Morris, Tom Segev, Avi Shlaim and Baruch Kimmerling, who have now entered the mainstream of academic consideration.

Whilst there is a Christian theological discourse about Israel/ Palestine emerging from the context that challenges prevailing realities, but seeks a dialogue and process that might lead to a harmonious and peaceful resolution between Jews and Christians, it is less easy to identify a Jewish discourse that does not simply prioritise Israeli and Jewish interests. However, there are Jewish theologians who, in seeking to challenge Jewish theological and political attitudes towards Israel/ Palestine, represent a 'bridge' between the two communities. We have seen how Fackenheim, Rubenstein and Wiesel viewed Israel in the light of the Holocaust as a place of identity, a theological imperative for survival; and as a place of corporate identity. Space allows only a brief look at two further recent Jewish figures who have challenged more mainstream Jewish attitudes towards Israel.

Marc Ellis is an American Jew who has spent a lifetime exploring the implications of the Jewish faith as regards the State of Israel and the Holocaust. Ellis was shocked in early visits to Israel and Palestine to witness the outcome of what he referred to as 'Constantinian Judaism' (what Judaism has become in a position of power) for the Palestinian people. Recognising that after the Holocaust and the Six Days War, Israel had become 'more important than religious observance' and 'the new absolute, untouchable by others and by Jews themselves', in which justice for Jews after the Holocaust is found in Israel alone, Ellis asks what happens if we apply the same measure of justice to the State of Israel.[28] 'What does it mean to be a Jew after the Holocaust, and after what Israel has done and is doing to the Palestinian people?'[29] Ellis argues that Israel has lost its moral compass, indeed its very identity, and that in order to restore its very essence, Judaism must undergo

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27 Leah Shakdiel, 'Revisiting the Holy Rebellion', in *Abraham's Children. Liberty and Tolerance in an Age of Religious Conflict*, ed. Kelly James Clark, Yale University Press, New Haven, London, 2012, p. 67.

28 Marc Ellis, *Judaism does not equal Israel*, The New Press, New York, London, 2009, p. xi, p. 5

29 Marc Ellis, *Judaism does not equal Israel*, p. 53.

a process of 'revolutionary forgiveness' and a 're-presentation' of the Jewish prophetic. Ellis acknowledges that empowerment for Jews was essential after the Holocaust for Jewish survival, but that Israel has achieved this power through the suffering of others, and that it is only when Israel can acknowledge that suffering and its part in creating it, that Israel's vocation to be a 'light to the nations' can be restored. At present, he believes Israel represents a new kind of idolatry for the Jewish faith, an idolatry which can only be healed when Jews are honest about their history and the current realities.

Ellis is not hopeful about whether this kind of 're-presentation' of the prophetic role is ever likely to be adopted. For too long Jews and Christians have colluded in the denial of the Palestinian narrative. This, Ellis states, is due to what he calls the 'ecumenical deal', in which Christians are offered forgiveness for their collusion in the Holocaust by the Jewish people, only if they in turn offer their unconditional support for the State of Israel. Citing Martin Buber's concern for the Zionist project,(he recognised the displacement and suffering of another people in the creation of the State of Israel, and affirmed that Jewish self-determination produced obligations for justice and the rights of any other community), Ellis, in what he terms the 'broken middle', states that hope lies where the 'other's' claims, history and suffering are recognised. This 'broken middle' refuses to let past suffering mask the necessity for present accountability.[30] However, according to Ellis, it may be too late. For him, Jewish history has been almost totally compromised by how power is lived and practised by the State of Israel. He even goes so far as to suggest that the actions of the State of Israel have brought about 'the end of the Jewish history we have known and inherited'.[31]

The model that Ellis believes can offer hope of redemption for the Jewish people lies in liberation theology, and in what he terms the 're-presentation' of the prophetic. In his profound work *'Revolutionary Forgiveness'*, he affirms that the integrity of Judaism can only be restored by a 'revolutionary forgiveness' which is found 'in the ending of injustice and the journey towards a mutual and just future'.[32] This

30 Marc Ellis, *Towards a Jewish Theology of Liberation*, Baylor University Press, Waco, Texas, 2004, p. 188, p. 195.

31 Marc Ellis, *Judaism does not equal Israel*, p. 218.

32 Marc Ellis, *Revolutionary Forgiveness. Essays on Judaism, Christianity, and the Future of the Religious Life*, Baylor University Press, Waco, Texas, 2000, p. 103.

Revolutionary Forgiveness allows the possibility of new beginnings, of healing, and the transformation of memory.

Ellis has been subject to years of opposition from Jewish peers. He regards himself and those who challenge the State of Israel as 'Jews of Conscience' living in an intellectual and religious 'exile' imposed by his own people. In, *'Future of the Prophetic. Israel's Ancient Wisdom Re-presented',* Ellis sees the prophetic tradition as the only hope for the redemption of Judaism. He writes: 'The consequences of the prophetic are enormous. … Our newfound power stands under prophetic judgement. Our memorialisation of the Holocaust stands under prophetic judgement. The State of Israel stands under prophetic judgement.'[33] Ellis believes that the establishment of the State of Israel has been catastrophic for the integrity of the Jewish faith, and that the predictions of Jewish figures like Arendt and Buber, who feared the consequences of Jewish empowerment, have come true. Nevertheless, this 'catastrophe' can be reversed if Israel reclaims her prophetic tradition, and if in mutual reflection and acknowledgement of Israeli and Palestinian narratives, reconciliation, through revolutionary forgiveness, is allowed to take place.

Another more recent Jewish contribution is that of Dr Mark Braverman. Like Ellis, it was his first visit to Israel/Palestine that left him burning with the questions: 'Why are my people doing this?' and 'Why is the Christian world helping us do it?'[34] His conclusion was that in attempting to absolve themselves of anti–semitic doctrines of which Christians have been accused by Jews in contributing to the Holocaust, (namely 'supersessionism' and 'replacement theology') Christians in the West have 'embraced a theology that effectively supports the superior Jewish claims to the land'.[35] This reverts Christianity from a faith that preaches the love of God for all, that hears the prophetic cry and seeks the ending of injustice and the idolatry of power and instead the establishment of a Kingdom of God for all, to a particularity that

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33 Marc Ellis. *Future of the Prophetic. Israel's Ancient Wisdom Re-presented*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2014, p. 6.

34 Mark Bravermen, 'Beyond Interfaith Reconciliation: A New Paradigm for a Theology of Land', in *Theologies of Liberation in Palestine-Israel. Indigenous, Contextual, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, eds Nur Masalha and Lisa Isherwood, *Postmodern Ethics Series*, Vol. 4, Pickwick Publications, Eugene, Oregon, 2014, p. 156.

35 Braverman, *Beyond interfaith Reconciliation: A New Paradigm for a Theology of Land*, p. 159.

endorses land possession and conquest. In endorsing a purely Jewish claim to the land, Christians are embracing a new triumphalism that is at odds with the essence of both Judaism and Christianity. In a term similar to Ellis's 'ecumenical deal', Braverman speaks of the 'Interfaith trap' in which the post-holocaust obligation of sensitivity towards the Jewish narrative, experience and perspective 'determines the nature and direction of the discourse,' and that 'the superior right of the Jews to the land is not to be challenged.'[36] Braverman does not mince his words. He writes: 'The Christian impulse for reconciliation has morphed into theological support for an anachronistic, ethnic-nationalist ideology that has hijacked Judaism, continues to fuel global conflict, and has produced one of the most systematic and longstanding violations of human rights in the world today.'[37]

In the light of the tragic realities that persist in Israel-Palestine, in the face of growing concern amongst Jewish and Christian theologians, and perhaps most importantly of all, for the sake of Palestinians (both Christian and Muslim) who are suffering daily injustices, and Israelis who are being brutalised by a theologically justified political system— and as Marc Ellis states; 'for the sake of Judaism itself'—it is increasingly imperative that we seek ways in which Jewish, Christian and Muslim concerns can be aired and heard; actions that lead to injustice, violence and hatred ended; and relationships and policies that are true to the Jewish and Christian traditions of justice and righteousness, transformed. The challenge is to consider how this might be achieved.

Conclusion

Given Britain's historical responsibility for helping to create the circumstances that prevail in Israel/Palestine, it is vital that we play a significant part in seeking to resolve the conflict. This cannot simply be a political initiative, though political change is essential. For our responsibility is religious as well as political. Israel/Palestine is sacred

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36 Braverman, *Beyond Interfaith Reconciliation: A New Paradigm for a Theology of Land*, p. 164.

37 Braverman, *Beyond Interfaith Reconciliation: A New Paradigm for a Theology of Land*, p. 167.

to all three Abrahamic faiths, and it is the 'home' of both Judaism and Christianity. Any form of resolution, both political and religious, will involve the changing of hearts and minds in different faith communities, from long-held cultural and religious prejudices, and theological assumptions, and through a painful process of reconciliation after decades of suffering and conflict. People of faith are instrumental in this process. Indeed, if part of our Christian vocation is to help build the 'kingdom of God' on earth, it is our duty to assist that process and to challenge injustice and violence wherever it comes from.

The Churches in the Holy Land are already playing a significant part in seeking non-violent ways of challenging the status quo. Christian organisations such as Sabeel, Kairos, the Al-Liqa Centre, and Bethlehem Bible College, are doing important work in exploring and challenging the theology that perpetuates the situation. Musalaha, (Reconciliation) is another Christian-run movement that brings Israelis and Palestinians together in the desert to build dialogue and friendships. There are also many Jewish organisations that are deeply involved in advocacy for change, and in seeking to deepen understanding of the different narratives. For example: ICAHD (the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions) helps to rebuild Palestinian homes that have been demolished; 'B'tselem' is an Israeli NGO that monitors all human rights abuses committed against Palestinians in the Palestinian territories, and seeks to hold the Israeli Government to account for them; and 'Zochrot' takes Israelis on tours of destroyed villages to tell the story of the events of the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, (the *'nakba'*—'catastrophe' as it is termed by the Palestinians) and the consequences for the Palestinian people.

The Churches in England are engaged to a certain degree, as can be seen by the reports that have been produced by the mainstream Churches and the meetings that are held. However, the nature of that engagement is viewed with cynicism by Christians in the Holy Land. For all engagement by Christians outside the Holy Land is subject to that 'sensitivity' that was mentioned earlier, and any statement made or action suggested that is perceived to challenge the Jewish narrative or status quo is often labelled 'anti-semitic'. This means in reality that there is little change 'on the ground', and the Kairos cry of the Christians in the Holy Land is mostly ignored.

So where do we go from here? Is it possible to find a 'bridge' that can both meet the concerns and anxiety of the Jewish people and respect the sense of identity that Israel represents for them, and respond to the real issues of injustice that are experienced and have been experience by the Palestinian people for the past hundred years? I believe that a combination of some of the prophetic approaches mentioned in this dissertation may offer hope for Jewish-Christian engagement on this issue in Britain.

There are some foundational elements that have been established between Jews and Christians in this country. In 2001, the Church of England established the following areas of agreement as regards discussion on Israel–Palestine: Christians and Jews agree on the 'continuing vitality' of Judaism and repudiate all forms of anti-semitism. In finding 'replacement' theology unacceptable, the report states that theologically, it 'calls into question the faithfulness of God' to those He calls; that scripturally, it 'fails to do justice to the subtlety of the New Testament witness regarding Israel'; historically, it leads inevitably to Christian accusations of the 'Jews God-forsakenness' which was at the root of so much persecution; and finally pastorally, any idea that the Old Testament is 'out of date' 'continues to feed negative attitudes to Judaism'.[38] The Jewishness of Jesus is acknowledged, and the need for sensitivity in Christian liturgy and education is affirmed. Jews and Christians also share the same hope for the realisation of God's Kingdom on earth. None of this denies continuing differences as regards understanding of the Covenant, of the Land, and of Christology. Nor does it require agreement on these matters. However, clearly it does not go far enough. It clings to the boundaries set by Jewish sensitivities that stifle engagement and hope for real progress in addressing the core issues that affect all communities in the Holy Land. A new paradigm of hope that goes further is needed.

The situation in Israel/Palestine will continue to deeply affect Jewish/Christian relations in Britain until we can both honour Jewish sensibilities and justly address Palestinian realities. The bases upon which current discussions are held are inadequate. We need to go further and we need to engage the prophetic. I believe that the principles necessary for progress have already been established, both within the

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38 *Sharing one Hope? The Church of England and Christian-Jewish Relations*, Church House Publishing, London, 2001, p. 20.

Jewish community, and by the Christian voices in the Holy Land today.

From the Jewish community Buber, Levinas and Ellis each have wisdom to offer that could transform a Jewish approach to the conflict if Jews had the courage to follow them. Martin Buber, who lived both through the first and second world wars, and, having moved to Palestine in 1938, was in Jerusalem for the creation of the State of Israel, saw 'union with the other' as 'the path of realisation'.[39] Authentic human existence he said is not found in theories and sensations but in 'meeting' with the 'other'. At the heart of human and divine encounter is the I/thou relationship, which 'demands' participation, not distance, giving oneself, not objectivity'.[40] If God is everywhere as Buber believed, then our lives ought to be transformed in such a way that we are enabled to discover a personal relationship with God and with the world around us. Buber saw relationship as more important than Jewish tradition and law, and therefore strongly advocated a bi-national Arab and Jewish State in Israel/Palestine. 'We want Palestine', he wrote, 'not "for the Jews". We want it for mankind, because we want it for the realisation of Judaism'. [41] In Buber's challenge to Jews to acknowledge the sanctity of all life, and to transform the world into a place of peace, justice and relationship, he offers a model that is still relevant to the Israel/Palestine debate.

Another Jewish writer who, in response to the challenge of the Holocaust, developed a different and ethical approach to issues of evil and violence is Emmanuel Levinas. Confronted with the reality of Auschwitz he asks the question: 'Can we speak of morality after the failure of morality?'[42] He sees the only possible response as an ethical one, in which we respond to the suffering of the other. He writes: 'It is only by ethically responding to the evil inflicted on my fellow

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39 Tamra Wright, 'Self, Other, Text, God: The Dialogical Thought of Martin Buber', in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Jewish Philosophy*, eds Michael L Morgan and Peter Eli Gordon, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007, pp. 102-122 (p. 104).

40 Eugene Borowitz, *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought*, Behrman House Inc., West Orange NJ, 1983, p. 145.

41 Martin Buber and Hermann Cohen, 'A debate on Zionism and Messianism. (Summer 1916)' in *The Jew in the Modern World. A Documentary History*, eds Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 1995, pp. 571-577.

42 Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 254.

human beings that I *become* fully human',[43] and '… this is my entire philosophy—there is something more important than my life, and that is the life of the other'.[44]

If we were to take the principles of these two writers alone, and combine them with the cry for the prophetic approach of Marc Ellis, we would have a Jewish approach to the complexity and the moral imperative of seeking to address the long-standing conflict in Israel/Palestine, that, whilst remaining faithful to Jewish theology, may be able to 'unstick' the binding of Jewish tradition and entity which prevents progress.

From a Christian perspective, we have already referred to the writings and theology of Naim Ateek, Mitri Raheb and the challenge of Kairos, and 'Christ at the Checkpoint'. These offer a theologically rooted practical basis for a profound Jewish-Christian dialogue on approaches that seek ways of justice and peace, and that go beyond the complexities and disagreements of historical dialogue and debate. More than ever, all communities need to hear the 'other' with empathy and respect, and to put aside doctrinal differences in the search for a peace that can respond to the needs of all. The mechanisms for the kind of dialogue required are also available, such as the approach of Hans Gadamer (1900-2002) who sought a 'fusion of horizons' through dialogue and understanding. We may attempt the approach of David Bohm (1917-1992), who seeks through dialogue to create a 'pool of common meaning', and through listening and enquiry to the other seeks to lift a 'mirror' to the other to observe thought processes and discern meaning from which progress can be made.

That dialogue is essential is beyond doubt. In Britain today, and partly as a consequence of the terrible events unfolding throughout the Middle East, the Jewish community in particular has retreated into an even more protective and entrenched stance in relation to the wider world. Political realities in Israel suggest that that entrenchment is a fact for many Israelis as well. Nevertheless, the Israel/Palestine conflict remains one of the most important conflicts in the world yet to be resolved, and a just and peaceful resolution for all communities would herald incalculable benefits for all the people of the region, and would transform relations between members of the Abrahamic faiths.

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43 *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, p. 263.
44 *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, p. 264.

Israel/Palestine, because of its historical, theological and political importance, requires both a theological and a political approach in debate and resolution. I believe that the individuals and organisations mentioned in this Dissertation offer paths of hope and possibility for the future, and that Christians and Jews in England are well placed to engage in this dialogue and consider these matters in depth. Sadly at present, it is unlikely that either Christian or Jewish leadership in England have the political or religious will to do so, for the reasons we have explored. However, when they choose to grasp the challenge and opportunities that these theological and political approaches present, we may see the chance for a just and peaceful future for Israel/Palestine, and a new paradigm of Jewish/Christian/Muslim relations, not just in the region, but in Britain and around the world as well.

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JESUS THE JEW AND
JESUS THE PALESTINIAN?*
Duncan Macpherson

'*How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?*' (John 4: 9)

The rediscovery of 'Jesus the Jew' is by now widely accepted in academic circles. The argument that Jesus could only be understood in the context of contemporary Judaism has been powerfully advanced by Geza Vermes[1] and E P Sanders [2] The attempt to introduce a second, new emphasis upon 'Jesus the Palestinian' requires some justification. This justification necessitates a re-examination of why it was thought appropriate to stress the Jewishness of Jesus and to ask whether an analogous case can be made for identifying him as a Palestinian. It will be seen that, at first sight, there are good grounds for rejecting either identification as misleading. Nonetheless, a critical use of the concept of 'Jesus the Jew' is essential to understanding his original historical context. Just as importantly, despite potential dangers of ideological one-sidedness, there are sound theological reasons for accepting the title. Similarly, it can be argued that the title of 'Jesus the Palestinian' has corresponding and complementary value, both for historical study and for theological perspective.

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* An earlier version of this article appeared in *A Third Millennium Guide to Pilgrimage to the Holy Land*, ed. Duncan Macpherson, Melisende, London, 2000, pp.91-98.
1 G Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* (*A historian's reading of the Gospels)*, Collins, London, 1973. See also his, *Jesus and them World of Judaism*, SCM Press, London, 1983 and *The Religion of Jesus the Jew*, SCM Press, London, 1993.
2 E P Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, SCM Press, London, 1985. Cf. also E P Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, Penguin Books, London, 1993.

Neither Jew nor Palestinian?

Reference to Jesus as either a Jew or a Palestinian needs to be carefully qualified. Both need to be seen as primarily analogical. Modern literary criticism cautions us to deconstruct the reading of any text and to be aware of the way in which it is refracted through the perceptions of the reader. Any reader in the 21st century brings to the word 'Jew' numerous associations that depend on the role of Jews in history and literature over the last two thousand years. These would include the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple, the Jewish diaspora, the Talmud, the Christian stereotypes of Jew as miser, Jew as victim and Jew as threat.[3] All these would have been unknown to Jesus just as much as would the language of Yiddish, the tragedy of the Shoah or the establishment of the State of Israel. The word 'Jew' on the lips of the Samaritan woman would have meant simply that Jesus was perceived as a follower of the official Judaean cult with its temple in Jerusalem. However, given mutual antipathy between Jews and Samaritans, her words can be taken as reflecting awareness of the distinctiveness of the two identities, even if they did not express actual hostility.

Speaking of 'Jesus the Jew' begs many of the questions raised by modern historical scholars over what precisely is meant by calling Jesus a 'Jew' in the very different religious framework of 1st-century Palestine. It is not at all clear that it is helpful to talk about '1st-century Judaism' when it would be more accurate to speak of several contemporary 'Judaisms'. So, to refer to 'Jews' in this period is, at the very least, problematic. Much of the detail of the way in which religion was practised in 1st-century Palestine remains a matter of conjecture and the assumption that it coincided with that of the destruction of the Second Temple is by no means secure. Later Judaism developed partly as a reaction against early Christianity and was developed over hundreds of years through numerous stages of reinterpretation by rabbinic scholarship.

However, there may be good grounds for claiming that the Jewishness of Jesus is an important prerequisite for seeing Jesus in

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3   There is however evidence of anti-Jewish prejudice in the pre-Christian culture of the Roman world. For example, see Victor Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, Atheneum, New York, 1975 and John M G Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE–117 CE),* University of California, Berkeley, 1999.

his original historical and cultural context. Locating Jesus within the framework of the Judaism of his time was intended to provide otherwise unavailable historical insights into his life and teaching. There are also sound ideological and moral reasons for stressing his identity with a people that have been subjected to centuries of persecution and contempt by those claiming to be his followers.

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Jesus the Jew

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Despite the caveats and qualifications there is considerable substance to the identification of Jesus as Jewish. The Gospel of John in particular tells us that he went to worship in the temple at Jerusalem and that he followed the worship prevalent among the people of Judaea rather than that of the Samaritans who worshipped in their own temple on Mount Gerizim. Without his Jewish context his actions and teachings would cease to be reasonable; his death would have been inexplicable, and the commitment of his followers would have been utterly implausible. Jesus is called Christ, the Messiah of the Jews. All four of the Gospels carry the same motif of promise and fulfilment. The Jewish Scriptures are interpreted as the harbingers of his life, death and resurrection. Every attempt to legitimise or explain his actions is justified by the appeal to Scripture. Jesus was at ease within the Jewish tradition of Covenant, prayer and Scripture. Thus, the religion of Jesus had much in common with that of later Judaism.

The city of Jerusalem had a central place in the official Judaean religion with which Jesus identified. So too had the Pentateuch and the Psalms as well as other biblical literature which eventually found its way into the Hebrew Canon [4]. Jesus and his disciples lived in a society that expected observance of the Sabbath (e.g., Mark 2: 23-3: 6) that observed Jewish rules on ritual pollution (e.g., Mark 1: 40-45)—rules which proscribed eating together or socialising with gentiles or with other categories of 'impure persons' (Mark 2: 15-17). This society enjoined ritual washing before meals (Mark 7: 1-8). These and numerous other practices were to become a feature of later Judaism. Jesus also celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7: 2) and the Passover (Mark 14: 12-16

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[4]   The Hebrew Canon was in fact quite fluid and was not finalised until the emergence of the Masoretic Text at a date between 7th and 10th centuries AD.

and parallels; also, John 2: 23 and 13: 1)—festivals that have survived in Judaism up until our own time. Clearly some understanding of this religious context to the life and teaching of Jesus is an absolute prerequisite to New Testament scholarship.

The emphasis on 'Jesus the Jew' is also ideological. Whatever value it may or may not have for building a bridge of understanding between Christian biblical scholars and later Judaism it is seen as helping to remove 'the culture of contempt' which characterised earlier Christian attitudes towards Judaism. It is worth noting, too, that critical biblical scholarship has coincided with an increasing scepticism towards traditional orthodox Christology. Liberal Protestantism, Consistent Eschatology, Roman Catholic Modernism and the Form Critical School all manifested this tendency. For those overly influenced by these theological currents the return of Jesus to Judaism provides an alternative focus from incarnational and Trinitarian Theology. Whatever such an approach does theologically, politically it can only weaken Christian sympathy for the Palestinians, strengthen support for the modern Zionist enterprise and effectively silence criticism of Israeli irredentism.

The inspiration for discovering the Jewishness of Jesus

The attempt to discover 'Jesus the Jew' was inspired by both historical and moral considerations. According to some, the Church had 'toned down' the emphasis on the Jewishness of Jesus in the interest of his more general appeal. Attempts to deny the Jewishness of Jesus reached their apogee in the Protestant theological academy in Germany during the Nazi period.[5] At the artistic level, too, Jesus was made to appear like a European gentile. At the same time it was hoped that the identification of 'Jesus the Jew' would correct the anti-Jewish perspectives in the Christian tradition and help to promote a stronger solidarity between Christians and Jews in the future.

For some of those whose emphasis on 'Jesus the Jew' is primarily ideological, however, one consequence of their perspective has been a reappraisal of supercessionalist Christology; the belief that Christ

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5   See T Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2008.

fulfilled the law and the prophets in such a way as to render Judaism an anachronism. For others such as John Pawlikowski and Paul van Buren, the implications of rediscovering Jesus the Jew has resulted in an even more radical approach, calling into question the metaphysical basis of traditional Christology. Recently the German theologian Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt has argued that the repatriation of Jesus to Judaism excludes traditional metaphysical formulations of who Christ is. For Marquandt Jesus is the saviour of the gentiles but not the saviour of the Jews, an approach challenged by the Messianic Christian theologian David Stern who insists that Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews and the Gentiles.[6]

Jesus the Palestinian

As with 'Jesus the Jew' reference to 'Jesus the Palestinian' provides similar and useful reference points for the Bible historian and invites the same degree of misgiving over potential anachronism. The justification for using the phrase 'Jesus the Palestinian' is not self-evident. The Samaritan woman refers to Jesus as 'a Jew' but the Scriptures never identify him as a Palestinian. Nowhere in the Bible is the land referred to as Palestine. The Hebrew equivalent *Philistia* refers only to the land of the Philistines, modern Gaza and its environs (see Exodus 15: 14 and Isaiah 14: 29 and 31). Jesus lived in the Roman province of Palestine, an area covering modern Israel, the West Bank and the East Bank of the river Jordan and the word had been used to refer to this area in the ancient Greek world since at least the time of Herodotus who wrote in the 5th century BC. For the modern reader, however, the word Palestine comes to the modern ear with all the historic associations of Islamic culture and Arabic language, and, more recently, with territorial dispossession, violent resistance, the two *Intifadas,* the Oslo Accords, Hamas and the ongoing conflicts in Gaza. Nonetheless the historical and ideological reasons justifying the identification of 'Jesus the Jew' have parallel validity in the case of 'Jesus the Palestinian'.

The identification of Jesus as a Palestinian is not intended to rival or to supplant the earlier project but to complement and provide a

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6   See Harald Hegstad, 'Saviour of the Gentiles or Israel's Messiah?', *Theology Digest*, summer 1997, for an accessible summary of this debate.

balance to it. Together with the emphasis on 'Jesus the Jew' it can help us to see Jesus in his original context. It can also be claimed that this identification serves sound ideological and moral purposes, not least that of seeing Jesus as one who identifies with the oppressed. It may also act as a reminder of the importance of the dialogue between Christianity and Islam. This project too is frankly ideological in its motivation and derives from the 'preferential option for the poor'[7], in this case the Palestinians, which is a fundamental principle of Liberation Theology.[8] It can be argued that some understanding of the Palestinian context in the life and teaching of Jesus is a necessary dimension to the study of the Gospels.

The physical geography of the Roman province of Palestine has much in common with the physical geography of modern rural Palestine. During his childhood and adolescence Jesus would have shared in the Palestinian peasant life of Galilee. The patterns of farming and of social life remained largely unchanged over subsequent centuries. The patterns of social life and of farming provided the material of Christ's parables and the context of many of his miracles. Today's pilgrims are often thrilled at the sight of sheep and shepherds, olive groves and fig trees. Jesus would have witnessed these things largely unchanged as they persist in the life of Palestinians today.

However, since the same land is claimed both as the land of Palestine and as the land of Israel, it is with the patterns of social life that the Palestinian Jesus becomes relevant for the historian. There are numerous similarities between the peasant society in which Jesus lived and the society which exists today in the Middle East.[9] Such similarities are certainly stronger than any that may exist between 1st century Palestine and the mainstream of modern secular Western societies (including Israel), where most Jews live today.[10] In common

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7   This phrase originated with. Gustavo Gutiérrez seminal work, *Teología de la liberación*, ('A Theology of Liberation'), Lima, 1971.

8   See Naim Ateek, *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation: The Bible, Justice, and the Palestine-Israel Conflict*, Orbis, New York, 1981.

9   Modern Palestinian Society is changing dramatically under Western influence. The early stages are described in Alexander Schölch, *Palestine in Transformation, 1856-1882, Studies in Social, Economic and Political Development*, Institute for Palestine Studies, Washington DC, 1993. Also, Nur Masalha, *Palestine: A Four Thousand Year History*, Zed Books, London, 2018

10 For a summary of the main differences between family in the US (the country with the largest Jewish population and first century Palestine, see K C Hanson

with most 20th century Palestinians, Jesus lived in the culture of the extended family[5] constituting an economic unit (e.g., Matthew 3: 33-42 and 22: 1: 28, Luke 15: 11–32) in which parents exercised control over the choice of a marriage partner within a defined social group. They also controlled the arrangements of formal betrothal, dowry, indirect dowry and bride–wealth. The bride lived with the bridegroom's family, and her virginity before marriage (e.g., Matthew 1: 18–25) and faithfulness to her husband after it (Luke 16: 18) were both important elements in a code of shame and honour which operated both at the individual and the family or clan level. In such a society promiscuity was abhorred, particularly in women (Matthew 11: 19 and Luke 7: 37-390), and adultery was, in principle at least, punishable by death (John 8: 3-4). The laws governing inheritance also embodied the passing on of direct and indirect dowry to the widow and the transmission of the paternal estate to the children, with the rights of sons having relative priority over those of daughters (Mark 12: 7 and //s, Luke 15: 11). These laws derived directly from the Pentateuch but are very similar to those embodied in Islamic *Shari'ah* law which governs modern practice in the majority Muslim Palestinian community.

Another important element which existed in the world of Jesus and which still survives in modern Palestinian society is the patron–client relationship by which power, influence, inducement and commitment are exchanged between persons of unequal social standing (e.g., Luke 16: 1-9). These operate either over one issue or over a range of issues.

A final, this time purely contingent historical parallel relates to the fact of living under military occupation. However there was nothing to approximate to a Palestinian national consciousness in the time of Jesus. Roman imperialism was based upon local loyalties, local leaders and apocalyptic religious movements.

THE INSPIRATION FOR DISCOVERING THE PALESTINIAN JESUS

If the discourse on Jesus the Jew can be hostile to traditional Orthodox Christology, it is also clear that it can be hijacked by those with a political Zionist agenda. Even when this is not the case it generally

and D E Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts*, Augsburg Press, Minneapolis,1998, p 22.

fails to advert in any way to the Palestinian predicament. Just as the Jewish religious context was forgotten during the course of Church history, so too the geographical context of Palestine has been played down in the interests of Christian universalism. Similarly in religious art the background scenery has been European rather than Palestinian. In whatever sense Jesus was a Jew he did not live in the Jewish Diaspora and he was not the citizen of a Jewish state. He lived in a place called Palestine under an oppressive foreign occupation. This realisation can offer a moral analogy between the life of Jesus and the predicament of contemporary Palestinians.[11] From a Christian theological perspective Jesus the Jew suffered in the pogroms and the concentration camps. From the same Christian perspective Jesus the Palestinian suffers in the catastrophe of the Palestinian people. This is not an attempt to appropriate the sufferings of the Jews to Christian ends any more than it is to give Christological significance to the suffering of the mainly Muslim victims of the Catastrophe *(Nakba)* of 1948. It simply reflects the Christian conviction that in his sufferings and death Jesus shows his solidarity with *all* oppressed people throughout history.

The infancy narratives provide the first parallels between Jesus the Palestinian and the Palestinians of today. In Luke's account of the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary were without a home and Jesus was born in makeshift conditions not dissimilar from those under which thousands of Palestinian babies have been born during the last seventy years. So too, in Matthew, the threat of massacre drove the Holy Family to become refugees in Egypt thus foreshadowing the fate of those Palestinians in 1948 who fled from Palestine to find refuge in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, the West Bank and Jordan. In some cases their flight was in response to massacres such as that at Deir Yassin.

In his active ministry Jesus shared fully in experiences which would be familiar to the Palestinians of our own era. Like them, he experienced homelessness and harassment. Like them too, he was marginalised by those closest to him. The Palestinians have been failed repeatedly by their Arab neighbours. Jesus too was regarded with suspicion by his family and rejected by the people in the synagogue of his own hometown. Like the Palestinians too, Jesus was ultimately betrayed by those closest to him. In the continuing passion of the Palestinian

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11 In passing, it is noteworthy that although Roman rule involved hideous cruelty, there was no wholesale ethnic cleansing of the indigenous population.

people the Christian pilgrim may encounter the contemporary context of the sufferings of Christ.

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CONCLUSION

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Like Simon of Cyrene today's pilgrim to Jerusalem may not immediately recognise the identity of the one carrying the cross. Just as his or her grandparents may have been ignorant of the enormity of what was inflicted on the Jews, today's pilgrim is probably unaware of the seventy year-long *Via Dolorosa* of the Palestinian people. He or she may also be ignorant that it was from the ancient Christian Palestinian community that his or her ancestors first received the Faith and that the descendants of that community are now in danger of eventually disappearing from the land of Jesus.

For those who do understand, however, the presence of the empty tomb in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is a reminder of the hope of resurrection and that God can over-ride the apparent verdict of history. Just as the renewed awareness of the Jewishness of Jesus can serve as a remedy for centuries of anti–Judaism and anti–Semitism so too the rediscovery of Jesus the Palestinian can free Christians from more half a century of the facile Christian Zionism of some and the morally indefensible indifference of others.

CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS: FROM CONFLICT TO DIALOGUE
A CRITICAL ACCOUNT OF PRESENT AND RECENT CATHOLIC TEACHING ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM DIALOGUE

Duncan Macpherson[★]

> An attitude of openness in truth and in love must characterize the dialogue with the followers of non-Christian religions … True openness involves remaining steadfast in one's deepest convictions, clear and joyful in one's own identity, while at the same time being convinced that the encounter with someone different than ourselves can be an occasion of growth in a spirit of fraternity, of enrichment and of witness.
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> Pope Francis (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 250-1)[1]

This 'attitude of openness' now represents the official position of the Roman Catholic Church in its approach to other faiths. Elsewhere Pope Francis has expressed the wish to 'emphasize once more the great importance of dialogue and co-operation among believers, in particular, Christians and Muslims, and the need for it to be enhanced.'[2] However, this spirit of positive openness to Islam is of relatively recent vintage. Over the centuries, Christian-Muslim relations have developed from murderous intolerance to negative tolerance and then towards the final stage of positive tolerance.

[★] Some of the material in this essay has been adapted from my article in 'The Second Vatican Council and the Future of Christian-Muslim Dialogue' in *University Lectures in Islamic Studies*, vol. 2, ed. Alan Jones, Altajir World of Islam Trust, London, 1998.

[1] Vatican Council and Papal Statements on Islam, Unite States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Internet Source, http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/interreligious/islam/vatican-council-and-papal-statements-on-islam.cfm. Accessed 18 August 2017.

[2] *Ibid*. Message to Muslims throughout the world for the end of Ramadan, 10 July 2013.

Negative tolerance implies a 'live and let live' disposition that accepts the rights of others to hold views, or to live by values, which one may regard as false or even repugnant, whereas positive tolerance can be described as an 'appreciation of a variety of social cultures and value traditions.'[3] Genuine dialogue between Christianity and other religions and philosophical perspectives always presupposes positive tolerance; the readiness to affirm the sincerity of the other, to celebrate shared beliefs and values and to explore areas of co-operation in the service of the common good. This article traces a development in the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church in its relationship with Islam following upon the Second Vatican Council which urged positive tolerance in its relationship with all the great world faiths. However, in the case of Christian-Muslim relations there were, and are, particular problems in building a positive dialogue. These derive both from the theology and history. Theologically, although a range of beliefs and teachings are shared by the two faiths, there are irreconcilable differences particularly in their respective understandings of the figure of Jesus Christ. Historically the relationship between Christianity and Islam has been a long and bitter record of mutual contempt, persecutions and conflict, Crusades and violent *jihad*. Shared ground is also contested ground.

CONTESTED GROUND

A son of perdition has arisen, the false prophet Muhamad, who has seduced many from the truth with wordy enticements and the pleasures of the flesh. Although his treachery has prevailed up to the present day, we nevertheless put our trust in the Lord that the end of the Beast is approaching whose number, according to the Revelation of Saint John will end in 666 years of which nearly 600 has already passed.

Pope Innocent III, (*Quia Maior,* proclaiming the Fifth Crusade in 1213*)*

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3 Karl Otto Apel, 'Plurality of the Good? The Problem of Affirmative Tolerance in a Multicultural Society from an Ethical Point of View', *Ratio Juris*. Vol. 10 No. 2, June 1997, Hoboken NJ, pp. 199-212. The debate over the concept of positive and negative tolerance turns in part on the issue of whether this implies moral relativism. In the sense in which it is used here it does not.

The quotation above, taken from the papal bull of Pope Innocent III, calling the Fifth Crusade, represents a perception of Islam not only as a rival faith but as a diabolical enemy.[4] Long before the Crusades, the early expansion of Islamic power had made it into a military opponent of the Christian Byzantine Empire. From 780 and on into the eleventh century, the 'Abbasid, and latterly the Fatimid caliphate, engaged in the conquest of the Eastern Mediterranean, with extensions into North Africa and Spain. This situation did not favour Christians developing any genuine interest in what Muslims actually believed or practised. As early as the 8th century, Saint John of Damascus had identified Muslims as followers of a false prophet who was the 'forerunner[s] to the Antichrist'.[5]

During the period of the Crusades, the Christian imagination perceived Muslims as idolaters who worshipped the prophet Muhmmad and an idol called Bafumetz [6] Happily, there were exceptions to this view. In a review of Shayne Aaron Legassie's *The Medieval Invention of Travel,* Barbara Newman[7] selects one such exception documented by Shirin Khan Mohmamadi's 2014 work, *In Light of Another's Word: European Ethnography in the Middles Ages* referring to *The Book of John de Mandeville,* a work of uncertain authenticity, but according to Newman, "Mandeville is well informed about Islam. He claims to have read the Quran, knows that Muslims revere Jesus as a prophet and Mary as his virgin mother, and states that the Saracens, unlike Christians—are 'good and faithful'—in keeping the law God has given them.' Barbara Newman goes on to claim that 'at a time when romances often depicted Muslims as polytheists worshipping 'Mahoud' ... Mandeville and his peers represented a tradition of more authentic knowledge ... and an

4 J Riley-Smith (with L Riley-Smith), *The Crusades. Idea and Reality, 1095-1274. Documents of the Middle Ages*, Edward Arnold, London, 1981, p. 31.
5 'From that time to the present a false prophet named Mohammed has appeared in their midst. This man, after having chanced upon the Old and New Testaments … gave out that a certain book had been sent down to him from heaven. He had set down some ridiculous compositions in this book of his and he gave it to them as an object of veneration.' *Fount of Knowledge*, part two entitled *Heresies in Epitome: How They Began and Whence They Drew Their Origin,* http://orthodoxinfo.com/general/stjohn_islam.aspx. Accessed 18 August 2017.
6 Pouille, Simon de (1968), Jeanne Baroin, ed. Simon de Pouille, *Chanson de Geste* (in French), Librairie Droz, Geneva, p. 153.
7 'Mercenary Knights and Princes Brides', *London Review of Books*, London, Volume 39, Number 16, 17 August 1917, p. 29.

unexpected appreciation of non-Christian religious customs. Travel writing could even support belief in the possibility of salvation for virtuous pagans—a controversial view entertained by William Langland in Piers Plowman, along with Mandeville and Dante."

