THE LIVING STONES OF THE HOLY LAND TRUST

Registered Charity No. 1081204

'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 2020

Living Stones
YEARBOOK
2020

Encounter, Sacred Places, Dialogue, Mysticism, and Eastern Christian Presence in the History of the Modern Middle East

Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust
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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

The eighth volume of the *Living Stones Yearbook, Encounter, Sacred Places, Dialogue, Mysticism, and Eastern Christian Presence in the history of the modern Middle East* is a very rich collection of essays which begins with the 'reconversion' of the Hagia Sophia Church into a mosque by the Turkish government in 2020—Anagnostopoulos and Gibbons. This controversial act at one of the foremost Eastern Christian Churches in the world has disturbed and deeply troubled the Christians of the wider Middle East whose presence has already been significantly challenged by a long series of conflicts destabilizing religious and political relations between all communities across the region. Despite such a challenging context, Christians in the Middle East continue to offer to the Christian tradition theological reflection of a high order which both provokes and provides an opportunity for a creative exchange—Ashdown, Brown, and Colwell. Mysticism has been at the centre for the life and work of Christian scholars and thinkers in their dialogue and encounter with the Muslim tradition and this is reflected in the contributions by Dallh, Derrick, Latham and Wilkins. The Armenian Christian tradition is one of most ancient ecclesial, theological, and spiritual cultures in the region which remains an important framework for understanding the modern history of Christian presence in the Middle East—Neressian and Whooley. This edition also reflects on the life and scholarly contribution to the academic community of Living Stones by Hugh Boulter and Christopher Brown.

Editors
May 2021

HUGH BOULTER

Hugh Boulter died on 28 June 2020 of a heart attack. Hugh will be sorely missed. He was a long standing member of the Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust. As a member of the Theology Group, his contributions were always welcomed. He had the ability to put into words complex ideas with a simplicity and a directness that was appreciated. He is remembered with affection.

His scholarly interest in the Christian communities in the Middle East and their relationships with people of other faiths had a long history. His contribution to the life of 'Embrace the Middle East', previously BibleLands'and the Bible Lands Society, as member, Chairman and more recently President is notable. In 2004, at the 150th Anniversary of the Turkish Missions' Aid Society, the 'mother charity' of the Bible Lands Society, Hugh, as Chairman, presided over the event hosted by Dr Rowan Williams, then Archbishop of Canterbury, at Lambeth Palace. Dr Williams, himself, was a great advocate of justice for Christians in the Middle East.

Hugh recognized, along with others at Living Stones and Embrace, the need for an easy, plain and accessible literature/ guide to enhance the understanding and raise the awareness of the challenges faced by Christians in the Middle East and their witnesses. He wrote, as a consequence, a overview entitled *The Christian presence in the Land of the Bible: A brief history and overview*, which filled the gap in the available literature to laymen and experts alike about Christians in the Middle East. Everyone who attended the important 'Service to celebrate the contribution of Christians in the Middle East' in the presence of HRH Prince Charles the Prince of Wales at Westminster Abbey on 4 December 2018 went back with a copy of this very welcomed contribution,

which Hugh handed out personally as he welcomed attendees into the Cathedral.

Hugh Boulter obtained a first class degree in History from Oxford University and, later in life, in 2003 obtained his PhD with a thesis entitled, The Spirit in Islam: A study in Christian-Muslim Dialogue and Theology of Religions'. In 2013, after ten years of experience, focused interviews and further reflection, Dr Boulter contributed an article to the *Living Stones Yearbook*, 'Dialogue—what is the point of it' (2013). It concludes with the sentence, 'By listening prayerfully to God within us, we may be able to discern how we can help to move from "works of the flesh" to "the fruit of the Spirit".' Hugh remained active within the Diocese of Oxford in the field of interfaith relationships,

Hugh was a member of St Mark's Church, Englefield and his wife, Carol, remains a church warden of St Marks, today. Hugh's service to the Anglican Church was exceptional and he was awarded the Order of St Frideswide in 2019 by Oxford Diocese in recognition of this fact. Hugh made a much wider contribution to the life of communities than just the institutions and agencies of the Church. He was mentioned in the New Year's honours lists in the United Kingdom, at the end of 1999, receiving a MBE for services to the National Advisory Council of Boards of Visitors and HM Remand Centre Reading. He was also a member of the Clothworkers Company, one of the twelve prestigious livery companies of the City of London which is a charity devoted to leadership and philanthropic activity.

The editorial team, the Theology Group and present and past members of the Living Stones Executive wish to record their appreciation and respect for an amazing life of service.

Colin South
Chair
Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust

CHRISTOPHER BROWN
(1938-2020)

Christopher Brown (or Chris as he preferred to be known) was ordained into the Church of England in 1963. After serving as curate, he left parish work to become a 'worker priest' exercising his ministry in the probation service and later as Director and Chief Executive of the NSPCC (1989-95). On his 'retirement' and following a number of visits to India, he set up the charity 'Building Better Futures International' (formerly known as 'Friends of the Poor in South India').

He studied for his MA in Christianity and Inter-religious Dialogue at Heythrop College (2003-5). For research purposes he came to know Bishop Kenneth Cragg who he considered to be the most significant Anglican scholar to engage with Islam in the twentieth century. He published a well-received article 'Kenneth Cragg on Shi'a Islam and Iran: an Anglican Theological Response to Political Islam', (*ARAM*, Vol. 20, 2008). He also contributed to the L*iving Stones Yearbook* 2016—'Kenneth Cragg as an Anglican Theologian of Islam'.

He was a good friend to many and will be greatly missed.

David Derrick
Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust

CONTRIBUTORS

Archimandrite Nikodemos Anagnostopoulos is an Orthodox priest of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and along with his pastoral duties, he lectures at the University of Notre Dame in London teaching Christianity and Islam. He has also completed Doctoral Research at Heythrop College University of London specializing on Muslim-Christian Relations in South-Eastern Europe. His main research areas are Muslim-Christian relations and Eastern and Orthodox Christianity. Recent publications: 'Eastern Orthodox Perspectives on Nostra Aetate and Muslim-Christian Relations' in *Nostra Aetate, Non-Christian Religions, and Interfaith Relations*, ed. by Ellis Kail (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021); *Orthodoxy and Islam: Theology and Muslim-Christian Relations in Modern Greece and Turkey* (London: Routledge, 2017); 'The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Greek Minority in the Context of Muslim-Christian Relations: Contemporary Challenges', *Living Stones Yearbook, Christianity engages with Islam: Contexts, Creativity and Tensions* (2014).

Fr 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 studies including *For The Life of the World: Eastern*

Christian reflections on the environment, Institute for Religion, Politics and Culture, Maryland USA; 'Landscapes of ecumenism: a Vast and Complex realm', *One in Christ*, Vol. 46, no. 1, 2012; editor *The Sunday Missal; The Order of Mass for Sundays* (London: Harper Collins, 2012); editor *The Weekday Missal: The order of Mass for Weekdays* (London: HarperCollins, 2012); *The Eastern Christian Churches*, CTS, 2006; 'The Eastern Catholic Diaspora in Contemporary Europe: Context and Challenges', *The Downside Review*, 2016, Vol. 134 and Weekly reflection e Journal (Sunday reflection in Independent Catholic News 2013—ongoing) http://www.indcatholicnews.com/index.php. His contributions to the *Living Stones Yearbook*: 'For the Life of the World: An Eastern Christian Perspective on Care of our Planet' (2019), 'Ex Tenebris Lux? A Pastoral Reflection on Some Issues around Middle Eastern Christianity in the West' (2017-2018), 'The dhimmi: dhimmi and dhimmitude in the Ottoman empire' (2014).

Revd Andrew Ashdown, independent scholar and until recently a researcher at the University of Winchester, his research has focused on the religious context in Syria, a country he visited several times before the conflict, and in which he has travelled extensively during 10 visits since 2014, in the midst of the current conflict, as a guest of faith leaders in the country. In January 2021 based upon this field work he published his monograph on the subject: *Christian–Muslim Relations in Syria: Historic and Contemporary Religious Dynamics in a Changing Context* (London: Routledge, 2021). He has been a priest of the Church of England for thirty years. His contributions to t*he Living Stones Yearbook*: 'An exploration of issues surrounding Anglican/Jewish relations in the UK in the light of the Israel/Palestine conflict' (2017-2018) and 'An exploration of issues surrounding Anglican/Jewish relations in the UK in the light of the Israel/Palestine conflict' (2016).

Revd Peter Colwell is Deputy General Secretary of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, a Reformed minister, and a doctoral research student at the School of Advanced Studies, University of London. Peter studied for an MA from Heythrop College, University of London in Christianity and Inter-religious Dialogue—which he published in the *Living Stones Yearbook*: 'To Defend the Faith? Themes and Concepts in the writings of Sayyid Qutb and Rowan Williams'

(2015), and for which he also contributed 'From Crisis to Grace: Theological reflections on Developing Trends in Jewish-Catholic relations, through aspects of the work of David Neuhaus SJ' (2019).

Revd Christopher Brown had been an Anglican priest who held senior positions in Social Work for many years. He completed an MA from Heythrop College, University of London in Christianity, and Inter-religious dialogue in 2005, focusing on the life and thought of Kenneth Cragg on Islam. He published in *The Living Stones Yearbook*: 'Kenneth Cragg as an Anglican Theologian of Islam' (2016). He died in 2020.

Fr Minlib Dallh OP is the HM King Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussein of Jordan Fellow for the Study of Love in Religion at Regent's Park College, Oxford. Following a doctorate at the University of Exeter in Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations, he taught at Hartford Seminary (CT), Loyola University New Orleans (LA), and Candler School of Theology at Emory University (GA). His research focuses on comparative mysticism in Islam and Christianity, with special interest in love-mysticism, and the contribution of women mystics in both faith traditions. His book, *A Sufi and a Friar. A Mystical Encounter of Two Men of God in the Abode of Islam* was published by SUNY Press, New York, in 2017. Currently, he is working on a monograph entitled 'Female Mystics in Medieval and Early Modernity in Islam'. He recently published 'Exploration in Mysticism and Religious Encounter: The Case of Charles de Foucauld (1858–1916)', in *The Downside Review*, 2020, vol. 138(4).

Revd David Derrick trained as a worker priest for the Church of England and has exercised his ministry in London's inner boroughs for the last fifty years. an article based on his MA dissertation (Heythrop College, University of London), 'Can we re-image an Islam with purely a Meccan identity, as set out in the writings of Kenneth Cragg?' appeared in *Living Stones Yearbook* 2013. This was followed by 'Kenneth Cragg, Charles Malik and Dag Hammarskjold—some thoughts on the question of mysticism and the "public square"' (*Living Stones Yearbook* 2016). He is currently a postgraduate student at the School of advanced Studies, University of London, researching the theology of Kenneth

Cragg in dialogue with Charles Malik and Dag Hammarskjöld with reference to 'The Human Condition'. His most recent contribution to *Living Stones Year* is 'The ecclesial thought of Kenneth Cragg in relation to the Church of England's presence in Jerusalem. Reflections on modern history' (2019).

Br 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 Spirituality* (London, 2004);'Charles de Foucuald (1898-1916): Silent witness for Jesus in the face of Islam', in *Catholics in Interreligious Dialogue: Studies in Monasticism, Theology and Spirituality* (London, 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. His contributions to *the Living Stones Yearbook,* 'Mary in the Qur'an and Islamic Tradition' (2017-18) and 'Christian Encounters with Islam in history and modern times: some Theological Reflections' (2015).

The Revd Dr Nerses (Vrej) Nersessian was born in Tehran in 1948. He was educated at the Armenian College in Calcutta, the Gevorgian Theological academy in Holy Etchmiadzin (Armenia),and king's College, University of London. He has a degree in theology and a doctorate in Modern Greek and Byzantine Studies. after graduation in 1975 he joined the British Library as curator responsible for the manuscripts and printed books of the Christian Middle East section, a post which he held until his retirement in august 2011. among his British Library publications are: *Catalogue of Early Armenian Printed Books. A history of Armenian Printing (1512-1850)* (1980), *Armenian Illuminated Gospel Books* (1987), *Treasures from the Ark, 1700 years of Armenian Christian Art, a catalogue of the British Library exhibition marking the 1,700th anniversary of the conversion of Armenia to Christianity, The Bible in the Armenian Tradition* (2001) and most recently *A Catalogue of the Armenian Manuscripts in the British Library acquired since the year 1913 and of collections in other libraries in the United Kingdom* (London,

2012), described as 'a fitting culmination to the long and distinguished career'. He is the author of the articles on the Armenian Church tradition in *Jesus in History, Thought, and Culture. An Encyclopedia, In the Beginning*, 'Bibles before the year 1000', *The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity*, 'Sacred Books of the Three Faiths: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Byzantium 330-1453', *The Orthodox Christian World*. He was ordained a priest in 1983, elevated to archpriest in 1991 by Vazgen I Catholicos of all Armenians of Blessed Memory, and in October of this year he was awarded the distinguished medal of Saint Nerses Shnorhali by His Holiness Garegin I, Catholicos of All Armenians, for his distinguished career in the British Library and devoted services to the Armenian Church. His contributions to *The Living Stones Yearbook*: 'Church-State relations in the Soviet Republic of Armenia during the Catholicate of Gevorg VI Ch'orekch'ian (1945-1954) and his successor, Vazgen I Palchian (1955-1994)' (2016), 'The Impact of the Genocide of 1915 on the Armenian Orthodox Apostolic Church' (2015), and 'Christology of the Armenian Church' (2014).