THE END OF CONVIVENCIA

The history of Christian–Muslim conflicts in the centuries that followed the period of the Crusades were not favourable for such positive appreciation of Christendom's Muslim 'other.' In 1492 Muslim forces were finally defeated in Spain and the period of *convivencia* [8] came to an end with the expulsion or forced conversion of Jews and Muslims. Meanwhile at the other end of the Mediterranean the expansion of Ottoman power led to the capture of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453, followed by many further conquests especially into Europe. However, they met serious reverses of fortune at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571 and in the lifting of the siege of Vienna in 1683; an event that marked the limits of Ottoman military conquest in Europe.

Despite some successes against the Venetians and the Russians, the 18th century saw the decline of Ottoman military power and Napoleon's military campaign of 1798-1801 marked the beginning of the dismemberment of the Turkish empire and its gradual decline to become 'the 'sick man of Europe'; a state of affairs which continued to the First World War and whose consequences remain a huge problem up to the present.

Fuelled by the wealth and technological advances of the Industrial Revolution, the European powers embarked upon a worldwide imperial expansion which included the conquest of Muslim lands in Asia, Europe and Africa. In consequence, the stereotype of the Muslim as a dangerous enemy gradually morphed into that of a culturally inferior, though still treacherously dangerous, subject. [9]

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8 *La Convivencia* (or coexistence) is a term used to describe the period of relative mutual tolerance between Jews, Christians and Muslims considered to have prevailed from the eighth century until 1492. This theory received critical attention in James C Conroy's article, 'Toledo Guidelines and the Myth of the Andalusian Caliphate', *Living Stones Yearbook 2014*, pp. 1-19.

9 Despite this prevailing attitude of superiority colonialism brought some interest in Islam on the part of European colonialists even to the extent of notable British

In Christian theological tradition, there had been several examples of negative tolerance towards those who had not heard the Gospel and speculation concerning their salvation. Pius IX in his 1854 'Allocution on Invincible Ignorance', *Singulari Quadam*, concedes that 'it is necessary to hold for certain that ignorance of the true religion, if that ignorance be invincible, is not a fault in the eyes of God.'[10]

Moving from this limited, almost grudging, position of purely negative tolerance the Second Vatican Council marked a decisive new approach by the Roman Catholic Church towards other faiths and a new spirit of dialogue and respect towards those outside the community of Roman Catholic Christianity. The recognition of positive religious toleration, as set out in the Declaration on Religious Liberty,[11] provided the inspiration for this new attitude. After centuries of conflict, hatred and contempt, the texts of the Council which speak of Islam point towards a new and positive relationship between Christians and Muslims in general and between Roman Catholic Christians and Muslims in particular.

The final texts of the Council identify what the followers of the two religions share in respect of belief. They also suggest areas for future dialogue and practical co-operation. They recognise the theological disagreements between the two faiths, though perhaps they do not take them seriously enough. Certainly, there is no attempt to gauge fully the limits of what can be expected from the new dialogue. Obstacles to dialogue are also frankly recognised in the memories of past political and cultural conflicts. Unfortunately, however, the Council fathers

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conversions to Islam in India as described in William Dalrymple's 2004 *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in 18th-century India*. Other socially important British conversions to Islam took place in the late 19th century, including W H Quillam, a Liverpool solicitor who had visited Morocco, Lord Headley who had encountered Islam while working in India and Marmaduke Pickthall, an Arabic scholar best known for his English translation of the Qur'an.

10 The English translation is from Internet Source, http://catholicheritage.blogspot. co.uk/2013/12/the-immaculate-conception-iv-singulari.html. Accessed 18 August 2017.

11 *Dignitatis humanae* ('Of the Dignity of the Human Person'), promulgated by Pope Paul VI on December 7, 1965. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html. Accessed 18 August 2017.

could not have foreseen the extent to which such obstacles were to be continually reinforced by on-going political and cultural conflicts exacerbated considerably by the 2001 9/11 attacks, the consequent military intervention of the US and its allies in Afghanistan, and the invasion of Iraq and the ongoing Al Qa'ida and Islamic State terrorist outrages in Europe and elsewhere.

In Our Times

In the Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*,[12] the Council proposed a new approach towards non-Roman-Catholic Christians. The Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions *(Nostra Aetate)*[13] went on to provide a positive appreciation of non-Christian world religions. The Jews came first in terms of emphasis and space although last in the order of religions discussed. Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and other, unspecified, religious traditions were treated in reverse order. As with its approach towards other belief systems and ideologies, the Council attempted to provide a principled methodology for dialogue and co-operation. The two passages concerned with Islam are section three of *Nostra Aetate* and section sixteen of 'The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World', *Lumen Gentium*.[14] In setting out the new approach, *Nostra Aetate* sought first to manifest goodwill and respect towards believers in Islam ('The Church has a high regard for the Muslims'). Next, it set out the beliefs, values and traditions which the Church considers as common ground for to the proposed dialogue. In the case of Islam, these centred on a shared belief in the one God who is Creator, Revealer and Judge. ('They worship God who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, Lord of heaven and earth, who

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12 *Unitatis Redintegratio* ('Restoration of unity) promulgated by Pope Paul VI on 21 November 1964.

13 *Nostra Aetate* ('In our Time') Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions of the Second Vatican Council, promulgated on 28 October 1965, by Pope Paul VI
http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html. Accessed 18 August 2017.

14 *Gaudium et Spes* (' Joy and Hope'), The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, promulgated by Pope Paul VI 7 December 1965.

has also spoken to men. Together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day …'). *Nostra Aetate* also refers to the shared belief in the Day of Judgment ('they await the day of judgment and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead'). Other shared values include ethical and religious practices ('they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms-deeds and fasting' as well as key Islamic concept of submission to the will of God ('They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God').

<div align="center">DOCTRINAL DIFFERENCES</div>

The common Abrahamic root of the two faiths is emphasised as well as elements of shared tradition in respect of Jesus and Mary. It is only in the context of emphasising what is shared that *Nostra Aetate* frankly admits crucially significant doctrinal differences over the divinity of Christ. 'Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus as a prophet, his virgin mother they also honour, and even at times devoutly invoke.'

An appeal is then made for a new beginning in relations between the two faiths in the future. 'The sacred Council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges a sincere effort to be made to achieve mutual understanding and, for the benefit of all men, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.'

Nostra Aetate identifies obstacles to present and future good relations in the historic conflicts between the Church and Islam. It observes that 'Over the centuries many quarrels and dissensions have arisen between Christians and Muslims.' Some of these historic quarrels were theological and others cultural and political. It can be argued, however, that the Council Fathers failed to examine theological disagreements in sufficient detail or to identify the scope and the limitations of Christian-Muslim theological dialogue. They can also be accused of failing to recognise or to anticipate the extent to which historic political and cultural conflicts were replicated in contemporary political problems. The circumstances in which treatment of Islam was included in the agenda of the Council illustrate this fact graphically.

MIDDLE EASTERN POLITICS AND THE COUNCIL

The controversies which surrounded the Council's deliberations provide very clear evidence that the obstacles to better relations between Christians and Muslims were not wholly doctrinal. It was the thorny political issue of Israel and the Palestinians which compelled the Council to broaden its discussion on the Church's relations with the Jews to include consideration of relations with Islam and other major world religions. The explanation for the inclusion of a section on Judaism in a document on Christian unity derived from the special relationship between the Christian Church and the people of the Old Covenant. The inspiration for such a move was based on an awareness of the contribution made by Christian teaching and preaching to anti-Semitism in Europe over the centuries. Such an awareness had been rendered the more acute by the Nazi extermination of Jews in the 1940s. At this stage, there were no firm plans to extend the discussion to Islam or to any other world religions. Indeed, the decision to broaden the scope of the discussion arose as a direct response to the uproar provoked by the Council's encounter with the political realities of the Middle East.

The proposed chapter IV of the schema that was to find expression in the final text of *Nostra Aetate* rejected the idea that the Jews shared a communal guilt for the crucifixion of Christ. The charge of 'deicide' was to be specifically rejected, and priests and catechists were warned of the dangers of inciting hatred against the Jews in their preaching and teaching of the Gospel narrative of the Passion of Christ. At a distance in time of only thirteen years after the flight and expulsion of some quarter of a million Palestinians from their homes in 1948, the Arab world universally misread the theological and pastoral intentions of the document. One commentator summarised the Arab response as follows: 'If the Council did in fact proclaim the brotherhood of Christians and Jews, such a proclamation might well help the two to live together in peace in the countries of the West, but above all it would redound to the advantage of the State of Israel.'

Representatives of Arab Catholic communities in the Middle East were particularly vocal over this question and expressed anxiety over the possibility of a consequent backlash against Christian minorities in Arab countries. Arab suspicions about an undisclosed Zionist agenda

were further inflamed by the decision of the World Jewish Congress to appoint an official from the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs as its representative in Rome. Unsurprisingly, this was widely viewed as an attempt to gain semi-official Israeli influence at the Council. In November 1963, a revised version of chapter IV was brought to the floor of the Council and was met with the united and determined opposition of Catholic bishops from Arab countries.

In a decisive speech, Cardinal Bea pleaded for the retention of the statement on the Jews in the schema and tried to distance the political questions from the theological: 'We are here treating a merely religious question, there is no question that the Council will get entangled in those difficult questions regarding the relations the Arab states and the state of Israel, or regarding so-called Zionism.' Pope Paul VI's pilgrimage to the Holy Land in January 1964 attempted to give practical expression to just such a pastorally motivated and politically even-handed approach.

By October 1964 the chapter on the Jews had been debated again and been given approval by most of the participants in the debates. As opposition mounted against the declaration, the decision was finally made to follow up the suggestions to enlarge the declaration to embrace all the major world religions. The theme of shared elements of religious truth in the major world religions was emphasised in several of the speeches from the early months of Pope Paul VI's new pontificate in 1963. His first encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* (August 1964) centred on the theme of dialogue between the Catholic Church and other traditions and belief systems. The encyclical envisaged a series of concentric circles. The inner circles consist first of Roman Catholic and then of other Christian traditions. The next circle is that of non-Christian monotheism: 'We refer first briefly to the children of the Hebrew people, worthy of our affection and respect, faithful to the religion of what we call that of the Old Covenant. Then to the adorers of God according to the conception of monotheism, the Moslem religion is especially deserving of our admiration for all that is true and good in their worship of God. And also to the followers of the great Afro-Asiatic religions.'

The new, broader perspective on the question largely failed to assuage Arab anxieties. On 20 November 1964, the voting took place on the revised document which was largely carried. Arab reaction followed

speedily. A Syrian radio broadcast referred to 'a facelift which would fool nobody.' It went on to observe that the Church had regarded the Jews as responsible for the death of Christ for twenty centuries. Why then did they wish to change their minds when Arabs were engaged in a bitter struggle with Jewish aggressors who had invaded Palestine and expelled a million Arabs from their homes to languish in refugee camps? If the Church had not had the courage to speak out during the Nazi persecution of the Jews why did it choose to speak out at a time when Jews were persecuting Arabs? Jordanian leaders and Arab orthodox Christians expressed equally strong views.

Some Muslim voices counselled a more nuanced approach. One article in the Beirut francophone liberal Christian newspaper *L'Orient* argued that Arabs should have welcomed the awakening of the Christian conscience to the truth in other religions. 'It is a pity that the fear of Zionist exploitation prevents them from examining its contents … Islam is presented as a sister religion. The Christian is exhorted to end all disrespect not only to Jews but to all non-Christians.' In this respect, the author considers that Christianity is moving closer to the greater inclusiveness of the Qur'an. These thoughts were echoed by another writer in the same issue of the same journal: 'now men will be able to live as brothers, and it will be left to God to ask them to justify their faith on the Day of Judgement.'

Such positive responses from the Middle East were, however, the exception. The general view was that the wrongs done to the Jews were being acknowledged but that the injustices still being suffered by the Palestinians were being ignored and, by implication, being condoned. The inclusion of a sympathetic statement on Islam did little to mollify this sense of injustice.

Whether or not this view was fair, the final promulgation of the document at the end of the Council gave some encouragement to commentators sympathetic to Zionism. It also gave some basis to the worst fears of the Arabs especially to the suspicion that the next step would be the recognition of Israel by the Holy See. In passing, it should be noted that Vatican recognition of the State of Israel had to wait for more than thirty years (30 December 1993), until there was, apparently at least, some serious prospect of peace between Israel and the Palestinians, and the Palestinians themselves had accorded Israel such recognition.

Cultural and political impediments to better Christian–Muslim relations

It is ironic that it was 'the problem of Israel' which eventually directed the attention of the Second Vatican Council towards Islam. Nevertheless, the Israel–Palestine conflict remains a complicating factor in attempts to establish better Christian–Muslim relations. As such it does not stand alone. Political conflicts with Muslim states and the struggle to contain Islamicist terrorism all constitute serious political impediments to greater understanding between Christians and Muslims. Frequently too, Muslims find it difficult to differentiate between Christianity and Western political and military interests. On the Christian side, there is a corresponding inability to distinguish between Islam and the political interest groups of either autocratic feudal sheikdoms or of fanatical Islamicist organisations. At the cultural level Muslims may perceive consumerist materialism and sexual licence as Christian values. Christians, too, may identify opposition to the rights of the individual and hostility to democratic institutions as characteristic of the faith of Islam.

Underlying all these contemporary conflicts and misunderstandings there are the unhappy memories of historical confrontation and wars between representatives of the two religions. Such memories probably lie heavier upon the thinking of the Muslims than of Western Christians. In the words of one commentator, '[While] on the Western side, ecumenical and intellectual progress has made it possible to regard past events with equanimity of spirit, the same does not apply to the Moslem countries. These are still engaged in a struggle against Western pressure, which they all too often equate with 'Christian' pressure. The wounds of the past are still far from healed and some leading Moslems ... find it difficult … not to recall the 'aggressions' of the West at the time of the Crusades as well as at those of 'colonialism' and 'imperialism'. Many concrete situations have to be cleaned up (for the Arab countries especially the problem of Israel and the liberation of some of their peoples) before the conflicts of the past can also be forgotten.'[15]

The now somewhat faded hopes for a settlement of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict have been greeted by the Vatican as 'an

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15 Georges C Anawati, 'Excursus on Islam', in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II,* vol. III, Burns & Oates, London, 1969, p. 154.

encouragement towards Muslim–Christian co-operation, and indeed to trilateral dialogue and co-operation.'

The close linkage between ancient and more recent conflicts in the Muslim psyche is evident in Muslim writers, even among those who are otherwise irenical. According to one, Saudi Salafist, and partisan, perspective: 'Ever since the Crusades, the relation between Europe and the Muslim world was distorted by the colonialist agenda of the European countries, and after World War I almost all Islamic countries were in the grip of European colonialism. A long struggle ensued that secured political independence but colonialism merely took another form, neo-colonialism headed by the United States of America, which does not depend on occupation armies but on economic leverage.'[16]

THEOLOGICAL LIMITS ON CHRISTIAN–MUSLIM DIALOGUE

The treatment of Islam in the Council documents has been criticised both for exaggerating and for minimising the convergence between Christianity and Islam. More could have been said about shared belief in the mission of Jesus as 'the Word of God', *kalimat Allah* (Qur'an IV, 171) and 'the Spirit of God' *ruh Allah* (Qur'an IV, 169). However, in the view of the notable Arab Dominican commentator, Georges Anawati, 'it would not have been right … to make use of phrases which are indeed to be found in the Koran but could lead to misunderstanding if they are not explained in the Moslem sense.'[17] On the other hand, several crucial issues of disagreement are left out of account. The Christian doctrine of Original Sin is not accepted by Muslims and the concept of redemption has no place. 'The Koran is aware of human disobedience against God … but … does not speak about human sinfulness or the need for redemption. Human beings do not fall into sin and become imprisoned in guilt from which they need to be saved. Apart from theocentrism where a redeemer has no place, human beings also do not need a redeemer.'

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16 *Islam and the Others*, World Assembly of Muslim Youth, pp. 12-13, Riyadh Internet 12/11/97. http://www.islamindepth.com/books/MUHAMMAD%20 The%20Prophet%20of%20Islam. [PDF]
17 Georges C Anawati, 'Excursus on Islam', p. 154.

Other areas of disagreement not referred to in the documents include polygamy and divorce by unilateral repudiation of the wife by her husband (*talaq*). However, these disagreements in the area of family life probably explain the omission of a proposed text extolling the virtues of Islamic family values. This text read: 'They (Muslims) strive also, in obedience to God, to lead a moral life as individuals in the family and in society.' More fundamentally still there is no acknowledgment that both Christianity and Islam consider themselves as the ultimate truth. 'Both religions consider themselves absolutes and both religions are exclusive to the extent that they understand the Word of God become Book (Koran) and the Word of God become flesh (Jesus Christ) as definitive and universally valid.'[18]

Clearly this exclusiveness needs to be qualified in the case of both religions. In common with many other Christians the Council Fathers offer an inclusivist Christian approach to other religions. However, this approach is not accepted by all Christians. Islam, by contrast has a universally accepted inclusivism, at least towards Jews and Christians who are regarded as *ahl al-kitab* ('peoples of the book') granted a protected, although somewhat inferior status to Muslims. They are recognised as followers of true prophets of God through whom true scriptures were communicated to humanity. However, unlike the Qur'an, these scriptures are no longer available except in a corrupted form. Muhammad is *khatim al-anbiya'* ('the seal of the prophets') and Islam is believed to have superseded all earlier religions.

The question of the prophethood of Muhammad constitutes another major obstacle not adverted to in the Council documents. Indeed, Muhammad is not mentioned in either of the relevant Council documents. Faced with the claims of Islam to a fuller, more accurate knowledge of Divine Revelation than Christianity, earlier generations of Christians had frequently denounced Muhammad as a false prophet. In some cases, slanderous attacks had been made on his personal character and moral life. As in an earlier quotation from Pope Innocent III, he has even been identified with the Anti-Christ prophesied in the Book of Revelation. More recently Christian writers have tried

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18 Karl Wolfgang Troeger, 'Christian-Muslim Dialogue', *Theology Digest* 44:2, summer 1997, pp. 117-124. Originally published in German as 'Der christlich-muslimische Dialog. Theologische Aspekte einer kirchlichen Aufgabe', *Berliner Theologische Zeitschrift* 13 (1996): 122.

to build bridges to Islam by accepting Muhammad's prophethood in some limited sense, characterising him as a prophet to the pagan Arabs but denying him the status of a universal prophet fulfilling and, where necessary, correcting Christian beliefs.[19]

Ultimately some issues of faith are not resolvable. Christians believe that the content of public revelation is complete with the coming of Christ and that nothing can be added to it after the death of the last of the twelve apostles. Muslims believe that Muhammad is the last of the prophets completing and correcting the understanding of the other 'peoples of the book'. Thus, it is no use for Christians to claim that Muslims have an incorrect perception of Christian beliefs about the Holy Trinity since this perception derives directly from the words of the Qu'ran, believed by Muslims to be the literal Word of God.

Pope John Paul II recognised this fundamental stumbling block in an address to a General Audience, in May 5, 1999: 'The Christian doctrine on the Trinity, confirmed by the Councils, explicitly rejects any form of 'tritheism' (three gods) or 'polytheism' (many gods). In this sense, i.e., with reference to the one divine substance, there is significant correspondence between Christianity and Islam …. However, this correspondence must not let us forget the difference between the two religions. We know that the unity of God is expressed in the mystery of the three divine Persons ….'[20]

The only refuge here is to hypothesise that there were in fact Christians in Arabia in the time of the Prophet who held a heretical belief in three gods (of which one was the Virgin Mary!) If this were the case, then the Qur'an could be interpreted not as an attack on Christian doctrine but upon a deviant version of it.

The final texts of the Council and the papal documents that followed it identify what the followers of the two religions share in respect of belief. They also suggest areas for future dialogue and for practical co-operation.

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19 Ibn Anwar "Was Muhammad a true Prophet of God? Find out what some major Christian academics and scholars have said in answer to this question." Internet Source: http://unveiling-christianity.net/2016/03/01/christian-scholars-begun-accept-prophet-muhammad. accessed 2/10/17.

20 Vatican Council and Papal Statements on Islam, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Internet Source, http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/interreligious/islam/vatican-council-and-papal-statements-on-islam.cfm. Accessed 18 August 2017.

They recognise the importance of doctrinal disagreements between the two faiths, though perhaps they do not take them seriously enough. Certainly, there is no attempt to gauge fully the limits of what can be expected from the new dialogue. Obstacles to dialogue are also frankly recognized in the memories of past political and cultural conflicts. Unfortunately, however, the Council fathers could not have foreseen the growth of Salafism and the impact of terrorist violence in Western Cities.

Salafism[21] is a conservative traditionalist interpretation of Islam rooted, among others in the thought of the conservative revival movement initiated by Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792). His movement protested against practices considered to be un-Islamic such as veneration of Sufi saints or pirs and visiting their graves. Christians and Jews, he regarded as sorcerers who should be 'struck with the sword.'

In 1774, he formed a pact with the family of Ibn Saud and Wahhabism became the face of the religion of the future state of Saudi Arabia. Today Saudi Arabia imposes a very conservative form of Islam with extreme punishments such as public executions, amputations, and stonings, together with limited rights for women and prohibitions of any non-Muslim acts of worship in a country that includes the holy sites of Mecca and Medina. Saudi Arabian based organisations have also been spending over $2bn a year promoting Wahhabism, including backing hundreds of mosques throughout the West.

There are three main currents in these conservative revival movements. The first of these is a purist current which emphasises the spreading Islam by preaching or proselytising, da'wah; (literally 'Invitation' as well as by education and campaigning to purge whatever they regard as the pure Islam of the Prophet and first four caliphs. The second current is the activists, who engage peacefully in politics to advocate the introduction of Shari'a law in Muslim states. Finally, there are the Jihadis who engage in violence to re-establish a Sunni Muslim Caliphate. There are around 50 Salafi-Jihadi groups, often violently opposed to each other, including Al-Qa'ida, Al-Nusra, ISIS or ISL, Boko Haram and Islamic Jihad. Although only representing a minority of Muslims worldwide, their terrorist actions often produce a degree of

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21 *Salaf* is the Arabic word for 'predecessor' or 'ancestor'.

anti–Muslim sentiment among non–Muslims and the characterisation of Islam as a uniquely violent religion.

Unwittingly giving credibility to such a negative approach Pope Benedict's 2006 Regensburg lecture cited a 14ᵗʰ-century dialogue between Byzantine Emperor Manuel II and a Persian Muslim. He quoted Manuel's contention that the new things in Muhammad's religion were 'only evil and inhuman', in particular, forcible conversions and violence 'incompatible with the nature of God'. Pope Benedict qualified this by adding that Manuel spoke with a startling 'brusqueness that we find unacceptable' and he did not endorse the emperor's words. Nonetheless, Muslims were deeply offended.

The future Pope Francis, Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, immediately distanced himself from Benedict's language and said statements which provoke outrage with Muslims 'will serve to destroy in 20 seconds the careful construction of a relationship with Islam that Pope John Paul II built over the last 20 years.'[22]

Shortly after his election, the pope called for more interreligious dialogue as a way of 'building bridges' and establishing 'true links of friendship between all people'. Speaking to diplomats in March 2013, Pope Francis said that he hoped to 'intensify dialogue' with other belief systems, particularly Islam. He noted that 'pontiff means 'a builder of bridges' and that St Francis was a peacemaker.

Inevitably, dialogue is impossible with people who wish to deny religious freedom or who are even ready to destroy those who do not share their understanding of Islam. Undeterred Pope Francis argues that 'Christians should embrace with affection and respect Muslim immigrants to our countries in the same way that we hope and ask to be received and respected in countries of Islamic tradition. I ask and I humbly entreat those countries to grant Christians freedom to worship and to practice their faith, in light of the freedom which followers of Islam enjoy in Western countries!' Further he urges that 'Faced with disconcerting episodes of violent fundamentalism, our respect for true followers of Islam should lead us to avoid hateful generalisations, for authentic Islam and the proper reading of the Koran are opposed to every form of violence.'

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22 Ghosh, Palash, 'Pope Francis: A friend to Muslims?', *International Business Times*, 15 March 2013, retrieved 16 March 2013.

Pope Francis has urged development of a 'dialogue of life' with Muslims built on mutual trust, saying such an approach is essential to maintain a climate of peaceful co-existence and discourage violence.'[23] Whether this attitude of openness will be fully reciprocated by the majority of Muslims or given whole hearted support by the majority of Christians remains to be seen. However, if it were, it would undoubtedly 'be an occasion of growth in a spirit of fraternity, of enrichment and of witness.'[24]

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23 8 September 2014, Episcopal Conference of Cameroon 'ad limina' visit, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/september/documents/papa-francesco_20140906_ad-limina-camerun.html. Accessed 18 August 2017.

24 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 251.

EX TENEBRIS LUX?
A PASTORAL REFLECTION ON SOME ISSUES AROUND MIDDLE EASTERN CHRISTIANITY IN THE WEST

Robert Gibbons

Is Christian Identity waning in Europe?

Sometimes it is hard to feel anything except depression when looking at the contemporary situation of Christians in the Middle East. We have been used to the gloomy rhetoric of diminishing numbers and presence of ancient Christian communities and group in countries where Christianity began for several decades. For example a spate of recent articles over the past few years have begun to address this issue particularly in the light of ISIS, it's not that various people did not know, many individuals including Living Stones have been at the forefront of making sure the plight of Christians in these regions is not forgotten, it is just that in the *Realpolitik* of the big powers, issues like survival of a faith have not taken front stage until it is almost too late. This is particularly true in the European situation where there is an almost endemic refusal to categorize Christianity as anything else except a set of symbols that had meaning and still have for some but do not form a cohesive religious identity within the various nation states. Yet despite that famous interruption of Alistair Campbell during Tony Blair's premiership quoted widely in the press: 'Alastair Campbell, Mr Blair's director of strategy and communications, intervened in a recent interview to prevent the Prime Minister from answering a question about his Christianity. "We don't do God," Mr Campbell interrupted'.[1] Despite the issue of secularity and even opposition to religion that can be found across the political spectrum, Christianity has not gone away.

In fact it is rather more obvious that Europe is becoming more aware of the rather nebulous but real relationship of the secular state

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1   'Campbell interrupted Blair as he spoke of his faith: "We don't do God"'. Article by Colin Brown, Political Editor, *The Telegraph*, 4 May 2003.

with Christianity itself, the different strata are difficult to disentangle but they are there. In an online article dating from 2013, in the German-based opinion magazine, *The European*, academic Alexander Görlach argued that secularism in Europe does not imply the destruction or abrogation of religious belief or practice, just a lessening of influence in the secular sphere of law and politics. But in the article I found a clear example of how things shift and have shifted quickly. Pointing out that traditional Christian Churches have learnt the art of secular discourse, Görlach accepts that there is a tacit supremacy of law over religion, but points out that boundary lines are not hard and fast, for many of the traditional Churches, in particular the Catholics, are well versed in political accommodation and able to lobby in the political sphere. As he puts it succinctly: 'The mission of the Church isn't to sidestep the law, it is to influence its content.'[2] Yet even his well-argued case for evidence of a general slackening in people's religious practice, in favour of a more amorphous acknowledgement of Christian 'spirituality' as one guide amongst other ways, is not quite what it seems. There is also a rather prophetic element in his article that may have considerable implications for the future. Far from suggesting religion is on the way out as many others do, Görlach hints at change. He chooses a rather amorphous symbol, not openly religious yet linked to a religious festival in popular imagination: 'Will an example from the City of Oxford become the norm? It recently ruled that no Christmas trees could be erected in public places, lest non-Christians be offended. This is as silly as it sounds, and it will be a passing phenomenon.'[3]

This was in 2012, but anybody who lives and works in Oxford, as I do, can tell you that for the past few years Christmas trees have been clearly present, especially the public ones in main spaces such as St Giles and Broad Street. Though trees may not be specifically religious, Görlach makes a precise link, for despite the pagan antecedents attributed to this feast, the symbols of religiously based celebration are multivalent and surprisingly resilient. The continued use of them even outside any religious context suggests that far from religion disappearing, or being marginalised into a 'folk culture', these symbols still engage our communities.

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2 'As If God Did Not Exist', article by Alexander Görlach, *The European Magazine*, The European Institute. April 7, 2013

3 *Ibid*.

Paul Tillich's theology of symbol reminds us that they do indeed die, much as the ancient Churches in the Middle East were stripped of Christian imagery under the Muslim conquest and turned into mosques, but they can also be resurrected if their potency remains alive elsewhere, as the recent debate about Hagia Sophia might suggest![4] 'As Tillich claims: "a religious symbol can die only if the correlation of which it is an adequate expression dies." If there is no "correlation" with the reality the symbol is void of meaning.'[5] There is not time to discuss the power of symbols extensively, but as a theologian I will note that there are symbols used in an exterior and interior context. Tillich's theology of symbol makes that important differentiation, religious imagery has a potency that we cannot ignore, precisely because it involves that element of transcendence.

Within the context of Eastern Christianity symbols are powerful, perhaps made more so by the centuries of persecution. Examination of the symbolic world of religion in our own culture of the UK and elsewhere in Europe reveals a surprising vitality. The Latin motto of the great Benedictine abbey of Monte Cassino, *succisa virescit* , 'cut down(or pruned) it flourishes', is so apt for a monastery that has been destroyed a number of times, yet still remains a symbol of Benedictine *stabilitas* and of the search for God. Our symbolic world still suggests that any debate about religion in the public sphere is alive and well. One of the counter-cultural surprises for those who have little or no faith background, is that other religions welcome Christian symbols in the public space, because that means some form of respect, as well as life, which they hope will be accorded their own traditions, cut down they return anew!

Whilst it might be true that Christianity has ceased to be an active religion in terms of actual practice for many in Europe, there is a continuity of faith; its final death has not taken place. Transformation and change may have happened and the 'nones' (those who are self identifying non-religiously affiliated) may have increased, but the trend away from religion is by no means guaranteed. The Pew Centre reports that though this may be happening in Europe it is not guaranteed elsewhere:

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4 See article by Fergus M Bordewich, 'A Monumental Struggle to Preserve Hagia Sophia', *Smithsonian Magazine*. December 2008.
5 Slavko Krajnc, '*Liturgy and Tillich's theory of symbols*', *Bogoslovni vestnik* 74 (2014) 2, p. 319.

> … it should not be taken for granted that all countries will
> follow a European pattern in which religious disaffiliation
> increases following advanced economic development.
> There is currently no precedent for this sequence in
> a Muslim-majority country. In Hindu-majority India,
> religious affiliation remains almost universal even as the
> country is experiencing major social changes. And while
> it is difficult to measure religion in China, religious
> identification seems to have increased as the country has
> developed economically.[6]

I would also suggest that the status of the 'nones' within Europe
may also change due to a number of factors, there are always unforeseen
events that can shift perspectives and perhaps the continued presence
of a Christian witness in many countries of Europe is in no small
way due to other influences from immigrant communities, Christian,
Muslim and others.

The debate about Islam, for instance, has started to contribute to a
more aware and historically based approach to Christianity. Here the
experience of Christian communities in and from the Middle East
is important, they have had centuries of accommodation with their
Muslim neighbours, sometimes peacefully so, at other times painful and
subservient. An immigrant religious community (such as experienced
in the UK with a particular form of emergent Islam) defines itself by
certain practices, and a debate emerges about the appropriateness of
these symbolic acts and images in the context of a wider secular society.
Christianity has long had practice in dealing with this situation, there
is a theology of inculturation within the tradition that is present at the
heart of their experience. The late Fr Anscar Chupungco OSB wrote
eloquently about inculturation in terms of the Church's worship, but
this can be set in a larger context:

> Culture is in constant evolution. Although many of its
> traditional components have survived the test of time, new

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6 Conrad Hackett, Marcin Stonawski, Michaela Potanoková, Brian J. Grim, Vegard
   Skirbekk, 'The future size of religiously affiliated and unaffiliated populations',
   Demographic Research, Volume 32, Article 27 Descriptive Finding, p. 837. http://
   www.demographic-research.org.

elements are continually being introduced and integrated into it. Societies that have been traditionally agricultural are quickly shifting to industry. The Fourth Instruction on the Liturgy, issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship on January 25, 1994, is keenly aware of this. It calls for a balanced approach to this situation: 'Liturgical inculturation should try to satisfy the needs of traditional culture, and at the same time take account of the needs of those affected by an urban or an industrial culture.'[7]

Chupungco is writing here about the long historical process of cultural adaptation in worship, but it is an important point, especially for the Churches of the East, because they are theological and ecclesial Churches whose life is planted in a spirituality far more liturgically rooted than some Christians in the West, especially a more evangelical Protestantism, and despite their seeming historical background are well able to adapt.

In the context of any debate about religion in the public space, its symbols will help a reappraisal of the living tradition! Religious inculturation not only revitalises the symbolic world of traditional Christianity but refocuses attention on the long and historical links within Christianity itself. The presence of Eastern Christians reminds us that in ancient times there was greater movement between different groups than hitherto understood and this has given life to ancient practises and customs. Witness the great revival of the pilgrimage, not only to the Holy Land but also the shrines of ancient saints such as Cuthbert in Durham, Aidan in the Holy Island of Lindisfarne, or St James at Compostella, places that are not only UNESCO heritage sites but exercise a powerful attraction for people who seek meaning in their lives. Pilgrimage has always been a part of religious phenomena but so has the desire of humans to create particular spaces for an encounter with the Divine. This is particularly noticeable as heritage and national issues continue to emerge concerning places of worship and it is something the Eastern Christian community values highly. It is also noticeable that though there may be a diminution of church attendance the principles and

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7   Anscar J. Chupungco, OSB. 2010. *What, Then, Is Liturgy? Musings and Memoir*, A Pueblo Book, Minnesota Liturgical Press, Collegeville Mn, p. 10.

themes of Christianity are still held up as valid spiritual ways for people to follow.

Part of this is due to continued debates about the problem of religion in the public space, particularly identity and practice in countries of immigration. Recent problems have pushed religious matters into a new focus, but that is not all, it can be partly attributed to a gradual recovery of spiritual confidence within the Churches themselves, and certainly the growth amongst many European communities of Middle Eastern Christian groups. Their presence is proving to be small but significant in unforeseen ways, particularly in two main areas, firstly the constant reminder of the origins and diversity of the Christian family, and secondly because their witness ensures that the persecution of Christians in Iran, Syria and elsewhere is not only noticed in the West but also connected to real communities through relationships between Churches, families and organisations within the diaspora. There is a different type of ecumenism at work: in conflict and persecution the Churches come together. The Prince of Wales acknowledged this dual significance in his speech to the Greek-Catholic Melkite Community in London in December 2017:

> It does seem to me that in our troubled times, when so many Christians in the Middle East face such desperate trials, there is at least some potential comfort to be found in remembering our connections to the earliest days of the Church. Indeed, as all of you know only too well, the Christmas story itself ends with the Holy Family fleeing for refuge from persecution; just as in 2017 large numbers of Christians, such as the families that I had the particular pleasure of meeting before this service, are being forced to leave their homes in the face of the most brutal persecution on account of their faith. Such barbaric persecution is even more perverse and dreadful when as many Christians seem unaware.[8]

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8   HRH Prince of Wales. *Address to the Greek-Catholic Melkite Community*. London, 19 December 2017.

What is important about this speech is that the Prince of Wales is making a direct reference to the persecution of Christians today, something that Governments and NCOs seem reluctant to admit.

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To stay or return:
the problem facing Middle Eastern Christianity?

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Recent immigration has caused a lot of problems in Europe, but amongst the untold stories, the presence amongst us of Middle Eastern Christians is one that needs to be noted. There have been communities of Christians from the Middle East in Europe and the Diaspora for well over a century. My own Melkite Church had two parishes in France that dated from the 19th Century and still exist. Our London Parish started 25 years ago, partly as a response to the growing exodus of Melkite Catholic from regions of persecution, but also to root families that had emigrated for other reasons. At the recent visit of HRH the Prince of Wales to our parish, Fr Shafiq Abouzayd acknowledged that the emigration of our Middle Eastern Christians is not one sided, seeking a safe haven is also about learning to share and adapt, the questions of course are 'how and why? In his address of welcome to Prince Charles he said:

> I see our present exodus to the West as a sign of universalism, bringing our Oriental tradition to enrich other local traditions and so to enrich the universal Church.
> We are very proud of our suffering as Christians, because this is the way of the Cross, which leads towards life and resurrection. We are very proud of innocent and righteous martyrs, because their blood is watering the dry earth of Middle Eastern society and promising a new spring to our Church and society in the Middle East.[9]

The same can be said of other Arab and Iraqi Christians, Orthodox and Catholics, Syrians, Chaldeans, Copts, and Maronites. This

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9   Fr Shafiq Abouzayd. *Address on the Visit of the Prince of Wales to the Greek-Catholic Melkite Church*, 19 December 2017, London.

enrichment of the Christian presence is slowly emerging, but it begs a deeper question. Is the future of the Middle Eastern Christianity a life apart from these countries of their ancient faith? In other words will emigration hasten the death of those Living Stones? Eliza Griswold in the *New York Times* of July 2015 gives us a particular flavour of this question:

> For more than a decade, extremists have targeted Christians and other minorities, who often serve as stand-ins for the West. This was especially true in Iraq after the U.S. invasion, which caused hundreds of thousands to flee. 'Since 2003, we've lost priests, bishops and more than 60 churches were bombed,' Bashar Warda, the Chaldean Catholic archbishop of Erbil, said. With the fall of Saddam Hussein, Christians began to leave Iraq in large numbers, and the population shrank to less than 500,000 today from as many as 1.5 million in 2003.[10]

We face a real problem. I can ask myself as a British born Melkite priest, just where does my own community think it is going? I do not detect the nostalgia for homeland as a primary factor that suggests we are in a 'holding' operation, nor do I think we are in the business or receiving refuges without end. Our own bishops want people to return and help the recovery of the Mother Church but recognize an alternate reality. In fact our two Melkite priests in London have repeatedly reminded the congregation that the linguistic future of the community will be Anglo-phone not Arabic. This I think is a wise, if difficult vision for them; it suggests the ever present theological development of their tradition, a reminder that culture and national identity are not the hall mark of a diverse but universal faith. There is a difference between adaptation and inculturation!

Fortunately the Catholic communities in particular acknowledge plurality and since Vatican II have encouraged their Eastern Churches to return to their authentic traditions. Other Orthodox communities have yet to identify this pattern of adaptation and some remain resolute in keeping their national identity alive, but at a price. Launching a

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10 'Is This the End of Christianity in the Middle East?', article by Eliza Griswold, *The New York Times*, 22 July 2015.

Study on Persecuted Christians in October 2017, Aid to the Church In Need invited the Melkite Archbishop of Zahle, Issam John Darwish to speak; his comment is one often heard from Bishops and Church leaders in the Middle East today: 'He told the attendees of the event chaired by Lord Alton of Liverpool, that the number of Christians in the Middle East is declining because so many have fled.'

He added:

> We urge Syrians, and especially Christians to return to the homeland. We ask that Western Governments stop facilitating the immigration of Christians from the Middle East.[11]

Perhaps the repetition of the plight of our brothers and sisters in our western news diminishes its acceptance by the wider population, certainly Christianity was not perceived as a persecuted faith until recently. The ignorance of Western and other Christians about the origins of their primitive community in the early centuries, and the long history of the Middle Eastern Christians has not been as widely known as it should, or if it has, seems to have suffered in the politics of Arab–Israeli conflict to name one issue amongst many. It is fortunate that there are advocates for these communities amongst Europeans and Americans but their voice needs to be concerted and consistent. John Pontifex of Aid to The Church in Need, told Premier Radio that Christianity is on the brink of being wiped out in certain countries.