Fr John Whooley, Diocese of Westminster. He has a special research interest in the modern history of Armenian Catholicism including 'The Armenian Catholic Church in the Middle East—Modern History, Ecclesiology and Future Challenges', in *The Downside Review*, 134(4), 2016, 'The Armenian Church in the Contemporary Middle East', in *Eastern Christianity in the Modern Middle East* (London: Routledge, 2010); 'The Armenian Catholic Church in the Middle East', in *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East: Studies for the Synod of the Middle East*, (London: Melisende, 2010), 'The Armenian Catholic Church: A Modern History until the Synod of Rome of 1928', in *Christianity in the Middle East: Studies in Modern History, Theology and Politics* (London: Melisende, 2008); 'The Mekhitarists: Religion, Culture and Ecumenism in Armenian-Catholic Relations', in *Eastern Christianity: Studies in Modern History, Religion and Politics* (London: Melisende, 2004); 'Armenian Christianity: An Historical and Theological Overview', *One in Christ: A Catholic Ecumenical Review*, vol. 40, no. 3 (2005).

Sr Agnes Wilkins OSB is a Benedictine nun of Stanbrook Abbey, Wass, Yorkshire, UK. She holds a degree in Catholic theology from the Maryvale Institute, Birmingham, and a doctorate from York at St John University in Muslim/Christian relations, concentrating on the contribution of Hassan Dehqani-Tafti and Jean-Mohammed Abd-el-Jalil to Muslim/Christian dialogue. Publications include 'Straight Writing on Crooked Lines', in *Touched by God: Ten Monastic Journeys*, edited by Laurentia Johns OSB (London: Continuum, 2008), and on the Christian encounter with Islam: 'Thomas Merton's encounter with Islam', in *Catholics in Interreligious Dialogue: Monasticism, Theology and Spirituality* (London, 2006); 'Louis Massignon, Thomas Merton and Mary Kahil', *Society for Syro-Mesopotamian Studies* (special issue on 'The Life and Thought of Louis Massignon'), Vol. 20, 2008; 'Monasticism and Martyrdom in Algeria', *The Downside Review* (special issue on 'Catholic encounters with Islam), Vol. 126, no. 444, 2008, and most recently in *Dilatato Corde*, Vol. IX, No.1, Jan-June 2019, the online journal of DIM/ MID Interreligious Dialogue, 'Paul Mehmet Mulla-Zadé and Jean- Mohammed Abd-el-Jalil'. Her contributions to *the Living Stones Yearbook*: 'Mary Kahil: A Life Given for Muslims' (2013) and 'Hassan Dehqani-Tafti: struggles of a convert from Islam to be Christian in post-revolutionary Iran?' (2019).

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE CONVERSION OF THE GREAT CHURCH OF HAGIA SOPHIA INTO A MOSQUE ON MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY TURKEY

Nikodemos Anagnostopoulos

The recent conversions of the Great Justinian Cathedral known as Hagia Sophia Church in Constantinople (July 2020), of Chora Church (August 2020) and of Hagia Sophia Church in Trebizon (July 2013)[1] into Islamic places of worship marks for many Turkish Islamists—including the President of the Turkish Republic—the fulfilment of a long-held dream of restoring important symbols of Ottoman grandeur. For many others around the world, these conversions are perceived as a dismaying setback of some of the world's greatest architectural and cultural monuments. For Christians and especially for the Eastern Orthodox, these decisions of the Turkish authorities, despite the disrespectful attitude shown towards the history of Byzantium and Orthodoxy, bring into the fore the challenges that the Greek Orthodox minority of Istanbul and the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople are still facing in modern Turkey, raising questions even for the very future and survival of the Ecumenical Patriarchate as well as the Greek minority within the Turkish borders.

The Turkish Council of State, on 10 July 2020 annulled the 1934 presidential decree that converted Hagia Sophia into a museum[2] and

1 'In 2012, the religious authorities (Diyanet) filed a lawsuit against the ministry of culture, claiming the ministry had been 'illegally occupying' the church for some decades. The Diyanet won the case, getting ownership of the building. On 5 July 2013, the former church was partially converted for a while into a mosque according to the local Vakif Direction of Trabzon, which is the owner of the estate', 'The Church of Hagia Sophia Trabzon', *Pontos World*. https://pontosworld.com/index.php/pontus/churches/225-saint-sophia-trebizond

2 The importance of the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a museum a few years after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, stood as one of the cornerstones of the broader Republican project grounded on the revolutionary pillars of 'secularism', 'modernity' and 'superiority of science'. See the work of Ceren Katipo_glu and Ça_gla Caner-Yüksel in *Hagia Sophia 'Museum': A Humanist*

ruled that the Turkish government has the authority to convert the former church, presently a museum. Immediately after this decision, the president of the Republic of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, signed a decree transferring the jurisdiction of the building to the Turkish Religious Affairs Directorate, changing its former status of museum. The official conversion ceremony took place on 15 July, since Erdoğan called for prayers on that day in remembrance of the 2016 failed coup attempt against him[3]. Fulfilling a dream of his Islamic-oriented youth, Erdoğan joined hundreds of worshipers on Friday 24 July for the first Muslim prayers in 86 years inside Hagia Sophia, the Istanbul landmark that served as one of the most significant cathedrals of the Christian world, a mosque and a museum before its conversion back into a Muslim place of worship.

The phenomenon of the conversion of places of worship, a practice of the Ottoman conquerors, and especially the recent conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque for the second time in history, has been criticised by several religious and political leaders all over the world. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the leader of the 300 million Orthodox Christians, warned that the conversion of Hagia Sophia would cause a break between the East and West:

> 'It is absurd and harmful that Hagia Sophia, from a place that now allows two people to meet us and admire its greatness, can again become a reason for contrast and confrontation. It is the symbolic place of encounter, dialogue, solidarity and mutual understanding between Christianity and Islam.'[4] Patriarch Bartholomew also added: 'As [a] museum, Hagia Sophia can function as place and symbol of encounter, dialogue and peaceful coexistence of peoples and cultures, mutual understanding and solidarity between Christianity and Islam.'[5]

Project of the the Turkish Republic, Pisa University Press, Pisa, 2010.

3 Hürriyet Daily News, 'Hagia Sophia converted into mosque as Erdoğan signs decree', 10 July 2020, https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/hagia-sophia-converted-into-mosque-as-erdogan-signs-decree-156455

4 Paul Marshall, 'Implications of the Hagia Sophia's Conversion to a Mosque', *Providence*, 13 July 2020, https://providencemag.com/2020/07/implications-hagia-sophia-conversion-mosque/

5 Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew about Hagia Sophia, 'Ecumenical Patriarchate

In their statement on the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque, the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America, protesting the decision of the Turkish civil courts and the profound direction of the Turkish Government to re-convert Hagia Sophia into a mosque, expressed concerns about the possible negative effects because of this change as well as the impact that it will have on religious pluralism in Turkey and the relations among nations and between faith-based organizations.[6] Archbishop Elpidophoros of America, an Orthodox Bishop and Turkish national, who before his inauguration in the United States served for several years as a Deacon, Chief-Secretary and Bishop at the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, expressed his disappointment for the conversion of both Hagia Sophia and Chora Church.

> After the tragic transgression with Hagia Sophia, now the Monastery of Chora, (the 'Place of the One beyond space'—*Chora tou Achorētou*), this exquisite offering of Byzantine culture to humanity is being changed into a mosque. This is a sad state of affairs for the very same Turkish people who, since the founding of the modern state, have struggled to achieve an international reputation of productivity and progress that leaves a sorry legacy of conquest and carnage behind. This is a real shame, because no one is deserving of such a narrow-minded policy. Demeaning humanity's monuments to serve fleeting political schemes does not diminish the monuments themselves, but the schemers. The pleas and exhortations of the international community are ignored. How long?[7]

Permanent Delegation to the World Council of Churches', https://www.ecupatria.org/2020/06/30/ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew-about-hagia-sophia/

6 Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States, 'Statement on the Tragic Conversion of Hagia Sophia from Museum to Mosque', 10 July 2020, http://www.assemblyofbishops.org/news/2020/tragic-converstion-of-hagia-sophia

7 Archbishop Elpidophoros of America, 'Turkish people do not deserve such a narrow-minded policy', *Doxologia Info News,* https://www.doxologiainfonews.com/2020/08/archbishop-of-america-turkish-people-do-not-deserve-such-a-narrow-minded-policy/

As a peaceful reaction to the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America has declared a day of mourning on Friday 24 July, the first day of Muslim prayers at the Byzantine cathedral and UNESCO World Heritage site.

'Knowing that on Friday, July 24th, there will be an "inauguration" of this programme of cultural and spiritual misappropriation and a violation of all standards of religious harmony and mutual respect, we call upon all the beloved faithful of our Holy Archdiocese to observe this day as a day of mourning and of manifest grief,' the Holy Synod of the Church of America announced, following a meeting under Archbishop Elpidophoros. 'We ask that every Church toll its bells in lamentation on this day. We call for every flag of every kind that is raised on the Church property be lowered to half-mast on this day. And we enjoin every Church in our Holy Archdiocese to chant the Akathist Hymn in the evening of this day, just as we chant it on the Fifth Friday of the Great and Holy Fast.'[8]

Another very important leader of the Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow said in a statement that the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque posed a threat to Christianity. 'A threat against Hagia Sophia is a threat to all of Christian civilization; a threat to our spirituality and history. What could happen to Hagia Sophia will cause deep pain among the Russian people.'[9]

Archbishop Nikitas of Thyateira, Great Britain and Ireland, in response to the letter of support he received from Justin Welby Archbishop of Canterbury, who expressed his concerns about the status of the Great Church, the former Cathedral of God's Divine Wisdom, stated:

> I was extremely grateful that the Presidents of the Churches Together in England issued a joint statement lamenting the decision to change the status of Hagia Sophia by converting it once again into a mosque.

8 Church of America declares day of mourning over Hagia Sophia, *Kathimerini*, 17 July 2020, https://www.ekathimerini.com/254830/article/ekathimerini/news/church-of-america-declares-day-of-mourning-over-hagia-sophia

9 Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, 'Russian church leader says calls to turn Hagia Sophia into mosque threaten Christianity', *Moscow Reuters,* 6 July 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-museum-russia/russian-church-leader-says-calls-to-turn-hagia-sophia-into-mosque-threaten-christianity-idUSKBN2471C7

> Indeed Hagia Sophia in recent centuries became a symbol of peaceful coexistence and a meeting place of civilizations, as was always the case for the City which bridges two continents and so many peoples and cultures; however, for the Christian world, since its consecration on December 27, 537 AD, it was the most exulted seat of Christianity, the place where worship 'in spirit and in truth' mixed imperial grandeur with the heavenly splendour and reality. The Great Church's narrative and legacy must not be re-written or used for commercial or geopolitical goals. For Christians, most especially Eastern Orthodox Christians, the Great Church continues to be the spiritual womb of our genos-the pulpit of so many saints, the Seat of Ecumenical Councils and Regional Synods of the one undivided, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. It is the place where whole nations were converted and where so many spiritual feats of Christ's Church were celebrated.[10]

The members of the Holy Synod of the Autocephalous Greek Orthodox Church expressed their disappointment and strong protest in a communiqué about the conversion of the Holy Church of Hagia Sophia, the Great Church in Constantinople into a mosque while they made direct international appeals, calling for the restoration of the Monument and its performance in its proper use.[11]

Fortunately, some other non-Christian voices reacted on the decision of the reconversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque. The imam of Milan and president of the Italian Islamic Religious Community, Yahya Pallavicini, has explicitly taken a stance against the decision of the Turkish President to turn Hagia Sophia into a mosque. 'In the history of Islam, when our sages visited a synagogue, a monastery, a cemetery, they always respected the identity of these

10 Letter of H.E. Archbishop Nikitas of Thyateira and Great Britain to the Most Right Reverend Justin Welby Archbishop of Canterbury, *Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain Archives,* 18 July 2020.

11 Holy Synod of the Greek Orthodox Church, 'Communiqué of the Holy Synod for Hagia Sophia', Official website of the Holy Synod of the Greek Orthodox Church, 13 July 2020, http://www.ecclesia.gr/epikairotita/main_epikairotita_next.asp?id=3038

places; I believe that this decision is the result of political calculations, he added.'[12]

The President of the Republic of Greece referring to the conversion after eighty-six years of Hagia Sophia into a mosque stressed this was a profound event and argued that it brutally offends not only the Orthodox and all Christians universally, but the entire civil humanity as a whole. She also added that this decision seriously damages Turkey's relations with Greece, the European Union and the international community. The President of the Republic also referred to the recent escalating Turkish aggression, noting that it openly undermines the dialogue and bilateral relations between Greece and Turkey, adding that Turkey is working on the agreement on migration and refugees by directing migration flows towards Greece. In addition, she expressed her concerns about the Turkish authorities in relation to the illegal claims in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean, which challenge the sovereignty and sovereign rights of Greece and create tensions in the wider region.[13]

It is universally acknowledged that Hagia Sophia is part of the Historic Areas of Istanbul, a property inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List, a monument that millions of people visit every year. The Director-General of UNESCO deeply regretted the decision of the Turkish authorities, made without prior discussion, to change the status of Hagia Sophia. He stated that 'Hagia Sophia is an architectural masterpiece and a unique testimony to interactions between Europe and Asia over the centuries. Its status as a museum reflects the universal nature of its heritage, and makes it a powerful symbol for dialogue.'[14] Considering the international engagements of the Republic of Turkey, under Article 6 of the UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, to which Turkey is a signatory, the conversion of heritage sites is not permitted without prior consent, as such

12 See *Orthodox Times*: https://orthodoxtimes.com/imam-of-milan-against-the-conversion-of-hagia-sophia-into-a-mosque/

13 President of the Republic of Greece Katerina Sakellaropoulou, 'The conversion of Hagia Sophia offends civilized humanity', To Vima, 24 July 2020, https://www.tovima.gr/2020/07/24/politics/ixira-minymata-tis-proedrou-tis-dimokratias-stin-tourkia/

14 See Statement by UNESCO on the conversion of Hagia Sophia: https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-statement-hagia-sophia-istanbul

heritage constitutes a world heritage over whose protection it is the duty of the international community as a whole to co-operate. Undoubtedly, the decision of the Turkish authorities to reconvert Hagia Sophia into a mosque provoked strong reactions in the international community.

In order to better comprehend these recent decisions of the Turkish authorities to convert into Islamic places of worship important monuments of the UNESCO's World Heritage List, it is important to examine in a wider perspective minority policies that have been implemented and applied in Modern Turkey. The question of religious minorities[15] among the post-Ottoman States has had a great influence on the specific foreign policies followed by each particular country and has without doubt deep roots in history. The coexistence of minority and majority religious groups therefore creates an environment of religious pluralism within society. On the other hand, the religious identity of a particular state is actually a feature of national and international affairs in modern societies.[16] A large amount of contemporary research has been conducted by sociologists of religion, who have investigated the role that religion plays among immigrant groups in relation to the ways that these groups maintain group identity and solidarity. Furthermore, the investigation of the connection between religion and ethnic identity has revealed the continuing significance of religion in preserving and understanding cultural and ethnic traditions. It should be noted that some immigrant religious communities place more emphasis on religious identity among their members than on their ethnic background, whereas others stress their ethnic identity, relying primarily on religious foundations in order to preserve their culture, tradition and ethnic customs and boundaries.[17]

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15 The term 'minority' refers to a group of people which in numbers is lower when compared to the rest of the population of a particular state or a region, whereas the term 'religious' refers to different religious characteristics including ethics and customs when compared to those of the majority of the population. This can be perceived to the extent that a 'religious minority' is defined as a group of individuals which is lower in numbers when compared to the rest of the population of a state, and bases its claims for identity on the particularities of its religious convictions. Richard Étienne and Pascal Tozzi, pp. 3-4.

16 Oliver-Dee Sean, *Religion and Identity*, Theos, London, 2009, p. 11.

17 Lori Peek, 'Becoming Muslim: The Development of a Religious Identity', *Sociology of Religion* 3 (2005), p.218.

The collapse of the Ottoman empire brought the minority issue in the newly established Turkish Republic to the forefront.[18] In the wider context, the minority question is an issue which arose particularly in Europe by the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century with the establishment of national states. The existence of minorities is the result of particular policies followed by national states in order to create homogeneity among their ethnic citizens.[19] In a more specific context, the Republic of Turkey can be characterised as a mosaic of diverse populations having unique ethnic, linguistic and religious characteristics. These diverse groups have maintained their own linguistic, religious, ethnic and cultural characteristics and have co-existed in Turkey since the establishment of the Republic for nearly a century.[20] However, the implementation of the Kemalist secular regime in Turkey has created serious conditions of religious discrimination, which affect the situation of religious minorities in the country.[21] The Greek Orthodox minority of Turkey, which is an officially recognised religious group as well as an ethnic minority according to the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne,[22] is a small community made up of the descendants of those who were permitted to remain in Turkey after the massive and compulsory exchange of populations agreed under the Treaty. The exchange of Greek and Turkish populations was a compulsory

18 See the studies which look at the Armenians, the Greeks and the Syriacs in Turkey from various modern perspectives: Göl, 'Imagining the Turkish nation through "othering" Armenians', pp. 121-39; Kuyucu, pp. 36180; Samur, pp. 327-40.

19 Ulrike Schuerkens, 'Ethnic, Racial and Religious Minorities', *Social and Economic Development*, 5 (2004).

20 Karimova and Deverell, p. 8. See also Toktaş, 'EU Enlargement conditions and minority protection: A Reflection on Turkey's Non-Muslim Minorities', pp. 489-518. A large amount of the literature refers to the issue of the Jewish community in modern Turkey and the political impact that has upon Israeli-Turkey relations as well as the question of Turkish relations with the EU. This political impact could be better comprehended when an international issue occurs between Turkey and any of the kin states of the minorities that Turkey accommodates; the non-Muslim minorities usually become part of the issue.

21 Prodromou, 'Turkey between Secularism and Fundamentalism?: The "Muslimhood Model" and the Greek Orthodox Minority', p. 13.

22 The Peace Treaty of Lausanne between Greece and Turkey, which was signed on 24 July 1923, the foundation and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey on 29 October 1923, as well as the exchange of Turkish and Greek populations, were the most significant events, until the first quarter of the twentieth century, which affected and dramatically altered the situation of the Greek population of the late Ottoman Empire. Pentzopoulos, p. 51.

transfer of a large number of people, officially adopted in order to determine a minority problem based only on the religious identity of the population.[23] The members of the Greek Orthodox minority of Turkey reside mainly in the city of Istanbul, the Princes' Islands (Tk. Büyükada, Heybeliada, Burgazada, Kinaliada) of the Marmara Sea and the Islands of Imvros (Tk. Gökçeada) and Tenedos (Tk. Bozcaada) next to the Aegean coast of Turkey. The Greek Orthodox population of Turkey has decreased[24] from over 100,000 in the 1950s to less than 3,000 at present.[25] Since the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 the status of the Greek Orthodox minority of Turkey has been inextricably linked with the status and role of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. The fact that the Turkish authorities approach the Greek Orthodox community and the Ecumenical Patriarchate as separate components of the whole Greek Orthodox minority is another problematic aspect, which creates more difficulties for the minority.[26] It is therefore dependent upon Ankara's political willingness to accept religious pluralism and develop democratic policies towards self-administration of all minority religious entities of the country.

In the political context of modern Turkey as it relates to the minority question, the new Islamist political movement, which has emerged as a political party, demonstrates distinctive qualities and therefore is a phenomenon that deserves special attention. In Turkey the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), which came to power in November 2002,[27] has an Islamic background and presents a unique case for this aspect of political Islam. The political reformation process in Turkey continued with five packages by 2004 which instituted the

23 Zürcher, 'Greek and Turkish refugees and deportees 1912-1924', p. 4.

24 The Istanbul and Izmir pogrom between 6 and 7 September 1955 known as 'Septemvriana' events, followed by the events of 1964, led the vast majority of the Greek Orthodox citizens of Turkey to abandon the country. For the Istanbul events of 1955 see the work of Dilek Güven, *'Riots against the Non-Muslims of Turkey: 6/7 September 1955 in the context of demographic engineering'*.

25 Achilleas G Adamantiades, 'The Status and Issues of the Greek-Orthodox Minority in Turkey', *Tolerance and Non-Discrimination,* 2 (2012).

26 Prodromou, 'Turkey between Secularism and Fundamentalism?: The "Muslimhood Model" and the Greek Orthodox Minority', p. 14.

27 Anna Maria Beylunioğlu, 'Freedom of Religion and non-Muslim Minorities in Turkey', *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 4 (2015), 141.

establishment of minority associations.[28] Non-Muslim minorities in Turkey, and particularly the Greek Orthodox, the Armenians, and the Jews, view the minority policies of AKP with uncertainty. There is a sense that the direction of the AKP is to create a type of Islamic state in Turkey.[29] However, the positive attitude of the AKP Turkish Government towards non-Muslim minorities is a significant aspect, and shows the willingness of the Turkish authorities to improve the conditions of minorities.[30] Nonetheless, there is no legal framework for non-Muslim minorities in Turkey in order to solve their issues in relation to legal recognition, constitutional protection, religious freedom, and protection against discrimination. The approach of the AKP towards freedom of religion is coupled with and influenced by Islamic ideology and therefore remains restrictive for non-Muslim minorities and their religious freedoms.[31]

Examining the various aspects of the modern historical context of Turkey in relation to the minority question, it is obvious that the specific foreign policies which are followed in addition to the application of international conventions on human and minority rights form the umbrella under which adjustments in the relations between minorities and the official State take place. Although Turkey is demographically a homogeneous country, it accommodates within its borders officially recognised minorities whose status is regulated by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. Geopolitical and ideological factors obstruct the Turkish State in granting minority recognition to these communities, a policy which leads in many cases to violation of the principles of human rights, such as the rights of self-identification and freedom of religion.[32]

The political background to the decision to convert Hagia Sophia has a profound double dimension: the first emerges immediately following the defeat of Erdoğan, the Turkish President and the leader of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) candidate for the Istanbul

28 Beylunioğlu, p. 141.

29 Rabasa and Larrabee, p. 65.

30 For Turkey, the question of respect and protection of minorities is still one of the most problematic areas as it relates to the preconditions for accession to the EU according to the Copenhagen Criteria from 1993. Arndt Kunnecke, p. 78.

31 Beylunioğlu, pp. 145-147.

32 Nikodemos Anagnostopoulos, *'Orthodoxy and Islam: Theology and Muslim-Christian relations in Modern Greece and Turkey'*, pp. 122-123.

mayoralty, to Ekrem Imamoğlu of the Republican People's Party in June 2019. Erdoğan, a former mayor of Istanbul, observed that he needed to boost his popularity in the city. Furthermore, the Brookings Institution recalls that the 'combination of a weak economy and an unending spiral of authoritarianism will make a robust recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic even more difficult. Instead, the path to normalisation is likely to be marked by growing political instability and debates over the likelihood of early elections. The second aspect concerns the religious background of the governing Justice and Development Party and President Erdoğan himself, as a devoted Sunni Muslim.

The recent decisions of the Turkish authorities to convert Hagia Sophia and the historic Chora Monastery in Constantinople into Islamic places of worship intensifies frustration and concern. Unfortunately, the Turkish political leadership insists on following a path of disrespect for religious monuments of the Orthodox Church but also displays contempt for monuments that constitute a part of the world's cultural heritage. There are currently more than 3500 mosques in Constantinople. There is no need for another one to be added to the list as most of them are empty. Unfortunately, Turkey is moving in the opposite direction from what all modern democracies and societies have set out to do in recent years. At the same time, it invalidates all actions and steps taken in previous decades by the Turkish Republic and the Turkish people, choosing to go backwards instead of progressing and showing disrespect even for its own history. However, it should be noted that such decisions not only constitute an insult to Orthodox Christians or, generally, to Christians around the world. It is important to understand that such initiatives promote intolerance, religious fanaticism and nationalist ideology while, at the same time, undermining peaceful coexistence, which is a pursuit of all religions. It is crucial to ponder—particularly by those who instigate and execute such decisions—that no present intervention can change the historic reality reflected in a monument. It can only determine the future. And this is why the responsibility that comes from such decisions is heavy-laden.

At the time of the historic desecration with the conversion of Hagia Sophia Cathedral to a mosque, by a state and a leader, a whole nation is led backwards in terms of intolerance and isolation. In the same place, there is still this gaze of Christ, in an exquisite specimen of Byzantine

art, of the thirteenth century. The civilized world has many weapons to defend against bullying, disrespect for international rules and cultural barbarism: it certainly has the alliance of civilized nations—but it also has the power of art. Whatever the desperate neo-Ottoman desires are, the meek, invincible and transcendent appearance of Jesus Christ will always be present on the walls of the Byzantine Cathedral of the Divine Wisdom, reminding all of the differences between civilization and barbarism.

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HAGIA SOPHIA, MUSEUM, MOSQUE, OR CHURCH OR SOMETHING ELSE?

Robert (Robin) Gibbons

The return of Hagia Sophia to a mosque

That the return of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul by President Erdoğan to use as a mosque, and an announcement that the first Muslim Friday prayers would be held in Hagia Sophia on 24 July 2020, has provoked a heated debate in the Eastern Orthodox (and Byzantine Catholic) Churches as well as concerned comments from various religious and political leaders, as well as other interested parties including UNESCO, who made this comment in Paris on 10 July 2020: 'Hagia Sophia: UNESCO deeply regrets the decision of the Turkish authorities, made without prior discussion, and calls for the universal value of World Heritage to be preserved.'[1]

On the whole in the wider European context, the move has been seen as retrograde. Far from being understood as a pious religious move, many have seen the political undertones which are many and various, but despite vocal protestations outside Turkey, the move has been met within Turkey by broad agreement; although there is some minority opposition this is hardly likely to be allowed to make too much noise! In the 'Opinion' column, written for *This Week in Asia*, Dr Serkan Yolacan, a native Turk, who is a research fellow at the Middle East Institute at the National University of Singapore, warned that this event (one amongst many) spells trouble ahead for Erdoğan and Turkey. He also reminded us that Erdoğan is not the first Turkish president to open the 'Ayasofya' for Muslim prayers. Without changing the status of the iconic 'Museum' in 1991, the previous president Turgat Ozal dedicated the 'Sultan's Pavilion', an eighteenth-century annexe to the Hagia Sophia as a

1 https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-statement-hagia-sophia-istanbul.

place for prayer, bypassing in a sense the need to change the status of the main building.