He said:

> We've got a ticking bomb going on here, in that Christians in certain parts of the world haven't got very much time left for their situation to be resolved.
> The ticking bomb is particularly expressed in the extent to which there is a migration of Christians. In Iraq there were 1.2 million Christians 15 years ago and there are now barely 200,000 left.

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11 Archbishop Issam Darwish, speaking at the launch of the Study *'Persecuted and Forgotten'* by Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), 13 October 2017.

If that rate of decline continues, what we're going to see is an end to Christianity in the foreseeable future."[12]

We can only hope this is not so!

Hope in the Darkness?

Are there voices of hope? We see the positive aspects of Middle Eastern Christians settling and living amongst their co-religionists in Europe even if at times they are not fully understood, but at least they are beginning to be known. In the UK, various people maintain a profile for them, amongst their leaders Archbishop Angaelos of the Coptic Church has many links with establishment figures, but he is a voice for his own community; there are others badly in need of spokespersons to help them. My own work is trying to create a dialogue with other Christians particularly in rooting these communities within the life of the wider Church. The Centre for Eastern Christianity at Heythrop College has been enormously influential in creating an academic milieu, forum and virtual community of like minded people. The Living Stones Theology Group brings together other interested and committed people who research and critique the situations of our Christians. Organisations like Aid to The Church in Need help promote the cause and understanding of these Churches.

At the other end of the spectrum, international Christianity has top level ecclesial meetings where several declarations have committed Churches to a plan of action. Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at a private meeting stated in their joint Declaration in Jerusalem in May 2014:

From this holy city of Jerusalem, we express our shared profound concern for the situation of Christians in the Middle East and for their right to remain full citizens of their homelands. In trust we turn to the almighty and merciful God in a prayer for peace in the Holy Land and in the Middle East in general. We especially pray for the Churches in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, which have suffered

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12 John Pontifex, *ibid*.

most grievously due to recent events. We encourage all
parties regardless of their religious convictions to continue
to work for reconciliation and for the just recognition
of peoples' rights. We are persuaded that it is not arms,
but dialogue, pardon and reconciliation that are the only
possible means to achieve peace.[13]

These are noble words, largely symbolic as major meetings often
are, but underpinning them is real politic, emphasising that something
has to be done if the very survival of these communities are to be
ensured. That Patriarch Bartholomew signed this together with the
Pope is important, for one of the grave problems of the Palestinian and
Jerusalem Orthodox Church is a tension between the Arab faithful and
their Greek Hierarchs especially over the sale of land, because of this
and other ethnic problems, the Greek Orthodox Church in the Holy
Land has not always enjoyed good relationships with other groups. The
divisions amongst Christians has not helped things one bit, especially
at a time when a united front is more than ever necessary in the face
of multiple problems.

On the 12 February 2016, Pope Francis met Russian Orthodox
Patriarch Kyrill of Moscow, (leader of the largest Orthodox Church), in
Cuba, this in itself is significant, for as Christianity seemingly (my words)
declines in the ancient places of its origins, in what was euphemistically
known as the 'new' world much growth is taking place. Here the two
Church leaders issued a much more strenuous appeal for Christians
in the Middle East, setting the problem in a wider historical–political
setting, predictably because the situation had become much worse. It
is worth quoting their statement fairly extensively as it is quite explicit
in its focus, but it is also important to note the nuances:

Our gaze must firstly turn to those regions of the world
where Christians are victims of persecution. In many
countries of the Middle East and North Africa whole
families, villages and cities of our brothers and sisters in
Christ are being completely exterminated. Their churches
are being barbarously ravaged and looted, their sacred

13 Common Declaration of Pope Francis and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew,
Apostolic Delegation (Jerusalem) Sunday, 25 May 2014.

objects profaned, their monuments destroyed. It is with pain that we call to mind the situation in Syria, Iraq and other countries of the Middle East, and the massive exodus of Christians from the land in which our faith was first disseminated and in which they have lived since the time of the Apostles, together with other religious communities.[14]

My comment here is that this is a simple statement of pretty appalling facts, too many horror tales have emerged, become known and alleged to allow any civilised person the option of ignoring what is going on. As a theologian and pastor I have the duty of care for a Middle Eastern Community that lives in freedom amongst us, but as their brother in Christ I also have a duty of articulating a prophetic and well structured voice with others in order that from our knowledge those who have gifts of influence and organisation can help shape policy and change situations, this is part of outreach, not only of Church leaders but any of us involved with these communities.

We call upon the international community to act urgently in order to prevent the further expulsion of Christians from the Middle East. In raising our voice in defence of persecuted Christians, we wish to express our compassion for the suffering experienced by the faithful of other religious traditions who have also become victims of civil war, chaos and terrorist violence.

Thousands of victims have already been claimed in the violence in Syria and Iraq, which has left many other millions without a home or means of sustenance. We urge the international community to seek an end to the violence and terrorism and, at the same time, to contribute through dialogue to a swift return to civil peace. Large— scale humanitarian aid must be assured to the afflicted populations and to the many refugees seeking safety in neighbouring lands.[15]

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14 Meeting of Pope Francis and Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kyrill of Moscow, Cuba, 12 February 2016.

15 *Ibid*.

How will these declarations effect change? Are they simply the usual rhetoric that accompanies meetings of dignitaries, symbolic but empty words of the celebrity culture surrounding us? Or is there more at stake? We have as the Gospel says to be alert to the deeper waters of entente cordiale: 'Jesus said to them, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."' (Mt 10:16)

Certainly in terms of the Russian Orthodox, more hegemony in the Middle East has been an aim for a very long time and there is a conflict of interest with the Patriarchate of Constantinople.[16] The rise of Orthodoxy within Russia and the Russian military help for Assad and his regime in Syria have made that religious presence a bit more realistic if totally ambivalent. The pope himself is a figure widely respected, and his own communion with the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem as well as Latin Church congregations in the regions ensures that the pope and Vatican will certainly play a role in mediation and dialogue. At end of the Cuban statement both Hierarchs made this plea:

> We address, in a fervent appeal, all the parts that may be involved in the conflicts to demonstrate good will and to take part in the negotiating table. At the same time, the international community must undertake every possible effort to end terrorism through common, joint and coordinated action. We call on all the countries involved in the struggle against terrorism to responsible and prudent action.[17]

This is crucial, especially given a new western world order imposed on us by media and demagogues, for whom the term 'fake news' is a useful epithet disguising almost anything and capable of rendering the truth unconscious! The future of Christianity in the region of its birth is now uncertain. According to a Pew study, Christians face religious persecution in more countries than any other religious group. 'ISIL has

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16 See James Likoudis . *The Power Struggle in Eastern Orthodoxy*. The Wanderer, 9 August 2007. http://www.jameslikoudispage.com/Dialogue/struggle.htm, accessed 20/02/18).
17 *Ibid*.

put a spotlight on the issue,' says Anna Eshoo, a California Democrat in the US House of Representatives, whose parents are from the region and who advocates on behalf of Eastern Christians. 'Christianity is under an existential threat.'[18] The question is, does this mean its end in these regions?

<div align="center">Problems of the task ahead</div>

Recent political events, particularly the contentious and unilateral decision of President Trump to move the USA Embassy from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem, against—let it be said—majority protests from UN member states and all the native (an important word here) Middle Eastern Churches. The visit of Vice-President Mike Pence to the Holy Land in January 2018 was boycotted by local Middle Eastern Church leaders, as CNN reported: 'The former Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, 84-year old Michel Sabbah, says it was the destabilization of the region, resulting from the war in Iraq in 2003, that led to the increase in persecution of Christians from groups like ISIS.'[19] This of course is a reality that some in the West either ignore or refuse to think about, but it is undeniable and because of what has taken place in Syria and in Palestinian territories it reveals a reality that though to some surprising, is not an unknown problem as Michel Sabbah stated:

> Our fear is not from our people, from Muslims. Our fear is from America … If [Trump] wants to defend Christians in the Middle East, he has to start [by] changing American policy in the Middle East: to [begin] a new vision of politics, built on life and … not more death or destruction.[20]

Local clergy believe that driving away Christians from the Holy Land, is linked to the perceived preferential treatment the US shows toward Israel, involving the occupation of Palestinian lands, which

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18 *Ibid*.

19 *From pilgrimage to exodus: Is the end nigh for Palestinian Christians?*, by Ian Lee, CNN, updated January 22, 2018. https://edition.cnn.com/2018/01/22/middleeast/bethlehem–christians–israel–palestinians–intl/index.html.

20 *Ibid*.

also means restrictions on the lives, movements, and opportunities of Palestinian Christians and Muslims.

This act in itself has brought out into the open an Evangelical Alliance with a particular type of Geo-politics, very strongly rooted in the US but with links in the UK and Europe, but by extension it brings up a very deep theological question of how exactly are the Christian Churches responding to pressures in the Middle East, by exodus or return? From my own vantage point of a priest who moved to a minority but truly ancient Eastern Catholic Church in order to help root them in a diaspora situation, the lack of understanding about these communities from some of the mainstream Protestant Western Christian Churches is pretty dire, from the USA Evangelical setting it is negligible and this is part of the problem! Another contentious issue within the territories of the Middle East is the aggressive proselytising of new evangelical Churches amongst older Christian groups, a deliberate and flagrant imposition of an ecclesial colonialism that has no place in ecumenical dialogue, nor does it have the grace of being something of a renewal of Christianity, rather it is destructive and symptomatic of a lack of care we in the Western Churches have for our ancient roots. This needs to be addressed, but will it be? I would hope that is what our immigrant Eastern communities can help us achieve in some manner !

In 2014 in a question and answer session reprinted in the *National Catholic Reporter*, Vinnie Rotondaro said:

> As a Christian, I have to look at it beyond the Christian context because as a believer, I'm not called to defend myself; I'm called to promote good in the world and to defend others who are vulnerable. Especially as American Christians, this should not be about defending our own and to hell with the rest. This is has to be about how do we help foster, how do we, in a sense, atone for the sins of our past, sins that helped foment this kind of sectarianism, for which not only Christians are paying a bitter price, but also Yazidis and Turkoman and countless others in Syria and in Iraq.[21]

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21 Vinnie Rotondaro: *Understanding Persecution of Christians in the Middle East*. Blog Article in National Catholic Reporter NCR online.org . Kansas City MO, 8

This is absolutely true; if our Christian vocation is to reach and protect the vulnerable, we are definitely obliged to do this to members of our own household of faith and beyond, but also to do it in a respectful, thoughtful and knowledgeable manner. It is the height of unthinking, ingrained, ecclesial–colonial arrogance, to impose a form of Christianity on an already ancient Christian culture, even if it is simply by comparison, but we do this time and time again.

Humility is one of the gifts of the Spirit, but it is one that clergy in particular, and some believers in general, forget and forgo time after time. This is something I have met personally in my own ministry, it is I have always thought, the price of martyrdom within the faith, a minority in the land of a majority run the risk of being overlooked, but that is made worse when majority faiths have little interest in learning or even opening themselves to the uncomfortable truths of faith and the plight of their sisters and brothers. Let us put it this way, one form of oppression and abuse is for a religious culture to dominate others and refuse to accommodate them.

In the case of our Middle Eastern Christians this is a danger we need to point out, especially for those Eastern Catholics who in the past have often found themselves in the 'no mans land' between Orthodoxy and Latin Roman Catholicism. But this can be no more, the ecumenism of martyrdom in the Middle East does not allow this theological or ecclesial luxury of division. Pope Francis states often that the:

> ecumenism of suffering and of the martyrdom of blood are a powerful summons to walk the long path of reconciliation between the Churches, by courageously and decisively abandoning ourselves to the working of the Holy Spirit.[22]

In an interview for *National Catholic Reporter*, questions about Palestinian Christians were asked of James Zogby, president of the Arab American Institute and son of Lebanese parents, he was clear and trenchant in his response:

Sept 2014.
22 Address by Pope Francis at an Audience with Karekin II Patriarch of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Vatican, Rome, 8 May 2014.

> Palestinian Christians have always seen themselves as part
> of a Palestinian community—not separate from, but tied
> to, the fate of the rest of the Palestinian community …
> They have also felt that they have been ignored, slighted,
> and maybe at times treated as less-than-Christian by their
> co-religionists in the West.[23]

This is a viewpoint echoed by many! In an article in *Religion News Service*, written about Trump's decision to move the US Embassy from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem, this criticism was echoed by Wadie Abu Nassar, adviser to the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land and a Catholic Political analyst who spoke on behalf of the International Center for Consultations—his think tank in Haifa, Israel.

> Christians in the Middle East, the vast majority of them,
> believe American evangelicals have crocodile tears … The
> American evangelicals, if they really care about Christians
> (in the region), should boost better understanding
> between the U.S. and its Arab neighbors—not become
> part of the problem.[24]

This type of argument between Middle Eastern Christians and prominent American evangelicals over the State of Israel and its policies is nothing new and it has ramifications across an evangelical alliance in Europe.

In 2014, Texas Republican Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas—an evangelical Christian—spoke at three-day Summit, a conference bringing together a range of Middle Eastern Christians—Orthodox, Catholic, Coptic, Syriac, Lebanese, Assyrian, to name a few—to help foster a new sense of unity in the midst of a politically fraught time. Cruz's remarks met with audience hostility when he moved from condemnation of ISIS, al-Qaida and Hamas to state in front of this mixed group: '…today, Christians have no greater ally than the Jewish state.'

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23 *Ibid*.

24 Religion News Service. *Is Trump widening a rift between the evangelicals and Mideast Christians?* Jack Jenkins, 8 January 2018; see https://religionnews.com/2018/01/08/is-trump-widening-a-rift-between-the-evangelicals-and-mideast-christians/.

The audience shouted and Cruz accused some of being consumed with hate. After being booed he promptly ended his speech, saying, 'If you will not stand with the Jews, then I will not stand with you.'[25] I might add extreme as this was, it is a view I have heard in the United Kingdom from similar evangelicals, but this is no excuse for it. Commentators were sharply divided over the incident and a number portrayed the 'In Defense of Christians' meeting as fiercely anti-Israel, but that is a banal and naïve 'appreciation' of what was going on. Left out of many accounts was the context, reason and the nature of the participants of the meeting which was mainly about the plight of Iraqi Christians. Middle Eastern Christians are not a comprehensive monolithic group, there are very complex issues, but Cruz's response is symptomatic of the perception that dogs much of an US evangelical view towards Palestinian-Israeli politics with little concept of the historical reality of religious tradition.

James Zogby spoke at the meeting and reflected on Cruz's words, what he said is absolutely crucial for any future dialogue:

> If policy makers want to help Christians, they will first listen to them, before they try to lecture them. Having an 'I love Israel, and I don't care about the rest of the Arab World' mindset may work in US politics, but it's why we are in the mess we are in across the region.[26]

To my mind this is also the uphill task facing our communities in Europe, those of us who are priest and pastors must find ways to open out this voice. Fortunately, the ecumenical approach we have here in the UK goes a long way to opening the doors of perception!

Conclusion

In October 2017, Bethlehem's mayor, Anton Salman, wrote a withering opinion piece published in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, and entitled

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25 Report by Elizabeth Dias. 'Why Ted Cruz Was Booed Off Stage at a Christian Event', *Time*, 11 Sept 2014

26 *Ibid.*, see also online article in National Catholic Reporter: https://www.ncronline.org/news/world/trump-widening-rift-between-evangelicals-and-mideast-christians.

'As Bethlehem's Mayor I ask Why Are U.S. Christians Celebrating Israeli Policies Strangling Jesus' Birthplace?' In it he decried both occupation of the Palestinian territories and the evangelical U.S. Christians that support it as 'fundamentalist theological positions are used to justify injustice.'[27]

We need to educate conservative Christians not only in the United States but in Europe about our faithful peoples; many of them will not return. Safety, a new life, work and freedom are inalienable rights and we cannot force people back into what they perceive as a battle ground, but it is our task to work for peace.

There has always been this lack of understanding between the communities, and that is still a work in progress, but one of the tasks of Middle Eastern Christians here in Europe and the UK is to educate by example and also by information. We should perhaps also stop talking about each other as though there was a huge theological and ideological fence between East and Western Christianity. We are after all one family in Christ, we share in the joys and sorrows of each other!

What future may there be for the Living Stones? Do they seek life and freedom away from an uncertain future in their own lands by remaining in the diaspora? Will then the material shift of this historical source culture of Christianity remain only outside lands of origin? The omens do not look good and as I have acknowledged there are complex issues at work. The growth of Christianity in the future is certainly in Sub-Saharan Africa, South America and the great unknown of China. Islam unlike Christianity has not yet had to face the inner reformation that occurs within communities at times of paradigmatic shift and so glib pronouncements about Islamisation of Europe need more grounding.

But there are signs of hope, small signs maybe. I shall end with Pope Francis' words to my own Melkite Greek-Catholic Synod:

> In this difficult historical period, many Christian communities in the Middle East are called to live their faith in the Lord Jesus amid many trials. I ardently hope that with their living witness, the Melkite Greek Bishops and priests will be able to encourage the faithful to remain

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27 Anton Salman, 'As Bethlehem's Mayor I ask Why Are US Christians Celebrating Israeli Policies Strangling Jesus' Birthplace?', *Opinion*, *Haaretz*, 15 October 2017.

in the land of birth that Divine Providence desired for them. In the previously mentioned letter of June, I recalled that 'in this particularly difficult time, Pastors are called upon to manifest communion, unity, closeness, solidarity and transparency before the suffering People of God.' I fraternally invite you to continue on this path.[28]

28 Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Synod Assembly of the Greek-Melkite Catholic Church, Vatican, Rome. Monday, 12 February 2018.

THE REVIVAL OF THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS FOLLOWING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Khalid S Dinno

INTRODUCTION[1]

When southeastern Anatolia and the Arab lands to the south were incorporated into the Ottoman Empire in 1516/17, the Syrian Orthodox Church[2] was one of the smaller Oriental Churches to join the newly expanded empire.[3] In common with other Syriac Christian communities, Syrian Orthodoxy, which had endured nearly two centuries of a stifled existence under the oppressive rules of the late and post-Mongol dynasties found relative peace and stability under the protection offered by the Ottoman *millet* system, as this system evolved over the centuries. However, major sociopolitical developments occurred in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that changed the tenets of stability offered by this system.

The *millet* system, under which the non-Muslims lived, assigned the internal affairs of non-Muslim communities to their respective religious authorities. This, in turn, strengthened the bond between the Christian communities and the Churches. In particular, this closeness

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1 It is with honour that I presented this article to *The Living Stones Yearbook 2017-18* which is dedicated to the case and cause of Mor Gregorios Yuhanna Ibrahim the kidnapped Metropolitan of Aleppo.

2 There is also a growing tendency to replace the traditional part of the name 'Syrian' in the name of the Church with 'Syriac' in order to avoid confusion with the country of the same name. I have generally used 'Syrian' in deference to the historicity, except when referring to all Churches that use the Syriac liturgical tradition. For a discussion on the historicity of the name adopted here, see article by author in *Parole de l' Orient* 38 (2013) 193-211. Further, the name of Church is intended to include Church followers.

3 Under the Ottomans, the Syrian Orthodox lived mainly in southeastern Anatolia, northern Iraq, and in and around major cities in Greater Syria, including Aleppo, Damascus, and Homs.

between Church and its people preserved the overall integrity of the smaller Christian Churches (such as the Syrian Orthodox) as Church and community from potential absorption within other larger religious entities. Thus, despite certain important shortcomings, the *millet* system preserved and protected the smaller, and one may dare say, even the larger Christian Churches and their communities, at both central and local levels, from coercion to apostasy and from the pressures of being under the direct authority of a potentially intrusive system and often corrupt officialdom.

The missionaries were from the start permitted to apostatize indigenous Christians as long as they did not engage in apostatizing Muslims. This apathy toward the indigenous non-Muslims of the empire effectively undermined the *millet* system under which its non-Muslim subjects had peacefully existed. It removed the shield that had protected the *millets*. This resulted in divisions within the indigenous Churches, which undermined the *millet* system under which they historically lived, as it could no longer constitute a protective shield, but was rendered a mere umbrella.

Looking beyond intra-Christian issues, the insecure environment in southeastern Anatolia, where most of the Syrian Orthodox lived, caused their towns and villages to be constantly at the mercy of the often abusive Kurdish tribes, which surrounded them. The rebellion by Badr Khan in the 1840s against the central government wrought mayhem on the members of the Church of the East in Hakkari and also on some of the neighbouring Syrian Orthodox communities. In the succeeding decades some of the worst atrocities were committed during the Kurdish violence that started in 1895.

On a somewhat broader scale, the rapid internal sociopolitical developments in the empire during the second half of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman-Russian wars, the Balkan wars of independence, and the resultant population displacements—all left their indelible fingerprints on the security environments in which the small Syrian Orthodox communities, along with other East and West Syriac Church communities, who were living in Anatolia. Consequently, these communities were the victims of violence, not of their making, that was initiated in 1895 and grew to horrific proportions in the 1915 genocide and in the associated exile of most survivors. This brought Syrian Orthodoxy, which

lost nearly half of its Middle Eastern population in this genocide, to the edge of an abyss.

The arrival of the majority of those exiled to the Arab lands, where Arab nation states were in the process of being formed, brought these communities to the threshold of a new life, to be among people who welcomed them in their midst, as though in remembrance of, and as a measure of reciprocity for, the way the Christians in Greater Syria and Iraq had welcomed their Arab cousins in their midst some thirteen centuries earlier. This new, much more tolerant environment afforded the devastated emigrants from Anatolia safety and the opportunity to begin to heal their lives from the devastation that had befallen them in their traditional homeland.

The new nation states also offered a complete departure from the 'sectarian' *millet* system that still lacked the spirit of equality and citizenship, despite its reform during the second half of the nineteenth century. The immigrants, as citizens of the new nation states, began to feel an overall sense of freedom and security in the new environment. They also came to see the relationship between themselves as individuals and the Church as basically religious and not civic. At the same time, the new environment offered the Syrian Orthodox Church, with its new well–defined and reduced level of social responsibility, the opportunity to embark on much needed revival, not least by means of the education first of its clergy. The Church succeeded, in the course of this transformation, in developing a new bond with its communities through cultural and social interaction that was commonly based on the tenets of revival.

In the immediate post–war period, the Syrian Orthodox Church, led by Patriarch Elias III and Archbishop Aphram Barsoum, in their different ways, laboured to provide compassionate leadership and demonstrated resolve to commence a period of recovery and revival. Both were far-sighted leaders who were aware of the constraints of their immediate environment and proceeded wisely, though with differing scopes of aspiration. Patriarch Elias III, very much aware of the plight of his people who were still living in Turkey, followed

a policy of accommodation and submission towards the new Turkish leadership. On the other hand, Barsoum, then Archbishop of Syria and Lebanon, had already concluded that the future of his Church and people lay within the Arab social and cultural environment to which it had contributed such a great deal many centuries earlier. This was consistent with his instinctive pro-Arab nationalist background and leanings. It was also reinforced by his negative experience in dealing with Western Powers in 1920 at the Paris Conference and with Western Churches.

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AT THE THRESHOLD OF THE SECOND RENAISSANCE

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Despite the tragedies the Syrian Orthodox witnessed a remarkable revival during the first half of the twentieth century which in turn paved the way for a greater revival in the succeeding decades. This revival had two aspects: one related to the Church and the other to its community. Given their historical inseparable identity and fate, the advances experienced by one branch had a direct impact on, and formed an incentive to, the other. Despite this positive interaction each of the two grew under its own specific potentials and emerging personalities. Both the Church, as an institution, and the community made major steps forward from the early 1930s on, despite the economic and the socio-political difficulties caused by the two World Wars, which had significant impact on the pace of recovery. In the course of this revival the Church in question made education of its clergy a major priority. Other priorities included the forging of a continuing bond with its communities and the review of liturgical material to better address the needs of modernity. A consequence of the revival is that the Church was able to shed the stigma of backwardness that had been attached to it, particularly over the previous century, and that had been exploited by others to apostatize its followers to join other branches of Western Christianity. The Church's success in these endeavours enabled it, by the turn of the second half of the twentieth century, to re-establish itself among its followers and to shed the debilitating stigmas of the past. The momentum generated by the first generation of reformers continued in the following decades to mark a recovery that, according

to the late Patriarch Zakka I Iwas,[4] had not been matched since the days of Bar Hebraeus in the thirteenth century. In this chapter attention is paid to the narrative of this revival that Syrian Orthodox came to view as a second renaissance.

The beginnings of the revival were humble and the first steps were barely noticeable flickering lights that had appeared over the horizon during the years that immediately preceded World War I. Those beginnings were characterized by working out an internal *millet* constitution *(Nizamnameh)*, printing a few liturgical books and attempting to manage the few schools that the Church had finally been able to establish. By all optimistic accounts, the Church in Anatolia was at that point at least half a century behind that of the Armenians living in eastern Anatolia, and even further behind in relation to the Armenians and the Greeks living in Istanbul. In Mosul, a traditional stronghold of Syrian Orthodoxy, Christians were in a better cultural environment than their counterparts in Anatolia, but were still generally behind the Chaldeans, who had had several decades of prior Latin missionary cultural and economic help, which put them well in the lead as regards professional and cultural achievements, such as in journalism and printing. In Mardin, an important Syrian Orthodox stronghold, the intellectual fervour of the years immediately preceding World War I resulted in the issuing of the first literary journal, *Al-Hikmat*, in the summer of 1914. In Diyarbakir there were a few signs of enlightenment too. However, the flickering lights in Anatolia were soon to be extinguished by the advent of *Sayfo.*

Given this humble state of affairs it is reasonable to pose the following question: How did the Syrian Orthodox Church, the smallest of the indigenous Oriental Churches, already exhausted by safety issues with neighbours over the several previous decades, and by resisting alignment with the West for more than one century still survive the additional existential threat during *Sayfo* and still revive? What is additionally remarkable is that this revival did not come as a result of aid from others, for attempts to garner the help of Western Christians—both British and American—after the war proved fruitless. Thus, revival came about by drawing on the Church's own resources. If this was the case, what were

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4   Ignatius Zakka Iwas, *Buḥīth ta'rīḵiyya wa-diniyya wa-adabiyya* ('Historical, Religious and Literary Treatises'), Vols. I and II, Damascus, 1988; Vol. III, Damascus, 2000, p. 292.

the main ingredients of this revival, and what were the catalysts? Who were the main actors in the vanguard of the healing process, which also ushered the Church over the threshold into a new renaissance?

The Motivations for Revival

One may cite several factors that come to the fore in considering what motivated the revival.

The Church's Historical Identity with Antioch and its Semitic/Aramaic Tradition

The Syrian Orthodox, as well as other West Syriacs (the Antiochian Orthodox, the Melkite Catholic, the Syrian Catholic and the Syrian Maronite) take pride in identifying themselves with Antioch, the city, and the historical Church of Antioch, even though Antioch was lost to all of them over the centuries. More importantly, it was where the first adherents to the new faith were called Christians[5] and where Peter the Apostle preached in 34 CE, and stayed until 41 CE, in consequence of which he was considered to be the first Bishop of Antioch.[6]

Moreover, the Christianity of Antioch was Semitic with clear Jewish roots. It was 'greatly influenced by the faith that Jesus and his disciples and their early followers preached and practiced.'[7] With their continued attachment to their Semitic roots, away from Greek influence, the Syrian Orthodox 'eventually alone inherited this ancient liturgy of Antioch, which since the schism has been used only in its Syriac form.'[8] Thus, as Fortescue states with reference to the 'Jacobites': 'so the rite of Antioch, once so mighty in the East, became the speciality of one little sect only.'[9]

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5   Acts of the Apostles 11:26
6   Ishak Saka, *Kanīsatī al-suryāniya* ('My Syrian Church'), Aleppo, 2006, p. 126; Zakka I Iwas, 'The Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch at a Glance', *Syriac Studies*, 1983, p. 27.
7   John Joseph, *Muslim-Christian Relations and Inter-Christian Rivalries in the Middle East: The Case of the Jacobites in an Age of Transition*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983, p. 9.
8   *Ibid*.
9   Adrian Fortescue, *The Lesser Eastern Churches*, Catholic Trust Society, London, 1913, re-published, Gorgias Press, Piscataway, NJ, 2001, p. 346.

The inclusion of the poetry of the fourth-century St Ephrem the Syrian and of the fifth/sixth-century Jacob of Sarug in the daily liturgy continues to bear witness to this and acts as a reminder of past glory. The scholarship of these and others, such as Philoxenus of Mabug (d. 523), and Moshe bar Kepha (d. 903) signified an early development of an indigenous Syriac exegetic culture that was increasingly independent of Greek thought. Further, while the Church was under a minority status under Islam, its scholars and historians Jacob of Edessa, Dionysius of Tel Mahre, and—in the late Abbasid period, early Mongol period, the exegete, historian and scholar of Dionysius bar Salibi, Michael the Syrian, and Gregory bar Hebraeus adorned the pages of history of this small Church with an outstanding cultural heritage.[10] The culture which the Syriac fathers developed was Semitic/Aramaic, which reflected the roots of Christianity in Palestine. Thus despite their minority status, the Syrian Orthodox were aware that they carried within them the DNA of a venerable Semitic/Aramaic culture, which became one of the main inspirations for their revival.[11]

A Paradigms of Martyrdom and Endurance in a Minority Status

The Syrian Orthodox Church, in common with other Oriental Churches, inherited martyrdom, as a paradigm of an exemplary mode of sacrifice for the sake of belief, from the early martyrs of the Church starting with Stephanos, Christendom's first martyr. It was again in Antioch where Ignatius accepted his fate as martyr when he left for Rome upon orders by the Roman Emperor Trajan (98-117)[12] to stand on trial knowing that the likely outcome would leave him to be devoured by the lions.

The post-Chalcedonian history conferred upon the Syrian Orthodox Church the robe of endurance under Byzantine persecution.

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10 Herman Teule, 'Reflections on Identity. The Suryoye of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries: Bar Salibi, Bar Shakko, and Barhebraeus' in *Church History and Religious Culture*, ed. Bas ter Haar Romeny, Vol. 89, No. 1-3, Brill, Leiden, 2009, pp. 184-187.

11 Dorothea Weltecke, 'Michael the Syrian and the Syriac Orthodox Identity' in *Church History and Religious Culture*, ed. Bas ter Haar Romeny, Vol. 89, No. 1-3, Brill, Leiden, 2009, pp. 115-125; Herman Teule, 'Reflections on Identity', pp. 179-189.

12 Christine Chaillot, *The The Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch and All the East*, Geneva, 1998, p. 22.

This persecution is abundantly attested to in the literature.[13] As Bas ter Haar Romeny, *et al.* note '[T]hose who had been persecuted by the Byzantines assumed the role of martyrs and were remembered as such. These memories formed the basis of a historical conscience.'[14] During the same period the fate of the Church and of its communities under the Sassanids fared no better.

The minority position of the Christians as *dhimmis* under successive Islamic rules brought all Christians under one umbrella of equal status. However, the Syrian Orthodox constituted a numerical minority within the *dhimmis*, a paradigm under which they continued to live. They learned the skills of survival as a minority: self-reliance, prudence and allegiance to their Church.

Responsibility for a Large Following in India

One of the significant factors that helped the beleaguered Church promote the will to survive and revive, was its feeling of responsibility towards its large following in India, a following that was several times greater than its following in the Middle East. This added a sense of responsibility for what was at stake gave rise to an added sense of determination to overcome hardship and to forge ahead on the road to recovery. It was in the context of this feeling of responsibility and attachment that Patriarch Elias III headed for India in 1931, even though his communities in the Middle East were still in the midst of recovery from the results of *Sayfo*.

The Venerable Historical Standing of the Patriarch among his People

The Church communities held their patriarch in high esteem because of his spiritual and historical position as Patriarch of Antioch. He was also the chief of their *millet*, a corporate status that endowed a significant temporal authority. The numerous letters that the patriarch received

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13 Adrian Fortescue, *The Lesser Eastern Churches*, p. 327; John Joseph, *Muslim-Christian Relations,* p. 10.

14 Bas ter Haar Romeny, *et al.*, 'The formation of a Communal Identity among West Syrian Christians: Results and Conclusions of the Leiden Project', in *Church History and Religious Culture*, Vol. 89, No. 1–3, 2009, pp. 46-47.

from ordinary people, addressing him directly with their problems, bear witness to the closeness between him and his people.[15] However, one of the main reasons for attachment between the patriarch as leader and his people was the manner in which he was appointed and the simplicity of his daily life. He lived as one of the people for the people. He lived in a monastery surrounded by monks, not in a palace surrounded by nobility. His life was as endangered as their own was. Just as their towns and villages were sacked, so was his abode.[16]

Congenial and Supportive New Environment

One of the main factors that aided the revival was the nature of the environment in which the Syrian Orthodox communities found themselves following their exile from Anatolia. The majority that settled in Greater Syria enjoyed the safety and the tolerance offered by the people of these lands with whom they had shared a largely peaceful history many centuries before. Furthermore, the newcomers greatly benefited from being in the congenial cultural environment that these countries offered at that time. Syria had been in the forefront of Middle Eastern cultural revival and thus offered the new immigrants remarkable opportunities that were completely unknown to them in their previous homeland in Anatolia. Those who immigrated to Northern Iraq settled largely around Mosul and benefited from the educational and cultural opportunities that Mosul offered at that time.

The Rise of a Core of Motivated Reformers

From within the people of this impoverished Church arose a core of three reformers who initiated and led the drive against a decline that had been entrenched for so long. The three, with Aphram Barsoum in the lead, also included Yuhanon/Yuhanna Dolabani and

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15 Khalid Dinno, *Syrian Orthodox Christians,* pp. 110-120.

16 See Southgate, *Narrative of a Tour Through Armenia, Kurdistan, Persia, and Mesopotamia*, 2 vols, Appleton, New York, 1840, pp. 194–213 on the simplicity of the patriarchal setting in Deir al–Za'faran, and p. 225 on the insecurity of that monastery. See also Oswald Parry, *Six Months in a Syrian Monastery.* Horace Cox, London, 1895, reprint by Gorgias Press, 2001, pp. 61-63.

Ni'matallah Denno/Dinno.[17] With their devotion they were able, by example, to inspire others to shed the lethargy of the past and to turn what had been a debilitating decline into a revival. They promoted the education of the clergy and of the community, and worked to rejuvenate and reform liturgical practice to suit modern needs. But above all, by their devotion to scholarship, they raised the aspirations of their communities to emulate the glorious past and thus encouraged the rise of the enlightened ecclesiasts of the next generations. Their initiatives resulted in the rise of successive generations of inspired scholars and reform-minded personalities who advanced the cause of revival. A brief account of the first and next generations of reformers will follow shortly.

<div align="center">

THE FIRST GENERATION OF REFORMERS
Patriarch Aphram I Barsoum (1887-1957)[18]

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As a young man of 18, Barsoum left Mosul, his hometown, to Deir al Za'faran in 1905, where he pursued his Syriac language and theological learning. He was tonsured a monk in 1907 and a priest-monk in 1908, taking the ecclesiastic name Aphram, in honour of Ephrem the Syrian, the venerable and prolific Syriac-language fourth century hymnographer and theologian. In 1911, he took on the responsibility of managing the Monastery's press, in addition to teaching at the Monastery. Motivated by a keen interest in the Syriac heritage from an early age, he began to tour the towns and villages in southeastern Anatolia where the Syrian Orthodox traditionally lived, and Tur Abdin in particular. He visited churches and monasteries where he documented their possessions in the form of books and

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17 In an interview I had with Patriarch Iwas in St Ephrem's Seminary in Ma'arat Sednaya (located 40 km to the northwest of Damascus) on 26 August 2007, Patriarch Iwas expressed what he considered to be his own opinion as well as what he considered to be the general consensus among his generation of Church scholars, that the names noted above formed the first core of modern Syriac reformers. Ishak Saka, *Al Suryan Iman wa Hathara*, Syrian Orthodox Bishopric, Aleppo, 1983, Vol. IV, p. 153, also includes Naom Faiq and Yacoub Saka (d. 1931).

18 Poulus Behnam. *Nafāḥāt al-ḳuzām aw ḥayāt al-baṭriyark Afrām* ('The Aromas of Lavender, or the Life of the Patriarch Aphram'), Mosul, 1959; Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, *The Glory of the Syrians, Mar Ignatios Ephrem Barsaum, Biography and Bibliography,* Sidawi Printing House, Damascus, 1996.

manuscripts and interviewed elders for recollections of events of the past. The calamities that befell these communities a few years after these visits and interviews, eradicated most of these communities and scattered the survivors, making the wealth of information he collected unique.[19]

In addition to his travel and research in Anatolia, Barsoum travelled in 1913 at the age of 26 to several centres of learning in Europe in pursuit of his study of Syriac literary heritage in manuscripts and in other literary sources. He visited London, Paris, Rome, Berlin, Cambridge, Oxford and Florence. These travels presented Barsoum with the opportunity of meeting with orientalists with whom he would have had so much to discuss and to explore. During this trip he wrote an introduction to the *Book of Treasures* by Job of Edessa.[20] He also published with Chabot the work entitled *Chronicon Anonymum* in CSCO in 1920.[21] His interaction with the literary figures of his time is typified by the letters he exchanged with Paul Bedjan.[22] When the letters were written in 1920, Bedjan, a renowned scholar who had published 40 Syriac volumes, was 82 and Barsoum 33. Yet, despite the large age difference the tone of the letters conveys a deep sense of respect from a seasoned scholar to a fellow scholar who was only just beginning to make his imprint felt in the world of scholarship and ecclesiastical leadership. Further, the topics discussed indicate the two were well acquainted with each other's scholarly work. Such was the reputation that Aphram Barsoum had already gained in the literary field even from an early age. Beginning with his early years at Deir al Za'faran, Barsoum gained the reputation of being an active pursuant of Syriac heritage and seeker of reform. Two letters from the archives provide clear evidence of this. The first was from the Mardin branch of *Jamiyat al Intibah* (Society for the Promotion of Alertness), a lay Syrian community society that was concerned with

19 A considerable portion of this information was published largely by Ignatius Zakka Iwas, as will be noted later.
20 Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, *The Glory of the Syrians, Mar Ignatios Ephrem Barsaum, Biography and Bibliography*, 1996, p. 76
21 *Ibid.*, p. 34
22 Khalid Dinno and Amir Harrak, 'Six Letters from Paul Bedjan to Aphram Barsoum.,' in the *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies*, Vol. 9, 2009, Gorgias Press, pp. 55–73

promoting social–cultural progress, which had branches in major towns. The letter, dated June 30, 1913, pleads with Barsoum not to travel at that time in view of the rise of certain sensitive issues concerning Jerusalem, in which the Society wished him to play a leading role.[23]

Of Barsoum's entire scholarly heritage his book *al-Lu'lu' al-manthur* remains the most distinguished and best known. Dolabani translated it into Syriac and Moosa Matti into English under the roughly equivalent title 'The Scattered Pearls, A History of Syriac Science and Literature'.[24] A detailed analysis of *al-Lu'lu' al-Manthur* may be found in Matti Moosa's introduction to his English translation.[25]

Bishop Philoxenus Yuhanna / Yuhanon Dolabani (1885-1969)

Dolabani, born and educated in Mardin, joined the newly established Patriarchal School in Deir al– Za'faran as a teacher in 1910.[26] Driven by a strong missionary spirit, Dolabani trained and ordained many priests and monks and deacons to serve in remote places as far away as Bitlis and Van, where the faithful had lost their clergy. He was consecrated as bishop in 1933. His ascetic personality served him in all this, but in addition enabled him to also devote a good deal of his life to scholarship in the fields that he loved so much: Syriac literature and philosophy. He was a role model for the upcoming generations of Syrian Orthodox clergy and members of Church communities, especially for those with roots in southeast Turkey. In that capacity alone, he contributed greatly towards the revival of his Church. He is still widely remembered for his ascetic life and for his devotion to scholarship. He was a prolific writer who was active not only in the authorship of new material but in the revival of the Syriac heritage, liturgical or otherwise, compiling it from manuscript form, translating it and publishing it.

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23 Archival Document 40M 24/48 – 175.

24 Barsoum, Patriarch Aphram. *Al -Lu'Lu' al-Manthur, (The Scattered Pearls)* published originally in Arabic in 1943, trans. Matti Moosa, Gorgias Press, Piscataway, NJ, 2003.

25 *Ibid*., pp. vii–xix.

26 Mar Filoksinos Yohanno Dolabani, *Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts in Syriac Churches and Monasteries,* Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim (ed, and pub.), Introduction, pp. 7-50, Dar Mardin, Aleppo, 1994, p. 15.

Ni'matallah Denno (1885-1951)

Denno was a scholar, educator and reform-minded member of the Syrian Orthodox community in Mosul. He was born in Mosul, and grew up at a time when his Church was at its lowest ebb. He also witnessed the arrival of refugees fleeing the 1915 massacres of Syrians and Armenians in southeastern Turkey. He saw the dire need to educate the members of his community, young and old, in the virtues of the beliefs of his Church and in the richness of its Syriac liturgy and heritage. He mastered the Syriac language and wrote several grammar textbooks for it. He wrote a number of books and articles defending the Syrian Orthodox Church and its beliefs against what he saw as defamations and distortions of historical facts. He paid particular attention to Church music and wrote a series of articles in which he analysed the role of music in Syriac's liturgical tradition. However, he was also aware of the dire need to engage the Arabic speaking communities of his Church in the liturgy. As part of this effort he complied and published the first hymn book in Arabic in the Syrian Orthodox Church.[27] As with Barsoum and Dolabani, Denno was at the forefront of efforts to introduce structural Church reforms and to promote a meaningful education of the clergy.

Na'um Fa'iq (1868-1930)

Fa'iq was born in Amid (Diyarbakir) where he attended Church school. When the school was shut down due to lack of funds, he pursued self-teaching and later became qualified to take up teaching as a profession, along with many other intellectual interests. Fa'iq had an enthusiastic affection for the Syriac language and literature. He was also a renowned Syriac journalist and nationalist, who like many others of his generation witnessed the persecution and extermination of his people in their homeland in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He reflected his devotion to the Syriac language and nationalism through his extensive journalistic pursuits and in his other publications. He published a newspaper *Kawkab Madenho* in Diyarbakir in Syriac, Arabic

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27 Dinno, Khalid, 'Arabic Hymnology in the Syriac Orthodox Church in Iraq in the Early 20th Century', *Parole de l'Oriente* 35 (2010), pp. 169-179.

and Turkish from 1910–1912. He initially had faith in the Young Turk movement, but that faith soon dissipated when the Islamic backlash to the Italian invasion in 1911 became evident. The persecution of nationalists not aligned with CUP caused him to emigrate to America in 1912, where he established the newspaper *Beth Nahrin* (Mesopotamia) (1916 to1921).

Second and Subsequent Generations of Reformers[28]
Abdul-Ahad Tuma
(later Patriarch Jacob Yacoub) III (1913-1980)

Born in Bartilla, a historical Christian town near Mosul in 1912, Shaba Tuma (his name at birth) received his early education in his hometown before joining the seminary school of Deir Mar Mattai in 1923. In 1931, he left for Beirut where he taught the Syriac language at the Syriac Orphanage in Beirut. In 1933/1934 he was tonsured a monk, taking up the name Abdulahad, and was soon after ordained a priest monk He was sent in the same year by Patriarch Barsoum as patriarchal envoy to India to head Mar Ignatius Seminary in Malabar, where he learned the local language, Malayalam, and published in it. In 1946, he joined the Ephremic Seminary in Mosul, working closely with his colleague Paulus Behnam. After a spell as Bishop of Syria and Lebanon, he was elected Patriarch of Antioch (Ignatius Jacob III) in 1957 following the death of Patriarch Aphram Barsoum. He was an accomplished orator and a prolific writer whose works covered a wide spectrum of knowledge: theological, linguistic and historical.[29] He was well versed in Arabic, Syriac, English and Malayalam, which he mastered during his service in Malabar. He published most of his work in Arabic but he also published work in Syriac and Malayalam.[30] He wrote extensively on Church history up

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28 For brief accounts of their contributions see K Dinno, *The Syrian Orthodox Christians in the Late Ottoman Period and Beyond: Crisis then Revival*, Gorgias Press, Piscataway, NJ, 2017.
29 See Ishak Saka, *Al-suryān īmān wa-ḥaḍāra* ('The Syrians: Faith and Civilization'), Vol. IV, Aleppo, 1983, pp. 233–240 and Christine Chaillot, *The Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch and All the East*, Geneva, 1998, pp.146-147.
30 Albeer Abouna, *Adab al-luğā al-ārāmiyya* ('The Literature of the Aramaic Language'), second ed., Dar al-Mashriq, Beirut, 1996, pp. 570-572.

to the fifth century, on the history of the Syrian Orthodox Church in India, on the Himyarite Christian Arab martyrs in the sixth century, as well as on literary topics on the interaction between Syriac and Arabic literatures.[31]

In addition to his ability as a scholar, he was exceptionally skilled in liturgical Syriac music of both the 'School of Tikrit', popularly followed in the Churches of Iraq, and of the 'School of Edessa', popularly followed elsewhere. He was endowed with a remarkable memory for the tunes of over 700 melodies of the *Beth Gaz*, the Syrian Orthodox treasure of liturgical music tunes and their variations. This treasure had been orally transmitted over the centuries, but, in the midst of the turmoil of the early twentieth century, was in danger of being lost, despite certain attempts at expressing it in modern musical format in the 1920s.[32] It was, therefore, most fortunate that an excellent sample of the *Beth Gaz* tunes was recorded in Patriarch Jacob III's voice in the early 1960s and recently made available on the Internet as an invaluable resource.[33]

Paulus Behnam (1916-1969)

Born in Bakhdeda (Qaragosh), a historic Christian village near Mosul, Behnam received his preliminary education in his hometown and further education at the Seminary School of Deir Mar Matti starting in 1929. In 1938, he joined the Ephremic Seminary in Zahle, Lebanon, where he completed his studies and became a teacher in the college. He then became dean of the college when it was moved to Mosul in 1945. He edited and published two literary journals in Arabic: *Al-Mashriq* from 1946 to 1948 and *Lisan Al-Mashriq* from 1948 to1951. Both journals were scholarly and highly educational. Their articles had a deep impact on the community for their cultural and educational value, and their publication represented a milestone towards learning, spreading awareness, and appreciating the wealth of the Syriac cultural heritage. The journals were augmented with contributions from a

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31 For his bibliographical profile see Ishak Saka, *Al-suryān īmān wa-ḥaḍāra*, Vol. IV, pp. 241-251, and for a summary see Matti Moosa's translation of Ignatius Yacob III, *History of the Church of India,* Gorgias, Piscataway, NJ, 2010, author's profile.
32 Yuhanna Ibrahim, *Beth Gazo according to the School of Edessa—Music of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch*, Damascus, 2003.
33 See sor.cua.edc/BethGazo/PY3RecordHistory.html. Accessed 25/10/17.

wide spectrum of literary scholars,[34] including Muslim scholars,[35] on topics on Syriac and Arabic cultural interactions. In 1951, Patriarch Barsoum awarded Behnam the title 'Melphan' for a thesis he wrote on Moshe Bar Kepha. In addition to being a prolific writer he was an outstanding orator.[36] His sermons attracted large audiences for their rich context and poetic expressions. His humility and kindness added to his immense popularity. He was ordained Bishop of Mosul in 1952 and continued his service as Bishop of Baghdad until his death in 1969.

In addition to the numerous articles Behnam wrote in *al-Marshriq* and in *Lisan al-Marshriq*, he authored a number of books on Syriac heritage, including a well-known treatise on Bar Hebraeus' *Ethecon*.[37] Among other books he authored or translated one may cite: *Ibn al-Ibri al-Sha'ir* (Bar Hebraeus, the Poet) 1967; *A'alaqat al-Jawhariya bein al Lughatain al-Suryaniyah wal 'Arabiyah* ('The Intrinsic Relationship Between the Syriac and the Arabic Languages'); a translation of Aphram Barsoum's *History of Tur Abdin* from Syriac to Arabic; *Khamael al-Rihan* ('Orchards of Blossoms'), which was a rebuttal to Ishaq Armalah concerning the renowned Sixth Century liturgical poet Jacob of Sarugh.

Patriarch Zakka I Iwas (1933-2014)

Born in Mosul, Sanharib joined the Ephremic Seminary in Mosul, where he was re-named Zakka. He took his monastic vows in 1954 and joined the Patriarchal Secretariat during the last years of Patriarch Aphram Barsoum's life. He studied at the Episcopal School of Theology

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34 Abdulahad Tuma (later Patriarch Yacoub III, Ni'matallah Denno, Yuhannon Dolabani, Matti Moosa, Mary Abdul Ahad, Gorgies Awwad, Issa Iskander Ma'loof, Hanna Butrus, Yusuf Mas'oudi, Jirjis Yusus (later Bishop Barnaba), Yusuf Amin Qassir, Hanna Saigh, Ibrahim Khouri, Ghanim Naqash, Victor Naqash, Abdul Maseeh Aphram, see Ishak Saka, *Sawṭ Naynawā wa-ārām aw al-muṭrān Buluṣ Bihnām* ('The Voice of Ninevah and Aram, that is Mutran Paulus Behnam'), Ruha Publications, Aleppo, 1988, p. 104.
35 Shathil Taqa, Shaban Rigab Shihab and Tho-al-Noon Shihab, see Ishak Saka, *Sawṭ Naynawā wa-ārām aw al-muṭrān Buluṣ Bihnām*, p. 104.
36 I had the immense pleasure in listening, in person, to many of his sermons and lectures between 1965 and 1969, the year of his passing.
37 See Ishak Saka, *Sawṭ Naynawā wa-ārām aw al-muṭrān Buluṣ Bihnām*, and Albeer Abouna, *Adab al-lughā al-ārāmiyya*, pp. 563-566.

in New York in 1961 to1962. He represented the Church at Vatican II in 1962 to 63. He was ordained Archbishop of Mosul and environs in 1963, where he served until 1969, when he took charge of the Diocese of Baghdad and Basrah. He was enthroned as patriarch on September 14, 1980. He held a fellowship of the Institute of Syriac Studies at the University of Chicago in 1981, and was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from the Episcopal General School of Theology in New York in 1984. Endowed with a friendly personality he helped his Church meet the challenges of the 34 year term of his office with a progressive ecumenical attitude.[38] He accompanied Patriarch Jacob III in meeting Pope Paul VI in 1971 when a Common Declaration was issued (see later), and he held a meeting with Pope John Paul II in 1984 when a second Common Declaration was issued (see later).

One of Patriarch Iwas' most fruitful legacies has been his encouragement of seminary graduates to seek further learning at institutions of higher learning in Europe and America. As a result, most of the younger generations of bishops and many of the clergy have higher university degrees. The necessity of educating the clergy to keep up with the demands of progressively advancing society was not lost on Patriarch Iwas. The fact that the current patriarch, Ignatius Aphrem II Karim is a doctoral graduate from a Western university gives evidence of this fruitful approach.

Patriarch Iwas also published extensively on several issues: ecumenical, Church history, Syrian Orthodox theology, on the role of women in the Syrian Orthodox Church and on many other topics that relate to Christian life in late twentieth century (see Appendix A6.5 for a summary). Some of his most significant contributions were the numerous articles he published in The Patriarchal Journal on varied topics, including from the legacy of unpublished works by previous authors such as Aphram Barsoum, Ni'matallah Denno.[39]

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38 The author personally knew Zakka Iwas as Archbishop of Baghdad and Basrah and then as Patriarch whom he visited several times. He is deeply indebted to Patriarch Iwas for granting him the approval to search for and photograph the archival material used in this work.

39 *The Patriarchal Journal:* on Aphram Barsoum No. 1, 1981, pp. 21–26; No. 2, 1981, pp. 73–81; No. 3, 1981, pp.145–151; No. 4, 1981, pp. 208–221; No. 6, 1981, pp. 269–282; No. 9, 1981, pp. 333–346; No. 10, 1981, pp. 407–413; No. 12, 1982, pp. 16–24; No. 13, 1982, pp. 4–19; No. 17, 1982, pp. 8–14; No. 23, 1983, pp. 21–28; No. 24, 1983, pp. 24–32; No. 25, 1983, pp. 27–34; No. 27, 1983, pp. 26–33; No. (28, 29), 1983, pp. 37–42; No. 30, 1983, pp. 18–20. On Ni'matallah Denno: No. 11, 1982, p.36; No. 13,

Ishak Saka (1931-2013)

Born in Bartilla in 1931,[40] he graduated from the Ephremic Seminary in Mosul in 1952. He was, throughout his life, devoted to serving at seminaries and religious schools; St. Ephrem Seminary in Mosul (1953 to 1955), and al–Hasaka Syriac School (1956 to 1961). He was ordained priest monk in 1961 and bishop in 1981. He continued to serve in various capacities in seminaries in Zahle, Mosul, Deir Mar Mattai, and was appointed Patriarchal Vicar for Higher Studies in 2002. He published 16 books and numerous articles. Some of his books are on exegetic topics, such as *al-Asrar al Sabʿa* (the Seven Sacraments) which he co-authored with Zakka Iwas, others are of historical nature. Of these *al-Suryan Iman wa Hathara* ('The Syrians—Faith and Civilization'), an extensive work that appeared in five volumes and *Keneesati al-Suryaniyah* ('My Syrian Church'), stand out in particular.[41]

Saliba Shamoun (1932-)

Born in Bartilla in 1932,[42] he graduated from the Ephremic Seminary in Mosul in 1954 and served initially in several dioceses and at different ecumenical conferences. He represented the Church in the Second Vatican Council in 1964/1965. He was appointed Bishop of Mosul in 1969 taking up the ecclesiastic forename Gregorius. He authored nine books on various liturgical topics, and translated from Syriac to Arabic 11 others, most important of which are *The Six Days* by Jacob of Edessa,[43] the *Chronicle of Michael the Syrian,*[44] the *Chronicle of Bar Hebraeus*, and *Fann al-faṣāḥaʾ* ('Art of Linguistic Eloquence') by Anton of Tikrit.

1982, pp. 20–33; No. (65,66), 1987, pp. 238–250; No. (94, 95, 96), 1990, pp. 154–155; No. (133, 134), 1994, pp. 158–159;No. (191, 192, 193), 2000, pp. 24–29; No. (221, 222, 223), 2003, pp. 29–60; No. (224, 225, 226), 2003, pp. 239–240; No.(241, 242, 243), 2004, pp. 17–26.

40 Ishak Saka, *Kanīsatī al-suryāniya* ('My Syrian Church'), Aleppo 2006, pp. 414–417.
41 Ishak Saka, *Al-suryān īmān wa-ḥaḍāra* ('The Syrians: Faith and Civilization'),Vols. I to IV, Aleppo, 1983.
42 Saliba Shamʿun, *Fann al-faṣāḥaʾ*, ('Art of Linguistic Eloquence'), Duhook, 2014, back cover.
43 Published by Dar al-Ruha, Aleppo, 1990.
44 Saliba Shamʿun, *Fann al-faṣāḥaʾ*, Duhook, 2014.

'Abd al-Masih Numan Qarabashi (1903-1983)

Born in Qarabash near Diyarbakir, he joined Deir al–Za'faran at the early age of eight where he learned Syriac, Arabic and Turkish. He resumed his learning when things settled somewhat after Safo. He chose teaching as a career, which he practiced in Beirut until 1936, in Jerusalem (1937-1939), Qamishli (northern Syria) (1952-19760, and St. Ephrem Seminary in Beirut (1972-1975).He authored several books; a series of Syriac readers, a grammar, poems and on Sayfo.45 He also translated several works from Arabic to Syriac: Gibran Khalil Gibran's The Prophet and Jesus the Son of Man; Michael Niema's al-awjuh; Addai Scher's Ta'rikh kaldu wa–athur; and the Code of Hammurabi.46 He also contributed to several literary journals that appeared in the fourth and fifth decades of the twentieth century such as al-Nashrah al-Suryaniyyah47 that was issued in Aleppo, thus joining other literary contributors to this and to other journals like al–Mashriq and Lisan al–Mashriq, contributors such as Foulos Gibrael and Ni'matallah Denno.48

Gregorius Yuhanna Ibrahim (1948-)

One of the outstanding examples of the succeeding generations of ecclesiastical and cultural reformers is Yuhanna Ibrahim. Born in 1948 in Kamishli, northern Syria, he joined the Ephremic Seminary, graduating in 1967. The path he followed from that point demonstrates the development of the phenomenon of revival of the Syrian Orthodoxy in the second half of the twentieth century, which among other features, was characterized by the opening up to and the interaction with the rest of the world. He studied in Rome, the quintessential opponent of an independent Church of Antioch and of Syrian Orthodoxy in particular. This step was a manifestation of the attitude by the Syrian Orthodox Church towards the ecumenical vision that appeared on the world scene following Vatican II, in the mid 1960s. Both Patriarchs Jacob

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45 'Abed Mschiho Na'man Qarabaschi, *D'mo Zliho*, ADO, Ausburg, 1997. *Al Dam al-Masfook*, trans, Theophilus George Saliba, Beirut, 2005.

46 Polycapus A Aydin and G A Kiraz, 'Qarabashi, 'Abd al-Masih Numan,' in Brock et al., *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, 2011, p. 343.

47 *Ibid*.

48 Ishak Saka, *Al-suryān īmān wa-ḥaḍāra*, Vol. IV., Syrian Orthodox Bishopric, Aleppo, 1983, pp. 357-358.

III (1957-1980) and Zakka I Iwas (1980-2014) interacted positively towards this new atmosphere in intra-Christian relations. Young clergy were encouraged to pursue their further studies in reputed centres of learning, irrespective of the denominational affiliation of these centres. The Church thus entered a new era in its revival with confidence as it found no cause for fear of conversion of its clergy to other denominations, as had been the case a century or less, earlier.

Ibrahim contributed significantly towards the Syrian Orthodox Church's interaction with the rising ecumenical movement. He represented his Church at meetings of this movement and was a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, and a consultant (for Uomina e religioni ct. egidiou state committees) in Rome. He was also an active member of the Standing Commission of the Syriac Dialogue (Pro-Oriente) in Vienna from 1990 to 2006; of the Standing Committee of the Oriental-Catholic dialogue (Pro-Oriente); the Orthodox-Orthodox Dialogue Commission; and an advisor to the Executive Committee of the Middle East Council of Churches from 1999 to 2003 and to the Forum Syriacum of the foundation of Pro-Oriente since 2006.[49]

One of Ibrahim's major contributions towards the revival of the Syriac culture was his establishment of publishing houses in Aleppo, Dar al-Ruha and Dar Mardin in 1980 through which he provided encouragement to scholars, both experienced and new, to research and write about this heritage. He often wrote lengthy prefaces to the contributor's work, a matter that attests to the breadth and spectrum of his scholarship. His publishing facilities issued more than 170 books, before they were closed down in 2011 by the events of the civil war in Syria.[50]

In 2008, Ibrahim started a programme of International Syriac symposia that were to be held bi-annually in Aleppo, each devoted to a theme or a historical Syriac scholar. The 2008 Symposium was on the work by Jacob of Edessa (d. 708), marking 1,300 years of his passing. The 2010 Symposium was on the work by Gregory Bar Hebraeus (d. 1268). The one scheduled for 2012 could not be held due to the war in Syria.

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49 I am indebted to Aziz Abdulnour and to Chorepiscopos Joseph Shabo, Syrian Orthodox priest in Aleppo, for providing a CV of Bishop Ibrahim.

50 List provided by Fr Joseph Shabo, who, until the start of the Syrian civil war, undertook the distribution of most of the books published by Dar al-Ruha and Dar Mardin.

On Monday 25 April 2013 Bishop Ibrahim was kidnapped near Aleppo, along with Paul Yazdigi, the Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Aleppo. Nothing has been heard of either since then. This has been a matter of the utmost concern, not only for their safety but, taken in the broader context, for the future of Christianity in their historical homeland.

Concluding Note

Emboldened by this spirit of revival, which was also shared by other branches of Oriental Christianity, Syrian Orthodoxy became an active participant in the ecumenical movements that flourished in the second half of the twentieth century. This movement, in addition to providing much needed faith-based dialogues, opened the door for the participants, particularly the Syriac Churches, to share in and to benefit from their individual revivals. The spirit of revival also enabled the Church to better cope with the challenges presented by an extended diaspora, with the inherent threat of dissolution in the wider world. This expansion resulted in a four-fold increase in the number of dioceses from the immediate post-World War I period, to cover a geographical area that has extended from Australia to Sweden and from India to the Americas, involving forty eight dioceses. This, to some extent, permits comparison with the glory of bygone days when Patriarch Dionysius of Tel-Mahri (d. 845) ordained bishops to serve in over eighty dioceses that were spread out across Asia.

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PAOLO DALL'OGLIO SJ, EASTERN CHRISTIANITY, MONASTICISM AND THE COMMUNITY OF DEIR MAR MUSA: A STUDY IN MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS IN MODERN SYRIA

Christopher Knollys

INTRODUCTION

This paper will describe the monastic foundation at Deir Mar Musa in Syria by Fr Paolo Dall'Oglio SJ, with reference to the role of the monastery in furthering local Christian-Muslim dialogue. The description of Deir Mar Musa itself will be within the context, first, of an awareness of Syrian history since the time of the Roman empire, secondly of the Christian communities in present-day Syria and thirdly of the theological influences on Fr Dall'Oglio himself. This introductory note would not be complete if I did not mention that in late July 2013 Paolo Dall'Oglio entered rebel held territory in eastern Syria but was soon kidnapped by the militants of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, while walking in Raqqa on 29 July. Opposition sources from Raqqa said that Paolo Dall'Oglio has been executed by the extremist group and his body thrown into a ground hole in the city of Raqqa, called 'Al-Houta'. Dead Assad loyalist soldiers would have often been thrown into the same hole. The claims are not yet confirmed.[1]

From 1949-1970 Syria was ruled by military governments who applied a 'rigid nationalism'[2] with a view to abolishing communal differences. Christians, though, feared to lose their distinctiveness, which they still

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1 During the years leading up to the crisis in Syria, and the abduction in 2013, Paolo Dall'Oglio published numerous important theological reflections on the religious and political context of Christian-Muslim relations in Syria but also in their wider context: *Amoureux de l'islam, croyant en Jésus*, in co-operation with Églantine Gabaix-Hialé, Les Editions de l'Atelier, Paris, 2009; *La sete di Ismaele. Siria, diario monastico islamo-cristiano*, Gabrielli Editori, Verona, 2011; *La rage et la lumière*, in co-operation with Églantine Gabaix-Hialé, Les Editions de l'Atelier, Paris, 2013.

2 J-P Valognes, *Vie et Mort des Chrétiens d'Orient: des Origines à nos Jours*, Fayard, Paris, 1994, p. 711.

saw as protecting their identity. In 1963 the Arab nationalist Ba'ath Party was formed, with Michel Aflaq as leader. The party, and when it took power, the government, came to be dominated by the Alawites, a minority Muslim sect. The party's policy was that Arab identity was to be the basis of the state; a consequence was that religious bodies lost any constitutional existence. In 1982 the Sunni Muslims of Hama led a local uprising against Ba'ath power. The government suppressed them, using modern military force, causing great loss of life, among Christians as well as Muslims.

In recent years, that is from the 1980s, Muslims have remained numerically dominant.[3] From census returns, Sunnis number 8 million—70 percent of the population, Alawites 1.2 million—10 percent[4] and Druzes 400,000 plus a small number of Shi'as leaving Christians as about 10 percent. By 2005 according to 'senior clergy' in Syria, Christians numbered only 1 million in a total population of 18 million.

Syrian Christians comprise a complex of religious communities that have resulted, first, from the theological and language differences in the early centuries of Christianity, from the arrival of refugee groups such as the Armenians, from the transfer by some bishops of their religious allegiance to Rome in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and from the arrival of missionaries of the Reformed traditions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Valognes[5] gives some statistics of Church membership. About 75 percent of Christians belong to Orthodox Churches and 25 percent to Catholic (Latin and Oriental, but all recognising papal authority). Of the Orthodox, 400,000 belong to the Greek Orthodox patriarchate of Antioch and the East, 50,00 are Syrian Orthodox, 100,000 Armenians of the patriarchates of Etchmiadzin and Sis and lastly several thousand Assyrian Orthodox—refugees of the Church of the East from Iraq. Catholic groupings include 150,000 'Greek' Melkites; 25,000 Syrian Catholics, under the Patriarch at Beirut in the Lebanon; 20,000 Maronites, plus a few thousand Latin-rite Catholics and Chaldean Catholic communities.

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3 Valognes, p. 727.
4 On the question of the character of Alawite religious identity see: Yvette Talhamy, `The Fatwas and the Nusayri/Alawis of Syria', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 2010, Vol. 46, no. 2, pp. 175-194
5 *Op. cit.*, p. 713.

Before the conflict erupted in March 2011 there is evidence of recent Christian renewal, such as monastic life, prayer groups, a review of theology, teaching, liturgical renewal and a new translation of the Bible into Arabic. The Churches may not be accepted *de facto* as the social equals of Islam, but they are tolerated and even privileged. Priests are exempt from national service, military and civil; a government delegate attends the consecration of bishops; the government works with Christian charities which include the de Foucauld Sisters and the Sisters of Mother Teresa and which work with and care for Christians and Muslims alike. Christmas and Easter are official holidays.

Although Christians now have some civic equality with Muslims, this favourable situation is offset by a strongly negative factor, emigration. Valognes[6] states that emigration is the main reason for the decreasing relative size of the Christian population of Syria, as compared to the Muslims. There seem to be a number of causes. Christians include well educated and skilled people who experience a lack of economic opportunity within Syria, in particular because of Ba'ath Party control of the business sector. The Syrian Christians had looked to the large and concentrated Christian population of the Lebanon for at least moral protection and were 'traumatised' by the 16-year civil war there. Young people were averse to the four years of military and civil national service. And perhaps, too, a sense that the political situation of a government controlled by a minority community is precarious, especially since the majority Sunni community is now being influenced by Islamists who, if they came to power, would doubtless try to transform Syria from a secular to a strictly Muslim state. Against these factors which favour emigration, it has become more difficult for emigrants to reach their traditional destinations in North and South America and in Europe because of state controls in the host countries there.

To summarise: in Syria were found some of the earliest Christian communities. Under Muslim rule Christians remained a notable group of communities, as they still are today.

Present-day Syria has a more favourable political, social and religious environment for Christians than at any time since the fifth century. Although there is still some discrimination in favour of Muslims, it does not amount to the level of religious oppression or persecution

6   *Op. cit.*, p. 699.

under the Byzantines, nor to the subservience of the notional *dhimmi* status in the first centuries of Islam; nor again to the limited political status of Arabs, Muslim and Christians in the Ottoman empire. The present secular state of Syria provides for Christians an approximate social and political equality with the other Syrian communities and Christians are outstanding in business and in secular culture. In religion itself Syrian Christians partake in the ecclesiastical revival of the post-Vatican II Catholic communities and in the wider ecumenism between Churches. The unfavourable elements for Syrian Christians are a falling relative population because of emigration and a possible loss of Muslim tolerance if the current international influence of largely Wahhabi Islamists undermines the Alawite government, which has already made alliances with them at an international level.

PAOLO DALL'OGLIO SJ: BIOGRAPHY OF A VOCATION AND ITS SETTING IN THE SYRIAC CATHOLIC CHURCH.

This section covers the personal background of Paolo Dall'Oglio the founder of the present community at Deir Mar Musa and outlines the current situation of Catholics in Syria.[7]

  Paolo Dall'Oglio was born in 1954 and comes from a 'very engaged Catholic family'[8] and a background of 'strong interest in solid and

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7 The main sources of information for this section are; an interview with Paolo Dall'Oglio reported in *The Tablet*, 12 April 2003, 'The Community of al-Khalil' (the draft of a joint article by Paolo Dall'Oglio and Emma Loosley for *L'Orient Chretien*);Valognes: *'Vie et Mort des Chrétiens d'Orient'* ('Les Eglises') and chapters by eds Jean Corbin and J Maila in Pacini, *Origin and Identity of the Churches in the Middle East,* (trans) Carey F Tupper, Clarendon, Oxford, 1998, p. 92. Other sources include statistics from the Vatican's *Annuario Pontificio*, newsletters and other documents from the Deir Mar Musa website; also documents referred to in Section 8 of this paper ('Influences').

8 E Loosley and P Dall'Oglio, 'The Community of Al-Khalil: Monastic Life in the Service of Christian-Islamic Dialogue', September 2003, p. 3. See also E. Loosely and P Dall'Oglio, 'La communaté d'Ad-Khalil: une vie monastique au service du dialogue islamo-chrétien', *Proche Orient Chrétien*, 54 (2004), pp. 117-128; 'Louis Massignon and Badaliya', *Aram: Society for Syro-Mesopotamian Studies*, 20 (2008), pp. 329-336; P Dall'Oglio, 'La refondation du monastère syriaque de saint Moïse l'Abyssin à Nebek, Syrie, et la Badaliya massignonienne', *Badaliya au nom de l'autre (1947-1962)—Louis Massignon*, eds. M. Borrmans and F. Jacquin, Paris, 2011, pp. 372-374.
  Other theological-political reflections Paolo Dall'Oglio SJ include: 'Elogio del

political issues'. He was involved in *'Christians for Socialism'* and was a member of the left wing of the Italian Socialist Party. At age 20 (1974) Paolo had become aware of a vocation first to celibacy, 'in order to have a more radical and engaged relationship' with God as Father of Jesus Christ, and secondly to the Church's universal mission 'based on the relevance of Jesus Christ for the salvation of every man and woman in the world and throughout all of history.'

In 1975, after travelling in the Middle East, Paolo joined the Society of Jesus. As part of the noviciate he undertook St Ignatius 'Spiritual Exercises' and experienced a call to offer himself to the Church's mission to Islam. In 1977 Paolo met Pedro Arrupe, the General of the Jesuits at that time and asked to be appointed to the Society's work in the Islamic world. In the same year, and presumably as a result of the meeting with Arrupe, the Society sent Paolo at age 23 to Beirut to study Arabic. He went with a 'strong desire to inculturate Christian faith in an Islamic … background'.[9]

To Paolo this meant also entering the culture of the Eastern Churches, since he is convinced that the 'Universal Church will *not* be able to meet Islam by jumping over the Oriental Churches, but through them.'[10]

In 1982 after a retreat at Deir Mar Musa Paolo came to see three 'apostolic priorities'—first the contemplative life, in the culture and tradition both of Islam and of the 'old Oriental Christian tradition'—'a pluralistic spirituality for a globalised world'.[11] Secondly, manual

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Sincretismo' ('In Praise of Syncretism') 'A message to Jesuits involved in Muslim-Christian Relations; 'From Rome to the Damascus Mosque' in *Storia Politica e Cooperazione Internazionale* May/ June 2001 University of Rome; *Il Restauro del Monastero di San Mose l'Abissino, Nebek, Syria*. Damascus 1998. Further information on Paolo Dall'Oglio can be found at: http://www.paolodalloglio.net/. Accessed 20/10/18.

Further publications include: *Speranza nell'Islam: Interpretazione della prospettiva escatologica di Corano XVIII*, 365 pp., Marietti, Milano 1991; `Massignon and Jihad through de Foucauld, al-Hallaj and Gandhi', in eds J J Donohue SJ and C W Troll SJ, *Faith, Power and Violence* Orientalia Christiana Analecta 258, (1998) pp. 103-114; *Amoureux de l'islam, croyant en Jésus,*- avec Églantine Gabaix-Hialé, preface by Régis Debray, 190 pp., Les Editions de l'Atelier, Paris 2009; *La sete di Ismaele. Siria, diario monastico islamo-cristiano*, Gabrielli Editori, Verona 2011; *La rage et la lumière*, avec Églantine Gabaix-Hialé, Les Editions de l'Atelier, Paris, May 2013.

9   Loosley and Dall'Oglio, 'The Community of Al-Khalil', p. 3.

10 *Op. cit.*, p. 4.

11 T Michel. T SJ, Letter (e-mail), 27 Feb. 2004, personal communication.

work, which Paolo saw as both an ascesis, reinforcing the religious vow of poverty, and a taking-on of responsibility for the environment. And thirdly, hospitality, which unites the love of God and the love of mankind.

Of these priorities, contemplation is common to Jesuits and to monks—for Jesuits it is 'contemplation in action'. For monks contemplation has been associated more with the sameness of the monk's life, based in one place and progressing day by day through an ordered routine.

Manual work and hospitality, however, have been monastic attributes since the time of the earliest Christian monks. Neither manual work nor hospitality, though, fit easily into the principle of 'going where we are sent'[12] which governs the work of Jesuits in general, and Paolo's adoption of manual work and hospitality as principles led to tension between himself and the Society.

Meanwhile Paolo began a doctorate on Islam and religious dialogue, 'Hope in Islam'.[13] The more pastoral side of his life was seen in youth camps for prayer and work organised in the ruins of the monastery at Deir Mar Musa. These camps 'gradually led me to realise that I had as a matter of conscience to establish a monastic community at Deir Mar Musa'.

Paolo was especially encouraged in this project by the Melkite Archbishop of Aleppo, Mgr Neophytos Edelby, but Paolo was obliged to leave the Society of Jesuits from 1992 until 1997 over differences about the project's compatibility with a Jesuit vocation. The Society resolved the issue by transferring Paolo into the local Syriac-rite diocese for a five-year period, 'technically on leave' from the Society. At the end of this period, a new Jesuit Provincial was more in favour of Paolo's project and Paolo reverted to his membership of the Society. The project remains, however, an independent project rather than a work of the Society of Jesus as such.

Paolo was ordained into the Syrian (Syriac) Catholic Rite, one of the Oriental Rite Churches which acknowledges the authority of Rome. The monastery of Deir Mar Musa is under the canonical

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12 Loosley and Dall'Oglio, 'The Community of Al-Khalil', p. 4.
13 *Speranza nell'Islam: Interpretazione della prospettiva escatologica di Corano XVIII*, 365 pp., Marietti, Milano 1991.

jurisdiction of this rite, which is distinct from the rites of other Oriental Catholics—for instance the Melkites.

Most inhabitants of Syria refused the doctrines of the Council of Chalcedon (451) about the nature of Christ and the Church then became divided between 'Jacobites', led by a bishop, Jacobus Baradai, in opposition to Chalcedon and Melkites who accepted Chalcedon and comprised mainly the hellenised townspeople. The Jacobites eventually became the Syrian Orthodox Church.

The numbers of Syrian Catholics today is uncertain. Valognes says less than 100,000. 'The Syrian Catholic Church' gives a figure of 150,000,[14] *Annuario Pontificio* shows for 2004, 123,376,[15] while according to Valognes the Syrian Catholic hierarchy claim up to 200,000 members. Valognes concludes that the only certainty is that Syrian Catholics are fewer than Syrian Orthodox. However, *Annuario Pontificio* shows figures which at least give some idea how Syrian Catholics are distributed. The largest number—60,000—are in Iraq, 14,500 in Lebanon, 30,000 in Syria and 12,000 in the USA. A few thousand others (nowhere more than 3,000) are found in Jerusalem, Egypt/ Sudan and Turkey.[16] Many of the Syrian Catholics in Syria itself are descended from emigrants from Turkey after the First World War. But a community, now, of some 5,000 has a tradition that goes back to the earliest days of the Syrian Catholic rite, in the seventeenth century.

Under Islam Christians had adopted Arabic as the language of religion. Christians became integrated into the life of the wider community. Several moves were made in the Middle Ages to bridge the separation of the Eastern Churches from the Latin Church of the West. The Jacobite Church was invited to a 'Council of Reconciliation' at Lyons in 1245, which failed when the Latin Church refused to recognise the patriarch's autonomy. A few years later, however, a Jacobite patriarch was personally reunited with Rome.

In 1439 the Jacobites were represented at the Council of Florence, convened with a view to uniting the Roman and Eastern Churches. In 1444 the Jacobite bishops signed an agreement for reunion with Rome, but were disowned on their return home. The fall of Byzantium

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14 *'Eglise Syriaque Catholique'*—www. Syriancatholic.org/ histoire. [Accessed 20/10/18].
15 *Annuario Pontificio* 2004.
16 *Ibid.*

in 1453 meant that the Jacobite Church was again cut off from the West and it was only in the sixteenth century that Latin missionaries were sent out with a view to reuniting the Eastern Churches with Rome. The Jacobite Patriarch Ignatius XVII Namatallah did recognise Roman authority and though nothing more came of it at the time, the movement towards unity continued to grow.

In the seventeenth century it was the missionary work of the Capuchins—a branch of the Franciscans—and the diplomacy of the French Consul at Aleppo, Francois Picquet, which led to further developments, assisted by the Maronite Church in the Lebanon, a Church already in union with Rome. In 1656 Andre Aqidjan became the first Syrian Catholic bishop of Aleppo and in 1662 Picquet secured Aqidjan's recognition by the Ottoman authority as patriarch. The French interference, as it seemed, caused a reaction against Aqidjan's successor, however, and the upshot was that the patriarchate remained vacant during the eighteenth century until 1783, when a new patriarch was elected, Michal Jarweh.

In the nineteenth century the Syrian Catholic Church established a seminary at Charfeh. Several bishops from the Orthodox Church joined the Syrian Catholics. In 1853, in contrast to the other Oriental Catholic Churches, the Syrians accepted Rome's latinising demands. Even so, says Valognes, the Syrian Catholics flourished and in 1913 were joined by several Orthodox bishops. After the First World War the Syrian Catholics accepting increased Western influence and the Patriarch Gabriel Tappouni was made a cardinal. [17]

Turning to the Syrian Church's religious organisation, Valognes points out that the Church has preserved a genuinely ancient liturgy, even though the rites of some sacraments and the calendar of major feast days follow the Latin rite.

The patriarch is elected by his Synod of Bishops, subject to confirmation from Rome and has a world-wide authority over Syrian Catholics, though giving precedence, outside the Middle East, to the local Latin bishops. The present patriarch elected in 2009 is Ignatius Joseph III Yonan who succeeded Mar Ignatius Peter VIII Abdel Ahad, born in 1930 and elected Patriarch in 2001

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17 John Flannery, 'The Syrian Catholic Church: between history, martyrdom, mission, identity and ecumenism', *Christianity in the Middle East: Studies in Modern History, Theology and Politics*, ed. A. O'Mahony, Melisende, London, 2008, pp. 143-167.