Erdoğan's move fed into something that political commentators understand better than myself, as Dr Yolacan stated:

> Although this was a symbolic act, it went a long way towards showing how the long-held dreams of Turkey's Muslim conservatives could be addressed without openly attacking Ataturk's legacy. To walk this fine line, Ozal leaned on the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis.[2]

This is something the Churches themselves need to recognise, there are a lot of symbolic acts coming out of Erdoğan's Turkey and in the days following the opening of Hagia Sophia to public prayers, other places of ancient Christian Byzantine tradition have been similarly targeted. The thread running through this is not forward looking at all but a conservative restorationist symbol of an Ottoman Islamic past. There are problems ahead, Erdoğan has used symbols to seek approval from his base, but there are negative forces at work as Yolacan points out:

> Of late, Erdogan has had nothing to offer but symbols. Some have come in the form of megaprojects, like the country's biggest mosque in Camlica, Istanbul, completed and inaugurated in 2019 … The Hagia Sophia move is the latest example. In the meantime, the state he is running is tangled in webs of nepotism and is unable to arrest the economy's free-fall. The patronage networks he has spearheaded have made Erdogan unpopular with the majority, and he is using symbols to touch base with his constituency and rally support.
> Erdogan knows he is on thin ice.[3]

But it is also true, as anybody who works with rituals, gestures and imagery might know, that symbols themselves have deep power—and

2 https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/opinion/article/3094037/why-hagia-sophia-move-spells-trouble-turkeys-president-erdogan.

3 *Ibid*.

not only positive; there is a deep ambivalence contained in them, they can sometimes backfire!

Orthodox and other religious leaders comment on the situation

Into this matrix we have to add the perennial and also neo-emergent problem of Eastern Orthodox Churches, who are autocephalous, whilst linked in ecclesial tradition to the ancient ideals of 'communion' with one of the major patriarchates, which in this case is the senior Patriarchate of Constantinople. That they are also linked to nationalism of a particular kind is of little help in trying to evaluate and critique just what the Hagia Sophia event means to them and a wider world which perhaps has little appetite for religious squabbles. Yet, I am convinced that unless we acknowledge certain symbolic references of deep importance for the Eastern Christian tradition, the slow death of Eastern Christianity in certain regions will only continue—Hagia Sophia is of supreme importance to them. Perhaps the Eastern Catholics might help, though some Churches may be 'national' in many respects, all are linked theologically and juridically within the wider format of Catholicism, meaning they make up the Catholic Church with their larger 'sister' Church of Rome, though all are in communion with the Bishop of Rome. This gives them a stronger connection in the global Church, even if numerically they are not large, more importantly many of them are now embedded in countries outside their homeland, giving another dimension to a colourful communion! Rapprochement between the Byzantine families could help in this kind of situation, but it will never be easy!

Pope Francis

In the BBC report which made the announcement (the BBC News on 12 July 2020) it was simply stated that, 'Pope Francis confined himself to a few words on the issue: "My thoughts go to Istanbul. I think of Santa Sophia and I am very pained."'[4] While in one sense this

4 BBC News, 12 July 2020.

is not surprising, the delicacy of inter-Church relationships of ancient Patriarchal (territorial) juridical boundaries, the divisions between Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism and a deep, even now bitter memory by the Orthodox of the Latin sack of Constantinople and the take-over of the cathedral as Latin Rite (Roman Catholic), between 1206 and 1261, quite obviously lies behind the pope's remark. In contrast to previous times, it has a sensitivity which needs to be acknowledged, especially as many Roman Catholics wanted the pope to make a greater condemnation of the event.

There is also something we should consider in the silence of the pope and Vatican from this time. Firstly that this opening of the Hagia Sophia is redolent of Turkish politics. John L Allen Jr, a noted Catholic columnist, pointed out several reasons for this lack of condemnation in a 30 July article in *Crux Now*. Allen noted the symbolical, political nature of the restoration of Friday prayers, stating: 'The political nature of the whole thing was also clear from the fact that Erdoğan chose 24 July for the reopening, which is the anniversary of the Treaty of Lausanne that established the borders of modern Turkey. Erdoğan resents the fact the treaty ceded the Aegean Islands to Greece, and this was his way of reclaiming the date for national pride rather than shame.'[5] In this sense Allen contends that Francis, whilst showing pain at this action is somehow playing a longer and perhaps wiser game.

By distancing himself from other world leaders the pope is keeping out of what is becoming a political game. Then there are the ecumenical implications of his actions, which are also important as I have already noted. Francis' sensitivity to Orthodoxy and the role of the Patriarch of Constantinople is perhaps an attempt symbolically to right an old wrong, and in my eyes far more prophetic than those who seek to score points. He is also very keen not to upset the relationship he has forged with the wider world of Islam, 'Francis is generally an advocate of dialogue in relations with Islam, and he may not want to set back momentum created by a "Document on Human Fraternity" he signed with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar in Abu Dhabi in February 2019.'[6]

5 John L. Allen Jr., 'Why Pope Francis may be content with a supporting role over Hagia Sophia' in *Crux Now*, 20 July 2020. https://angelusnews.com/voices/why-pope-francis-may-be-content-with-a-supporting-role-over-hagia-sophia/.

6 *Ibid*.

There is also the problem with some of the voices raised in protest at the shift. Francis may perhaps be turned off by some of the voices, particularly Western politicians, who are leading the clamour over Hagia Sophia; as Allen points out, 'they tend to be the same "hawks and culture warriors" he clearly distrusts on other fronts. (It doesn't help that the leader of Italy's far-right and anti-immigrant party, Matteo Salvini, staged a demonstration in front of the Turkish consulate shouting "Hands off Hagia Sophia", warning that if we don't draw the line, soon the Cathedral of Milan might also be a mosque.)'[7] But for me there is also another point, one I am going to use to really examine and critique the innate meaning of this building and that is a theology of Christian space. Part of me wonders, given the various conflicts within the Roman Catholic Church concerning liturgy and the space for worship, whether a real acceptance and analysis of Hagia Sophia as a 'supreme example of a type of *Domus Dei*' in the Byzantine tradition, might not also help create a much needed debate within the context not of a world that is secular versus sacred, but of the earth as a holy place, a bearer of the holy in so many ways and worth our loving concern especially in concerns of our planetary future.

Here I have to also point out that Erdoğan and wider Islam are not necessarily compatible. Erdoğan comes from a conservative Muslim tradition and has chipped away at the legacy of secularism put in place by Atatürk, but he is also making a concerted effort to revive the glories of the Ottoman era. Others seem to be reacting to his political vision, for instance the fact that President Bashar al-Assad, with the backing of President Vladimir Putin, announced he would be building a smaller replica of the Hagia Sophia in Syria makes it hard to believe this is done out of any religious motive. In fact the *Middle East Monitor* of 28 July 2020 was critical of this ploy: 'The construction of this mini Hagia Sophia, taking place in the central province of Hama, will be assisted by Syria's prominent ally Russia and will reportedly show the importance of "peaceful dialogue" between the major faiths.'[8] In fact it should be seen as a warning of yet more religious and political shenanigans, with Russia positioning itself as a protector, backed by the Patriarchate of Moscow which has long desired to hold a similar place or even usurp

7 *Ibid*.

8 Memo, *Middle East Monitor*, 28 July 2020. https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200728-syria-to-build-new-hagia-sophia-with-help-from-russia/.

the role of the Ecumenical Patriarch. *The Middle East Monitor* spells it out: 'Syria's aim to build a replica of the historic building is seen to serve as a gesture of revenge against Turkey, against whom it is fighting in the ongoing Syrian civil war. It is also a symbolic gesture by the Assad regime towards the Syrian Christian community, which it has posed as being a protector of, despite having targeted churches and persecuting Syrian Christians during the civil war.'[9]

The primary person to make any great declaration from Christianity is either a representative spokesperson of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, or Bartholomew himself, who as one might expect, has made several strong statements against the decision, more recently including a strong criticism of the subsequent decision to turn the Chora Church of the Holy Saviour into a mosque shortly after that of Hagia Sophia! Bartholomew commented:

> These two unique monuments of Constantinople were built as Christian churches. They express the universal spirit of our faith as well as the love and hope of eternity. The unique mosaics and the icons are 'nourishment for the soul and a remarkable sight for the eyes', as the Greek writer and painter, Fotis Kontoglou would say. They are part of the world cultural heritage …
> We pray to the God of love, justice, and peace to enlighten the minds and hearts of those in charge.'[10]

There is much to ponder on in this. Bartholomew is appealing to something more than the cultural artistic heritage contained in the palimpsest of that building, rather to a deeper symbolic world, one often ignored today by many westernised Christians, that here in the bridge territory between Europe and Asia, the early centuries of Christianity were formed, that these places too are in many ways a 'Holy Land' and need respect and acknowledgement as important sites for Christianity now and in the future, for in these places the great debates about the Trinity and the nature of Christ were expounded, in these buildings the

9 *Ibid*.

10 https://greekcitytimes.com/2020/08/24/ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew-we-are-hurt-by-the-conversion-of-hagia-sophia-and-chora-church-into-mosques/; see also :https://greekcitytimes.com/2020/09/06/turkey-hagia-sophia-mosque-in-nicaea-iznik/.

voices of our great teachers like John Chrysostom preached, served the liturgy, pastored their flocks. There is a deep sense of *anamnesis*, great, deep remembering, so important for our understanding of the Communion of Saints and our connection with the moments of salvation history.

Carlotta Gall in an article in *The New York Times* of 8 July 2020 quoted a recent sermon of Patriarch Bartholomew which not only condemned the then proposed change, but also urged Turkey to honour their 'obligation' to the wider world:

> We consider it as detrimental … for Hagia Sophia, which, due to its dedication to the Wisdom of God is a point of encounter and a source of fascination for the faithful of both religions, to become, in the twenty-first century, a cause of confrontation and conflict.
> The Turkish people have the great responsibility and the highest honor to give prominence to the universality of this exquisite monument.[11]

The standpoint of the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby is also significant. He noted, on an official visit to the Phanar as leader of the world-wide Anglican Church to meet with the Ecumenical Patriarch on 13-14 January 2014, his opposition to any possibility that Hagia Sophia should be transformed into a mosque. When he was asked about his impressions of Hagia Sophia after this visit, he responded:

> My main impression is of the extraordinary history of the place, a sense of sadness that it is such an example of loss—of a great building that feels in need of more love and affection. I was overwhelmed by the beauty of the building and the importance that it is kept available for everyone and not becomes the property of one particular group. Its beauty is overwhelming. It is a place that needs explanation so that it is understood when people come in, of what it stood for and stands for.[12]

11 Carlotta Gall, article: 'Erdogan Talks of Making Hagia Sophia a Mosque Again, to International Dismay' in *The New York Times* , 8 July 2020. ttps://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/08/world/europe/erdogan-hagia-sophia-mosque.html.

12 Nikolaos Manginas, article: 'The Archbishop of Canterbury: Hagia Sophia Should Not Become A Mosque' in *The Archon Newsletter of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in*

This of course was before the events of 2020, but there are some key points to note here, the sense of a space that is transcendent, filled with contextual and symbolic meaning, a bit of the awe that in 987 captured the souls of the Kievan envoys on behalf of Pince Vladimir seeking a faith for the people of Rus, their oft repeated comment similar in tone to the archbishops, 'We no longer knew whether we were in heaven or on earth'! The other points made are important today, namely it has to be kept for all, it cannot now be the sole responsibility of a particular group and needs clear, historical and religious explanation! I shall come back to this.

In August 2020 the Archbishop of Canterbury, and four other presidents of the ecumenical Churches Together in England (CTE) group spoke out against Turkey's decision to turn the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul back into a mosque.

When the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, took part in the first Friday Prayers in July 2020 at Hagia Sophia to mark its transition into a Mosque, it was a move condemned by various bodies including UNESCO and the World Council of Churches.

In a statement issued shortly before this event took place, five Churches Together in England (CTE) presidents, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, described in rather emotive terms the move as 'lamentable and painful for many people of faith the world over.'

In another joint statement the CTE presidents expressed sadness at the move, commenting on it in these words:

> … for a long period of time Hagia Sophia has been a unique centre symbolising a co-existence of people of faith. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and, as a place where the rich history of Istanbul is told visually, can be a living example of religious tolerance and respect.
> The decision to alter the status quo in this way is a powerful, symbolic change that is lamentable and painful for many people of faith the world over.[13]

America, January 2014. https://www.archons.org/-/the-archbishop-of-canterbury-hagia-sophia-should-not-become-a-mosque-by-nikolaos-manginas.