(succeeding Patriarch Moussa Daoud who had moved to Rome to become Prefect of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches). The patriarchal see is at Beirut though the Church keeps its title as the Church of Antioch.

In Syrian society, the civil, social and cultural aspects of Christian communities *(ta'ifa)* distinguished the Churches as religious bodies *(kana'is)*, which are seen as transcending the merely human aspect of other communities.

Ecumenically, the asserted weakness of the Syrian Catholic Church is less important where the Churches work together. In an interview with 'ZENIT' in January 2004, the Greek-Catholic Metropolitan of Aleppo, Archbishop J-C Jeanbart, referred to the eleven Christian religious leaders in Aleppo, including six Catholic. The 'mistrust and suspicion' between Catholics and Orthodox before the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) had changed over time to relations that were friendly, even 'fraternal'. The Christian leaders met regularly and had set up ecumenical committees. They also met Muslim religious leaders 'several times a year'. At the community level, schools were open to any applicants and charities likewise offered their services without distinction.[18]

Deir Mar Musa:
the Monastic Community and its Tradition.

The main source for the material in this section on monastic tradition is Ignazio Pena *The Amazing Life of the Syrian Monks in the 4th-6th Centuries.*[19] He discusses the origins of Syrian monasteries, the various monastic lifestyles, monastic routine and monastic activities outside their lives of prayer.

Christian monastic life began in the fourth century. As Pena writes 'monasticism was born as an anti-triumphalist reaction at the very moment a triumphant Church entered the stage of history.'[20] In Syria, three forms of monastic life became established from the fourth century onwards—stylites who lived some or all of their time at the

18 Report of Interview—Archbishop J-C Jeanbart with 'ZENIT', 21 Jan. 2004.
19 Milan, 1992. trans. J Sullivan.
20 I Pena, *The Amazing Life* …, p. 12.

tops of pillars, anchorites who lived solitary lives more conventionally in buildings, and cenobites who lived in community.

After the Muslim invasion of the seventh century, stylites declined in numbers and as a current monastic lifestyle were extinct in Syria by the end of the ninth century.

In their 'quest for pure contemplation' solitary monks other than stylites set up 'natural barriers of various sorts … a tower, a grotto, a hut, a cistern …'[21] In the east of Syria monks occupied Roman forts abandoned by the imperial army in 363. In the north west, around what are now the Dead Cities, they put up purpose-built towers in the course of the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries.

Cenobite communities of monks—henceforth referred to as monasteries—were established in Syria before the end of Constantine's reign. Pena names early monasteries at Jenderes, Mount Corypheus (Jebel Cheikh Barakat) and at Deir Teladi.

Fourth-century monasteries began as anchorite cells—a master and disciples each in separate cells and living as solitaries other than meeting daily for common prayer and meditation. (This seems to have been the original format of the monastery at Deir Mar Musa).

The daily life of the Syrian monks, according to the 'Canons of Maraton'[22] comprised liturgy and reading, work, and time for food and rest—a routine essentially similar to St Benedict's Rule in the West. John Chrysostom describes the daily routine of monks around Antioch as beginning at 'cockcrow', and alternating the liturgical offices with time for individual prayer and reading, rest and food—no mention of manual work.

By the fifth century the 'seven-fold office' was widely adopted, fusing Egyptian and Cappadocian practices. Physical exercise could ward off sleep and Pena compares the prostrations of Muslims at prayer as 'nothing less than a faithful reflection of prayer as it was practised by the Syrian monks.'[23] Meditative reading also had a large place in monastic routine, as part of the discipline of private prayer.

Syrian monks took solemn promises rather than vows. Superiors were 'designated in a charismatic way by their

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21 *Op. cit.*, p. 4.
22 *Op. cit.*, p. 77.
23 *Ibid*.

predecessors,'[24] rather than being elected by their community. Superiors of cenobites were entitled 'archimandrites', a title still applied to ecclesiastical superiors.

Monastic celibacy was 'strictly safeguarded',[25] though documents show evidence of parallel male and female communities. Monks could own possessions, with their superior's permission, a practice still usual in Eastern monasteries, in contrast to the West.

The early monastic communities were without canonical Rules. Monks followed their superior's example or took their rule of life from the Scriptures. In the later monasteries where more of a life in common had developed, each house or federation developed its own Rule. Even then the Rule tended to leave much to personal initiative; for instance the Rule of Rabbula comprised only twenty-six exhortations and thirty-six canons (compare the sixth century 'Rule of St Benedict' from Italy which has 73 chapters.)

'Syrian monasticism, if essentially contemplative, was distinguished by its social and apostolic activities.'[26] For instance St Ephrem left his hermitage to aid victims of drought, Linnaeus of Targues built residences for beggars and blind. St John Chrysostom records that after civil disturbance in 387, monks moved into urban Antioch to share its citizens' afflictions.

It was mainly monks who spread Christianity in rural Syria, and among the Arabs of the Syrian steppes. Poets in pre-Islamic times and even under Islamic rule celebrated monastic hospitality—'Good Samaritans of the steppes.'[27]

Manual work for monks was a normal part of earning a living for their community. Later monasteries, though, became 'centres of knowledge and culture'[28]—novices were required to be literate. The monks became learned in philosophy, poetry, history, medicine and even astronomy (Severus of Sebolet). Monks and other clergy became experts in medicine (a discipline forbidden to Byzantine and Western clergy) and the physicians of Muslim emirs were often monks.

The present monastic community of Deir Mar Musa was founded in practice when the first two community members, Fr Paolo himself

24 *Op. cit.*, p. 114.
25 *Ibid.*
26 *Op. cit.*, p. 121.
27 *Op. cit.*, pp. 121-23.
28 *Op. cit.*, p. 134.

and Yacoub Mourad, a Syrian Catholic deacon, became resident there in 1991. In September 2003 the monastic community comprised 9 members, including 3 women.

The Community is open to members of all Christian denominations 'who feel themselves in accord with the Community's theology.' Besides its own monastic members the Community welcomes lay associates. And, to assist the Community with fund-raising and publicity, there is an Association of Friends based in Italy, and a website editor, Prof Gianini Piccinoli. Further, Fr Paolo foresees an association with families in a common ministry to the Muslim world.

The Community has members on three sites. Deir Mar Musa itself; another ancient monastery, Qaryatayn, 40 km. to the north east, and a house for the Community's students at Cori in Italy.

The Community depends canonically on the Syrian Catholic Archbishop of Homs, Hama and Nebek.[29] It has drafted a constitution, in Arabic, for a federation of monasteries, to allow for possible further foundations in other Islamic countries. The Community decided that its name should be the 'Community of al-Khalil'—'the Friend'—as Abraham was the 'Friend of God' (and father both of Isaac and Ishmael). The pattern of monastic vows follows Catholic Canon Law for the Oriental Churches and provides for a one-year postulancy and a three-year noviciate, followed by perpetual vows, with a particular commitment to love and serve the Islamic world.

The Community's daily life at Deir Mar Musa aims to embody Fr Paolo's three 'apostolic directives'.

The first directive, contemplation, is the main object of the Community's daily routine, which begins at 7.30 am with one hour of communal prayer. Again in the evening, the Community meets for one hour's silent prayer, followed by the Eucharist. The rest of the day is largely taken by work and study.

The second directive, 'manual work', covers all the various practical activities of the day, such as work on the monastery's physical environment, and also study. The Community has established a library which contains the classic texts of Christian theology, plus commentaries on the Qur'an. The Community also plans to start a press to produce publications in Arabic.

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29 Loosley and Dall'Oglio, 'The Community of Al-Khalil …', p. 5.

The Community undertakes serious study of the local environment and works with other environmental organisations, to counteract the encroachment of the desert and to promote diversity in agriculture. The Syrian government has established in principle a National Park of Deir Mar Musa to assist in this work and the Community itself has set up several environmental projects. The Community hopes that this emphasising of the environmental dimension can preserve the cultural and spiritual significance of a monastery in the desert

Fr Paolo's third directive, 'Abrahamic hospitality', comes to life in the Community's welcoming of visitors; a comparison, again, with de Foucauld's welcoming of visitors to his hermitage in the Sahara in priority to all other calls on his time. The Community encourages visitors from all Churches and local Muslims to come in large numbers. The Community has to put some limit to callers, though, if it is to preserve its contemplative life and intends to do this by diverting the attention of 'eco-tourist' visitors onto the natural environment. The Community organises 'workshops' on inter-religious dialogue for Christians and Muslims.

The Community members have, however, expanded the concept of hospitality. Although they do receive callers rather than going out as missionaries, they have, even so, reached out beyond the monastery itself. For instance they have established a fraternal link with the monastery of Mar Gabriel in the eastern provinces of Turkey, a link to broaden the network of prayer and dialogue. And at Cori in Italy two student members of the Community aim to promote local dialogue and friendship with Muslim immigrants to Italy. In the neighbourhood of Deir Mar Musa itself the Community has assisted local people with building and restoring houses.

Financing of Deir Mar Musa still depends on grants and donations. The European Commission, the Orseri Fund of Rome and Solidarité-Orient of Brussels have all contributed to the Community's work of building inter-religious relationships, including a 3-year education programme funded by the European Union. The Community is searching for permanent scholarships for training Community members and lay assistants. And despite its financial dependency the Community distributes 10 percent of its disposable funds to people who request assistance.

The Community builds on the Christian witness of Eastern Christians who have lived in the same society as Muslims for fourteen centuries. Islam, however, is 'the human group to which [the Community] belongs, taking part in the life of the Umma.' As part of the Umma, the Community wishes to be a channel 'for taking the Body of Christ—in language, religion, history and symbol—into Islam, to fulfil God's blessing to Ishmael, through Abrahamic intercession; a channel more effective from the use of Arabic both for social life and liturgy.' Fr Paolo's aim is 'reinventing the positive relationship that existed between the first Muslims and the Christian monks on the borders of the Arabian deserts.' Deir Mar Musa is already 'becoming a part of the theological and inter-religious local panorama' and is trying to develop processes for 'creating shared culture'.

INFLUENCES: DE FOUCAULD, MASSIGNON, VATICAN II AND THE SOCIETY OF JESUS.

Fr Paolo has taken up as guides two French pioneers in Muslim/Christian relations—Louis Massignon (1883-1962) and Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916).[30] Massignon's Christian faith and commitment to the Catholic Church were restored while he was working among Arabs in Baghdad in 1908 at age 25. He went on to become the leading French scholar of Islam and worked to bring about, if not unity, then at least some reconciliation of belief between Muslims and Christians, besides working for solidarity with the Arabs as a people.

Massignon published his doctoral thesis—'La Passion d'al-Hosayn-ibn Mansour al-Hallaj, Martyre Mystique'—in 1922. He found in al-Hallaj a parallel with Christ in that al-Hallaj followed a Sufi tradition within Islam, focussing on God's love for Islam, rather than emphasising law in the Sunni tradition. Massignon found in al-Hallaj an example of a person being converted to a truer religion within Islam itself. Massignon had commented that to understand Islam Christians

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30 Ian Latham, 'Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916): Silent witness for Jesus' in the face of Islam', *Catholics in Interreligious Dialogue: Studies in Monasticism, Theology and Spirituality*, eds A O'Mahony and Peter Bowe osb, Leominister, Gracewing, 2006, pp. 47-70.

needed a Copernican revolution. Building on the Muslim belief that they were descended from Abraham through Ishmael he asserted a parallel between Ishmael and Isaac. Both were blessed by God through Abraham's prayer, before Ishmael was exiled from Abraham's tribe. This origin could provide some principle of legitimacy in Christian eyes to the Qur'an and to Muhammad as a prophet. Massignon argued for the 'conditional authority' of the Qur'an as a revelation from God and for a 'partial recognition' of Muhammad's authority as a 'negative prophet'[31], who proclaimed God but who denied that God was more than the simple oneness which Muhammad proclaimed.

In 1950 Massignon was ordained priest in the Arabic-language Melkite Rite, in order to represent Muslims in the celebration of the Eucharist. This shows too how important Massignon saw the Eastern Churches to be in the relationship between Christians and Muslims. Fr Paolo himself, ordained in the Syrian Catholic Rite, follows Massignon in seeing the Eastern Churches as a way towards meeting Islam rather than as an obstacle.

Fr Paolo says that Massignon's writings led back to Charles de Foucauld, a second major influence. In 1908 de Foucauld was an ordained priest who had established himself as a hermit in the North African desert, living mainly at Tamanrasset in the South of Algeria. Massignon and de Foucauld corresponded from soon after Massignon's conversion in 1908 until de Foucauld's death in 1916.

In 1886 de Foucauld had changed his lifestyle from soldier and explorer to a life of penitence and seeking God. Twenty-one years later, in 1907, came a 'second conversion', when he adopted as his example Jesus' life at Nazareth, private and prayerful, rather than directly seeking the conversion of Muslims to Christianity. From then on he sought to be 'an apostle by example, by goodness, by kind deeds, by an affection which calls for a response and which leads to God'.[32] Further, 'to live openly, in the light of day, without secrecy, but silently, without making disturbance, doing good around oneself and more distantly,

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31 A O'Mahony, `The Influence of the Life and Thought of Louis Massignon on the Catholic Church's Relations with Islam', *The Downside Review*, [Special issue on `Catholic Encounters with Islam'], Vol. 126, no.444, 2008, pp. 169-192; Sidney Griffith, 'Sharing the faith of Abraham : The "Credo" of Louis Massignon', *Islam And Christian-Muslim Relations* 1997, 8, 193—210.

32 J-F Six, *L'Aventure de l'Amour de Dieu. 80 Lettres Inédites de Charles de Foucauld à Louis Massignon*, Editions de Seuil, Paris, 1993, p. 272.

as Jesus worked without disturbance at Nazareth for the salvation of the universe.'[33]

At the same time de Foucauld methodically studied the lives and language of the Tuareg people among whom he lived. 'He performed a scientific work of enormous magnitude … our knowledge of … the Tuareg is due to him.' 'He was not a fanatic nor an ideologue; he let himself be guided by the haphazardness of events'.

De Foucauld wrote in January 1916, the last year of his life, to Rene Bazin: 'Isolated missionaries, … their role is to prepare the way … we must make ourselves Muslims and become for them the reliable friends one goes to in doubt or trouble …'[34]

> My life there consists in relating as far as possible with those around me and in providing all the services I can.[35]

De Foucauld's first priority was hospitality and compassion towards any callers at his hermitage which left an otherwise ordered routine of silent prayer and liturgy as important but in second place. 'His constant concern, until his last days, was the well–being of the people of the Sahara, beginning with the least favoured.'[36]

There is a clear parallel between de Foucauld's life as a hermit in the Sahara and Fr Paolo's foundation at Deir Mar Musa. Both de Foucauld and Fr Paulo see contemplative prayer and the Church's liturgy as the foundation for their monastic lives, and both emphasise that Christ is to be found in the neighbours who call, for whatever reason. Both take a long view in time of their 'mission to Islam'.

There are differences, though, between de Foucauld's circumstances and intentions and Fr Paulo's. The Maghreb (Northwest Africa) had been without Christian inhabitants from soon after Muhammad's time until the French colonists arrived. De Foucauld found that the Muslims around him tended to be hostile. Syria on the other hand has had a Christian population from the time of Muhammad, living harmoniously for the most part among the Muslim majority. Deir Mar Musa is therefore much less a Christian 'outpost' than was de Foucauld's

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33 *Op. cit.*, p. 273.
34 E Hamilton, *The Desert My Dwelling Place*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1968, p.213.
35 Six, p. 202.
36 *Op. cit.*, p.. 180.

hermitage. Further, although both de Foucauld and Fr Paulo focus on Christ's hidden life at Nazareth, de Foucauld, in the Church's apostolic traditions, saw the conversion of Muslims to Christianity as the main, if distant, aim of himself and other missionaries, whereas Fr Paulo's foundation is for the benefit of Muslims in whatever form may be God's will for them.

Other important influences which are essential to Fr Paulo's mission are the Church's developing approach to Muslims from before Vatican II until the present and the missionary policy of the Society of Jesus.

Louis Massignon was an important influence on the Vatican II document 'Declaration on the Church's relations to Non-Christian religions', known in the Latin original as *Nostra Aetate*. The Church ' … calls upon its sons and daughters,' says *Nostra Aetate*, 'through dialogues and co-operation with the followers of other religions … to recognise, preserve and promote those spiritual and moral good things as well as the socio-cultural values which are to be found among them.'[37]

Nostra Aetate omits references to Massignon's theories however and is silent about Muhammad and the Qur'an—no chance therefore of finding in the Declaration any possible spiritual validity for either. A further, lesser, omission is the Declaration's failure to refer to Muslims in their own terms as one community, the *Umma*.

Vatican II, then, while it commends mutual understanding and joint promotion of justice and moral values, lacks guidance as to how missionaries such as Fr Paulo are to engage with some of the main religious beliefs of Islam. Theologians have, however, tried over the last half century to develop concepts that might bring Muslim and Christian theology closer together. They started from views such as those of Thomas Ohm OSB who in 1961, the year before Vatican II first convened, summarised the 'Catholic' view of Islam up to the twentieth century as '… the mortal enemy and the most dangerous adversary ….'[38] Ohm recognised, however, in the twentieth century some striving for 'a new approach to Islam and admitted that Islam was a 'genuine religion'.

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37 N P Tanner, 'Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils', Georgetown, 1990.
38 Christian W Troll, S.J., 'Changing Catholic Views of Islam' in ed. J Waardenberg, *Islam and Christianity: Mutual Perceptions since the Mid-20th Century*, Peeters, Leuven, 1998, p. 22.

Ohm's contemporary Andre d'Alverny referred to Islam as 'essai de religion naturelle'[39] but in the end no more than human. Neither Ohm nor d'Alverny seem to have been in touch with Massignon's theories.

Christian Troll SJ considers the years after the Council and refers to 'countless initiatives that began to transform the Catholic vision of Islam.'[40] He refers in particular to the Vatican Secretariat for non-Christians, re-named in 1989 as the Pontifical Council for Dialogue between Religions, which has issued Guidelines for dialogue with Muslims.

The first edition of Guidelines, issued in 1969 'on the whole refrained from stating theological views of Islam.'[41] They stress that Islam is a faith and a movement towards God The second edition, in 1990, refers to Muhammad himself and asks Christians to 'assess … what was the inspiration, the sincerity and the faithfulness of the prophet Muhammad …' (Pontifical Council 1990, p. 57).[42] They go on 'to discern in him marks of prophethood' but, says Troll, fail to consider the 'contrast in the prophetic career'[43] of Jesus and Muhammad; Jesus choosing non-violent suffering and Muhammad using politics and warfare.

The Guidelines, though they evade the difficulties of dialogue, do build on the positive tone of *Nostra Aetate* and Fr Paulo can count on the backing in principle of the official Church as a whole for dialogue, beginning from the Guidelines, though he may have to argue for official approval of more 'syncretistic' initiatives.

Among other initiatives have been the pope's addresses to Muslims in the course of papal visits across the world, 'One dominant theme,' says Troll 'is the conviction that the submission to the same unique, personal Creator God, on the part of Muslims and Christians constitutes a link of "fraternity".'[44]

The Eastern patriarchs in 1992 and 1994 had issued pastoral letters which implied recognition and approval for the kind of Christian-Muslim relations to which the Community at Deir Mar Musa is

39 Troll, p.22.
40 Troll, p.28.
41 Troll, p. 32.
42 Troll, p. 34.
43 *Ibid*.
44 Troll, p. 33.

committed: 'Relations with Islam and the Muslims constitute a specific and fundamental aspect of the identity of our Churches.' The Patriarchs 'invite all religious and spiritual forces to join their efforts … to assume their responsibilities in the contemporary world.'[45] This socially oriented view of dialogue does not however mean that they would necessarily approve of either Massignon's or Fr Paulo's own theological initiatives.

A fourth main influence in the theological and social environment of Fr Paulo's foundation is the official Jesuit policy of 'inculturation' on the part of its missionaries to other faiths. Perhaps its starting point is found in Pope Paul VI's Encyclical Letter *Evangelii Nuntiandi* '… the split between the Gospel and culture is without doubt the tragedy of our time.'[46] In the proceedings of the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, John Carreira-Alfonso SJ calls inculturation 'the relation between the word and the world', the church [representatives] taking up the particular culture 'through some process of death and resurrection.' 'What is to be planted … is not a westernised Church but the word of God.'[47] And J-Y Calves SJ, in his commentary on the proceedings, says that 'we must search for a new language, a new set of symbols, that will enable us to leave our fallen idols … and to rediscover the true God.'[48]

The proceedings of the 34th General Congregation include also the same kinds of statement as above, for instance, 'Inculturating the Gospel … within human culture is a form of incarnation of the Word of God.'[49] The Society of Jesus does, it seems, favour the kind of Islam-focussed life which Fr Paulo is establishing at Deir Mar Musa.

PAULO DALL'OGLIO'S THEOLOGICAL VISION

Some of the effects of the influences referred to in the last section. Above can be seen in the comments which Fr Paulo Dall'Oglio makes in the Community's newsletter and in the draft article 'The Community of al-Khalil' for the periodical *L'Orient Chrétien*, and which provide

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45 Troll, p. 37.
46 34th Congregation of the Society of Jesus (proceedings).
47 32nd Congregation of the Society of Jesus (proceedings—J Carreira-Alfonso SJ).
48 *Ibid.*
49 *Ibid.*

some idea of his theological vision. His longer writings, especially 'In Praise of Syncretism', develop this vision more systematically.

In 'The Community of al-Khalil' Fr Paolo says that the Church is sent to 'all meaningful groups of people'[50] and that both spiritual discernment and Church teaching 'lead us to see that the relationship between the Church and the Muslim Umma is relevant for the history of salvation.' 'This is rooted in the Bible as much as in the particular spiritual and religious experience of the Prophet Muhammad.' Fr Paolo goes on to say that through Christians Christ can take his Body 'linguistically, religiously, historically and symbolically' into the Islamic world 'in order to fulfil the blessings of God to Ismail',[51] which were promised through Abraham's intercession. It is for the Spirit to harmonise this approach with the alternative religious experiences offered by other groups. For Fr Paolo the monastery is the spiritual home of 'disciples of Christ' whose vocation is to love Muslims and Islam, and to be 'a spiritual port for Muslims' who are called to friendship with Christians. For both Christians and Muslims the monastery is a 'place of harmony and a prophecy for peace'. As members of the Church we can believe that we can stay 'deeply faithful and even faithfully traditional' as we explore an 'always new Islamic–Christian relationship'.

Dialogue with Muslims is an 'essential part' of interpreting God's signs for our time and includes such topics as faith, prophecy, Muhammad as prophet, revelations outside the Bible and mysticism outside Christianity. Fr Paolo refers to the present violence in the Arab world and says that 'Our asceticism … will be to live in the virtue of Hope,' but a hope that involves creative imagination, 'ready to act and not only to dream'. All these statements by Fr Paolo are imaginative, searching and restless compared to de Foucauld's emphasis on 'the life of Nazareth' and seem to owe more to Massignon, reinforced by the developments, referred to in the previous section, in the official Church's outlook on Islam.

Fr Paolo's essay 'In Praise of Syncretism' shows that he fears, and needs to prevent, any accusation that his dialogue with Islam will lead to an 'ambiguous syncretism'[52] that undermines the distinctiveness

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50 Loosley and Dall'Oglio. p. 6.
51 *Op. cit.*, p. 7.
52 'Letter to the Friends of the Monastery of Saint Moses the Abyssinian', Oct. 2002,

of the Catholic faith. The Oxford Dictionary describes 'syncretism' as 'to combine, unite, reconcile'. In Christian dialogue with Islam, 'to reconcile' would be, for the official Church, legitimate; it is 'to combine' and 'to unite' that could be seen from some viewpoints as undermining the faith.

Fr Paolo says that syncretism is rarely defined and seems to be often condemned in order to protect the Church's identity. Human culture, however, Fr Paolo says, is by nature syncretist and religion is syncretist too, as being part of culture. Historical and psycho-social processes, however, he says, sometimes produce identity systems that try to remain 'uncontaminated and uniquely true'.[53] In the case of Christianity, its rejection of syncretism is probably rooted in the Jews' process of forming their identity, as found in the Bible. But the Jewish religion has, for instance, taken aboard from other cultures their creation myths, plus the story of the Flood and influences from Egypt. Judaism is therefore 'syncretist by definition'. We are, says Fr Paolo, as 'cultural subjects' the 'products and authors of syncretism', while, because we belong to a 'system of identification, we fear the corrupting influence of syncretism.'[54]

Some kinds of syncretism, Fr Paolo admits, are negative and harmful, such as the 'omnivorous syncretism' of a 'global television culture'[55] and the Gnostic syncretism of the Church's early centuries that would have undermined the originality of the Christian faith.

Fr Paolo sees the history of Christian ecclesiastical thought as swinging between two poles—on the one hand an openness between cultures that has allowed the Church to be 'incarnated' among wide cultural differences; and on the other, a 'faithfulness to one's identity' that results in the "consecration" of a fixed culture and tradition.'[56] Fr Paolo gives examples of this rigidity in the Church's maintenance of ancient Hellenic culture and Neoplatonic philosophy.

Fr Paolo refers to 'inculturation' as one aspect of syncretism and says that Jesuits, because of the dynamism of their Ignatian spirituality, are capable of new ways of inculturating inherited

(Deirmarmusa.org. [Accessed 20/10/18]).

53 P Dall'Oglio SJ, 'In Praise of Syncretism': a Message to Jesuits involved in Muslim-Christian Relations', (trans) T Michel SJ (Deirmarmusa.org [Accessed 20/10/18])

54 *Op. cit.*, p. 2.

55 *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

56 *Ibid.*

traditions. And for Christians generally, their identity comes from a 'mystical relationship' with the risen Jesus and the Holy Trinity, which implies a continuous 'incarnation' that is more or less syncretistic. Fr Paolo admits, though, that inculturation is now sometimes criticised among Jesuits as 'a last expedient of refined proselytism' or a 'giving up of Christian uniqueness'.[57]

Turning to Islam, Fr Paolo refers to a 'strong ecclesiastical resistance'[58] in recent years to the inculturation of Christian faith in an Arab–Muslim context. 'Radical inculturation' means going beyond externals, trying to 'actualise the benedictions obtained by Abraham for his son Ismail'.[59] And Christian love is the remedy for the sometimes hostile and legalistic aspects of Islam. At Deir Mar Musa the Community's aim is to feel at home in the world of Islam 'culturally, linguistically and symbolically' and to love that world, starting with Muhammad. Fr Paolo considers himself a Muslim 'because of the love of God for Muslims and Islam', though 'by way of the spirit and not the letter'. Both Christians and Muslims can now follow a 'joint spiritual path' based on 'Qur'anic categories and symbols'.[60]

To summarise Fr Paolo's vision: from de Foucauld he draws the value of contemplation as valuable in itself, combined, in the monastic life, with hospitality and with work for the benefit of the local community. In Massignon he finds the parallels worked out between Ishmael and Isaac as children of Abraham and the implications of Muhammad as being, at least symbolically, a descendant of Ishmael. From the official Church and from the Society of Jesus Fr Paolo is encouraged to adapt to Muslim culture and he supports this adaptation by the thinking which 'In Praise of Syncretism' elaborates. The Community of Deir Mar Musa exists *for* Islam rather than being a mission *to* Islam that aims to change it.

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57 *Op. cit.*, p. 4.
58 *Op. cit.*, p. 6.
59 *Ibid*.
60 *Op. cit.*, p. 8.

Conclusion

Fr Paolo at Deir Mar Musa could practise the three spiritual principles which he felt called to emphasise—contemplation, manual work and hospitality—in a community which would link Christians and Muslims. A pioneering community, comprising both men and women, Christians of varied denominations and aiming to be part of both Christian and Muslim wider communities. The Community is supported by the history of Christianity in Syria, of monasticism especially, by the examples of Charles de Foucauld and Louis Massignon, by the progress of the Catholic Church towards inter-religious dialogue and by the tolerance of the present nationalist government.

Fr Paolo inherits an ancient tradition, and renews it in one small instance by reviving a monastic life that had died out by the nineteenth century. De Foucauld and Massignon were both motivated by the hope that one day, however distant, Muslims would become Christian. Fr Paolo has gone further, abandoning all 'colonising' intentions towards Muslims and seeking only to further God's will for them.

Fr Paolo deflects possible charges of 'ambiguous syncretism' by showing that religions have borrowed from each other since early Biblical times and that to put up barriers against such an interchange can be an attempt to preserve a seemingly threatened religious identity. For Fr Paolo 'syncretism' includes the inculturation promoted by recent General Congregations of the Society of Jesus which themselves followed the Vatican Council Declaration *Nostra Aetate*.

Deir Mar Musa as a community has existed since 1992. With nine members the Community is at present viable. But its members already live on three different sites, although laypeople, single and married, add support at Deir Mar Musa itself. Fr Paolo admits that there are still too few new members for the Community's future existence. And it is unclear whether the Community could continue at all without Fr Paolo's own energy and initiatives, including fund-raising, his intellectual training and enterprise, his connections within the Society of Jesus, his ability to move easily between Eastern and Western Christian Churches and between Western and Arab cultures. It is also unclear how dependent the Community's existence is on Fr Paolo's religious superiors in the Society of Jesus and in the Syrian Catholic Church.

Future perils include first, the emigration of Christians away from Syria and, secondly, the rise of Islamist influence within Syria itself. Fr Paolo holds that the unity of Christians and Muslims in the Middle East will come through the Eastern Churches and one aim of the Deir Mar Musa Community is to build good relations locally between Christians and Muslims. It could soon be that, because of emigration, there will be no local Christians left.

As to the Islamists, Syria has a nationalist constitution and different religions and denominations can live and worship freely. Eyal Zisser shows that Syria has, however, made alliances with Islamists at the international level, which increase the risk that Islamists internally might come to establish an Islamic state, where Christians would be disadvantaged and unwelcome. On the other hand there is evidence that the Alawite President of Syria, Bashir Assad, is encouraging minority groups to take a larger part in Syrian society, to counteract Islamist influence.

The Christian Churches today, not only in Syria but across the world where Christians and Muslims meet, need a community such as Deir Mar Musa that is both traditional and pioneering, but whether the Churches will for long have more than the example and memory of it remains to be seen.

Final and on-going reflection

In June 2017 there was still no news of Fr Paolo, though after his disappearance there were reports or rumours both that he had been killed by ISIS and that he was alive and imprisoned by them. Fr Paolo had been expelled from Syria by the Syrian government for allowing a memorial service to be held at Deir Mar Musa for a Syrian dissident, Bassel Shahade, who had been killed in Homs.

In exile from Syria Fr Paolo continued to criticise the Syrian government. He is known to have entered Syria again and to have met ISIS representatives in Raqqa, with, according to Hind Aboud Kabawat, a view to negotiating the release of captive journalists.

At that time, 2013, there was no reason to fear such a meeting. However, ISIS detained Fr Paolo and since then there has been no reliable news of him.

The Syrian civil war, although it had affected the Deir Mar Musa sites in Syria, had not prevented the Community from continuing development. Deir Mar Musa itself had been free of warfare, but in the absence of civil order had suffered raids by robber gangs who had carried off the Community's livestock. The Community's members reported that the war had 'completely exhausted and changed' them. Even so they had continued to provide material and financial help to their local population, including support for medical treatment; plus food and housing support for refugee families in villages near Qaryatayn. Some visitors had again been welcomed, after a period of isolation, by the Community. The Community had also completed a housing project, started in 2008, providing housing for several families.

The Community had also been involved in providing more basic welfare assistance to people in the nearest town of Nebek, collaborating with their diocese and with the Jesuits and assisted financially by European charities.

The Community's other Syrian community, Deir Mar Elian, at Qaryatayn north east of Deir Mar Musa, had been occupied by ISIS and suffered from fighting in the area. The ancient monastery and the tomb of Mar Elian had been destroyed. The Community had, however, been trying to continue their agricultural projects and to save what had been neglected.

Families were trying to return to Qaryatayn, mostly Muslims, as Christians feared to return because of uncertainty about their future.

Deir Maryam al-Adhra is the centre in Iraqi Kurdistan which the Deir Mar Musa Community founded after 2004. In 2016 the the work of the centre was focussed on housing for refugee families, including a 'caravan village'. The centre was receiving material support from European charities and was supported pastorally by the local Chaldean bishop.

The San Salvatore centre at Cori near Rome was set up to provide accommodation for members of the Deir Mar Musa community while they attended study courses in Rome. The centre was referred to in 2016 as a 'nascent monastery'. The Community aimed for the centre to become 'a point of reference' for friends and supporters in Europe of Deir Mar Musa and a centre for inter–religious dialogue.

The Community's members: at the end of 2016 the Deir Mar Musa Community comprised ten members, four women and six men,

deployed across the Community's four sites. A two-week meeting of the members every two to three years had been proposed.

It seems unclear, meanwhile, how the Community is maintained as a body when it is so dispersed. One positive factor is the Community's contemplative emphasis in its prayer life and its almost Benedictine focus on the local environment, whether buildings or agriculture. The Community does not need many members if they are centred on such local concerns and supported financially by funds raised by supporters elsewhere.

The Deir Mar Musa Community by 2016 had existed for twice as long as when the original version of this paper was prepared in 2004. From the evidence of its 2016 Newsletter the Community has survived the Syrian civil war so far, despite the disappearance of its superior, Fr Paolo, who was also a member of the Jesuit community in Syria and despite the strain on the daily life of the Community's members in Syria, to which the newsletter refers.

Perhaps the Community is supported, in a shifting and violent social environment, by its stability which enables it to offer hospitality to refugees. It is clear too that the Community depends on charitable supporters in other societies, mainly in Europe, especially for work on buildings, sacred and secular, and for practical assistance to local communities, such as the generator for the power supply in the hospital at Nebek. The Community is in effect the focus of an organised wider society that supports developments at the Community's sites or in their neighbourhoods. Such activity fulfils one of the Community's main purposes which is to offer a Christian service to Muslims.

The support of the local bishops and, at present, of the Jesuits in Syria, is another main factor in the Community's continuance and stability.

In 2016 the state of the Deir Mar Musa Community did in some way seem more secure than in 2004. The site at Cori in Italy had developed from being simply a house of study to being itself a European, almost a specifically Roman, monastic centre. Cori had also become a firm ecclesiastical link between Europe and Deir Mar Musa.

Materially, European support groups seemed well-established. Ecclesiastically the Community seemed firmly supported by local bishops and, less securely of course, by the Syrian Jesuits.

There were still questions, however, about the future of the Deir Mar Musa Community in the longer term. In a country as unstable as Syria would the two Syrian sites be free of further violence? And with the possible exodus of many of the remaining Christians from Syria, would the Community attract enough new members for it to be viable? And could it find the leadership to replace Fr Paolo whether or not he returned in the shorter term?

Without Christians in Syria what would become the Community's main objective developing dialogue with Muslims through Christian service to them? Might the Deir Mar Musa Community become no more than a Muslim-organised environmental and rehabilitation project, though supported by European funds?

THE STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVAL: SYRIAC ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS PRIOR TO AND DURING THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

Noriko Sato

INTRODUCTION

Since the invasion of ISIS (*al-Dawlah al-Islamiyah fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham*) into Iraq and Syria, a large number of Syriac Orthodox Christians in Iraq and Syria have been obliged to leave their homeland. Syriac Orthodox Christians are members of one of the Miaphysite Churches and compose one of the small religious groups in the region. After Mosul's fall in June 2014, ISIS demanded Christians leave its territory, unless they converted to Islam or paid tribute. This resulted in the complete exodus of Christians from Mosul, whose community had been in existence there for over 1,700 years. Many became refugees and IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons). Before 2003, the Christian population in Iraq numbered 1.4 million, whereas, after the ISIS invasion, it is estimated to have been under 250,000 (Iraqi Christians Relief Council 2016). Northern Iraq became an autonomous region of Kurdistan. The Christians are not Kurds and thus their rights are uncertain. Although the Syriac Orthodox Christians, as well as the Church of the East and Chaldean Christians, claim that the Nineveh Plain in the Nineveh Governorate is their homeland and their rights should be acknowledged, both the Kurdish Regional Government and Iraqi Government have not taken this plan seriously into consideration. Thus, many Christians are unable to return to their homes.

It is not only Iraq but also Syria from where the Christian population has been gradually eliminated. For example, in August 2015, ISIS successfully raided al-Qaryatayn, one of the oldest villages of the Syriac Orthodox Christians, which was located on the route of the ISIS invasion from Palmyra. Many Syriac Orthodox Christians were killed, abducted and displaced (BBC News 2016). The survivors were

plagued by the fear that they would be killed and then left the village. The author met one of such Christian families in Beirut, who had escaped from the attack. They related that their Muslim neighbours collaborated with the Islamist militants and assaulted them. The conflict tends to be described as religious persecution. In Syria in 2009, there were 90,000 Syriac Orthodox Christians (excluding Syriac Orthodox Christian refugees from Iraq) (Bailey and Bailey 2010: 200; UN data 2012). However, by 2014 almost a third of the Christian population of 1.8 million had left Syria (Gledhill 2014).

Syriac Orthodox Christians have been making efforts to merge themselves into society, since many of them had experienced religious intolerance in Turkish Anatolia between 1914 and 1923, and consequently, emigrated to eastern Syria and northern Iraq. They commemorate this religious persecution as the *Sayfo* (sword) or the *Firman* (the decree of Christian persecution/massacre). Since their immigration to their new homes, they have attempted to establish their position in society by identifying themselves as Arab Christians. At the same time, they have strived to identify themselves as descendants of ancient Christians in the region. Mor Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, the Metropolitan of Aleppo, sought a place for retrieving their communal memory in Syria. One of such places is the monastery of St Jacob of Edessa at Tell 'Ada, which locates near Syria's ancient capital, Antioch, where inhabitants converted to Christianity in ancient times (Acts 11: 20-21). Mor Gregorios recollects his first visit to Tell 'Ada:

> One of the Catholic priests invited me to visit a place near the church of Saint Simeon Stylites (Qal'at Sema'an), where he believed forefathers were buried. It was Tell 'Ada. Later, I found books which mentioned that St Jacob of Edessa had studied Syriac language and the Old and New Testaments at the monastery in Tell 'Ada. I felt that our diocese should obtain the land which the monastery had occupied.

This recollection suggests that this ancient religious site becomes a symbolic place for reminding the Syriac Christian community's place of origin in Syria and provides them with an identity as descendants of ancient Christians in Syria.

However, such identity no longer functions in eastern Syria due to Kurdification of the regions, as the Kurds have been playing an outstanding role in the fight against ISIS and claim self-rule of their regions. Such regional situations favour non-state actors, such as the Kurds, and enhance their role in negotiating with states and non-state entities. By contrast, the Syriac Orthodox Christians feel that they are facing the second *Sayfo,* i.e. religious persecution and exodus.

This article deals with Syriac Orthodox Christians in eastern Syria (the Jazira region), where, in November 2013, Kurdish forces declared their own civil administration (AlJazeera 2014; International Crisis Group 2014). Syriac Orthodox Christians compose one of the small religious groups in eastern Syria, where Kurds and Arabs are the majority of the population. The Kurds attempt to hold themselves together by the belief that Western Kurdistan is their territory. Rojava (Western Kurdistan) includes Afrin, Kobani ('Ain al-'Arab) and Jazira. Under the condition of the Syrian Civil War, the Kurds have developed a strong sense of what Anthony Smith (1987) calls *ethnie*, which indicates that they hold a sense of solidarity among their members who have common origins and cultural traits as well as the association of a common territory. The Kurds want greater autonomy for Western Kurdistan and are getting closer to achieving their goals. This has encouraged the Syriac Orthodox Christians to develop their own identity, which is associated with their ethnicity and territorial consciousness (Lamont and Mizrachi 2012: 366-381). The article investigates how Syriac Orthodox Christians in eastern Syria have been striving to establish their position in society prior to and during the Syrian Civil War and how the Kurdification and Islamization have led to a rapid decline in the Christian population in the region. The analysis is made by using the qualitative data which the author collected in participant-observation and interview during anthropological fieldwork (1998-2008) among the Syriac Orthodox Christians in Syria as well as those collected in the UK, Germany, and Lebanon after the outbreak of the Civil War.

The Identity of the Syriac Orthodox Christians before the Outbreak of the Syrian Civil War

In Syrian society, the majority of the population are Arab Muslims. Kurds are regarded as an ethnic group different from Arabs, although most of them are Sunni Muslims. Thus, there are many Kurds who are unable to acquire Syrian citizenship, as the Syrian government rejected their requests. In terms of religion, Syrians hold different sectarian identities. The majority are Sunni Muslims. There are also Shi'as, which include Twelvers, Isma'ilis, and 'Alawites. Small numbers of Druze also exist. In Syria, there are eleven Christian denominations. Greek Orthodox (Melkite), Armenian Apostolic and Syriac Orthodox Churches, and their sister Churches which are united to the See of Rome (Catholic). The Armenians and Syriacs have Protestant Churches. Church of the East Christians, who belong to the Assyrian Church of the East, use Syriac/Syriac-Aramaic as their liturgical language, which is also that of Syriac Orthodox Christians.[1] There is also the Latin Church which is Roman Catholic. Before the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War, the Christians' political rights had been undermined, as Arab nationalism in Syria defines Syria as a country of Arabs. The various Christian traditions often convey a strong cultural marker which can be seen in their respective liturgical and linguistic traditions for example Greeks, Armenians, Arameans (those whose liturgical language is Syriac/Syriac-Aramaic) or indeed in a different but more cosmopolitan manner the Latins; that said some Christians see difference in ethnic terms. Thus, whether or not the Christians in Syria are ethnically included with the Arabs, who compose the majority of the Syrian population, is quite ambiguous.

Syrian-Arab nationalism under the regime of the President Bashar al-'Assad has attempted to incorporate a variety of religious groups into its society and acknowledged their heritage as forming the culture of Syrians (Hinnebusch 2001: 140). Syrian multiculturalism acknowledges the existence of plural religious groups and does not accept the plurality of cultures based on ethnicity. In order to unify the state, the regime denotes Syria as an Arab state, and maintains its political order as a

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1   Contemporary Syriac/Syriac-Aramaic includes two dialects: one is West Syriac and the other is East Syriac. The Syriac Orthodox Christians use the former as their liturgical language, and Church of the East Christians use the latter.

multi–religious state in which the communal histories of the existing confessional groups within Syria constitute the national history. The government's policy of religious multiculturalism acknowledges the idea of a religious subculture, which explains the existence of distinct religious cultures in the same geographic space where the dominant Arab–Islamic culture flourishes.

This means that the political elite in Syria has attempted to integrate those who hold different sectarian identities. Renan (1996) points out that nationalism promotes spiritual empathy within a nation, whose citizens will continue to value a 'common heritage'. Yet, the Syrian case differs somewhat from the definition of the creation of the modern European nation–state, given by Renan. In Europe, political elites reconstruct historical memories in order to conceal the differences among their citizens and to integrate them into the state. Whilst nationalism in Syria certainly falls within this mould, it is used to cloak a concept of communal exclusivity. The Syrian government acknowledges distinctive religious sub-cultures, in which each group has been maintained in Syria by emphasizing that these cultures form the shared heritage of Syrian compatriots. The Syrian regime attempts to evoke what Geertz (1973: 255–310) called the 'primordial sentiment' of its citizens, by mobilizing the cultural and historical elements, related to an early stage in the historical development of the region, and tries to enhance people's loyalty to the state.

Anthropological work relating to nationalism avers that political elites play a crucial role in promoting the idea of nationalism in order to increase solidarity among the masses while stimulating their consciousness of being citizens of a certain political entity (e.g., Herzfeld 1987; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Kapferer 1988). In Syria, by contrast, state ideologies of nationalism are far from the only way to sponsor authentic historiographies. One should examine alternative historiographies in cases where different religious groups have been acknowledged to maintain their sectarian identities, and where religious multiculturalism has been an ideology for integrating different religious groups into the Syrian state. In this regard, Syrian national movements differ from European ones. In their relationship to the Syrian state, each religious group has abided by the government's political discourse on religious multiculturalism and has attempted to establish their own religious identity as one of the acknowledged religious groups in Syria.

The religious multiculturalism in Syria is related to the issues of homeland, origin, and cultural indigeneity. The Syriac Orthodox Christians, many of whom in Syria have immigrant origins, strive to define themselves as members of the Syrian community and to legitimize their presence in Syria. In order to achieve this goal, they attempt to prove their Syrian origin and claim that their religion is part of the cultural heritage of Syria, which demonstrates the origin of their community and its endurance in Syria since ancient times. Their religious heritage, such as their liturgical language, i.e. Syriac/Syriac-Aramaic, which is derived from ancient Aramaic, one of the ancient languages of Syria, provides them with a means for confirming their direct connection to the ancient Christians in Syria, and establish links between the past and the present. By maintaining the persistence of their community in Syria, they attempt to claim Syria as their 'homeland' and their political rights as indigenous Christians of Syria. The connection between their community and Syria leads to the idea that their distinctive culture and religion are acknowledged as those of Syrians.[2]

In order to integrate them into Syrian society, the Syriac Orthodox Christians have to prove their genealogical origin by stressing that they are ethnically identical with Arabs. Among these Christians, the pedigree based on religion identifies one's origin and the place to which they belong. The Syriac Orthodox Christians believe that their liturgical language is derived from that of ancient Arameans in Syria and that ancient Arameans are the ancestors of the contemporary Syriac Orthodox Christians. They claim that their ancestors were descendants of Aram, who was a son of Shem (Genesis 10:22). They state that Arameans and Arabs are both descendants of Shem. Moreover, both the Muslims in Syria and the Syriac Orthodox Christians acknowledge the pedigree of Abraham as their ancestor. The Muslims believe that the prophet Abraham in his time became the leader of the righteous and that God blessed both lines of his progeny: those of Ishmael and Isaac [Ismā ʿīl and Isḥaq/Isaac] (Sura 2 al–Baqara: verse 133, 136). Descendants of Ishmael (Isma'il) are Muslims, and those of Isaac are Christians. By referring to Genesis (11:31; 12: 1; 15:7), the Syriac Orthodox Christians in Syria maintain that Abraham is their ancestor,

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2   Compare to the following work: Bhanha 1990: 66; Chatty 2010: 23-24 and; Gupta 1992: 7.

who was a member of the tribe of Paddan-Aram or Aram-Nahraim, i.e. Arameans who occupied the region of Harran, which was one of the regions in ancient Syria (Genesis 26: 20). By constructing a discourse that both the Christians and Muslims are the descendants of Shem and Abraham, the Syriac Orthodox Christians stress that they have an ethnic origin common to other Syrian Arabs. The Syriac Orthodox Christians who have negotiated the criteria of belonging to Syria, attempt to merge them into Syrian society, and, at the same time, have strived to maintain their group identity.

However, during the Syrian Civil War the Syriac Orthodox Christians in eastern Syria, i.e. Jazira region, have started to transform their identity. Radical Islamists, such as ISIS/Daesh, have attempted to establish an Islamic state in the land of Syria and to destroy its national community. These extremist Islamists show no interest in constructing a civil democratic society and treating the local inhabitants on the equal basis (Dianadarke 2014).[3] When such a political situation drives the Syrian state to the verge of collapse, the religious multiculturalism stance no longer works as a means for securing the position of the Syriac Orthodox Christians. In response to such a critical situation, the Syriac Orthodox Christians in eastern Syria attempt by themselves to protect their community and start to argue for the maintenance of their group boundary vis-à-vis radical Islamists.[4] In this course, many Syriac Orthodox Christians have started to cooperate with the Kurds and to claim their Assyrian or Aramean ethnic identity. The following sections examined how the Kurds have empowered themselves and how it affects the transformation of the identity of the Syriac Orthodox Christians.

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3   According to Kareem (2015), in February and March 2016, armed forces of the Syriac Orthodox Christians, which is the Syriac Military Council (MFS), joined the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF, *Quwwāt Sūriyā al-Dīmuqrāṭīya* in Arabic), which is an alliance of Kurdish, Arab, Assyrian, Armenian, Turkmen and Circassian militias, and attempted to liberate the villages in the Jazira region, which had been under the control of the ISIS (Hubo 2016a; Hubo 2016b).

4   The reason that this article confines its analysis to the Syriac Orthodox Christians in Jazira is that those in the western part of Syria seek strategies for their survival different from those in Jazira.

THE KURDISH EMPOWERMENT

In eastern Syria, the Kurds take the initiative for democratic transformation in Syria, in the course of fighting against extremist Islamist militants. The PYD (Kurdish Democratic Union Party) and its military wing, the YPG (People's Protection Units) have played an outstanding role in the fight against the ISIS. The PYD appears to be the Kurdish party that enjoys the support of many Kurds in Syria, and is able to interact with other states, as the US government recognizes it as its ally in anti–ISIS operation. The PYD secures the borders and checkpoints around towns in the region and claims that they are to maintain order and protect civilians. One of the reasons which empowered the PYD was the militarization of sectarian conflicts in Syria. The primary causes of the escalation are derived from the fact that foreigners sponsored Islamist groups for geopolitical purposes.

It is not well documented how donations from the Gulf states, such as Qatar, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, as well as those from the US, and Turkey, have played a role in the rise of extremist Islamist groups in Syria and Iraq. However, there is considerable room for speculating on their role in planting the extremist ideology in these two countries (Shatz 2014). These donors had welcomed the emergence of extremist Islamists because they regarded the extremists as strategic assets. The Gulf donors saw the threat as not only military but as the expanded influence over mainstream Sunni Islam, when they observed what occurred in Iraq after the Saddam Hussein's fall. To support extremist opposition groups in both Iraq and Syria was to weaken the exiting Shi'a dominant governments in both countries. The US considered that such opposition groups in Syria were a useful tool for regime change (Cockburn 2014).

Although there was a report that many foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq were from Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan (Hashim 2014), the author was told by Syrians, who fled to Lebanon, that militant groups composed of Uzbeks, Tajiks, Kazakhs, and Caucasians had entered Syria from Hatay in southern Turkey. They destroyed hospitals, mosques and the traditional market of Aleppo, and killed civilians. These Syrians condemned them as terrorists who were not real Muslims who destroyed Islamic heritage in Syria. They also believed that Gulf donors pull the wires behind the scenes. Turkey seemed

to support their operations for establishing a future Sunni Arab-dominated government in Syria and wanted to prevent Syrian Kurds from claiming autonomy (Allsopp 2014: 219). The following example suggests Turkey's involvement in dispatching foreign fighters: Syria's Muslim Brotherhood asked for Turkish military intervention in order to stop the Syrian government's crackdown on pro-democracy protestors (Akbaba and Özdamar 2013: 199). Moreover, some of the rebels were trained and armed in Jordan by the CIA (Sherlock 2014). Such Islamist militants became the core of sectarian insurgency and allowed the advancement of ISIS in both Iraq and Syria. Consequently, this led to the contemporary situation of the Middle Eastern region, which has sunk in a facile Sunni-Shi'a divide. International society also split into two camps: the Sunni supporters of the pro-US-Saudi allies and the Shi'a supporters of the Iran-Russia party (Ahmed 2015). Thus, conflicts in Syria tend to be looked upon as religious ones.

Such regional and international situations favour non-state actors, such as Kurds, and enhance their role in negotiating with states and non-state entities, in the course of fighting against radical Islamists. The PYD becomes able to interact with other states, as the US government recognizes it as its ally in anti-ISIS operations (Tabler, Cagaptay, Pollock and Jeffrey 2016). Russia also pushes for the inclusion of the PYD in negotiations for ending the Syrian conflicts (Iddon 2017). The PYD, which *de facto* represents Syrian Kurds, is not organized into a state but is made up of socio-political actors, who exert political influence over the Kurdish population in Syria as well as over the international system. Thus, it can be identified as a non-state actor (Charountaki 2015: 341). When looking at the empowerment of the Kurds in both regional and international politics, the Syriac Orthodox Christians, many of whom live in the territory that the Kurds occupy, fear that they might face the tragic fate similar to that of their Iraqi counterparts.

The militarization of the Syrian conflicts provides the PYD with an opportunity to introduce their ways of political management, which protects civilians from military threats and stands up for them. This is distinct from the top-down state management. Since the declaration of the autonomous Kurdish region, i.e. Western Kurdistan, Rajova, in Syria in November 2013, they have been establishing local councils and Kurdish administration, which are important steps for establishing a federal democratic system. They move into government buildings

and attempt to control over the so-called Kurdish region without the government's interference, as the PYD does not explicitly call for the fall of the al-Assad regime and maintains co-operative relations between them and the regime (Allsop 2014: 206-9). The PYD has been successful in their strategy which reflects popular calls from the street. The PYD presents an idea for overcoming nation-state and achieving multi-cultural and consensus-oriented democratic autonomy (Charountaki 2015: 346-7). Such a Kurdish model of self-rule and democracy has been developed by one of the most influential leaders of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), Abdullah Öcalan. He defines that a nation-state aims at creating a single national culture and enforcing a homogenous citizenship. Self-rule increases the resources of the society by pursuing multi-cultural and consensus-orienting democratic autonomy (ibid: 344). By looking at the Kurdish military advancement and their introduction of the idea of federal democracy into practice, the Syriac Orthodox Christians, who occupy the same geographical space as the Kurds do, attempt to pursue their own self-defence strategy.

TRANSFORMATION OF SYRIAC CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

The Syriac Orthodox Christians in the Jazira region, such as those living in the towns of Qamishly, Qahtaniya, and Malkiya, where their population density is high, face the advancement of extreme Islamists to the region. These Christians fear that such a small Christian group is at risk of extinction. In such a situation, their Kurdish neighbours, who maintain that the Kurds share the same destiny in this part of Syria with Arabs, Syriacs, and Assyrians, declare that they protect the rights of these groups (Muhammad 2015). This encourages the Syriac Orthodox Christians, and some have started to co-operate with the PYD in defending themselves.

When the Syrian Civil War was escalating, the Syriac Orthodox Christians in the Syrian Jazira established their own militia, *Sutoro*.[5] In January 2014, the *Sutoro*'s paramilitary counterpart, which is the Syriac Military Council (SUC), joined the People's Protection Units

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5 The northern Jazira is the highest Kurdish concentrated district. Kurds are the majority in both Qahtaniya and Malkiya, which are the towns that many Syriac Orthodox Christians live and support *Sutoro* (Bozbu a 2014).

(YPG) (al-Tamimi 2014). The *Sutoro* understand that their Kurdish allies approve them as a partner which pursues a self-defence strategy and attempts to establish a political system based on federalism, which acknowledges the rights of existing groups in eastern Syria. In 2016, armed forces of the Syriac Orthodox Christians joined the military operation conducted by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which is an alliance of Kurdish, Arab, Syriac, Assyrian, Armenian, Turkmen, and Circassian militias. This reflects the ideology of multi-cultural federalism. They co-operated in order to liberate the villages in eastern Syria, which had been under the control of ISIS (Hubo 2016a; Hubo 2016b; Kareem 2015).

In this course of action, the Syriac Orthodox Christians have started to stress their ethnic identity. It does not mean that they stopped identifying themselves as a religious group. Rather, they put emphasis on their ethnic identity in order to claim their rights to be equal to those of their Kurdish and Arab neighbours. Those who work with the PYD stress that the Syriac Orthodox Christians should be identified as Assyrians, as they have maintained Syriac/ Syriac-Aramaic language, i.e. the lingua-franca of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (934-609 BC). Thus, these Christians claim that they are the indigenous population occupying the region. The Neo-Assyrian Empire was a multi-ethnic state, although its citizens had retained their ethnic and tribal identities (Parpora 2004: 5-13). The idea of Assyrianism, as a politico-geographical concept, is not new, as European colonial powers introduced it in the 19th century in order to instigate ethno-separatist Christians (Hourani 1970: 55-57). However, by referring to their origin, the contemporary Christians look at the ancient system of unifying the multitudes of people into a single administrative system. Syriac/Syriac-Aramaic is the liturgical language of the Syriac Christians, such as those belonging to Syriac Orthodox/Catholic/Protestant, Chaldean, Assyrian, and Maronite Churches. Their identity is channelled by the ancient Aramaic language, which provides them with a means for confirming their direct connection to ancient Assyrians, as well as that for unifying those Christians living across the present state boundaries. Their liturgical language, Syriac/Syriac-Aramaic, is a marker for claiming symbolic boundaries which differentiate the Assyrian Christians from other inhabitants in eastern Syria. At the same time, ancient Aramaic

was a symbol of integrating people who had different ethnic, tribal and religious origins into the empire. Therefore, the Neo-Assyrian Empire was not a nation-state, which pursued a single culture and ethnicity for identifying its citizens. Rather, the empire was a multi-cultural state, which acknowledged rights of people holding different origins in the territory, as its citizens.

The contemporary Syriac Orthodox Christians believe that such a form of multi-culturalism enhances their hope for constructing an autonomous federal system, in which representatives of each group participate in the process of establishing a self-ruling political body. To some extent, they share the idea of a future state with the Kurds, in which non-state actors, including these Christians, can take a new initiative for pursuing *consensus-oriented autonomy*. Thus, many Syriac Orthodox Christians identify themselves as Assyrians and attempt to draw symbolic boundaries between Assyrian Christians and others in order to maintain their distinctiveness. To create such boundaries is also an attempt to claim their rights as the indigenous population of the region and is also a means for merging them into the federal self-rule, where the Kurds take the initiative. They use identity politics in which they shift group boundaries as a strategy for establishing their position in the changing socio-political situation (e.g. Shoshana 2007: 355–365).

However, it does not mean that all the Syriac Orthodox Christians support Assyrianism. There are those who stress that Syriac Orthodox Christians are descendants of ancient Arameans. Under the al-Assad regime, the Syriac Orthodox Christians had maintained that the origin of their liturgical language was a proof that they were the indigenous population of Syria. During fieldwork in Syria, the author collected the following narrative which described how the Syriac Orthodox Christians gave a broad outline of the Aramaic language development:

> Cuneiform was used in Babylonia and Assyria. Babylonian and the Assyrian dialects eventually developed cuneiform into a Phoenician linear alphabet, when the Aramean tribes expanded their territory from Mesopotamia to the Phoenician border. This was ancient Syria. Arameans developed Phoenician linear alphabets into the Aramaic

style and started to use Aramaic. It has developed into Modern Syriac/Neo-Aramaic, which is our liturgical language. Thus, the origin of our language is the ancient language of Syria. The history of the language proves that present Syriac Orthodox Christians are descendants of Arameans.

Ancient Aramaic was the language spoken in the territory of the historical Syria, including Galilee, when Jesus taught there (Palmer 1995: 1). Aramaic is a symbol of the association of all Syrians to pre-Islamic Syria. Thus, the contemporary Syriac Christians maintain the Syrian cultural tradition and are Arameans. Before the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War, the Syriac Orthodox Christians attempted to emphasize that Arameans shared the ethnic origin with Syrian Arabs by tracing the origin of their liturgical language and the pedigree of Abraham. Yet, in the Syrian Civil War, those who insist on an Aramean origin tend to separate Arameans from Arabs. Those who identify themselves as Arameans use the history of their liturgical language as a symbol which proves their Syrian origin and unifies its speakers as an Aramaic ethnic group.

Both Assyrian and Aramean ethnic identities are channelled by Syriac/Syriac-Aramaic, which is a symbol for establishing links between the past and the present. Their ethnic identities are constructed by referring to the endurance of their liturgical language in the region since ancient times. The Syriac Orthodox Christians identify themselves as *Sūryānē* (in Syriac) or *Sūryān* (in Arabic), who constitute a religious group and have a common origin and descent. However, their *Sūryānē* or *Sūryān* identity includes both religious and ethnic identities and therefore is ambiguous and manipulative when they try to control their ethnic identity in order to present themselves as being a unified, territorial and distinctive indigenous group of the region. When they pursue secular identities, they are divided into different factions in facing the question of whether they emphasize religious or secular identity, or whether they claim Assyrian or Aramean ethnic identity. This hinders the attempt of the Syriac Orthodox Christians to unify their group.

Currently, the reconstruction of their ethnic identities is a strategy for survival. Yet, it is not a goal in itself. Although they put emphasis

on ethnic identities, the attempt is not to merge them into the ethnic majority in the region (cf. Cherry 2010: 454-5). Previous studies of ethnic identities argue that ethnic minorities and immigrants tend to change themselves in order to become more like the country's 'insiders' (*ibid*: 468). The case of the Syriac Orthodox Christians suggests that they want to play within different frameworks of political behaviour and to maintain the distinction between them and other groups in Syria, although they are seeking ways of working and co-operating with other groups in society.

Although the Syriac Orthodox Christians ally themselves with the Kurdish autonomists by setting common goals of respecting equal rights of the existing groups, their future relations with the Kurds concern these Christians greatly. It is derived from the following reasons. First, when looking at the situation of their fellow Christians in Iraq, the KRG (Kurdish Regional Government) has provided the Christians with little aid. For example, since the 2003 War, many displaced Christian populations have been unable to return to their home in the Nineveh Plains, as the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) has prevented it and brought Kurds to settle there (Natali 2010: 106). In summer 2014, when Christian villages in the Nineveh Plains fell to ISIS, the Kurdish Peshmerga did not help the Christians, with whom the Kurdish Peshmerga had co-operated and withdrew from the Nineveh Plains (Cetti-Robets 2015). Such incidents make the Syriac Orthodox Christians distrust the Kurds.

The second is that under the al-Assad regime, the Syriac Orthodox Christians had not made effort to construct co-operative relations with the Kurds. Rather, the Syriac Orthodox Christians attempted to separate themselves from the Kurds, as the Syrian regime did not acknowledge the political rights of the Kurds, who pursued their ethnic identity differently from Arabs. These historical and political experiences have reproduced physical boundaries between the Syriac Orthodox Christians and Kurds. The Syriac Orthodox Christians had constructed their own discourses on the Syrian nation, where they had a common ethnic origin with the Arabs and had maintained the indigenous culture of Syrians. Thus, they were members of the Syrian nation-state and were also its co-producers of Syrian-Arab culture. When the President Bashar al-Assad's religious multi-culturalism endeavoured to preserve the 'imagined multi-religious national community of Syria' and kept

out those who were perceived to be non–Syrian Arabs, such as Kurds, the Syriac Orthodox Christians learnt its symbolic meaning through government propaganda. They have immersed the symbols, such as Arab identity and religious heritage, into their identity discourse in order to prove the authenticity of the Syriac Orthodox Christians as one of the indigenous religious groups in Syria. Such an identity strategy of these Christians in the past makes it difficult for both the Christians and Kurds to construct a trustful relationship.

The third is that the memories of the *Sayfo,* those of Christian persecution and exodus from Anatolia at the end of the Ottoman era, have affected their relationship with the Kurds. The Syriac Orthodox Christians believe that the Kurds, who collaborated with the Ottoman authorities, brutally massacred their ancestors during the *Sayfo.* Private and individual memories of the *Sayfo* have become a collective memory among the Syriac Orthodox Christians, and have been transmitted to their younger generation, who then reconstruct them in the context of the present political settings. Danforth and Van Boeschoten (2011: 226) argue that experiential communities of memory and political communities of memory are distinguishable, although they often overlap. Narratives of the latter are constructed by political ideologies and are directed toward political action in the present. Both experiential and political narratives are based on their experiences. In terms of memories of the Christian persecution in Anatolia, which have been structured by the Syriac Orthodox Christians in the political situation of Syria, the difference between the two types of 'community of memory' is blurred. The accounts of the *Sayfo* persecution, given by the Syrian/Syriac Orthodox Christians, have been reconstructed under the al–Assad regime as an attempt to emphasize the difference between them and the Kurds, who are not ethnically Arabs, and who have been excluded from the Syrian national community. During the Syrian Civil War when Christians are persecuted by radical Islamists, the contemporary Syriac Orthodox Christians recollect memories of the *Sayfo* and describe the current situation as the second *Sayfo*. In 2016, these Christians, as well as the Syriac Orthodox Church, have introduced its commemoration rituals in order to encourage them to overcome the present situation as their ancestors did during and in the aftermath of the *Sayfo*. However, such collective remembrance may hinder any

real progress toward constructing a co-operative relationship with the Kurds, as they massacred the ancestors of the Syriac Orthodox Christians during the first *Sayfo*. All these elements inspire the Syriac Orthodox Christians with distrust of the Kurds. It increases their anxiety, regarding their present and future state, and encourages them voluntarily to leave Syria.

<div align="center">

CONCLUSION

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Before the escalation of the Civil War, the Syriac Orthodox Christians, many of whom have immigrant origins, have strived to define themselves as members of the Syrian national community and to legitimize their presence in Syria. In order to achieve this goal, they have attempted to prove their Syrian origin and stress that their religion has been part of the cultural heritage of Syria. It is not their religious doctrine, but their liturgical language, i.e. Syriac/Syriac-Aramaic, which is derived from ancient Aramaic, that provides them with a means for confirming their direct connection to the ancient Aramean Christians in Syria and establishing links between them and other Syrian Arabs. By maintaining the persistence of their community in Syria, they have attempted to claim Syria as their 'homeland.'

However, in the situation of the Syrian Civil War where radical Islamists attempt to eliminate the non-Muslim inhabitants, their religious identity that they are indigenous Christians of Syria is unable to guarantee their political rights in Syria. Due to attacks conducted by radical Islamist on Christian communities, many Christians left Syria. By the time that the Civil War erupted, 2.2 million Christians, which was equivalent to less than 10 percent of the total population of Syria, lived in Syria. However, in 2016, it is estimated that the Christian population has decreased to 5 percent of the Syrian population (McKay 2016).

The military operations against radical Islamists have empowered the Kurds, in particular, the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its armed wing, the People's Protection Units (YPG), in eastern Syria. Their focus is to protect the region through civil defence and to call for self-determination and federalism in which the PYD declares that they acknowledge the existence of the allied ethnic groups in the

same geographical space which they occupy (Cafarella 2014). They are successfully introducing Kurdish language education in schools without interference from the government, as they, to some extent, co-ordinate with the Syrian regime (Allsopp 2014: 215). In the course of ethnicization and Kurdification of the region, the Syriac Orthodox Christians are obliged to re-examine their identity by referring to the origin of their liturgical language and to claim the authenticity as one of the ethnic groups in Syria. Their liturgical language, Syriac/Syriac-Aramaic, is a tool for developing their ethnic identity for achieving their goals which promote solidarity among them and establish their position equal to other groups. However, in this course of actions, the Syriac Orthodox Christians are divided into factions.

In the current situation Syria is unable to reconstruct a country based on the idea of the nation-state in which citizens constitute a single entity. Federalism is one of the options for constructing a future state of Syria and is an attempt to overcome the idea of the nation-state. To claim an ethnic identity is one of the ways for the Syriac Christians to fit in with Arabs and Kurds. Such an ethnic identity, either Assyrian[6] or Aramean identity, can be used to unify all Christians whose liturgical language is Syriac/Syriac-Aramaic, such as Syriac Orthodox Christians, Syriac Catholics, Syriac Protestants, Church of the East, and Chaldeans. Although each group is small, such ethnic identification encourages cooperation among these Christians. The reconstruction of their identity takes place in power relations with others, such as their neighbouring groups. However, in reality, these Christians do not work in close co-operation with each other across the boundaries of the denominations. Moreover, the Syriac Orthodox Christians are divided into Assyrian and Aramean factions. Such a situation does not contribute to strengthening their position in society. Their lack of power and the Kurdification of the region make the Syriac Orthodox Christians feel uneasy about the future. Thus, their diaspora has never ended.

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6 Syriac Orthodox do not readily identify with Assyrian which is more often associated with members of the 'Assyrian Church of the East' [Eds].

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AN EXPLORATION OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY OF DAVID BURRELL IN DIALOGUE WITH ISLAM, IN CONVERSATION WITH ROBERT MURRAY AND MODERN PAPAL THOUGHT ON ECOLOGICAL CRISES.

Patricia Morris

General Introduction

Contemporary ecological problems are having a tremendous impact on the planet as evident in recent natural disasters of the last few decades. For example, severe and frequent flooding, tsunamis and cyclones, air and water pollution, toxic industrial waste, water scarcity, over exploitation of resources and desertification have contributed to global warming and climate change.[1] Sustainable development is 'the greatest and most complicated challenge that confronts humanity.'[2] Lynn White, among others, has charged Christianity for misreading Biblical teachings on Genesis.[3] Was White right to charge Christianity? Is there a case of rivalry between God and humanity?

Structure

Dr David Burrell's work aims to explore the relationship between humanity, God and creation in the Catholic Christian and Islamic traditions. The first section is an exploration of David Burrell's philosophical theology.[4] It will introduce Burrell's contribution to

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1   For United Nation Reports on environmental problems, see online < http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/biodiversity/ > [Accessed 17 June 2017].

2   Professor Jeffrey D Sachs is the American Economist, UN Adviser on Sustainable Development, Director of The Earth Institute at Columbia University and co-recipient Blue Planet Prize (2015).

3   Cf. Lynn White, Jr, *'The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis'* (originally in Science, 1967), in ed. I Barbour, *Western Man and Environmental Ethics* (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1973), pp. 18-30. 3. J. Barr, 'Man and Nature: The Ecological Controversy and the Old Testament'.

4   Philosophical Theology (coined in 1960) is a branch of philosophy that deals

comparative theology with special reference to Thomas Aquinas' interaction with Islam and then highlight the distinctiveness of the Creator from creation, explicitly depicted in the doctrine of *Creatio ex nihilo*.[5] The second section presents Robert Murray's works on the ecological crisis. Second, it will illustrate Murray's exposition of the Eternal Covenant between God and humanity in Syriac Christianity and dialogue between ecological and social issues. Third, it will compare similar concepts of al *Khalifa* in Islam and stewardship and *imago dei* in Christianity.[6] The third section will outline modern papal teachings on the environment, especially Pope John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis. It will conclude that God and human beings are not in competition: there are implications for humanity. Catholic and Islamic traditions hold creation sacred and believe that they have a special role and privilege. Therefore they should use their freedom in the most authentic and non-violent manner and in alignment with God's plan.

DAVID BURRELL

David Burrell CSC is a Catholic priest, and among the leading philosophical theologians in the English-speaking world.[7] Bernard Lonergan SJ, his guide and mentor, and Karl Rahner SJ's lecture interpreting Vatican II influenced and taught him about learning from great philosophers and theologians of the medieval period.[8] His scholarly work is in 'philosophical theology;' a sub-division of philosophy of religion, which is also considered a branch of theology.[9]

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with analytical theology, which stimulates inquiry into religious traditions, David Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (US: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993) P. 1; Also see David Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*: *Ibn Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (USA, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986) p. 2.

5   Although the focus is Islam and Christianity I will also refer to Judaism.

6   *Imago Dei is Latin* for the Christian Scriptural understanding of *'image* of God' and similarly in *Sufi* Islam. *Khalifa* is the Arabic term for God's vicegerent earth.

7   Dr David Burrell (b.1933) Professor of Comparative Theology and Theodore Hesburgh Professor Emeritus in Philosophy and Theology at the University of Notre Dame (1964–2007).

8   Karl Rahner's Lecture, '*Towards a Fundamental Interpretation of Vatican* II, (Boston, 1979) Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, p. ix.

9   Burrell, *op. cit.*, p. 2 , Also see Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Faiths*, p 1.

Burrell's knowledge of the Arabic language and the Qur'an aided him in his research on Thomas Aquinas' (1224 -1274) inter-religious perspective.[10] Burrell's comparative theology includes the theological consequence of the act of creation. He skilfully demonstrates how Aquinas' Mediterranean roots enabled him to encounter Islamic philosophy of Hellenistic inspiration, in order to determine how to present Christian thought in general and to assist his main task of presenting the possibility of *theologia as* a *scientia*.[11] Thus, Burrell realised that Aquinas' classical synthesis of Christian philosophical theology was already an inter-cultural achievement.[12]

Burrell's Works

Burrell's significant work in the Abrahamic traditions has been at the heart of his intellectual inquiries.[13] Burrell's personal and passionate commitment exemplify his brilliant language about God within the productive inter-religious dialogue of the medieval period. For Burrell, human beings face the challenge of widening their implicit horizons regarding what they deem to be ideal. He realised this through his experience of living and working among other cultures, in countries, such as, Bangladesh and Uganda. Burrell's passion of understanding other cultures enabled him to engage with, and learn about various cultural and ethnic groups.

Burrell has translated several books on Aquinas, Moses Maimonides (1135–1204), a Jewish Rabbi who was also immersed in Islamic culture, Ibn Sina also known as Avicenna (980-1037), Al Ghazali (1058

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10 Thomas Aquinas was a Dominican Priest, Theologian, Philosopher and Doctor of the Catholic Church See more online < http://www.iep.utm.edu/aquinas/#H2 > [Accessed 23.06.17].

11 Martin Poulsom, *The Dialectics of Creation*, *Creation and the Creator* in Edward Schillebeeckx and David Burrell, (UK: Bloomsbury T&T Clark), p. 7.

12 Georges Anawati, O.P,, a priest, theologian and scholar of Islam, who along with his community at the Institut Dominicain d'Etudes Orientales gave Burrell a perspective on the Abrahamic religions.

13 Christianity Judaism and Islam are all monotheistic religions. They believe in One God and the Islamic term for them is 'People of the Book'. Their theological traditions go back to the Prophet Abraham in the Old Testament. See Adam Dodds *The Abrahamic Faiths? Continuity And Discontinuity*, in *Christian and Islamic Doctrine* < http://www.thedivineconspiracy.org/Z5283H.pdf > [Accessed 23 . 06. 2017].

-1111), Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) and Ibn Rushd (1126-1198) known in the Latin West as Averroës, among other Muslim philosophers and scholars.[14] Burrell presents Aquinas' many references to Rabbi Moses Ben Maimonides and Ibn Sina as illustrations of their exchange of thoughts through reading works of each other. They collaborated to use classical theology to establish the doctrine of God, which presents divine transcendence.[15] In Burrell's view, Judaism, Islam and Christianity have many related goals. One of their goals was to claim the free creation of the universe also adapted the metaphysical wisdom of the Greeks to assert their connection between Creator and creation.[16] The joint motivation and effort to resolve the relation between God and humanity was effective and prolific. It is worth noting that Burrell refers to Sunni Islamic philosophers, who do not represent other schools of Islam in the contemporary Western world.[17]

Burrell believes that, people need to appreciate the vast metaphysical difference between God the creator of the universe and humanity. Burrell explores divine freedom and human freedom in the context of creation. He presents an integrated argument for the benefit of contemporary culture. Burrell is a gracious and constructively critical interlocutor as he does not impose his views, but rather allows readers to discover their own discerned paths.[18]

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14   *Al-Ghazali on the Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society,1993); *Al-Ghazali on Faith in Divine Unity and Trust in Divine Providence* [Book 35 of his *Ihya Ulum ad-Din*] (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2001); *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas; Original Peace, Restoring God's Creation*; *Freedom and Creation in the Three Traditions*, *Friendship and Ways to Truth* Notre Dame, 2000); *Faith and Freedom: An Interfaith Perspective*; Brazos Press (Grand Rapids MI) *When Faith and Reason Meet*, (Scranton University Press, 2009); *Learning to Trust in Freedom: Signs from Jewish, Christian and Muslim Traditions* (2010), *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology* (Blackwell, 2011).

15   Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, p. ix.

16   Burrell illustrates how Aristotle's metaphysics help Aquinas' understanding, See Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in the Three Traditions*, p128. *Also see, Friendship and Ways to Truth*, p. 197.

17   Ahmed depicts Modern Islam as the contemporary global Islamic trend that has a strong Saudi, Wahhabi and Salafi influence and rejects a pluralist vision , unlike the earlier Islam that was influenced by Sufism and diverse practices. See Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam?: The Importance of Being Islamic*, (Princeton University Press, 2015) ebook ISBN 9780691164182. pp. 514 - 541 p. 537.

18   Alain Epp Weaver, in his Symposium introduction of Burrell, see *A New Forum For Theology* in *Syndicate* ,Vol. 2, Issue 4, July/Aug (OR, USA: An Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2015) P. 2 -4, p. 2.

Contemporary Problem

Burrell believes that 'human freedom is one of the least understood features of our existence.'[19] Burrell maintains that the original Christian understanding of creation has changed over time owing to various factors. Although Christians confess their faith 'in God the Father, Creator of heaven and earth' (Chalcedon 451), creation has been cut off from Christianity theology and many Contemporary Christians in the West do not care about the created universe.[20] He argues that Instead of valuing creation as a gift, people disregard and exploit it. Burrell cites Robert Sokolowski, who explains that, Christianity's belief in the incarnation in Christ does not disregard the fact that God and the world are not in opposition, 'God does not destroy the natural necessities of things He becomes involved with. them.'[21] Therefore, Burrell sums up that creation comes first within Christian theology, because we believe in God as its Creator in our articulation of the creed. This deems to be true, as with the advancement of science and technology, most people in the West, exploit and utilise creation for their own benefits.

Burrell sees a need to distinguish God from human beings as he bemoans the fact that contemporary culture has not understood human freedom and this has become problematic for human understanding of God's creation.[22] Human beings should treat all creation with respect because all creation is God's creation. Rather, they are indifferent towards creation, so much so that they exploit and waste it. Burrell points out that there is an inclination in the West to pit freedom of creation against God. He refers to it as, the 'zero sum game,' to show that one party's game is inevitably the others loss and vice versa.[23] Burrell argues that the general tendency of philosophers is to assign God a place in the universe and treat Him as another person, but God

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19 Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, preface.
20 Burrell illustrates that Alfred Whithead's Process Theology is narrow that it has diminished God's power and weakened the perspective of creation. Some Christians have adopted this idea and do not see creation as important. See Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, p. 3.
21 Burrell, *Challenges in Contemporary Theology: Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology* (Uk: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), p. 9.
22 Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, preface.
23 Burrell, *ibid.*, p. 2.

is Divine and not just another person, as he is the creator, and without Him, humanity is nothing. Thus, if God had to leave human beings for a second, the human beings will die.