13 https://www.anglicannews.org/news/2020/07/weekly-news-summary-on-tuesday-28-july-2020.aspx.

Again the language used is about the symbolism and deep history, beyond that of the fifteenth-century Ottoman conquest of Constantinople, remembering a specific place that is one of the great wonders of the world and a recognition (if not overtly) described as a 'symbolic' change. This is partly my own reaction as a Byzantine Catholic, for this building is one of those that encapsulated true dynamic symbolism of my tradition and today still retains its place as a Christian symbol of the command of Christ to have tolerance and respect for others celebrated in the liturgy.

The World Council of Churches Interim General Secretary, Dr Ioan Sauca, made this point, or perhaps it can be called a plea:

> We offer our solidarity and accompaniment particularly to all churches and Christians of the Orthodox family, for whom Hagia Sophia holds a very special significance, as well as to all Turkish citizens who do not feel represented in this action by their government.
> We continue to pray that the Turkish authorities will be moved to reconsider this decision, and to undo this deeply regressive measure.[14]

However not everybody had or has this reaction. The Turkish Catholic bishops remained silent on the issue, whilst the Catholic bishops in Greece, in solidarity with the Orthodox condemned the move. Fr Felix Körner SJ, a professor of the theology of religions at the Pontifical Gregorian University and a member of the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims, reflected in detail with *Domradio* on 14 July on the theme of 'hurt' Christian leaders. His contention is that this is all about 'old memory', the sack of Constantinople in 1453. His claim is that Eastern Christianity did not care about the fall of Constantinople nor the use of Hagia Sophia as a mosque by the Ottomans. To see it as a house of prayer again should make people happy, if anything should cause us pain it is a political game being played, but he has an interesting idea which has some merit, he calls on Christians 'not [to] fall into the trap of over-dramatising' the reconversion, but instead to see it as 'an opportunity to think again about what can become of a secularised

14 *Ibid.*

museum, which had become stiff as a result, turned now into a house of prayer for all peoples.'[15]

Others articulate much the same thing that it is somehow better the church was/is used as a place of prayer rather than remain as a museum. Giles Fraser, a well known Anglican priest, articulated this both on Twitter and in an article in *The Post* of July 10 2020: 'Now I am no particular fan of Turkish leader, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, but when it comes to his desire to return this once holy place back into a mosque, I cannot but applaud. There will be those—Greek Orthodox Christians especially—who would prefer it to return to being a Cathedral. Of course, that would be wonderful. But it is never going to happen in a country where Christianity represents a vanishingly small percentage of the population. And so that aspect of the argument is something of a distraction'.[16] But is it? The same rationale would mean a similar case for the buildings connected with the life of Jesus in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and the Holy Land; it is not always about numbers, rather the powerful symbols of a place!

The ongoing problem of converting churches to mosques in Turkey

Patriarch Bartholomew's reference to 'universality' of the monument is particularly poignant, as we shall note the architectonic features of this place are unique, but the frescoes and imagery are superb, giving the building an UNESCO protected status. When the Ottoman Turks took the building away from the Orthodox on 29 May 1453, Mehmet II and his army entered the city, marching straight to Hagia Sophia. It is said Mehmet dismounted from his horse at the door of the church, then bent down taking a handful of earth, which he sprinkled over his turban as an act of humility before God, he then ordered it to be protected in perpetuity, a protection that included deep respect for its history.

Perhaps because of this the Turks did not destroy all imagery, instead they hid its artwork under layers of plaster. Following reconversion

15 https://www.domradio.de/themen/islam-und-kirche/2020-07-14/ich-finde-das-heuchlerisch-jesuit-kritisiert-aufregung-ueber-hagia-sophia.

16 Giles Fraser, article: 'The Hagia Sophia is for Prayer Not Pictures' in *The Post*, 10 July 2020 https://unherd.com/thepost/the-hagia-sophia-is-for-prayer-not-pictures/.

into a museum under Atatürk, the mosaics and frescos were restored and have been on display since 1958. The same applied in the Church of the Holy Saviour.

Yet we must also note this respect seems to be ebbing today, Turkey has recently turned other notable 'church-turned-mosques-turned museums' back into mosques including Hagia Sophias in Iznik and Trabzon, also the Church of the Saviour in Chora, but there are voices of concern. On 11 August, Tom Heneghan wrote an article in *The Tablet* about the proposed reconversion of the Chora Church which is a UNESCO site, he cited French historian Fabrice Monnier making the point that the Chora is a different case, due to the extent of its artwork:

> Its beautiful mosaics and frescos cover almost all the church's walls and domes … It would be hard to imagine it being returned into a mosque without totally covering them over.[17]

But a word of warning, these other Hagia Sophias, and countless other churches in Turkey, are now either in ruins or used as mosques or for other purposes. Turkey's abusive treatment of churches, as well as other Christian and Greek religious and cultural centres, demonstrates that the cultural and religious destruction of Christian places is ongoing.

House of God, House of God's People, a Christian Determinant.

Archimandrite Robert Taft, one of the greatest of the twentieth-century Byzantine liturgical scholars, encapsulates this cosmic approach in the liturgical environment; writing on the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople he is particularly clear about its theological importance:

> … in no liturgical tradition is liturgical space such an integral part of the liturgy as in the Byzantine, and in no tradition has one edifice played such a decisive role as Justinian's Hagia Sophia … (it) was the cathedral

17 https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/13239/erdogan-expected-to-turn-another-istanbul-church-into-mosque.

> church of the city where the Byzantine rite was moulded and celebrated, and where the vision of its meaning, enacted elsewhere on a smaller stage, was determined and kept alive.[18]

This presents, I think, no small problem for anybody attempting to shift the whole theological meaning of this important and iconic building. When we examine a building we have a series of factors that give us its rationale, changing these in a minor way, for instance the legitimate development of a domestic dwelling over time, in no way compromises its use. But when we come to the reuse or redevelopment of 'religious' buildings we have a problem that is not totally specific to Christianity, but is in fact essential to the Byzantine tradition, an issue which we oft times ignore and rarely mention in a world that has both lost and badly misused its symbols, and this fact is precisely the religious and theological determinant of the building! Can it withstand change? What is its basic essence? And how far can we secularise a building developed for and around the cult of the divine-human Christ, which also exercised such a powerful influence, that a whole liturgical structure emerged from its rituals: here we face the clash of titans. Is it a *domus dei*, the very house of the Living God, or *domus ecclesia* that of the community, in other words what was its primary and secondary use? For God, or for use as a 'house of God's holy people' or is it an amalgam of both?

It has to be noted that Erdoğan's supporters speak of the building in terms of the third holiest site in Islam, coming after the Grand Mosque of Mecca and Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. That in itself would be a provocation too far for Greeks, Orthodox and many Christians not to mention many Muslims. It would be a re-writing of historical religious fact as well as something not consistent with one important tradition in Islam itself: the *domus ecclesia,* that is of buildings constructed for the 'Holy People of God' and multi-purpose in a very direct way, where the sacred is dependent on the gathered.

In the building of Hagia Sophia we see the merging of actions of the community in whom Christ is present, and the *domus dei*, one, which

18 Robert F Taft, 'The Liturgy of the Great Church' *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 34-*35* (1980-81). See also Robert F Taft SJ, *Liturgy in Byzantium and Beyond,* Ashgate Variorum, Farnham, 1995.

has more overtones of a specific sacral place in 'temple' terms with a stronger emphasis on the presence of the Divine within the building itself. In Hagia Sophia and consequent buildings we find a mixture of ideas, a fusion of these two theological explanations of presence which makes complete sense in the context of the Byzantine liturgy, where heaven and earth connect.

These do not connect well, however, when seismic change takes place. In the case of the type of building that Hagia Sophia represents the fusion of these modes does not allow easy transfer between them. Yes, it became a mosque, but in the symbolic realm of Christian liturgy and history, it remains par excellence a hugely potent symbol of so many Eastern Christian ideals and ideologies. It is quite disingenuous to make an equitable comparison say with the mosque at Cordoba now integrated into the cathedral. Why? I suppose if we can cut the ancient mosque off from the later buildings it could possibly be used as a mosque, but the addition of later elements create a tension. A mosque, like a synagogue comes from a single parent tradition of *beth* or house, it is in no way expected to carry the weight of Divine Presence, except perhaps in the Jewish context of the assembly at prayer, which was made the Christian understanding, when two or three gather the 'shekinah' or Christ is in their midst (Mt 19:20).

There is no derivative inference for this in Islamic architecture where the main context of the mosque is an outwards focus both in prayer and in the symbol of the directionality of Mecca not the building! One extremely important example is the Dome of the Rock of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Here where Israel had its Holy of Holies, the Dome of the Rock, venerated as a shrine both of the creation of the world and of the Prophet's Night Journey, is not intended as a temple edifice, nor a locus of Divine Presence. In fact the inscriptions running round its interior reinforce the denial of any connection with the Divine/Human Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity! The irony is it was built by Byzantine craftsmen and in style takes its plan from the *Kathisma* church on the road between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, but it is unique and its decorative internal calligraphy provided the inspiration for that form of art in Islam. Just to make a point it is described by the art historian Oleg Grabar as a work of art and a cultural and pious document, not as a sacred place.

Changed buildings?

This brings us to a moot point, how do we deal with any change in these charged buildings when circumstances force a new reality on them and their place as liturgical, spiritual centres of the *Ur*-religion are ruthlessly transformed? We can see from those 'bare ruined choirs' of dissolved abbeys such as as Fountains, Rievaulx, Tintern and Kirkstall in England, that they may be best left as a ruin where symbol, memory, romance can open them out to a wider and appreciative clientele, because the strength of the plan and form is almost too great to alter their purpose as a monastic centre. I won't push that thought too far, plenty of old abbeys and priories across Europe, victims of religious wars and the Reformation have been reused but often in very iconoclastic manner, such as at Cluny, where the ecclesiastical buildings were torn down, or in reverse, left standing and partially reused, such examples as at Abbaye aux Hommes at Caen, Mont St Michel in Normandy, Tewksbury Abbey and Gloucester Cathedral in the UK; two amongst many monastic buildings appropriated after the dissolution of the monasteries and reused for the 'cult', where still the church remains as a parish church, cathedral or Royal Peculiar as Westminster Abbey, where the monastic church retained its use under a secular Dean and Chapter of Canons (as with other monastic cathedral foundations) and the conventual buildings turned into a school. This is change indeed and quite seismic in its effects, but and it is a big but, it was and is still a building used by the same faith, even if of a reformed kind and Christian prayer and worship is offered there.

Sometimes ecclesiastical buildings have been reused, often changed quite drastically, we can see them all over Europe and in some of the stately homes of the UK, but the 'iconic' ones have a different power of resistance, for example Notre Dame in Paris was turned into the Temple of Reason during the Revolution of 1789, but soon reverted back to its intended Christian use once the 'Terror' was over and some stability returned. The concern and deep emotional links with this building as a sacred place continue down the ages. This was amply shown in the outpouring of concern and care after the fire which destroyed the roof and nearly engulfed the whole structure in April 2019; a reminder that this building has a deeply symbolic as well as a majestic physical presence.

Other buildings have been appropriated by Christians and turned into churches, but few of them have the deep resonance of an architecture built for a specific Christian liturgical tradition such as the Romanesque and Gothic in medieval Europe or the Byzantine tradition of which Hagia Sophia is perhaps the ultimate example. All of these hold deep spiritual, emotional and theological roots in the hearts and minds of many and can be said to be a form of 'moral' as well as 'spiritual' architecture. In this kind of context the religious plan holds, the purpose of cult and worship remains, there is a tenacity of purpose within the determinant of the building that keeps bringing us back to its inceptive vision as a religious building of a particular kind, but they have always allowed pilgrims as well as faithful, those who are drawn to the building or its history or who are simply curious, but these are welcomed alongside the worshipper, mainly because the buildings themselves are not one huge mass of single open space but different places within a larger whole. I point this out because there might be a solution to the tensions within the great church, for Hagia Sophia is a complex problem, there are too many uneasy overlays, whilst the initial purpose keeps emerging in different ways, but the idea of zones, spaces, places within the total space, could if people wished to break with tradition, create a different harmonic for the future.

Symbols cause problems: Veiling of images, a self-defeating case

The reaction from Turkey has been twofold: bullish, as in Turkey is exercising its sovereign rights and rejects attempts at outside interference, but also placatory, for the authorities allow free access to all visitors declaring they will not remove the Christian icons and do nothing to harm its status as a UNESCO world heritage site. How this is going to work remains to be seen, but the *Diyanet* (the government authority responsible for religious affairs), says Christian iconography will be draped, and not illuminated, during Muslim prayer times.

> 'The [Christian] pictures on the walls of the Hagia Sophia mosque do not constitute an obstacle for establishing prayers there healthily,' it said in a statement. 'However,

> the mentioned pictures should be curtained or blackened during prayers by means of utilizing appropriate methods in order to make sure that the [Muslim] community members establish their prayer in awe.'[19]

This idea of veiling the images is interesting, and in a sense inadvertently plays into a Christian tradition. It can easily be proved that the prohibition of imagery is not as simple a tradition as it seems. Cultural historians have noted this and in a fascinating article in *The Conversation* by art historians Christiane Gruber and Paroma Chaterjee on the veiling of images they say:

> Turkish Officials have stated that the veiling of the images, especially the interior mosaics, is necessary to transform the interior into a Muslim prayer space.
> As historians of Byzantine and Islamic art, we argue that in their rush to reassert the monument's Islamic past, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his associates have inadvertently—and superficially—emulated certain Orthodox Christian practices.[20]

This is important, for images of Mary and Christ were often ritually veiled and unveiled in Byzantium, but the Ottoman Muslim rulers did not engage in such practices.

When Sultan Mehmet II, left the ninth-century mosaic of Mary and Christ in the interior uncovered and untouched, Ottoman historians tell us that he remained standing in awe, feeling that the eyes of the Christ child followed him when he moved round the building.

These depictions of Mary and Jesus remained uncovered in the mosque, until 1739 when they were plastered over to be removed during the building's conversion into a museum in 1934.

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19 https://www.cnsnews.com/index.php/article/international/patrick-goodenough/mary-and-jesus-behind-veil-hagia-sophia-cover-christian.

20 Christiane Gruber, Paroma Chatterjee, article 'Hagia Sophia has been converted back into a mosque, but the veiling of its figural icons is not a Muslim tradition'. in *The Conversation*, University of Michigan, 18 August 2020. https://theconversation.com/hagia-sophia-has-been-converted-back-into-a-mosque-but-the-veiling-of-its-figural-icons-is-not-a-muslim-tradition-144042.

Allowing this display in the converted mosque may have been a gesture in appreciation of the Prophet who is said to have preserved an icon of the Virgin and Christ whilst other pagan images were destroyed in the Ka'ba, Islam's holy sanctuary, in Mecca, Saudi Arabia.[21]

There are other cases, and instances of treaties made by the Prophet where Muslim rulers understood that religious figures can be used for devotional purposes without being idolatrous. This nuance has been lost a in the more recent debates surrounding representations of the Prophet Muhammad.[22]

A Byzantine miracle

The two art historians make a singular connection to a miracle in Byzantium. We need to remind ourselves that the veiling and unveiling of icons and relics is a tradition particularly in the East, 'veils' being a wide term for covering. The unveiling, revealing was a means of opening up the sacred to the gaze of the faithful, and in *Hagia Sophia* the covering veil of the *Theotokos*, the *Maphorion*, was supposed to be amongst their greatest treasures. So, if as Turkish officials claim, the curtains covering the mosaics are on an electronic rail system and lowered to cover the icons only during prayer times, it means that the strips of cloth covering the central mosaic of Mary and Christ will be raised intermittently and non-manually, then a startling, if cursory, coincidence would emerge, because it would then resemble a well-known 11th-century Christian miracle in Constantinople. I quote them: 'The story goes that each Friday evening, the veil covering an icon of Mary and Christ would rise by itself after prayers. It would remain lifted until the following day when it fell again—on its own. The raised veil was interpreted, among other things, as a sign of the tangible interface between the divine and mortal worlds and, more specifically, as the Virgin Mary's embrace of her devotees.'[23] Whilst this

21 See al-Azraqī, *Kitāb Akhbār Makkah*, (ed.) F Wüstenfeld, *Die Chroniken der Stadt Mekka,* Leipzig, 1858, vol. 1, pp. 110-113.

22 See John Andrew Morrow, *The Covenants of the Prophet Mohammad with the Christians of the World*, Angelico Press, New York, 2013, pp, 13, 14ff.

23 art. cit. The Conversation. https://theconversation.com/hagia-sophia-has-been-converted-back-into-a-mosque-but-the-veiling-of-its-figural-icons-is-not-a-muslim-tradition-144042.

might be incidental it also hints at resonances that will start to emerge as the take-over of Hagia Sophia stirs other memories—symbolic actions and actual symbols are powerful, they can awaken deep seated emotions. I have no doubt that this stage of the great church's life is not the last phase by any means!

Conclusion: The paradox of the past

'Dear believers, what could be more sorrowful than a mosque whose minarets are silent?',[24] the Religious Affairs Minister, Ali Erbas, said during his sermon at the Hagia Sophia on the first Friday prayers. Yes, perhaps! But there are more complexities at work here, which only divinely inspired goodwill can possibly overcome. Those like Fraser and Körner who suggest that we accept what has happened and press the authorities to turn Hagia Sophia into a multi-faith place have a valuable point, but it is not a complete point. There is too much posturing and acquiescence towards Erdoğan's chess game by some political and religious authorities like Assad, Putin and elements of the Moscow Patriarchate and its followers. Western-based Churches, whilst they can support protests and appear 'hurt', need to recognise what we are learning from Black Lives Matter, that some injustices will not be forgotten, that religious symbols re-emerge from banished shadows, that the status of the *dhimmi* has been the lot of the Orthodox in these regions, that the acknowledgement of past issues like the genocide of Christian Armenians by the Turks cannot be airbrushed away, nor the constant onslaught against Christian sites and communities in Turkey by Erdoğan's followers today.

If as Felix Körner suggests we have an opportunity for us as believers to perceive and accept this place as a spiritual place the question is, what sort of place?

Well, Körner's suggestion is that Christians and Muslims should now draw up proposals for using the space together:

24 Erin Cunningham, Kareem Fahim and Adam Taylor, article 'First prayers held at Hagia Sophia after Turkey converts it from museum to mosque' in World Section, *The Washington Post*, 24 July 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/first-prayers-to-be-held-at-hagia-sophia-after-turkey-converts-it-from-museum-to-mosque/2020/07/23/0b8bf81e-ccf8-11ea-99b0-8426e26d203b_story.html.

> Istanbul's Muslims could, for example, formally invite Christians to pray with them in Hagia Sophia, 'just as … Muhammad himself invited Christians in Medina, according to tradition, to pray in his mosque there in the seventh century,' the Jesuit suggested.[25]

But Körner should also point out the wider tolerance of the Prophet towards Christianity, unlike many of his faith today, for there is also the tradition in which the Prophet made treaties with Christian communities, respecting their rights to practise and keep their places of religion, honouring the images of Mary and Jesus.[26] And which community of Muslims is Körner talking about? Surely it behoves those of a Protestant or Roman Catholic tradition to support those whose heritage is bound up in that deeper memory of *anamnesis*, these include all Orthodox in communion with the Ecumenical Patriarch, those other ancient Christian communities linked to the history of this region like the Byzantine Greek-Catholics, such as my own Melkite Church, Oriental Churches like the Armenians, but also knowledgeable scholars who can point out the deeper resonances. Yes, maybe it is time to look again at Hagia Sophia as a place of prayer, but if so, the origins, and Christian tradition of the Holy Wisdom is as important as the later Ottoman period and deserves its place in that supremely Byzantine liturgical space.

25 https://www.domradio.de/themen/islam-und-kirche/2020-07-14/ich-finde-das-heuchlerisch-jesuit-kritisiert-aufregung-ueber-hagia-sophia.

26 Morrow, 2013, *op cit*.

CHRISTIAN ZIONISM: SOME INTER-RELIGIOUS AND ECUMENICAL OBSERVATIONS

Peter Colwell

The Holy Land, Zion, Jerusalem, al-Quds, holds a particular place of yearning in the spirituality of three religions. The Sephardic Jewish song of the eleventh century, 'Zionida', laments over Jerusalem: 'Beautiful city, delight of the world, city of the great king! My soul yearns for you from the far-off west!' Al Quds, as Jerusalem is called in Islam, is forever cherished, being the first orientation of prayer before Mecca took its place, and in Christian spirituality hymns and religious songs speak of a 'blessed city, heavenly Salem', 'Jerusalem the golden' and of dreams most fair, of the Holy City. The yearning for this place is unique in history and culture and lies at the heart not only of rich spirituality and theologies but also a cause for conflict and division. As Bishop Kenneth Cragg helpfully states, it is 'competitively loved'.

But what is different in the current geopolitical context is that this spiritual yearning has been translated into absolutist claims over this land. This paper is not an exploration of the competing claims over the Holy Land, or specifically Jerusalem, but rather it explores what the inter-religious implications are for one specific exclusive claim, that of Christian Zionism. I want to place Christian Zionism in the broader context of history and theology into which it finds itself. Noting that it can mean different things to different people, I want to hold in tension two notions of Christian Zionism: The first is the straightforward belief that the land of Palestine needs to include some kind of Jewish self-determination as a Christian theological conviction either because it rests of scripture alone or because of a belief that the Covenant, the Torah, is not revoked by the New Testament and cannot be spiritualized, separated from or relativized with respect of land. A good deal of Christian approaches to Jewish-Christian relations belong to this understanding of Judaism and the Land, although its

significant shortcomings are uncovered by the geo-political matters concerning land. Jewish-Christian dialogue is almost always limited to a Western conversation that at best gives a passing nod to the reality for Palestinians, Christian and Muslim, let alone Mizrahi Jews, that is Jews or North African and Middle Eastern descent, who have a very different account of living in the land amidst plurality, yet account for a significant percentage of the Jewish population of Israel.

The second is the restorationist tradition that has its roots amongst the seventeenth-century Puritans that gained ground amongst evangelicals in the nineteenth century that looked to the restoration of the Jews to the Holy Land for reasons of eschatology. This restorationist tradition included figures such as the Baptist preacher C H Spurgeon, the Presbyterian and subsequent founder of the Catholic Apostolics Edward Irving, the first Bishop of Liverpool J C Ryle, and the social reformer Anthony Ashley Cooper (7th Earl of Shaftesbury). Into this understanding belongs the 'dispensationalism' of figures such as John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) who taught that Christ's return would first be to the Gentiles to gather them into heaven, and then to the Jews who have gathered into Palestine.[1] In its current manifestation this tradition of Christian Zionism has a particular role within the current Israel-Palestine conflict due to its significant influence upon United States foreign policy. It takes the view that there is an impending apocalypse that will end human history, and therefore has an uncritical support of the State of Israel in order to hasten the ingathering of Jews into the Promised Land, thus resolving history according to their religious world view.[2]

Given that various sources estimate that the numbers of Christians in the United States who hold to a dispensationalist theology are upwards of 30 million, this has a critical impact upon Christian literature concerning the land. Much recent church policy making in the United

1 *A Land of Promise? An Anglican Exploration of Christian Attitudes to the Holy Land with special reference to Christian Zionism*, Anglican Consultative Council 2012, London, second edition 2014, pp.37f; Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *The Politics of Apocalypse: A History and Influence of Christian Zionism*, Oneworld Publications, Oxford, 2006; A Marchadour and D Neuhaus, *The Land, the Bible and History*, Fordham University Press, New York, 2006, pp.198ff; Elizabeth Philips, 'We have read the end of the book: An engagement with contemporary Christian Zionism through the eschatology of John Howard Yoder', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 2008, Vol. 21 Issue 3, pp. 342-361.

2 *A Land of Promise?*, pp. 6ff.

States and the United Kingdom have demonstrated a concern with countering such religious ideas as part of the broader response to the Israel-Palestine conflict, but this is often confused with Christians who are sympathetic to the State of Israel out of their commitment to Jewish-Christian dialogue.[3] Similarly, the response to Christian Zionism is a significant part of the context of a corpus of literature from European and North American theologians,[4] and it also influences the way in which many Palestinian Christian theologians speak to the Church globally, particularly within the World Council of Churches.

Whilst many Jews in the West and in Israel assume Christian Zionists to be natural allies, a closer examination would suggest this is not always the case. Amongst dispensationalists, it will be the 'true Christian believers' who will escape the Great Tribulation and in the Armageddon that follows most Jews will be killed, namely the two thirds that reject the Messiahship of Jesus. Many Jews complain that Christian Zionists 'do not care for Jews as fellow humans but only as puppets in their gory Christian apocalypse story.'[5] This is not in any sense a respect for a continuing and flourishing Judaism on its own terms: it is an abrogating tradition that has no space for difference of any kind.

The historical period in which Christian Zionism is formed—roughly the seventeenth century through until the late nineteenth, early twentieth century, is a pre-Holocaust era when the 'Jewish Question' was a live one, and Jews were experiencing widespread discrimination. In

3 For example, the Presbyterian Church of the USA stated in 2004: 'In that position, the church accepts its special covenant relationship with God in Christ, in continuity with God's covenant with the people of Israel, and implicitly rejects fundamentalist, dispensationalist interpretations equating the birth of the modern state of Israel as a literal fulfilment of the biblical promise, and as such the beginning of Armageddon, the end-time battle in which the Jews would ultimately have to be converted or destroyed.' (Resolution on Israel and Palestine: End the Occupation Now: https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/_resolutions/endoccupation03.pdf); its sister church, the Church of Scotland, in its 2013 report 'The Inheritance of Abraham: A report on 'the promised land'' also seeks to counter Christian Zionist ideas http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/14050/the_Inheritance_of_Abraham.pdf .

4 See for example Rosemary Radford Reuther and Herman J Reuther, *The Wrath of Jonah: The Crisis of Religious Nationalism in the Israel-Palestine Conflict*, Augsburg Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2002, pp. 174-182.