Burrell insists that Christianity is in great need of integrating its faith in God's created universe for the sake of a balance between creation and redemption. God's creation itself is God's initial gift, that humankind cannot understand creation apart from God's revelation.[24] Burrell urges contemporary historians, philosophers and theologians to learn from medieval scholars of the Abrahamic traditions, as he explains that Aquinas also sought help from scholars who were from cognate traditions. For Aquinas it did not matter that these philosophers were from different traditional practices because he was interested in addressing the central tenet of Jewish–Christian revelation.

Burrell illustrates how practical interfaith dialogue in the medieval philosophical theology between Muslims and Christians brought about the common confession of God's creating initiative. [25] The Doctrine of *Creatio ex nihilo* is the starting point of convergence among the Abrahamic traditions.[26]

Creatio Ex Nihilo

Creatio ex nihilo or creation from nothing is the fundamental and central doctrine for Judaism, Christianity and Islam.[27] The doctrine proclaims that first **'there was nothing and then there was something,'** it presents God as a free creator of the universe, a creation from absolutely nothing.[28] It illustrates that God is all-powerful as he made all things from nothing. However, some people would understand the

24 David Burrell and Elena Malits, *Original Peace : Restoring God's Creation*, (USA, Paulist Press, 1997), p 56.

25 *Ibid*., p. 115, Also see Martin Poulsom, *The Dialectics of Creation*, *Creation and the Creator* in Edward Schillebeeckx and David Burrell (UK: Bloomsbury T&T Clark), pp. 3-4.

26 Janet Soskice, points to Maimonides' claim that it is the only doctrine where the three faiths converge. 'Creation Ex Nihilo :Its Jewish and Christian Foundations', in *Creation and God of Abraham,* ed. David B Burrell, Carlo Cogliati, Janet M Soskice, and William R Stoeger, (UK Cambridge University Press, 2010). p. 24.

27 *Ibid*., p. 24.

28 Burrell, 'Freedom and Creation in three traditions', p. 7, 15; Also Burrell cites Ernan Mc Mullan in *Creation and the Abrahamic* …, p. 16.

doctrine of *Creatio ex nihilo* in a literal sense and misinterpret it as an absolute beginning of time. Islamic and Judeo-Christian Scriptures have a similar concept of creation, maintains Burrell, even though Jews and Catholics are less concerned about the literal interpretation of their Scripture. However, the issue arises when Christians believe that the moment God spoke in Genesis I, the world began. Islam, on the other hand forcefully proclaims that, when God spoke the absolute fiat word, the world began.[29] Moreover, Islam is less concerned about probing this complex philosophical question of *creatio ex nihilo*. For Gerhard May the doctrine proclaims, 'th*e* unconditioned nature of creation and specifies God's omnipotence as its sole ground.'[30] Burrell cautions that the doctrine developed later than the Biblical narrative. It was only in 1213 that the Fourth Lateran Council promulgated the doctrine of *Creatio ex nihilo* in order to defend the concept of the divinity and eternity of God, which can establish that the Creator and creation are distinct.

The above Doctrine is the theological formulation to show the distinction between the Creator and creation.[31] Christianity is not concerned with whether the universe began or not. It tries to understand whether time began or, whether it has always existed. Thus, the doctrine reinforces the concept of God's necessary existence, it also confirms that there can be nothing greater than God and finally God is the sole, self existent, self explanatory Being who, cannot not exist.[32] I think Burrell is right in explaining that the doctrine is a theological formulation, because human beings can only imagine things that exist in time and when trying to imagine God we can only imagine Him as existing in time. However, the question of how to illustrate the existence of God persisted.

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29 Christianity is rooted in the Jewish Scriptures and therefore Christians refer to the Hebrew Bible. *Ibid.*, and Thomas F Torrance. *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being, Three Persons,* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996) , p. 207.

30 Gerhard May, *Creation Ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of Creation Out of Nothing in the Early Christian Thought* (Edinburgh: T& T Clark , 1994), p. xi.

31 Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, p. 2.

32 Copan, Paul and Craig, William Lane, *Creation out of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical, and Scientific Exploration*. (USA, MI: Baker Academic, 2000). pp. 25-26.

Joint Endeavour

Burrell maintains that when Aquinas confronted the problem of relating the Creator to Creation set out to expound the doctrine of *Creatio ex nihilo.* He then sought the help of Maimonides, Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd that addressed the problem of the relationship between God and man.[33] What is striking is that Aquinas sought the help of 'the commentator ' Ibn Rushd (1126-1198) to interpret the Arabic version of *Liber de Causes, which is known as al Kitab* al-Khair or the book of Pure good, which was *Originally the philosophy* of Proclus.' Its structure made it possible for Proclus to show the causes of beings, something that Aquinas skilfully adapted for Christian thought.[34] Burrell explains that the Greek concept of origination was already prevailing as seen in Plotinus' expansion of Aristotle's matrix. Aristotle already developed the argument for the eternity of the world (Physics, I, 9; On the Heavens, I, 3) and the 'cause of being' by emanation from the primary cause, acceptable to both the Bible and the Qur'an.[35] However, Aquinas had to make adjustments as he could neither accept Aristotle's recommendations nor that of Plotinus who proposed God as 'a separate substance, a celestial body and sublunary matter were eternally existent, distinct, and that none caused the being of the other.'[36] Aquinas could not show the distinctiveness from the above theories of the Greeks, and so borrowed Al Farabi's method as well to formulate his own theory of emanation.

Emanation

However, there was doubt whether 'emanation from one could be free.' Al Farabi, (c 870- 951 AD), the polymath was greatly influenced by Aristotle. Al Farabi surprisingly influenced many Jewish and Christian philosophers, including Aquinas. Al Farabi used the method of logical deduction to model the emanation from one. He argued for God's

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33 Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, p. ix.
34 Burrell, cites Peter Adamson commentary and adaptation of Proclus. See Burrell , *Faith and Freedom*, p. xv.
35 Burrell *knowing the Unknowable God*, pp. 16, 28.
36 Copan and Craig, *Creation out of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical, and Scientific Exploration,* p. 25, 26.

act as necessary. According to Al Farabi, since God is the eternal being, and all forms and types of existents eternally coexist, and then their coming into existence eternally, he concluded therefore that the act of creation was a necessary act. He further explains that, God has brought all things into existence.[37] Burrell explains that Al Farabi's idea of emanation that God is the primary cause and the only created Being or *Esse* from which everything else proceeds and thus, the emanation theory enabled Aquinas to claim that all secondary creatures flow from the primary and immediate cause that is God.[38]

Burrell maintains that once Aquinas' strategy removed any mediating role from the concept of emanation.[39] Aquinas used his own philosophical knowledge and metaphysics skills to enquire instead of simply following the Hellenistic classification. As a result, he made a lapidary definition of 'the emanation of all of being from one primary or Singular cause of being;' All existents follow from God [40] However, Burrell also wants to point out that God creates out of his own freedom. He does not have to create, as Burrell further explores this theory of the Free Creator.

Divine Freedom

Burrell begins with the complex questions of divine and human freedom in which the starting point is the doctrine of God's free creation as opposed to necessity.[41] Burrell indicates that for Sokolowski, there is a need to for a clear distinction that will identify God. Sokolowski asserts, that 'creation can only be creation if God can be God without creating'.[42] This statement is crucial for understanding God, because if God is considered as God then no external motive or internal incentive can persuade God to create. He has the freedom

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37   Abu Nasr al-Farabi, *On The Perfect State: Mabadi Ara Ahl Al Madinat Al Fadilah*, Translated by Richard Walzer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) p. 88.
38   *Summa Theologiae* 45.2.2.
39   Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, p. 86–91.
40   Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, pp. 16, 28.
41   Burrell clearly outlines the co-operation of scholars from the Abrahamic faiths in the medieval period. See Burrell *Challenges in Contemporary Theology: 'Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology'*, (UK :Wiley Blackwell Publication, 2011).
42   Burrell, *ibid.*, cites Robert Sokolowski, p. 11.

to create and creates freely; God need not create, to prove that God is the only One from whom all things originate. Thus, Burrell clarifies that 'if creating adds nothing to God, who gains nothing by creating then the act of creating is gratuitous.[43] Thus, this is a faith assertion for Islam and Christians and separates them from unbelievers.

<center>*Human Freedom*</center>

All creation receives a gift of life from God the Creator. Burrell asserts that nothing short of a free creation can ground a free revelation and a free human response to God, who is creator.[44] This means that God has created humanity of His own free Will and therefore, God gives humanity the gift of freedom to respond.[45] Humanity is motivated to respond to God, it's Creator and prayer is a kind of response. Burrell states that prayer is a faith response and is evident in Christian and Islamic tradition prayers and thanksgiving. Burrell illustrates that God is so good that humanity is predestined to return to the goodness of God (*Summa Theologiae* 1.6.1.2).[46] These communities have received the gift of revelation, for Islam, the Qur'an guides Muslims to do the will of God, 'follow it and you will find life, ignore it and you will face the harrowing judgment.'[47] Catholics believe that Jesus shows them the way to the Father and the Gospels teaches them how to live good lives.[48] Moreover, Catholics believe that the grace of God saves them. Thus, Islam responds through *Shariah,* whilst Christianity responds through grace.[49] Their concept of God indicates a *manuductio*, and guides them towards an understanding of God. Humanity then

43   Burrell, *ibid,*, p 11.
44   Burrell cites his own work in *Freedom and Creation, Burrell, The Act of Creation : Theological Consequence in Creation and the God of Abraham*, p. 45.
45   Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, p. 63.
46   Burrell cites Aquinas' resolution of God's unfailing providential care for human freedom. See *Faith and Freedom*, p. 74.
47   *Faith and Freedom,*.p. 74.
48   *Ibid.*, p. 74.
49   Howard outlines the grace-law opposition in Islam and Christianity; He argues that as much as Islam and Christianity both are religions of Law and Grace. Howard understands that Christianity is a law-abiding religion too as the Canon Law incorporates the Mosaic Law. Islam in its ethical sense touches upon every area of life. See Damian Howard, 'Islam and Christianity: On Religions of Law', *Christian Muslim Relation, Vol 24, No 2,* (2013), pp. 173-189,

is not only motivated to respond to their creator, but also free to return the gift.

However, contemporary human beings have a different perspective of this freedom. Burrell complains that people in the twenty-first century do not use this gift of freedom to respond to their creator, but rather, equate freedom by choosing, without discerning the consequences of their action. Burrell argues that humanity should understand that it is part of the larger 'ecological' system.[50] However, humanity pits their freedom against their creator.

Contemporaries should learn from the medieval context of creation, which offers an alternative model that invites human beings to regard themselves as responders to their creator rather than initiators. As Burrell points out, humanity should realise iits privileged vocation on earth, not as simply to dominate, but must rather understand their vocation on earth as 'one of stewardship, seeking to return all that is, as best we can, to the One from whom everything freely comes'.[51]

The following section will serve as a fresh examination of the biblical teachings about the order of creation and the place of humankind in it, according to Dr Robert Murray.

Dr Robert Murray SJ

Dr Robert Murray (b.1925-) is a Jesuit Priest and former lecturer of Biblical Studies and Theology at Heythrop College. People recognise Murray for his extraordinarily wide interests and intellectual homilies. Murray's intellectual work in Syriac has made important contributions to Biblical scholarship and theological studies, as well as, inter-church and inter-religious relationships.

This dissertation will explore Murray's fascinating and engaging book, '*The Cosmic Covenant: Biblical Themes of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation.*'[52] In his dialogical book, Murray combines

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50 Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, p.155.

51 *Ibid*.

52 Robert Murray has author of many books and articles and especially known for '*Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition.*' Originally Published in 1975 (London*:* Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2006) and *The Cosmic Covenant: Biblical Themes of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation*, First ed. 1992

Biblical teachings on creation, ecological issues and the human imagination.[53]

Murray is not afraid to use sources outside his tradition to present a coherent vision of the Biblical world. He uses imagery and symbolism from the ancient world, in order to illustrate a fresh reading of various themes, through which Christians can find truth and value within the created world. Moreover, Murray explores writings, such as, 1Enoch, the *Mishnah* and that of Philo so that he can confirm Biblical texts and narratives. Murray also employs the ideas of early saints, mystics and scholars, such as Francis of Assisi and St Ephrem.[54] He points out that, St Ephrem praised God through his poetry and music. Both saints believed in the sacredness of God's creation and their spirituality revolved around creation. Murray insists that people, especially Christians should understand that nature, cosmos and society are important themes in the Bible and therefore calls for a reassessment of human relationship with creation.

The Ecological Crisis

In 1962, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* highlighted the dangerous effects of chemicals on the environment, which consequently accelerated a modern environmental movement and 'changed the world.'[55] It also gave a new impetus for many Christian churches to recognise the urgency and seriousness of the ecological crisis. Besides Islam, Lynn White is known as the strongest critique of Christianity.[56] In his essay, White charged Christianity with being the most anthropocentric religion and charged her for misreading Genesis I that caused the

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(NJ; Tigris Publication, 1992, 2007).

53   See Robert Murray, The Ethel M. Wood Lecture, Exegesis and Imagination. Delivered at the Senate House (London: University of London, 1988) See online < www.biblicalstudies.org,uk > [Accessed 22.08.2017].

54   Murray, *Cosmic Covenant*, p.73.

55   Rachel Louise Carson (1907–1964) was an American Scientist, Marine biologist, writer and ecologists of the twentieth century, She challenged the notion that humans could obtain mastery over nature by chemicals, bombs and space travel through her studies of ocean life.

56   Islam has always critiqued Christianity for corrupting their Scriptures. See Anthony O'Mahony, 'Islam Face to Face with Christianity', *The Way Supplement* (2001) 104, pp. 75-85 p. 77.

present ecological crisis.[57] He argued that by giving humankind 'dominion' over all other creatures, the Biblical text encouraged the development of technology, and as a result, human beings exploited nature for their own proper ends.[58] White was selective in blaming the misreading of Genesis. Nevertheless, his paper urges Biblical scholars and theologians to review their Scriptural teachings on creation.

Murray's Theology

Murray's 'eco-theology' partially agrees with White's charge that the Biblical interpretation of Christian Scriptures and Systematic Theology were responsible for the environmental problems. Murray believes that the standard Christian theology of creation is flawed. It fails to represent the scope and power of the Biblical teachings on creation.[59] Moreover, he regrets that owing to the misreading of scriptures, Christians have developed diverse views, in their relationship with all other creation.[60] Thus, it can be summed up the current ecological problems are partly a result of modern technological and economic systems that have disregarded the significance of creation.

For Murray, it is imperative that theologians and other scholars examine and re-consider Biblical teachings.[61] He points out that there is evidence of fragmentations in the Hebrew Bible. Murray maintains that firstly, this is because Biblical texts were composed centuries apart. [62] Secondly, the Hebrew Bible refers to events, rituals and practices of various geographical cultures, such as, Egyptians, Hittites and

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57   Murray, *Cosmic Covenant*, p. 161.

58   Lynn White, Jr, 'The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis' See article online < https://www.uvm.edu/~gflomenh/ENV-NGO-PA395/articles/Lynn-White. pd> [Accessed 6 .8. 2017].

59   Robert Murray, *The Ecologists*, Vol 30, No 1, January /February 2000 , pp. 25–29, p. 25 See online < http://exacteditions.theecologist.org/browsePages.do?issue =6121&size=3&pageLabel=25 > [Accessed 6 .8. 2017]; also see < http://www. bethmardutho.org/index.php/hugoye/volume-index/107.html > [Accessed 6 .8. 2017].

60   *Ibid.*, also see < http://www.bethmardutho.org/index.php/hugoye/volume- index/107.html > [Accessed 6 .8. 2017].

61   Robert Murray, *The Ecologists*, Vol 30, No 1, January /February 2000 , pp. 25–29, p. 25 See online < http://exacteditions.theecologist.org/browsePages.do?issue =6121&size=3&pageLabel=25 > > [Accessed 6 .8. 2017].

62   Murray, *Cosmic Covenant*, p. 68–69.

Babylonians.[63] However, these events are not comprehensive, due to the limited information about these ancient cultural practices. Murray therefore surveys the concept of the covenant, which he explores beyond the times of the prophets and investigates the ancient concept of covenant within the creation narrative in the Hebrew Bible.[64] Murray believes that understanding the Biblical world order, its conservation and restoration in religious texts of neighbouring cultures can enlighten theologians and other scholars about Christian ecological ethics.

Murray adds a new dimension to the Christian understanding of the Covenant.[65] Murray echoes the idea of the cosmic order of Ancient Israel and its neighbouring Ancient Near Eastern and Middle Eastern worlds.[66] The area that is core to the three of the world's major monotheists or Abrahamic religions emerged.[67] Although Christianity has roots in Judaism and follows the Hebrew Bible, Christianity does not regard the covenants in the same manner as Judaism, because Judaism and Christianity have very different concepts of the Biblical covenants. The Covenant is central to Judaism by contrast Christianity has disregarded the covenant. Murray believes that it is because of the understanding that 'it [the covenant] has not been identified in its own right.'[68] In Murray's opinion, Christianity should learn something from Ancient Near Eastern and Middle Eastern cultures. As seen earlier, it highlights Burrell's theology of the inter-connectedness and interaction between neighbouring cultures.

Murray acknowledges that Christian theology depends on the interpretation of their personal conversion and salvation through Jesus

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63   *Ibid*,, pp. 68 -69.
64   *Ibid*., p. 2.
65   Christians connect the covenant to prophets of the Hebrew Bible. God made two Covenants with Abraham. First was that the land of Canaan was to be given to his descendants (Gen. 15. 18–21), and all his male children had to be circumcised (Gen. 17.9-14) Moses and David. Each covenant indicates a milestone in Israel's religious history.
66   Lenzi explains how modern Middle East, Egypt and Modern Turkey are geographically known for their ancient civilization. See Alan Lenzi's article online <
http://bibleodyssey.org/en/tools/bible-basics/how-does-the-hebrew-bible-relate-to-the-ancient-near-eastern-world > [Accessed 6 .8. 2017].
67   *Ibid*. http://bibleodyssey.org/en/tools/bible-basics/how-does-the-hebrew-bible-relate-to-the-ancient-near-eastern-world > [Accessed 6 .8. 2017].
68   Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant* p. xvii.

Christ.[69] Christians view the possibilities of salvation only through their grace, which according to Murray is anthropocentric as it points to God the Saviour and man the saved.[70] Murray compares this narrow process and does not approve of it. He argues that although, it may have a rich theological concept, it disregards other creation and therefore it violates God's Covenant with humankind. Owing to the selfish attitudes of many people towards the earth, Murray laments that humanity is destroying God beautiful and fragile creation. Hence, Murray suggests that Christians should also consider the created world simultaneously, and not simply focus on their own salvation.[71] Murray further infers that Christians are oblivious of the Cosmic Covenant that God made with human beings in Genesis 9. God says, 'I confirm my covenant with you, and your descendants… and with every living creature (Gen. 9:8–11).[72]

Murray agrees that there are various covenant narratives in the Hebrew Bible where God promises His peace and care to all living creatures.[73] Murray claims that Christians are not aware that God has also made a Covenant with the whole of creation that corresponds to the Covenant of Sinai. Besides, the Cosmic Covenant or Covenant of Peace is also known as the Eternal Covenant, which illustrates that God's Covenant concerns every living creature and their descendents and therefore the covenant holds true for all generations. Murray reiterates that no other covenant is comparable to God's Cosmic Covenant, as it is distinct. [74] This shows that it is crucial for humankind to understand their significant and symbolic role in the cosmos. In the similar vein, John Chryssavgis states that the Sacred Covenant is the symbolic connection between humankind and the world and by disconnecting this world from heaven, humankind has in fact desacralised both.[75] Likewise, Howard points out that the concept of God's Covenant with humanity is similar in Islam; however, the idea is implicit. Howard

69   *Ibid*., p.164–165.
70   *Ibid*., p. 164.
71   *Ibid*., Murray, p 164.
72   Also see Gen. 9.8–11 see online < http://biblehub.com/nasb/genesis/9.htm > [Accessed 6 .8. 2017].
73   Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant*, p. xix.
74   Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant*, in *The Month*, p. 427.
75   *Cosmic Grace Humble Prayer: Ecological Vision of the Green Patriarch Bartholomew*, ed. John Chryssavgis (Grand Rapids, MI–Cambridge, William B. Eerdmans. UK 2009).

suggests, that Islam takes God's *fiqh*, (interpretation of sharia revealed in the Qur'an and Sunnah by Islamic scholars) is taken seriously.[76]

Howard states that Islam understands that God made a covenant with human beings to follow this law even before they are born and according to Islam, human beings are bound to this agreement with God on the 'Day of *Alastu*' (Q 7.172).[77] While the Islamic concept of the divine covenant may differ from Christianity, nonetheless it can contribute to the understanding of respect for other creation. To sum up, Murray wants contemporary Christians to realise that God's made the Eternal Covenant with all human beings and should be understood as parallel to other covenants in the Bible.[78] Murray's exploration of the covenants is practical for the current ecological problem of the planet. He also presents the Syriac traditions of St Ephrem, to interpret themes of Hebrew Bible.

St Ephrem (306–373 AD)

St Ephrem was born in Nisibis in Mesopotamia, which lies in modern Turkey. Jacob of Sarug (c. 451 – 521) commemorates Ephrem as a great theologian, musician and orator and composer.[79] Murray acclaims Ephrem as 'the greatest poet of the patristic age perhaps, the only theologian-poet to rank beside Dante.'[80] Ephrem is highly esteemed in the Syriac tradition. Moreover, he is Deacon and Doctor of the Catholic Church.[81]

Murray explores the writings of St Ephrem for three reasons. First, Syriac traditions and fundamental principles are closer to those of the

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76 Damian Howard, 'Islam and Christianity: On Religions of Law', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol 24, No. 2 (London: Routledge Publication, 2013) pp. 173-189 p. 175.

77 *Ibid.*, p. 175.

78 See Covenant in Exodus < https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus+24&version=CEB> [Accessed 6 .8. 2017].

79 Jacob of Sarug or Mar Jacob (ca. 521) known as the flute (or even Harp) of the Holy Spirit was second to St. Ephrem. see online < http://syri.ac/jacobofsarug#footnote1_6yz4r0i> [Accessed 6 .8. 2017].

80 Walsh cites Robert Murray in *The Way*. See James Walsh SJ, 'Divine Call and Human Response: The Syriac Tradition: St Ephrem 1', *The Way*, pp. 228-233 see online < http://www.theway.org.uk/Back/20Walsh1.pdf> [Accessed 6 .8. 2017].

81 He was made Doctor of the Church by Pope Benedict XV (1920), *Ibid.*, Walsh.

Hebrew Bible, which are crucial for contemporary human understanding of how Scripture relates to nature.[82] Second, Ephrem's theology assimilates imagery, symbols and poems.[83] Ephrem's style of religious discourse was contemplative and based on detailed analysis of the Scriptures that clearly interprets mystical *raza* or revelatory symbols of Christ.[84] Murray states that Ephrem believed that, for people of faith, the hidden reality of God was symbolically present in creation. However, Ephraim stipulates that they are meaningful only to those who believe in them.[85] Third, Murray believes that there are no explicit doctrines of human duties relating to the environment or fellow creatures and theology has a serious task of correcting humanity's relationship with their fellow creatures.[86] Thus, Murray finds Ephrem's methods such as the use of imagery, symbolism and art to interpret the Biblical narratives, useful for teaching Biblical ethics to the present generation.

According to Murray, Contemporary Western human beings have a confused notion of being made in the image of God. They tend to identify with God and believe that they have a semi-divine status, with rights and freedom to behave and act in the manner they prefer without discerning whether it is right or wrong. Murray warns, that 'you [human beings] have no right to exploit or destroy, but you have duties to all, under God to whom you are responsible.'[87] Justice is the right relationship among all created order of things, as all humans are related and they are fellow-creatures of everything else in the cosmos.

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82   Murray. Cf *The Way*, Vol 20, Nos 1 and 2 (January and April, 1980), pp 67-76 , 148-57.

83   *Hymns to Faith*, 42, 1t-12: trans. R. Murray, art. cit., pp 30-31.

84   Murray cites Griffith, *Faith Adoring the Mystery* …, p. 8.

85   Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St Ephrem*, (Kalamazoo, 1992), p. 162.

86   See Murray's article 'The Ephremic Tradition and the Theology of the Environment', *Journal of Syriac Studies @* 1999, [2010] online < http://www.bethmardutho.org/index.php/hugoye/volume-index/107.html> [Accessed 6 .8. 2017]; Also see Margaret Barker, *The Everlasting Covenant Between God and Every Living Creature*. See online <http://ecocongregationireland.com/wp-content/uploads/The-Everlasting-Covenant-Margaret-Barker-DD.pdf> [Accessed 6 .8. 2017].

87   See Murray's article 'The Ephremic Traditions' online <http://www.bethmardutho.org/index.php/hugoye/volume-index/107.html > [Accessed 6 .8. 2017]

Tsedeq *and* Tsedaqa *(Justice and Righteousness)*

Similar to Pope John Paul II and Francis, Murray is a great defender justice and peace. He regrets that justice and peace, which are key characteristics, of the covenant have disappeared over time.[88] Murray wants Christians to understand the profound meaning of these themes in Hebrew so that they can relate to the environment responsibly. He starts by interpreting the Hebrew themes of *tsedeq* and *tsedaqa* that appear frequently in the Hebrew Bible.[89] *Tsedeq* and *tsedaqa* are frequently interchangeable terms in the Hebrew Bible.[90] They are interpreted as God's justice and righteousness and additionally be understood as *shalom*, which means peace and benevolence or can even be understood as wholeness, the kind of wholeness that includes everybody, every other non human creation. *Tsedeq* and *tsedaqa* can mean many things from just claims to individual rights. Murray explains that it is not some kind of retributive justice, which is concerned with punishing people for their wrongdoing. Rather, it is about what is right and just, or an equal or fair treatment of every person. For example, the Pauline doctrine views Abraham as a righteous man in the eyes of God. (Gen 15:6) Murray explains if a righteous person humbly does the will of God, then he is just. For Murray, these qualities are qualities of a good king and therefore, they are qualities of God.

Murray states that God is the supremely wise, powerful and good King. God 'has created the world as an ordered cosmos reflecting His goodness,' which he finally entrusted to humankind so that they can act as his representatives. Moreover, Philo, the Jew of Alexandria, recognised the metaphor of God as king.[91] This illustrates that from ancient times

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88   Robert Murray, 'The Relationship of Creatures within the Cosmic Covenant', *The Month*, November 1990, p. 425. Also see *The Month* CCXLIX Nos. 1148 -9 (Aug Sept 1988), pp. 798-803.

89   The Hebrew words *Tsedeq* and *tsedaqah* are found in the Dead Sea Scrolls and provide a foundation for comparing the concepts of righteousness, 'vindicate', to 'justify' the same as *diokaiosyné* and *dikaios* in Greek. See Murray, *Cosmic Covenant,* p. 168-169 < https://www.logosapostolic.org/hebrew-word-studies/6664-tsedeq-righteousness.htm > [Accessed 6 .8. 2017].

90   Murray, *Cosmic Covenant*, p. 73, Also see Hebrew meaning online < https://www.logosapostolic.org/hebrew-word-studies/6664-tsedeq-righteousness.htm> [Accessed 6 .8. 2017].

91   *Ibid.*, < https://www.logosapostolic.org/hebrew-word-studies/6664-tsedeq-righteousness.htm> [Accessed 6 .8. 2017].

people have been comparing God to a king. Hence, one can assume that the metaphor of God as King has always existed.

Murray further maintains that although Gen 1 has developed since, the original theme, the core concept of kingship is still implicit in Christian theology, while human beings still enjoy their kingly role. Therefore, human beings should behave in a manner that is acceptable to God who is 'a Just and Wise King'. They should imitate God and govern the earth with peace justice and righteousness and with a vision of moral order, which reflects His order, because Christians believe that they are made in God's image.

Imago Dei

For Murray the Jewish concept of the 'image,' as understood and reflected in First Temple liturgies, informed the very concept of the royal aspect of God's image. Murray maintains that St Ephrem, among other Antiochene and Syriac writers understood that the Genesis narratives were symbolic.[92] For example, the mimetic model of the word 'likeness' can also be understood as 'image,' and is commonly interrelated in Western Christian theology. How might the Syriac tradition understand this concept?

Once again, Murray expounds the Hebrew lexicon of Genesis 1:26-28, in order to present a proper interpretation and understanding of the vocabulary used in the Hebrew Bible. In Genesis 1:26-27, God created humankind, or as we know him as *adam* in God's own image (Gen 1:27) God then blessed human beings and told them to multiply and fill the earth, to subdue it and also gave them authority to 'rule over every living creature' that moves within the sea, on the ground and in the air. (Gen 1:26 -28)

While indicating the above passage, Murray specifically points out, that Syriac writers understood 'image' as a metaphor. This indicates that human beings are created in the image of God and are made viceroys of God, when God endowed them with authority over all other creation (Gen 1:26 -28). Murray points out that according to

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92   St Ephrem the Syrian composed deep theological hymns and biblical commentaries in order to help Christians understand their faith. < https://www. thoughtco.com/saint-ephrem-syrian-deacon-542862 > [Accessed 6 .8. 2017].

Ephrem and the Fathers, the writers of Genesis may have tried to regard humanity in the physical 'Image' of God and considered likeness in the *ruah or* 'breath' of God. Correspondingly, Richard Middleton, Professor of Biblical Worldview, indicates that YHWH breathed into the moulded form of *adamah,* which is earth, as God moulded earth to form *adam* and the Breath of God put life into *adam* and made him a living creature.[93] Murray also claims that, because adam represents all of humankind in the creation narrative, it is not a proper name. Furthermore, Middleton, in a similar manner to Murray, confirms that it is only later in the paradise narrative that people considered 'Adam' as a proper name.[94] In Genesis 1, the earth is called *Adamah*, as he is made out of the earth itself, this idea is similar to the idea of creation of human beings in Islam. James Walsh SJ confirms that Ephrem shares the same *point de depart* or anthropological starting point with Islam, as he wrote three centuries before the emergence of Islam.

Murray then questions the meaning of what it is to be made in the 'image and likeness' of God. 'Does it mean, the transcendent King confers on his creature humankind (adam) the dignity of existing in his image and likeness.'(Gen 1:26-27) [95] Christians universally conform to the theologically expression of 'image' *Selem* as the 'likeness' *dmut* of God, because of its spiritual and intellectual truth.[96]

However, according to Middleton, the Hebrew Bible mentions *Beselem Elohim,* which in Hebrew means the image of God is only mentioned in three events in Gen 1:26-28; when describing the image of God 1:26-27; 5:1 and 9:6.[97] Middleton further explains that in Hebrew, the word *selem* has different meanings and sometimes understood as 'shadow', 'phantom', 'dream' and 'image.'[98] Yet, there

93 See Richard J Middleton, *The Liberating Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (USA Brazos Press, 2005)p. 45 , These references are found in the section of Genesis (chapters 1-11) known as the 'primeval history' in literary strands typically assigned to the priestly writer. Cf. Middleton's article, 'The Liberating Image? *Imago Dei* in context'. *Christian Scholars Review* 24.1 (1994), pp. 8-25. Also see , *The Anchor Yale Bible*, Genesis, Intro., Trans. & notes by Ephraim Avigdor Speiser (London and New York, Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

94 http://www.bethmardutho.org/index.php/hugoye/volume-index/107.html > [Accessed 6 .8. 2017].

95 Murray, *Cosmic Covenant*, p. 98.

96 *Ibid*., < http://www.bethmardutho.org/index.php/hugoye/volume-index/107. html [Accessed 6 .8. 2017].

97 See Richard J Middleton, 'The Liberating Imago Dei in Genesis 1', p. 45-46,

98 *Ibid*., pp. 45-46, This move is also apparent in the Greek translation of *eikon* and

seems to be a completely different meaning at other times. *Selem* is occasionally understood as a physical form of a concrete 'statue' or 'copy,' which perhaps may be considered as appearance, or even pretence. Therefore, image is conceived as something in between solid and guise or rather understood as 'image' or 'form.'[99] However, this idea becomes more complex because if *selem* means image, then how can we understand the context of *dmut* as likeness. These various references make the concepts of *selem* and *dmut* very confusing to interpret. Thus, the image and likeness phrase becomes more and more complex and for this reason, it is natural that Biblical scholars frequently relate the human image to divinity.

Middleton states that additionally, *dmut* may show a relationship between two similar things. For example*, Gen 5:3, uses dmut* to compare Seth's relationship to his father Adam.[100] Clause Westermann elaborates on this idea in his detailed study on the meaning of the image and likeness of God to prove this concept. For Westermann employs likeness to compare two similar things, or that that are alike in appearance or form.[101] However, Westermann notes that these questions and issues can only point out to the more fundamental and main concern of God. He states that it points to the purpose of God as he questions, why would God decide to create humanity in His own Image?[102] He then states that 'both the decision and the specification indicate that the creator God decides to create something that is his own personal concern.'[103] Westermann's thesis makes sense, as the writers of Genesis must have tried to link this question to the act of God, in order to identify with God's reason for creating the human being to act as his representative on Earth.

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in the Latin *imago*. Also see D J A Clines, 'The Etymology of Hebrew *Selem*', *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*, 3(1974) p. 23.

99   *Ibid*., pp. 45-46.

100 *Ibid*., p. 45.

101 See Claus Westermann, Genesis 1-11:A Commentary, trans. John J Scullion (London: SPCK, 1984), p. 146.

102 *Ibid*., p. 155.

103 *Ibid*., p. 156.

Christians identify humankind as God's representative on Earth, Murray calls attention to the words 'dominion' and 'subdue.' Murray agrees that in the past, Christians mis-interpreted the certain words. He does not refute serious and substantial theological arguments concerning the interpretation of Biblical narratives of creation. However, he is not pleased that Genesis 1 has been 'demythologised' and altered.

Murray argues that in Genesis 1:28 God entrusts humanity with 'dominion' over other creatures (Genesis 1: 1-24). 'Dominion' and 'subdue,' lost their original meaning translated from Hebrew to Latin and European languages. Consequently, Western Christianity used their own interpretation to justify their irresponsible act of destruction of God's creation.[104]

Murray clarifies that according to Ephrem, when God bestows humanity with *shultana* or authority over all creation, which is a special role and task.[105] Murray explains that God said:

> Let us make man in our *image,* 'that is to say, endowed with authority (*shallit*) to the point that if it seems good to him (*en neshpar leh*) he will obey us.'[106]

Murray reiterates earlier commentaries of Ephrem, according to Ephrem, God gave freewill to human beings along with authority. I understand that this has implications for human beings; the responsibility to do what is pleasing to God because although God has given humanity a special role, God still regards humanity as part of creation and creation belongs to God and not to humanity. God still has complete authority over all creation. Human beings represents God's *neshltun or* authority and in this case it means that God has given humanity the responsibility to care 'over [for] the fish of the sea and the birds, the cattle and all the

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104 See Murray online < http://www.bethmardutho.org/index.php/hugoye/volume-index/107.html > Accessed 6 .8. 2017].

105 See Murray's translation in his article online < http://www.bethmardutho.org/index.php/hugoye/volume-index/107.html > [Accessed 6 .8. 2017].

106 *Ibid.*, '*The Ephremic Tradition and the Theology of the Environment*, Hug 2.1 (1999): par. 6 online < http://www.bethmardutho.org/index.php/hugoye/volume-index/107.html > [Accessed 6 .8. 2017].

earth.'[107] However, this special role of stewardship contradicts the secular contemporary concept that humanity owns the world. Murray argues that God has made humankind his stewards or 'viceroy' and thereby shows that God has entrusted the world to humanity so that they can act as His representatives and care for His creation, however, ultimately, humanity is answerable to God.[108] This shows that humankind only has the trusteeship of creation, which means they are responsible for their actions in the manner in which they exercise the trust that God has placed in them. In the twenty firsts Century, stewardship has to be exercised, especially, concerning their relationship to the ecological and environmental concerns. Hence, concept of stewardship provides a theoretical foundation for Christians to show that they are responsible for God's creation.

Humanum in Islamic Thought

Howard maintains that unlike Christianity, in Islam, the Qur'anic vocabulary demonstrates a clear opposition between 'man' and 'God.'[109] Howard is of the opinion that the Qur'an, does not give humankind any ontological privilege or '*imago dei' topos*.[110] Howard uses the Latin term human to describe humankind in the Quran. He points out that the Qur'an clearly states that *humanum* is created from baked clay (Quran 23:12-14) and created in a process that occurs in a 'secure receptacle' when God breathed His *Ruh* or Spirit into the human creature (Q15:29, Q38:72).[111] Howard maintains that until God put His Spirit into *humanum,* the human creature had no *nafs* or soul. However, Howard further clarifies that two *Sunni* Islamic *hadiths* explicitly states

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107 Robert Murray, SJ, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press 1975). P. 89.

108 Murray, 'The Image of God: Delegated and Responsible Authority', *Priests and People*, 14, (2000) pp. 49-54, pp. 50-51 ;Cf *The Way*, Vol 20, Nos 1 and 2 (January and April, 1980), pp 67-76 , 148-57.

109 Howard shows how human being are subordinate to God *Being Human in Islam, The impact of the Evolutionary Worldview. Culture and Civilisation in the Middle East*, (Routledge, 2011), pp. 26-36.

110 Damian Howard, *Being Human in Islam, The impact of the Evolutionary Worldview. Culture and Civilisation in the Middle*, p. 23.

111 *Humanum* in Latin for human beings, *humanum* is an Interreligious Colloquium on the Complementarity of Man and Woman.

that man is made in the image of God. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhari* narrates that 'God created Adam in His form or Image', and *Isti'dhan* states that 'the Son of Adam was created in the form of the Merciful One.'[112] Howard cautions here as he points out that throughout the Quran several passages seem to question the anthropomorphism or God's likeness to *humanam*.[113] Howard clearly demonstrates the difference in the concepts of the Christian understanding and Islamic understanding of Human beings. In effect, the Qur'an guides human actions, as it clearly demonstrates that God is distinct from humankind and for this reason Islam does not explicitly acknowledge human beings as *imago Dei*. Moreover, although there are similarities between Islam and Christianity, due to Islam's strict monotheistic nature, it is difficult to see parity between the two traditions.[114]

Al Khalifa

The Islamic concept of *al Khalifa* or vice-gerent is similar to that of Christian stewardship. *Al khalifa* is a representative of a supreme ruler of a state and is responsible for a specific area in an empire. For Islam, God declared His intention to create on the earth as His *khalifa*, or vice-gerent (*Surah Al Baqara* 2:35*)*.[115] As seen in Christianity, so in Islam *Allah* made human beings his representatives and trustees of His Kingship, so that they represent God's rule on earth. God bestowed humankind with *al-amanah* or 'the trust,' which is the gift of creation (*Qur'an* 33:72).[116] Islam believes that Man occupies the apex of God's creation and therefore God has bestowed him with trusteeship and stewardship of the bounties of the earth, of everything found over and beneath it.[117] The revealed Qur'an guides people through the *Sunna*

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112 Bukhari, *Isti'dhan*,1 ; Muslim, Birr, 115.

113 See Howard, *Being Human in Islam, The impact of the Evolutionary Worldview*. p. 23.

114 James Walsh SJ, pp. 228-233.p. 228, http://www.theway.org.uk/Back/20Walsh1. pdf > [Accessed 6 .8. 2017].

115 See also Qur'an 6:165 and 35:39.

116 See, Mohammad Ali Shomali,'*Aspects of Environmental Ethics: An Islamic Perspective,' Thinking Faith*, 11 November 2008, online < http://www.thinkingfaith.org/ articles/20081111_1.htm > [Accessed 12. 08.2017].