5 Victoria Clark, *Allies for Armageddon: The Rise of Christian Zionism*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2007, p. 127.

theological terms the church—Catholic and Protestant—was responsible for the teaching of contempt and that they were to blame for the death of Christ: Christianity had replaced Judaism in all aspects and a continuing Judaism was evidence of Jewish stubbornness and hardness of heart. In popular discourse, 'the Wandering Jew' was the tanner who refused kindness to Christ on the way to Calvary and was cursed to wander the earth in perpetuity.[6] Liturgies, especially during Holy Week, had, until recently, overtly blamed the Jews for the crucifixion. Antisemitism was part of the common cultural language from literary associations from Shakespeare's Shylock to Dickens' Fagin, to the accusations of financial control and connivance that would lead Karl Marx, himself a Jew by birth, to state that the religion of the Jew is money and control.[7] It cannot be understated the extent to which anti-Judaic sentiments were common currency to the point of being fashionable. Christian Zionism therefore emerges in an anti-Judaic context, yet there is no evidence that any of the proponents of it, from the seventeenth century Puritans to Shaftesbury or Darby, sought to repent of any inherited anti-Judaism. In that sense, Christian Zionism of this period shares the same presumptions about Jews as wider society and culture.

Jewish Zionism emerges around the same time, and arises in part because of post-Enlightenment Europe's failure to find permanency for a flourishing Judaism that was not reliant on Christian benevolence, and because of the close relationship between identity and nationalisms and why it seemed erroneous to many that Jews that they were the only people not seeking their own self-determination. Whilst Jewish Zionism was emerging, the ambivalent attitude of many churches and mission agencies towards Jewish self-understanding is worthy of note. Here is but one example among many, from the Free Church of Scotland, shortly before the outbreak of the First World War:

> While this idea of 'the Zionists', as they call themselves, is out of the question, there is no reason why the colonization of Palestine should not be encouraged … but

6 See further Peter Colwell: 'The Return of the Wandering Jew: The State of Israel as a Theological Challenge for Jewish- Christian relations', *World Council of Churches: Current Dialogue 58*, November 2016, pp. 26-28.

7 See David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The History of a Way of Thinking*, Head of Zeus, London, 2013, pp. 430ff; Robert S Wistrich, *A Lethal Obsession: Anti-Semitism from Antiquity to the Global Jihad*, Random House, 2010, New York, pp. 107ff.

> … we have no belief in the good time coming to which the Jews are looking forward, until they are brought to mourn for Him whom their fathers pierced.[8]

Jewish Zionism and Christian Zionism are often assumed to the more or less the same thing or at least very closely related. And whilst the two very different constructs they are both children of the Enlightenment and anti-Judaic Europe. Jewish Zionism is born out of the failure of Enlightenment Europe's ability to find a place of permanence in the nationalisms of European identities, hence a need to create a separate distinctive Jewish nationalism. Restorationist Christian Zionism arose from an evangelical yearning to escape the destabilizing effects of the enlightenment and hasten the return of Christ. For Jewish Zionism, Messianic longing is secularized into a political national movement of liberation whereby Judaism 'steps back into history' after centuries of perpetual wandering.[9] But to a very large extent, it was also a turning away from theism, although more recent forms of Zionism have developed a religious and theological character. Rabbi David Hartman makes the point that Jewish return to history means that it can longer be reduced to a spiritual abstraction.[10] Christian Zionism meanwhile sought to radically speed up salvation history by human hand by an ingathering of the Jews into the land of promise. One may seem political, the other eschatological, yet both emphasize the human endeavour rather than salvation by grace alone, in other words a negation of the divine and a salvation by works. The secular spirit of nineteenth-century Romanticism casts its shadow, where the human spirit can always succeed with a Promethean passion. This passion is what drives Jewish and Christian Zionism, but it also drove colonialism and nationalism, as well as progress in science, art, literature and music.

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8 'Monthly and Missionary Record of the Free Church of Scotland', quoted in Michael Marten, *Attempting to Bring the Gospel Home: Scottish Missions to Palestine, 1839-1917*, Tauris Academic Studies, London, 2006, p. 138.

9 Gershom Scholem, in reflecting upon his own experience of leaving Europe for Israel (but with obvious application for others) commented that by leaving Europe behind Jews was stepping out of world history in order to re-enter Jewish history. See Jay Howard Geller: 'From Berlin and Jerusalem: On the Germanness of Gershom Scholem', *Journal of Religious History*, Vol. 35, No.2, June 2011, pp. 211-232.

10 David Hartman, *A Living Covenant: The Innovative Spirit in Traditional Judaism*, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont, 2012, p. 304.

Whilst Christian-Zionism traces its roots to the seventeenth century, its nineteenth-century power and excitement is what is critical here. But if we ignore the anti-Judaic aspects of this then we miss a critical ingredient. We may wish to recover a sense of a Christian Zionism as a Christian theological conviction that the unrevoked covenant in what Christians call the Old Testament has a promise that cannot be cancelled, that the Jews belong to the land, albeit alongside other peoples and faiths. In order to give due honour to Jewish self-understanding, there needs to be some accommodation with the idea that the promises concerning land cannot be allegorized or spiritualized. The tendency of the Western Christian tradition to spiritualize and eschatologize Zion is surely part of the tendency in theology to delegitimize Judaism.[11] Pursing this line of thought needs great care and sensitivity so as not to delegitimize Palestinian self-understanding, nor to create what Pastor Mitri Raheb calls a new replacement theology, that of the Palestinian people by the State of Israel, what he calls 'displacement theopolitics'.[12]

Furthermore, we may wish to engage in a more in-depth theological reflection upon Jewish Zionism: Christian appraisals and critiques of it almost always begin with the European story. Yet Mizrahi Jews (that is, those that are Middle Eastern or Arab, previously known as Oriental Jews) often have a different understanding of what it means to belong to the Land and the political reality of Israel. The Egyptian-born Israeli feminist historian Jacqueline Kahanoff, suggests that Zionism was forged out of a European culture that was secular, socialist and masculine. As a Mizrahi Jew she grew up in a religiously plural context in Egypt, and her work pioneered what came be known as the Mediterranean Option (sometimes known as Levantinism) that affirms Jewish contribution to the diversity of the Mediterranean region—culturally, politically and religiously. From ancient times the Mediterranean has been a vibrant culture, it is claimed, held together by a dynamic interchange expressed, particularly through trade, but also through cultural and linguistic exchange. Thus the Mediterranean Option offers not only a rootedness in the land

11 See John T Pawlikowski, 'Ethics in a Globalized World: Implications for the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict', *Peace & Change*, Vol. 36, No.4, October 2011, pp. 541-556.

12 Mitri Raheb, 'Displacement Theopolitics', in M Raheb (ed), *The Invention of History: A Century of Interplay between Theology and Politics in Palestine*, Diyar Publisher, Bethlehem, 2011, pp. 15ff.

and cultural connectivity, but, and perhaps most critically, a context of cultural, political and inter-religious dialogue. Kahanoff sought to offer a different vision for Israeli society where Jews in the land would engage with cultural and intellectual exchange with its neighbours, not living in suspicion and hostility towards others, but fully immersed in the diverse culture of the Mediterranean region.[13] But Zionism, she suggests, represents a post-Christian and post-Islamic Judaism: The danger for Zionism is that Judaism becomes isolated from the world, viewing neighbours—religious and cultural alike—as something 'other' and a potential threat. When it comes to Christian Zionism there is a real risk that it colludes with the isolationist tendency within some dominant Zionisms of the present time.

What can be asserted at this point is the critical relationship between Judaism and Christianity. Judaism is part of Christianity's self-understanding, and therefore an ontological reality by virtue of a scriptural tradition as well as Jesus being Jewish and coming first to his own people. Christianity's relation to Islam (or any other faith) is not the same and is why some theologians, such as Karl Barth, have considered Judaism to be an ecumenical matter. Christian theology therefore has sought to understand Judaism in the light of who the person of Jesus is, and how the Church relates to the Jewish people who are the first to receive the Covenant.

However, in current geo-political terms Christian Zionism means something quite different, whereby the return of the Jews is not born out of a theological desire that Jewish self-understanding is integral to Christian self-understanding, but rather that of Christian supremacy over the unbelieving world—an unbelieving world that includes Jews and especially Muslims. I know of no Christian Zionist of this ilk that has actively participated in Jewish-Christian dialogue other than through a very thin conversation about the modern State of Israel that problematizes Palestinians, Arabs and especially Muslims, in favour of the notion of a greater Israel. Not for this school of thought are the convictions of *Nostra Aetate*, the document of the Second Vatican Council, that teaches that the Church 'holds the Jews most dear (and)

13 David Ohana (2006), 'The Mediterranean Option in Israel: An Introduction to the Thought of Jacqueline Kahanoff', *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 21:2, pp. 239-263, DOI: 10.1080/09518960601030159; *Israel and its Mediterranean Identity*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2011, pp. 77-97.

does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues—such is the witness of the Apostle', or of Karl Barth's suggestion that Judaism presented the most urgent 'ecumenical' task for the Church,[14] or Paul van Buren's assertion that Christianity had eradicated Jewish elements from its theology, replacing it with a pagan-Christian tradition, thereby leading to antisemitism and culminating in the Holocaust.[15]

It is therefore critical that whilst dispensationalists makes common cause with some Jewish Zionists, the two are very different—one is a political movement of liberation, whilst the other is a religiously eschatological idea driven by a very humanistic impulse. Meanwhile another angle is the place of colonialism. At the time when Christian Zionism was at its fullest ferment, European powers are also heavily involved in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonialism. Black liberation theologian Willie R Jennings dedicates a good deal of his book, *The Christian Imagination*, to the shared experience of black people and Jews who have both been 'othered' by a dominant white Christian hegemony.[16] And this othering of Jews must surely play a part both in driving Jews to the belief that there is no home to be found in Europe, and in the idea that the Jew must be returning to the land either to repent and become Christian or face eternal damnation. Both are products of Christian Europe's primal othering of the Jew. Can we go further? The implication of this suggests that dispensationalism is closely related to ideas of Christian white supremacy.

But again, let us not confuse different Christian Zionisms. Aside from the millenarian ideas that are often the focus for most discussion on Christian Zionism, there is also that which honours the continuing covenant and the self-understanding of the Jewish people, where the Biblical promises are not cancelled or revoked. This would suggest

14 Karl Barth's writings in relation to Jewish Election are extensively discussed in Katherine Sonderegger, *That Jesus was Born a Jew*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992; Mark R Lindsay, Barth, *Israel and Jesus: Karl Barth's Theology of Israel*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2007; see also Donald W Norwood, *Reforming Rome: Karl Barth and Vatican II*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2015, p. 222-230, which discusses Barth in relation to *Nostra Aetate*.

15 John T Pawlikowski, 'The Search for a New Paradigm for the Jewish-Christian Relationship: A Response to Michael Signer', in J T Pawlikowski and Hayim Goren Perelmuter, *Reinterpreting Revelation and Tradition: Jews and Christians in Conversation*, Sheed and Ward, Franklin Wisc, 2000.

16 Willie R Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2010, pp. 250-288.

that to suggest that to deny that the covenant connects the Jews to the land, in other words anti-Zionism, is to engage in a form of Marcionism that relegates the Old Testament as something inferior to the New Testament and is still holding to the ground that Christianity determines the nature of truth without reference to Judaism and holds the 'copyright' on scriptural interpretation. If we have learnt anything from the insights of feminist theology, of black, liberation and queer theologies, it is that we tread very carefully when we attempt to make definitive claims, asking ourselves where the power is located when statements of this nature are made.

One further point relates to what we might consider to be the indigenous religions of Palestine and surrounding area, namely Eastern Christianity, Islam and Mizrahi Judaism. Millenarian Christian Zionism is infamous in its disregard for these communities, especially Palestinian Christian communities, and why Palestinian theologians often express deep concern about the geo-political influence of Christian Zionism. We need to be honest in the twenty-first century about the way in which Islam is portrayed in many aspects of right wing political and religious thinking. As Philip Lewis notes, Islam has been 'essentialized' and 'reduced to some unchanging essence and pathologized.'[17]

Christian Zionism emboldened by the presidency of Donald Trump has played an active role in the characterization of Islam in the Middle East as monolithic, violent and a threat to the values of the West. In reality of course Islam is a complex and diverse religion that cannot be reduced to the crude perversions of Daesh, although it does suit many to portray Islam thus. But this too has its historic longevity in the West, with Christendom's pathological fear of the Saracen during the Crusader periods and later the Ottoman Turks. We should note that events such as the Ottoman siege of Vienna, the seat of the Holy Roman Empire, in 1529 has entered into the language of the political far right of today's West. Meanwhile Eastern Christianity is largely ignored, either with the assumption that all Arabs are Muslim, or that Orthodoxy does not represent true evangelical Christianity. And we should note that Christian Zionism arose in a worldview that has long characterized Eastern Christianity in pejorative terms. Language such as Monophysite, Nestorian and Jacobite would be familiar to many of us, yet define Eastern Christianity according to a Western judgement

17 Philip Lewis, *Young, British and Muslim*, Continuum, London, 2007, p. xiii.

on their lack of orthodoxy, especially with regard to Christology. Like Mizrahi Jews, Christians of Eastern traditions have a different story to tell of living amidst plurality in the land that needs greater attention. Here is an important ecumenical as well as inter-religious point, Christian Zionism carries with it the assumptions of Western, Protestant Christian hegemony that must be asserted and reasserted over other cultures, religions and world views whatever the cost might be. This is a mindset of colonial Europe and whilst many forms of Christian Zionism may seem 'other' to many Western Christians, the assumption from which it draws is part of the same historical religious narrative.