117 See joint declaration by Muslims in the US, *Al Khalifa* (*The Steward): What Every Muslim Needs to Know about His Role in Environmental Governance*. (Reprint 2007) P. 8 online < http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pnadl915.pdf [Accessed 12. 08.2017].

and *Shariah,* which are teachings and rules of what, is *halal (what is good)* and *haram* (what is evil and should be avoided) in this way the Qur'an helps Muslims to uphold their responsibilities as *khalifa* of the whole of creation and submit to the Will of God.[118] James Walsh SJ refers to Salaminius Hermias Sozomen, the ecclesiastical historian, who describes Islamic law as their understanding of God's Law. For Sozomen, Islam is not only strictly monotheistic and social, but also dominant in the manner that of its response to God. This demonstrates that human beings are capable of doing the will of God.

Murray asserts that there is no alternative but to change our whole perspective as the present outlook does not fully draw upon the relationship between humanity and the Divine, and correspondingly, between humanity and nature as a spiritual reality. Murray calls for *metanoia* that 'every person living on this planet' to change their ways and to live simple lives.[119]

MODERN PAPAL THOUGHT ON ECOLOGY

Has humankind forgotten that they are only trustees or stewards of the Universe, and that the universe belongs to God, the Creator?

This section will summarise the ecological crises and present modern papal thought on creation, illustrating the Second Vatican Council's recognition of impact of the environmental crisis on the wider society and its subsequent teachings on ecology. It will survey the works of Modern popes such as John Paul II's message on the World Day of Peace (1990), Benedict XVI's teachings in *Carita*s *in Veritate* and Pope Francis' *Laudato Si.*

The Columban priest and missionary, Sean Mc Donagh observed, 'it is a fact of recent history that the Church has been slow to recognise the gravity of the ecological problems of the earth.'[120] However, post Vatican II, Church teachings on the environment gained momentum and the concerns for ecological crises and its victims deepened and

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118 See Walsh's article online < http://www.theway.org.uk/Back/20Walsh1.pdf> [Accessed 12. 08.2017].

119 Daniel Castillo, 'Integral Ecology as Liberationist Concept', *Theological Studies* Vol. 77 (2) (2016) pp.353–376, p 353.

120 Sean Mc Donagh, *The Greening of the Church*, (MaryKnoll, NY: Orbis, 1990), pp. 175-76.

expanded. Papal documents, the Episcopal Conferences,' pastoral letters and other related documents were significant in responding to the pressing environmental and ecological crises.[121]

Concern for the Environment Post Vatican II (1962-1965)

Vatican II laid the foundations for the teaching on environmental issues that affected not only humanity but also the rest of creation.[122] St Pope John XXIII wanted to modernise the Church's relationship with the world calling for solidarity within the human family in the context of the increasing gap between the rich and poor. He laid the foundations even before the council began and urged governments to help the poor. He wrote, 'it is impossible for wealthy nations to look with indifference upon the hunger, misery and poverty of other nations' (*Mater et Magistra,* 1961, 157). For John XXIII, it is unfair that social injustice should affect poor people who are unable to enjoy their basic human rights. Thus, he called on rich nations to help poor nations and stressed equality, solidarity and the Common Good. Vatican II outlined that Lumen *Gentium's and Gaudium et Spes* were the foundational documents of the Vatican II Council that guided the Christian community.[123] *Gaudium et Spes* reflects Catholic theological position on the environment, when it declares, 'the joy and hope, the grief and anguish' of the people, especially the poor and the afflicted … are the joy and hope of the followers of Christ in *(Gaudium et Spes, 1965, §1).* Christian Community is guided by the Spirit 'who fills the earth*, (GS § 11) 'God pronounced all creation as 'very good' (GS § 12)* Thus, Vatican II increased the momentum of social, environmental and ecological matters of the globe.

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121 John Flannery, 'Catholic Concerns for the Environment', in *A Catholic Shi'a Dialogue: Ethics in Today's Society*. p. 105-128 p. 106; John McCarthy SJ, 'Catholic Teaching and Ecology Fact Sheet', see <http://www.ecojesuit.com/wp–content/uploads/2011/06/CST_ENG.pdf >[Accessed 17 .06. 2017].

122 Flannery, 'Catholic Concerns for the Environment', p. 105 and Flannery gives details in footnote 2 and 3.

123 *Ibid*., pp. 105–107.

Paul VI (1963-1978)

Paul VI continued in the Spirit of Vatican II and reiterated the Council's teachings on the environment as he addressed various issues concerning justice in the world.[124] Paul VI reminded Christians that it was their duty to serve others as they belong to the Church, who had declared herself as servant of humanity. He taught that, 'Jesus came not to be served, but to serve' (*GS* § 3).[125] Pope Francis recently praised Paul VI's encyclical on the progress of people (*Populorum Progressio* 1967) for its 'felicitous' explanation of integral 'development of each man and of the whole person' (*PP* §21, §14).[126] Paul VI referred to the ecological concern as 'a tragic consequence' of unchecked human activity, which had become a wide-ranging social concern that affected the whole human family.[127] Paul VI wrote that, 'God intended the earth and everything in it for the use of all human beings' (*PP* § 22), we therefore need to share what we have with the poor as all that is created should be divided equally among everybody. Thus, he argued that governments should not separate economics from human realities, nor development from civilizations as every person should be included in the human community.[128] He addressed environmental issues in the context of human development and maintained that if the earth was created to bestow on man the necessities of life and tools for progress, then 'every person has the right to glean, what he or she needs from the earth.'[129] Paul VI warned that through an ill-considered exploitation of nature, human beings risk destroying nature and in turn, they themselves become victims of degradation.[130]

Paul VI's key message was that people should care for creation as

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124 Flannery, 'Catholic Concerns for the Environment', p. 107; John McCarthy SJ, 'Catholic Teaching and Ecology Fact Sheet', see <http://www.ecojesuit.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/CST_ENG.pdf > [Accessed 17.06. 2017].

125 Paul VI's Closing address of the Vatican Council. See online https://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1965/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19651207_epilogo-concilio.html.

126 See Pope Francis address on the 50th Anniversary *of Populorum* https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/april/documents/papa-francesco_20170404_convegno-populorum-progressio.html[Accessed 17.06. 2017].

127 Pope Francis cites Pope Paul in *Laudato Si* No 4.

128 See *Populorum Progressio* No 14.

129 Flannery, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

130 Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), no.20, 21.

'everything that God created was good' (Gen 1:31). At the Stockholm Conference (1972) he approved the theme, 'One Earth' and highlighted the uncertainty and repercussions of science and technology.[131] This point has been reiterated by John Paul II in the social doctrine of the Church, as well as, by Benedict XVI and by Francis in *Laudato Si (LS* § 4). Paul VI warns that despite its advancement, atomic, chemical and bacteriological weapons pose a danger to plants and animals, as well as to humanity.[132] Human beings should aim to become better persons, rather than to possess more, as only then; can humanity and nature restore a harmony.[133] Paul VI believed that human beings are connected to their environment.

John Paul II (1978-2005)

Throughout his pontificate that lasted for 28 years, John Paul II carried out the Church's responsibility of 'reading the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel' (*GS* § 4). Very early in his pontificate, he acknowledged humanity's 'lack of respect for nature' and was aware of technical development, its exploitation of the earth's resources and its impact on the environment (World Day of Peace, 1990, No1). John Paul II contributed enormously to the promotion of a sound ecology by reminding people of their vocation and responsibility (*Redemptor Hominis*, 1979 § 16). He considered the ecological crisis as a profound 'moral' crisis (John Paul II 1990). He warned people about their moral and ethical values, duties and common responsibility as human beings towards other creation and their Creator.

Many of John Paul II's writings were completely devoted to the environment. On reflecting on the environment, he exhorts Catholics to live in harmony with ecology. He urged all human beings to use the

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131 See online <http://faculty.theo.mu.edu/schaefer/ChurchonEcologicalDegradation/documents/AHospitableEarthforFutureGenerations.pdf< [Accessed 22.08.2017].

132 See online <https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html< [Accessed 22.08.2017].

133 Paul VI address at the last General Meeting of the Second Vatican Council. See online <https://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1965/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19651207_epilogo-concilio.html< [Accessed 22.08.2017].

earth's resources with integrity, as they were limited. He reminds people that the cycles of nature should be considered and respected, especially when planning for any kind of development (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 1987, § 26) He cautions that the 'modern problem' has accentuated the 'ecological crises' and therefore insists that people recognise their human vocation and participate responsibly in God's creation.[134] John Paul II further warned that, care for the environment was not an option, but a responsibility that is integral to humanity and society.[135]

John Paul II maintained that when God gave the earth to humanity and was said to 'subdue it' (*Redemptor Hominis,* 16), it means that humanity should share in God's 'kingship', the kingly function of Christ himself. John Paul II explained, that 'kingship' and 'dominion' of man over the world, has a significant meaning. It means that human beings were given a task and this tasks consists of the priority of ethics over technology and the priority of people over things, which is also the superiority of spirit over matter. (*RH,* § 16) John Paul II recommends that people should change their concept of kingship and dominion into kinship, stewardship and deep concern for, and appreciation of, the environment.

During John Paul II's pontificate, he continuously reminds Christians that an essential part of their faith is their responsibility towards creation and their Creator. This obligation of caring for the environment appeared on the agenda of the ecumenical and interfaith dialogue at the World Day of Peace in 1990 and in his message to the Earth Summit (1992). He condemned human recklessness towards creation as a moral problem and called for a socially just and religiously inspired ecology.[136] John Paul II asserts, that 'it is the Creator's will, that humans should treat nature not as a ruthless exploiter, but as an intelligent and responsible administrator' (World day of peace, 1990, 7).[137] Human beings should understand that without the environment or created world, it is impossible for them or the future generations

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134 John Paul II, *The Ecological Crises: A Common Responsibility* .' Vatican City January, 1, 1990 Speech on the World Day of Peace, in 1990 , 'Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation,'

135 No. 12 see online < https://w2.vatican.va/content/john–paul–ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp–ii_mes_19891208_xxiii–world–day–for–peace.html > [Accessed 17.06. 2017].

136 *Ibid.*, No. 6.

137 *Ecclesia* in Asia # 41.

to survive, a point made by Francis *in Laudato Si*. Thus, it is crucial that they care for creation as they would care for their own selves not only in view of the present but also with a view to future generations.

Benedict XVI (2005-2013)

Known to many as the 'Green Pope', Benedict XVI became increasingly vocal in his concern for the environment and climate change. He denounced world leaders for not doing more to halt the climate change and not agreeing to a new Climate Change treaty. Benedict appealed to the international community to solve the energy problem as he urged, 'If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation,'[138] He believed that, the international community was obligated to seek 'institutional means of regulating the exploitation of non-renewable resources, involving poor countries in the process, in order to plan together for the future' (*Caritas in Veritate'* § 49).

At the inaugural mass of his pontificate in 2005, Benedict XVI observed that 'the external deserts in the world are growing because the internal deserts have become so vast.'[139] Benedict XVI echoed Seyyed Hossein Nasr, who pointed out decades ago that the external crisis is the symptom of the internal malaise, as Nasr put it, 'The blight destitution wrought upon the environment is in reality an externalisation of the destitution of the of the inner state of the soul.[140] This shows that Benedict XVI saw the ecological crisis as the deeper crises within the souls of human beings.

Benedict XVI wanted to make a difference to the climate cause and therefore, installed photovoltaic cells on the roofs of the Paul VI auditorium in the Vatican to convert sunlight into electricity, and as a result, the Vatican became the World's only carbon neutral state.[141] Benedict XVI followed in the footsteps of John Paul II, whose concept

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138 https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/ hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliii-world-day-peace.html> [Accessed 17.06.2017].
139 Kureethadam cites Andrea Cohen –Kiener, See Jostrom Kureethadam, *Creation in Crisis : Science, Ethics, Theology* (New York, Orbis Books, 2014) p. 288.
140 Kureethadam cites Nasr, *ibid.*, p. 288.
141 See Catholic Chaplain and Author Anna Nusbaum Keating article online <https://magazine.nd.edu/news/parting-glance-at-cardinal-joseph-ratzinger/ > > [Accessed 17.06. 2017].

of solidarity, springs from the profound conviction that 'we are all responsible for all. (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, 1987,* § 38), Benedict XVI defined solidarity as sense of responsibility on the part of everyone and with regard to everyone. (Caritas *in Veritate*, 2009, § 38) He argues that all human beings have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole. He states that human beings should respect the environment and use it responsibly to satisfy legitimate needs, rather than exploit nature. Jame Schaefer points out that Benedict XVI reminded younger generations about caring for the future of the environment at the Church's first 'eco friendly' rally.[142] By this gesture, he links the youth with the responsibility of the future as well as urges world leaders to endeavour to 'save the planet before it is too late.' [143] Although Benedict XVI has seen the importance of the natural environment, he warns about the dangers of making nature more important than human beings, since there is a possibility of it leading towards neo–paganism or neo–pantheism.[144] Additionally, he condemns biocentrism, which gives priority to other living things rather than human beings and argues that there has to be a balance between humanity and the universe as both are essential.

Benedict persistently reminds people of their responsibility to care for the environment by living simple lives as he calls for a shift in human mentality (*Caritas in Vertiate* § 51).[145] For Benedict XVI, the natural world is God's gift to all humankind and an expression of divine love and that nature expresses a design of love and truth. (Benedict XVI, 2009, § 48) Nature speaks of the Creator (Romans, 1:20) and God's love for creation. Thus, Benedict XVI reminds human being of their 'vocation' as stewards of God's creation in a similar way to Pope Francis.

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142 James Schaefer, *Theological Foundations for Environmental Ethics, Reconstructing Patristic and Medieval Concepts*, p. 12 Note 1.

143 *Ibid.*

144 See online *Caritas in Veritate* # 48 < https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict–xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben–xvi_mes_20091208_xliii–world–day–peace.html > [Accessed 17.06. 2017].

145 National Catholic Reporter, The Independent News Source, See http://en.radiovaticana.va/storico/2013/06/05/pope_%20at_audience_counter_a_culture_of_waste_with_solidarity/en1-698604 > [Accessed 17.06. 2017].

Pope Francis (2013-)

Francis builds on the work of his predecessors and simultaneously adds his own contribution, *Laudato Si,* which is his teaching on the environment of the Catholic social teaching.[146]

Francis shows his concern for the ecological crisis, first when he quotes from the Saint Francis of Assisi's canticle of the creatures,'*Praise be to you, my Lord.'* Then he takes a comprehensive overview of the global problems as he asks,' what is happening to our common home?' (*Laudato Si, § 17*). Like Murray, he considers the environmental crisis, to be a result of a crisis within humanity itself.

Laudato Si has two contrasting thoughts one is Francis' prophetic voice and the other is a fresh theological and spiritual agenda to campaign for a change in human relationship with its environment. Howard points out that this new combination may help to change the complex culture of the contemporary world.

Laudato Si is prophetic as it indicates the urgency of the ecological movement, as it stresses radically political and cultural dimensions that may sometimes be unsettling.[147] Francis argues that rapid changes in the environment, not only affects ecology and the sustainability of the planet but is also permanent and irreversible.[148]

Francis' idea of 'preferential option for the poor' is implicit in *Laudato Si*. Daniel Castillo states that Francis' pastoral experiences overlapped with the rise of liberation theology and therefore, Francis has a complicated relationship with liberation theology.[149] However, Francis' idea of liberation is similar to the theology developed by Gustavo Gutierrez's in '*A Theology of Liberation.*[150] Castillo point out that

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146 Denis Edwards, 'Sublime Communion: The Theology of the Natural World in *Laudato Si', Theological Studies*,Vol 77 (2), (Australian Catholic University , 2016). p. 378.

147 Neil Ormerod and Cristina Vanin point to solutions and suggestions made by Bernard Lonergan and Robert Doran as solutions to the human problems as pointed out by Pope Francis. Francis says that there is a need for radical conversion. See Neil Ormerod and Cristina Vanin, 'Ecological Conversion: What does it mean ?' *Sage. Theological Studies*, Vol 77 (2), pp. 328 –352 (2016).

148 See UN Report showing disparity between the rich and poor in the world and the increase in number of people living on less than US$ 1.25 dollar a day. < http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/rwss/docs/2010/chapter2.pdf > [26 .4.2017].

149 Daniel Castillo, *Integral Ecology as Liberationist Concept, Theological Studies* Vol 77 (2) (2016) pp.353–376, p 370.

150 Gustavo Gutierrez Merino (b. 1928) A Theologian and Peruvian Dominican

both understand the love of neighbour and God, as a human response to God's love as the only way human beings can convey God's love is by loving their neighbour.[151]

Francis reminds human beings that 'we are not god' (*LS*, § 67) He argues that the God-given 'dominion' over creation should be understood, not as power to dominate nor exploit , but rather as 'stewardship,' which is human responsibility towards creation (*Laudato Si*, § 66, 76, 116).[152] Thus, Francis' theological vision is to include humanity with the rest of the Creation and is not simply about human survival. Francis states that 'a spirituality that forgets God as the all powerful Creator is not acceptable' (*LS* § 75). Francis asserts, 'Let us protect Christ in our lives, so that we can protect others, so that we can protect creation.'[153] It simply means that human beings should respect all of God's creatures and that includes other human beings, animals and the environment, as God has entrusted human beings with the care of His creation. Francis consistently expresses his concern for the exploited earth, the environment and with poor and marginalized people.

For Francis, 'everything is closely related,' he says that 'today's problems calls for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis.' (*LS* § 137) He reiterates Benedict XVI's thoughts of a 'human ecology,' which he connects to environmental ecology as he articulates a vision of integration. Francis maintains that owing to scarcity of fresh water and shortage of food (*LS* 30, *LS* 189), many people are denied their dignity and basic necessities. Thomas Reese cites Francis' illustration of the ongoing interaction between plants and animals, atoms and molecules within the eco systems. (LS, 138) [154] In

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priest is of the key founders of the Liberation theologians of Latin America and wrote *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, Salvation* (1971) The groundbreaking work explaining Christian poverty, as solidarity with the poor and protest against poverty. See online < http://liberationtheology.org/people-organizations/gustavo-gutierrez/ > [Accessed 17.6.2017].

151 Daniel Castillo, 'Integral Ecology as Liberationist Concept', *Theological Studies* Vol 77 (2) (2016), p 370.

152 http://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/laudato-si%E2%80%99-seismic-event-dialogue-between-catholic-church-and-ecology> [Accessed 17.06. 2017].

153 https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130319_omelia-inizio-pontificato.html > [Accessed 17.06. 2017].

154 Thomas Reese, A Readers Guide to *Laudato Si* Online < https://www.ncronline.

this way, Francis sums up that everything in the universe is integrally related and just as all creation is dependent on humanity, similarly, humanity is dependent on all creation.

Francis stresses on solidarity and the common good as he points to the shared environment. For Francis, the earth's riches includes its climate, oceans and other earth's resources that benefit all creation *LS* §23 and § 174.[155] He reminds people that 'we have run up against the limits of a certain view of human society.'[156] Francis suggests that it is imperative that all people come together in solidarity to protect and promote the human rights of all peoples and communities. Patrick Riordan SJ points out that, there has to be a conversion within human beings. A conversion from individualism to solidarity with a vision of the common good of all creation, because it is a task of all human beings to work in collaboration and to strengthen community.[157]

Future Generations

Francis observes the gap between society's vision of the future and the long term ecological problems facing contemporary human beings, who have lost a vision for the future.[158] Francis argues that as a result of our 'technocratic paradigm,' humanity's relationship with nature has become dysfunctional and we see, Francis in a similar vein to Benedict cites Nasr, as he refers to man as 'Promethean' (*Laudato* S*i'* §115 and §116).[159] Francis agrees that previously technology worked with nature, but in contemporary cultures that focus on science and technologies often exploit nature. Modern

org/channel/vatican > [Accessed 17.06. 2017].

155 Patrick Riordan, *Philippine Common Goods: The Good Life for All* , (Philippines: Davao University Publication, 2016) p. 62.

156 Jonathan Sacks, *The Persistence of Faith*, 1991 p. 10) https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/43701.pdf> [Accessed 6 .8. 2017].

157 Patrick Riordon, *An Alternative Rationality*, p. 29.

158 Miller cites Riceour's statement '… is it not because we too often and too quickly think of a will that submits and not enough of imaginations that opens itself ?' Paul Riceour, 'Toward a hermeneutic of the idea of revelation' in Essays on Biblical interpretation, ed. Lewis S Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), p. 117.

159 Also see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Albany N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1989), p.160.

communication cultures can easily lead people to lose touch with the psychic flow and movement of life.[160] Francis warns people that the lack of ability to grasp their deep responsibility will be problematic for their own future and that of future generations.[161] Thus, Francis urges individuals and communities to reconsider their actions against the standards of the gospel and respond with a changed heart.[162]

It is the responsibility of the present generation to look after the planet, as our actions will affect future generation. Sean Mc Donagh asserts, 'if this generation does not act, no future generation will be able to undo the damage, which this generation has caused to the planet.[163] Benedict XVI and Francis have reiterated that it is up to the present generation to change their ways, as their actions are the ones that will determine the future of the planet. We understand that Islam and Christianity hold creation as sacred. The integrity of their own faiths should inspire and enable them to work for the common good by contributing, forming and strengthening secular, plural and democratic societies.[164] Their faiths can enable them to restore peace with all creations both animate and inanimate, and with God, who sustains and nourishes all creation and aim for a new ecological future.

Conclusion

The essay began with an exploration of the David Burrell's work, especially his comparative philosophical theology and explored his dialogue with elements of the Islamic tradition. It then illustrated

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160 Douglas Rushkoff, *Present Shock: when everything happens now.* (New York: Penquin 2013) p. 2.

161 Longeran and Doran also make this point see Neil Ormerod and Cristina Vanin , 'Ecological Conversion: What does it mean ?' *Sage. Theological Studies*, p.338; Douglas Rushkoff, *Present Shock: when everything happens now.* (New York: Penquin 2013) p. 2.

162 *Ibid*. Neil Ormerod and Cristina Vanin , 'Ecological Conversion: What does it mean?, p.338.

163 Kureethadam cites McDonagh. See Joshtrom Kureethadam, *Rebuilding our Common Home, Ten Green Commandments of Laudato Si,* (Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2016). See p. 6.

164 See online < http://www.acommonword.com/response–from–prof–dr–christian–troll–s–j/> [Accessed 6 .8. 2017].

how Robert Murray, develops fundamental ideas in Biblical thought alongside Syriac Christianity. Murray stresses that, there is a need for a rediscovery of Catholic theology, which can only happen with the help of St Ephrem's theological resources. I would like to suggest that Murray's work is highly significant, as it allows for a deepening conversation with ecology from within the great sources of the Christian tradition. Finally, I have shown how more recent papal thought and teachings, has highlighted the relationship between humanity, God and creation. I have outlined creation as understood in the Catholic and Islamic traditions that hold compatible key ideas regarding stewardship and *al khalifah to* show that human freedom is accompanied with responsibility for God's creation.

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MARY IN THE QUR'AN AND ISLAMIC TRADITION
Ian Latham†

This paper was prepared from the notes of Brother Ian Latham and outlines his thoughts on an important aspect of Christian-Muslim relations. [Ed.]

MARY IS 'CHOSEN' FROM 'AMONG ALL WOMEN' (Q.3:37)

The word 'chosen' is repeated, and linked with the word 'purified' *(al-Mustafa)*. As we see from the context, Mary is chosen and purified in her conception (her mother being Hannah, the commentators say), in her dedicated and prayerful life in the Sanctuary (the Temple in Jerusalem), in her God-given (virginal) conceiving of Jesus, son of Mary, called 'Messiah' and 'Word'.

Mary is here presented as the 'servant-adorer' *('abida)* of God. She is recognised by many commentators as a prophetess *(nabiyya)*, since God spoke to her, though not as an envoy/messenger *(rasula)* for she is not sent to 'warn' her people. But does she not receive and pass on One who is 'Word' of God'?

MARY LIVES IN THE 'SANCTUARY'

The word for 'sanctuary' is that now used for the 'prayer–niche' *(mihrab)*[1] which indicates the direction *(qibla)* for the official prayer *(salat)* in the mosque. At first this 'direction' was towards Jerusalem, and though later

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[1]   For the early meaning of the term see R B Serjeant, 'Miḥrāb', *BSOAS*, vol. XXII, 1/3, pp. 439-53. [Ed.]

towards Mecca, the Jerusalem orientation will, according to a hadith, be re-adopted at the Last Hour.[2] Further, part of this verse is often inscribed over the mosque prayer-niche: 'Whenever Zachariah entered upon her in the *mihrab*, he found provision beside her'. It suggests implicitly that Mary is the unseen 'leader' in the people's public prayer of prostrating adoration before the Most High. In fact, this 'suggestion' is perhaps made explicit in the poem of the Egyptian Sufi Ibn al-Farid: 'I delight in the prayer-niche, when she is my imam (leader in prayer).' It is not clear who the 'she' is—it could be the mystical 'Night' (*Layla*, feminine), but the connection between the prayer-niche and the prayer-leader is clear.[3]

We can add that this Qur'anic verse, with the explicit reference to Mary's name, and the added words, 'Truly God provisions whomsoever He will without reckoning', is found as a beautiful calligraphy in many Muslim homes and shops.[4]

By 'pushing' a bit the implications of this 'placing' of a Marian text over the sacred prayer-niche, we can say, I think, that Mary is present in Islamic worship as the place and the form of true Muslim devotion. There are no 'mediators' in Islam, but perhaps we can say that the devout Muslim prays 'with' Mary, and even 'in Mary'. Of course, this Marian presence is purely implicit, but it seems to be undeniably 'there'. And if we add that Mary and Jesus are never separated—they

2   Louis Gardet, *L'Islam. Religion et communauté*, Desclée De Brouwer, Paris, 1967, p. 121. Louis Gardet (15 August 1905 in Toulouse-17 July 1986) was a French Roman Catholic priest and historian. He was a member of the Little Brothers of Jesus associated with the spirituality of Charles de Foucauld. As an author he was an expert in Islamic culture and sociology who caught a sympathetic view on Islam as a religion. He considered himself 'a Christian philosopher of cultures'. Gardet wrote numerous works on classical Islam including *Introduction à la théologie musulmane, essai de théologie compar*ée, with the Dominican Fr George Anawati OP, with an introduction by Louis Massignon, Vrin, Paris, 1948; *La pensée religieuse d'Avicenne,* Vrin, Paris, 1951; *Expériences mystiques en terres non chrétiennes*, Alsatia, Paris, 1953; *La cité musulmane, vie sociale et politique*, Vrin, Paris, 1954; *Connaître l'Islam*, Fayard, Paris, 1958; *Mystique musulmane. Aspects et tendances, expériences et techniques*, with Georges Anawati, Vrin, Paris, 1961; *Dieu et la destinée de l'homme*, ('Les grands problèmes de la théologie musulmane') J. Vrin, Paris, 1967. Brother Ian Latham was deeply influenced by the life and thought of Louis Gardet.
3   Tim Winter, '*Pulchra Ut Luna*: Some Reflections on the Marian Theme in Muslim-Catholic Relations', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol. 36 (1999), pp. 439-469.
4   Richard J McCarthy, 'Mary in Islam', in *Mary's Place in Christian Dialogue*, (ed) Alberic Stacpoole St Paul's Publications, London, 1982, pp. 202-213, p. 206.

always go together—in the Qur'an, we can go even further … . Are they not a 'sign'?

THE 'SIGN' OF MARY-AND-JESUS IN THE QUR'AN

Two Qur'anic verses (21:91 and 23:52) declare explicitly, and two more implicitly (66:12 and 5:115/6), that 'Mary's son and his mother', or 'she and her son', will be a 'sign': in fact, a 'sign for all beings' in Sura 21:91. What exactly is the 'sign'? It seems to be the virginal conception of Jesus, to which Jesus as a baby in the cradle bears witness (19:30–35), which is linked with the conception of Mary 'untouched by Satan' (both Mary and her 'seed' are 'protected from the accursed Satan': 3:32). This 'sign' is refused by the 'unbelieving Jews' and deformed by the Christians who refer to Jesus son of Mary as 'Son of God'. But the 'sign' remains, and will be a question on the Last Day to all people, including the prophets (5:115). According to Louis Massignon, this mysterious 'sign of the two', to which Muhammad bears witness as a sign of God's rigorous transcendence, is, if fully understood, 'the sole safeguard of pure monotheism'[5]. Why? Because Islam, rightly, rejects a 'carnal paternity' for God' (God is not, cannot be, a 'father' in the human sense). It's worth noting that the 4th Lateran Council 1215 (during the Crusades) affirmed that there is 'only one true God … one essence, substance or nature entirely simple ... which neither begets nor is begotten'[6] (cf. Sura 112). In brief, the Qur'anic 'Marian sign' seems to point *beyond* the explicit Muslim formulation of belief.

MARY AS THE 'TRUE BELIEVER'.

'God has struck a similitude for believers …, Mary, Imran's daughter, who guarded her virginity, so We breathed into her of Our Spirit, and she confirmed the Words of her Lord and his Books, and became one of the *obedient* ' (66:12). This text opposes the wives of Noah and Lot as 'unbelievers', with the wife of Pharaoh and the Virgin Mary who are

5   R J McCarthy, 'Mary in Islam', pp. 206-207.
6   R J McCarthy, 'Mary in Islam', pp. 202-213, p. 202; and Louis Gardet, *L'Islam. Religion, et communauté*, pp. 56-57.

given as a 'similitude' for believers. The word 'similitude, *mathal*, means in general 'likeness', and so 'image', 'example' or 'parable'. Clearly Mary is understood as 'all for God', as her life in the Temple showed and above all her 'obedience' to God's word in being willing to conceive Jesus as a virgin, aware of the scandal that would ensue.

It is not, probably, Mary's virginity as such that is praised, but rather her 'detachment'. She is seen as *'al-Batul'*, the detached, more than as *'al-'Adhra'*, the Virgin, according to Tim Winter.[7] Virginity, certainly, is not a normal Islamic value. Marriage is the state of life appointed by God, and is seen as no obstacle to the worship of God and the keeping of His word. There is no downgrading of sexuality in marriage in Islam, nor any suggestion of sexual inequality—hence the exemplary role given to Khadija (Muhammad's first wife), to 'A'isha (his favourite wife) and to Fatima (his favourite daughter who was married to Ali his cousin). Married models of womanhood were needed, and they compete with Mary's place as 'above all women'.

MARY AS 'IMITABLE'

Popular piety has found, in the Qur'an, in the words of the Franciscan Jean-Marie Abd el-Jalil (himself of a Muslim family), an invitation to 'imitate' Mary. After the exhaustion of child-birth and the fear of scandal, Mary, under a palm-tree, is told, 'Shake the palm-trunk, and dates fresh and ripe shall come tumbling down' (19:25). It is an invitation to co-operate with God in order to receive the benefits of His gifts. And the short 'Shake the palm-trunk' has become a popular spiritual proverb. Notice that God's gift, the ripe dates, is first, as is first God's invitation to secure them (it is God who says, 'Shake …'); Mary's human response is second, and, as it were, *within* God's invitation.

Previously, when Mary is in the Sanctuary in Zachary's charge, and Zachary is surprised to find her always 'provisioned', Mary says: 'Truly God provisions whomsoever He will without reckoning'. Her prayerful faith in God encourages Zachary to pray for a son despite his and his wife's old age. In fact he prays to his Lord, asking a son, and adds, 'Yea, Thou hearest prayer'. Again we find pious Muslims quoting this verse, in short 'God provisions as He wills', to

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7   Tim Winter, *'Pulchra Ut Luna …'* pp. 439–469, p. 447.

stimulate their prayer and that of their friends in times of hardship and apparent impossibility.

Further, among Iranian Shi'ites, daughters are often told: 'Do not do that, because Hazrat Maryam (Lady Mary) would not have done it!' In this 'imitation' of Mary, Mary is perhaps the ideal of dedication to God, while Fatima, equally popular, remains a more down-to-earth figure. In fact Fatima is said to 'resemble' her father Muhammad (both being figures of the earthly–human believer), while Mary and Jesus, both 'untouched by Satan', have a more 'ideal' role.[8]

Mary as 'bearer of the Word'

There is a parallel, purely implicit it is true but seemingly 'there', between Mary's God-given role as 'birth-giver' of Jesus as the 'Word', and Muhammad's role as the one who receives, bears and passes on the Holy Qur'an.

The Qur'an 'descends' from God upon the prophet.

> 'With the truth We have sent it down, and with the truth it has come down, and We have sent thee not, except good tidings to bear, and warning; and a Qur'an We have divided, for thee to recite it to mankind' (Sura 17:106).

> Surely We have sent down the Qur'an on thee, a sending down (Sura 76:23).

The word Qur'an is from the root *qara'a* meaning to recite. Hence the frequent command in the *suras*: *qar'* or *iqra'*, 'recite!' It is in fact an 'announcing': the 'preaching' of a message to adore the One God in view of the impending Day of Judgement, and so a 'warning'.

The Qur'an is one whole; it cannot be rationally 'divided' and examined without betraying its divine origin and oneness. Certain distinctions can be made, such as distinguishing Meccan and Medinan *suras*, but each verse must be seen as part of the 'one whole'. And this 'one whole' *descends* from God where it is identified with the divine attribute of the Word, *kalima*, subsisting in God. It is true that this one

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8   R J McCarthy, 'Mary in Islam', p. 207.

Word 'descends' like shafts of lightning, message by message, but the basic unity of the whole remains.

Perhaps the key is to realise that the Qur'an, Word of God, descends upon the prophet-messenger Muhammad in its fullness and wholeness. For Muhammad is the 'seal of the prophets', his message clarifying, abrogating and completing all previous prophetic messages. Some *hadiths* present Muhammad as 'unlettered'. This is to stress his essentially passive role in 'receiving' the heavenly Word, and allowing it to 'pass' unadulterated to its hearers.

And Mary? Jesus her son is said to be 'Word of God', *kalimat Allah*, and this 'Word' is 'committed' to her (4:169). It is true that the passage is polemic: Jesus is called 'Messiah', 'Messenger', 'Word' and 'Spirit', but 'only a Messenger', and there is added: 'Say not 'Three'' (a note 'forbidding' the Trinity and Incarnation). But the parallel remains: Mary, like Muhammad, receives 'the Word of God', and in both cases this Word is given to men as a 'Book' to read, a 'Warning' of Judgement, a 'Law of life', and 'Sign dividing good from evil'. While such terms, which describe the Qur'an according to tradition,[9] are not given explicitly to Jesus, they can be said to be implicit in the Qur'anic descriptions of the life and role of Jesus. And while these epithets as such are not Biblical, they can be found in the Christian tradition. For the Muslim the Holy Qur'an is the 'revelation' of God (so far as God wishes to make Himself known). For the Christian, Jesus in person is 'the fullness of revelation' (cf. *Dei Verbum* 4), narrating the *'intima Dei'*, the intimate [things] of God. That is the difference. But for both a chosen and purified human being 'carries the Word of God' to their fellow human beings as a 'Word of life'.

A COMMON SYMBOLISM FOR MUHAMMAD AND MARY?

Tim Winter[10] has argued that the different soteriologies (theories of how we are 'saved'), and the different evaluations of virginity (in Islam considered abnormal, in Christianity a prized state of life), do not allow of profitable Muslim-Christian dialogue, if we remain on the level of historical figures and of official doctrinal formulations. He prefers to

9   Louis Gardet, *L'Islam* …, p. 43.
10 Tim Winter: '*Pulchra Ut Luna* …' pp. 439-469.

examine what he sees as a shared symbolic language, in the field of poetic and mystical expression.

An example: Christian piety has referred to Mary as being 'beautiful as the moon', and more generally has used the 'moon' (which is feminine in Latin, *luna*) as symbol for Mary (Mary appears standing on the moon). Similarly Muhammad is compared by some Sufi poets to the moon (in Arabic a masculine word, *qamar*). The Prophet is compared to 'a full moon in the blackest night' (Nabulsi), and is said to be 'more resplendent than the full moon' (Jazuli). And does not Mary in the book of Revelation 'stand on the moon', and is she not implicitly 'beautiful as the moon' according to the Song of Songs (6:10)?

Again, the image of the 'sea' (Arabic *yamm*, Latin *mare*) is used both of Mary, *Stella Maris* (Star of the sea), and of Muhammad, called by the poet Rumi 'an ocean' and by Nabulsi 'more generous than the sea'.

Similar arguments are developed from the symbols of the 'Night', of the 'Light', of the 'pearl', of the 'gate of heaven', and so on.

There are, to my mind, two major objections to this thesis. Firstly, as the author admits, both the Muslim and the Christian themes presented are marginal to the 'orthodox' faith of both religions. The Christian evidence is on the level of art and poetic images (not always correctly cited!). And the Muslim texts are mainly from the later Sufis (mainly Persian) who are strongly influenced by monist and emanationist tendencies (which see the world as a kind of 'extension' of the one divine essence). Secondly the manner of studying 'comparable images' seems to me too imprecise, in that the examples come in such varying degrees of 'centrality' to the main doctrines of Islam and Catholicism, and there is frequent confusion between the image and the concept.

It remains that the role of the imagination, and so the use of symbols, images, and paraboles, is of key importance. Is there not a parallel between the 'Word-made-flesh' and the 'Word-Made-book', and therefore between the respective roles of Mary and Muhammad?[11]

> Just as the Virgin was purified [to receive the divine Word], so too the infant Prophet experienced the washing of his heart by angels, thereby preparing it for the reception of the Word' (Ibn Hisham, *Sira Rasul Allah,* the classic biography of Muhammad).

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11 Tim Winter has an excellent page on this. Tim Winter, '*Pulchra Ut Luna …*', p. 446.

The author adds an interesting technical point:

> The Mutazilites, notorious for the belief in a created Qur'an, had accused their Sunni rivals of inclining towards a Christian doctrine, 'resembling the Christians in their claim that Jesus son of Mary is not created, since he too is Word of God' (letter of Caliph al-Ma'mun of Bagdad, supporter of the Mutazilites, c.820).

He has an equally remarkable explanation on God's compassion, *rahma*, as seen in Islam (462 n.155):

> The Companions are moved to tears at the sight of a woman reunited with her child, and the Prophet tells them. 'Truly God will show even more *rahma* towards you all than does this woman towards her son' (a *hadith* [saying] quoted by Ghazali at the close of his 'Revival of Religion': Ghazali 451H./1059-505H./1111)
> 'I am the All-Compassionate God *[al-Rahman]*, and I created the womb *[al-rahmm]* deriving it from My great name' *(hadith qudsi* quoted by Ibn Hanbal, *al-Musnad,* the best-known collection of *ahadith,* arranged by 'chains of transmitters', *isnad).*

We have the same root *RHM*, and the same imagery of motherly care in the Hebrew Scriptures (Ps 86:15-18, cf. Lk 1:78; Is 49:15 and 66:13). We can also ask ourselves: How does the Christian Scriptural *'agape'* relate to the Islamic *'rahma'* and the Jewish *'rahamim'*?