THE ARMENIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE CONTEMPORARY MIDDLE EAST

John Whooley

Introduction

This paper touches on matters, social, religious, and political, that are perhaps pertinent, not only to Armenian Catholics, but also to the wider Christian presence in the Middle East.[1] The situation and many of the concerns of the Armenian Catholic Church would be similar, it may be fairly stated, to those of other Churches in the region, whether in union with Rome or not.[2] The most recent developments, especially those in Syria and Iraq, will be approached through some description of the context and past circumstances relating to the Armenian Catholic Church and its relations with other Christians and with the Middle Eastern world in which it finds itself.

The emergence of the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate

Though the Armenian Apostolic catholicoses of Cilicia had their seat at Sis, (now Kozan in modern-day Turkey), they were often inclined to reside in Aleppo where there was a substantial Armenian community. It was here that a tendency to be sympathetic to Rome's claims was manifested from time to time, and Latin missionary activities were the

1 A O'Mahony, `Christianity in the Middle East: Modern History and Contemporary Theology and Ecclesiology: An Introduction and Overview', *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, Vol. 63, nos. 3-4, 2013, pp. 231-260; A O'Mahony, 'Christianity in the Wider Levant Region: Modern History and Contemporary Contexts', in: Kail Ellis OSA (ed.), *Secular Nationalism and Citizenship in Muslim Countries Arab Christians in the Levant*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 61-88.

2 John Whooley, 'The Armenian Church in the Contemporary Middle East', in *Eastern Christianity in the Modern Middle East*, A O'Mahony and E Loosley (eds), Routledge, London, 2010, pp. 78-106;

cause of a number of conversions in that direction. However, the two Armenian groups, Catholic and Apostolic, in their rivalry, could cause some commotion in the city.

In 1740, matters reached breaking point when the openly pro-Catholic Bishop Abraham Ardzivian (1674-1749) was elected catholicos. Journeying to Rome, two years later, he requested recognition from Pope Benedict XIV. His wish was granted, being confirmed as Catholicos-Patriarch of Cilicia of the Catholic Armenians. This was the beginning of a formal Armenian Catholic hierarchy and seen very much as a rival to its long-established Apostolic counterpart.

However, due to another Apostolic catholicos of Sis having been elected in the meantime, Ardzivian was unable to return to Aleppo and was eventually obliged to settle in Lebanon where he had already found the Maronites sympathetic to his situation.[3] The monastery of Kreim was to be his seat, but shortly thereafter his successors were to install themselves in the newly-constructed monastery of Bzommar. They were to reside there until 1866, when the then Armenian Catholic Archbishop of Constantinople, Andon Hassoun, was elected patriarch. He, however, was obliged to remain in the capital; hence, the removal of the patriarchal seat to Constantinople where it remained until 1928.[4] The devastation that befell the Armenian people within the Ottoman Empire during the First World War—and which affected all three Armenian denominations: Apostolic, Catholic and Evangelical—had necessitated a complete reorganization of the Armenian Catholic Church.[5] The Apostolic patriarchate returned to Lebanon where it still remains today. In 1921, after many centuries at Sis, the Apostolic catholicosate itself was obliged to move, finally able to resettle in Antelias, a suburb of Beirut. Thus the two religious leaders found themselves in the same vicinity.[6]

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3 Shafiq Abouzayd, 'The Maronite Church', in *The Syriac World*, Daniel King (ed.), Routledge, London, 2018, pp. 731-750.

4 John Whooley, 'The Armenian Catholic Church: a modern history until the Synod of Rome 1928', in *Christianity in the Middle East: Studies in Modern History, Theology and Politics*, A O'Mahony (ed.), Melisende, London, 2008, pp. 263-327.

5 Georges-Henri Ruyssen, La Question Armena, (1894-1896 1908-1925), (Rome, 2015) in seven volumes.

6 In 1441 a disagreement and a consequent division arose within the Armenian Church, whereby one branch remained at Sis, the former capital of the Kingdom of Cilicia, whilst another branch established itself at Etchmiadzin in Armenia, the initial location of the Catholicosate in the fourth century. Though at times there

Situation of the Armenian Catholic Church in the Middle East prior to 2010

The Armenian Catholic Church is one of 'twenty one [now 23] autonomous churches *(ecclesiae sui iuris)* which enjoy a status of relative independent self-governance vis-à-vis the Roman Pontiff with whom they are in full communion and in whose person universal communion is realized.'[7] It therefore functions in a somewhat different manner, and legitimately so, from the much larger Roman Church of the Latin rite.[8] It bears, however, a particular burden in that what many understood to be part of its *raison d'être* is now seemingly under duress, along with others of those autonomous Churches, due to recent ecumenical developments.

In addition, that its centre and leadership find themselves in one of the world's most politically disturbed regions, due in large measure to the ever constant conflict between Israel and a number of adjacent Arab states, the Lebanese Civil War 1975-1990, the Iran-Iraq War 1980-1988, the Gulf War 1991, the fall of the Baathist regime in Iraq in 2003, the conflict in Syria since 2011, accumulatively have been the cause of a considerable migration of Christians due to the associated insecurity, religious and ethnic conflict have all impacted upon the Churches of

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are tensions between the two, both adhere to the same doctrines and customs. On the history of Armenian Christianity and the Armenian Catholic Church please see my other studies: John Whooley; 'The Armenian Catholic Church in Modern Europe', *The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, vol. 67, no. 3-4 (2015), pp. 329-46; 'Armenian Christianity: An historical and Theological Overview', in *One in Christ: a catholic ecumenical review*, Vol. 45. no.4, 2004; 'The Mekhitarists: Religion, Culture and Ecumenism in Armenian Catholic Relations', in *Eastern Christianity: Studies in Modern History, Religion and Politics'*, A O'Mahony (ed.), Melisende, London, 2004, pp.452-489; John Whooley, The Armenian Catholic Church: A General Overview, One in Christ: a Catholic ecumenical Review, vol. 52, no.2, 2018, pp. 318-338.

7 John D Faris, *Eastern Catholic Churches: Constitution and Governance*, p. 46. He continues, 'Only one of these churches observes the Latin rite; the other twenty-one autonomous churches observe a specific rite derived from one of the five major Eastern traditions: the Alexandrian, Antiochene, Constantinopolitan, Chaldean and Armenian […] All churches and rites are equal.' There are now in fact 23 autonomous Churches as well as the Roman, the most recent being the Macedonian Greek Catholic Church, recognized in 2001. A O'Mahony, '... again to breathe fully from two lungs'. 'Eastern Catholic Encounters with History and Ecclesiology', *The Downside Review*, 134, 2016, (4), pp. 107-118.

8 John Faris, 'The Latin Church Sui Iuris', *The Jurist* 62 (2002), pp. 280–293.

the area.[9] That this drama is staged in a largely Islamic theatre is of considerable consequence; the fate of Jerusalem, a city of significance for all three monothestic faiths is a focus that enflames passions on many sides. The Armenian Catholic Church, though numerically small, participates in those attempts to assuage such passions and eventually bring peace and justice for all protagonists.[10]

Past Isolation

In the not too distant past, perhaps not so surprisingly, the Armenian Catholic Church in the Middle East, being not too dissimilar from the Armenian Apostolic Church in this respect, had been somewhat in isolation, particularly as its adherents were not ethnically Semitic and its culture not fundamentally Arab. It was in a sense separate not only from their Muslim neighbours, but also from most of their fellow, but indigenous, Christians, including those who were also in union with Rome. This might often result in a greater need for community support in their new environment. There began to be a strong Armenian political presence in the Levant, superseding in many respects the role thitherto played by the Church, though the latter still had importance. It remains uncertain as to whether the political parties, especially the Armenian Revolutionary Party (Tashnags), were as influential among Armenian Catholics as they were among the majority Apostolic.[11]

It would seem that other Eastern Catholic Churches had the same tendency to isolation, thus usually not acting in co-ordination, when it might have been for the general benefit of the Catholic Church so to do, if not for all Christians of the area. Any co-operation with the Orthodox was out of consideration till a greater ecumenical sense was to be developed within the Catholic Church itself, and this was not

9 Kail Ellis, 'Preface', Kail Ellis OSA (ed.), *Secular Nationalism and Citizenship in Muslim Countries Arab Christians in the Levant*, London, PalgraveMacmillan, 2018, pp. VII-XII.

10 John Whooley, 'The Armenian Catholic Church in the Middle East—Modern History, Ecclesiology and Future Challenges', *The Downside Review* 2016, Vol. 134, pp. 119-146

11 Cf. Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: the Development of Armenian Political Parties through the Nineteenth Century*.

to take place effectively till the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), and only becoming efficacious some years after that.

Tensions between Eastern Catholic Churches

There have also been tensions, or at least rivalries of sorts, between the various Eastern Catholic Churches themselves. It is believed that this originally stemmed from the time of the Ottoman 'millet' system that kept religious groups apart. With the formation of the 'Katolik milleti' in 1830, most non-Latin Catholics in the empire now found themselves under the umbrella of the Armenian Catholic Church. This arrangement proved unsatisfactory, with each Catholic Church eventually gaining its 'autonomy' and therefore becoming responsible for its own rights and duties vis-à-vis the Sublime Porte.[12] This, too, could create rivalry by the fact of often having to win the favours of Muslim persons of influence at both the local level and at the Sublime Porte itself, so that, if possible, one's own community might have certain inconveniences removed or be able to gain certain privileges for its own faithful.

Regrettably, such conflicts and tensions continued into more recent times. These were the subject of section 9 of Pope John Paul II's *Exhortation* issued after the conclusion of the Special Assembly for Lebanon of the Synod of Bishops (1995) held after the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990). He requested that a new mentality be adopted that would emphasize their unity and not be preoccupied by their differences.[13] Evidence that there were still some problems between the various Catholic Churches in the Middle East could be gathered when it was stated that one of the two goals of the then forthcoming Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East to be held in 2010 was 'to deepen ecclesial communion among particular

12 The Ottoman government was to recognise the various Catholic Patriarchs as 'patriks,' or 'civil' leaders, of their respective communities as follows: Greek-Catholic in 1848; Chaldean in 1861; Syrian-Catholic in 1866; Coptic-Catholic in 1898. Paolo Maggiolini, 'Bringing together Eastern Catholics under a Common Civil Head. The Agreements between the Syriac and Chaldean Patriarchs and the Civil Head of the Armenian Catholic Church in Constantinople. 1833-1871', *The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, 64 (2012), 3/4, pp. 253-285.

13 Cf. *A New Hope for Lebanon* (May 10 1997), Ch. 1, § 8.

Churches, so that they can bear witness to the Christian life in an authentic, joyful and winsome manner.'[14] More forthrightly: '… the attitude of the two apostles, James and John, who asked Jesus to grant them the first places at his right and his left, can still be detected, posing difficulties among the brethren. Instead of coming together to face difficulties in common, we sometimes argue among ourselves, counting the number of faithful in our Churches to ascertain who is the greatest. This spirit of rivalry destroys us.[15]

Tensions between Eastern Catholic Churches and Latin Catholics

There was also some tension between the Latin Catholic parishes and those of the various other Catholic Churches, the latter sometimes losing members to the former, as the Latin rite was then often understood as being superior to others, in the sense that it was taken to be the pre-eminent rite of the Catholic Church; being thus the *ritus praestantior*, it was thought to contain the fullness of Catholicity, as did those Catholic clergy, eastern and western, who had been trained in Rome and were thereby indelibly marked with a true and enviable 'Romanitas'.

In addition, European Catholics working or living in the Ottoman empire, perhaps over several generations, and who enjoyed the benefits of the 'Capitulations', were usually Latin in their rite. This was a further incentive to change one's birth-rite whenever it was possible to do so, not simply for the sake of fashion, but for gaining a greater security for oneself and one's family when facing the hazards of Ottoman administration.[16] Thus, the re-establishment of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem by Pius IX in 1847 had not

14 Cf. *Lineamenta*, § 2**:** 'affinché possano offrire una testimonianza di vita cristiana autentica, gioiosa e attraente.'

15 *Ibid.*, § 43. Cf. also *Instrumentum*, §55.

16 Regarding for example, Armenian Catholics in the Holy Land, Hoade remarks, almost in surprise, how many of them belonged to the Latin rite rather than the Armenian: *Guide to the Holy Land*, p. 71. The Latin Catholic cemetery in Şişli, Istanbul, also contains the remains of Armenian Catholics, even though not far away is the Armenian Catholic cemetery itself. A number of the members of various Latin religious orders in the Middle East were, and are, Armenian, one of the most noteworthy being the Capuchin, Guregh Zohrabian (1881-1972), at one time Eparch of Kamishlié, Syria, and a participant at the Second Vatican Council.

necessarily been greeted with universal delight at the time, as there was a likelihood that not only Orthodox might be tempted in that direction, but also Catholics of the non-Latin rites, thereby weakening their communities of origin, especially if the families concerned were of note. The Patriarchate was itself under pressure to increase its faithful, and Muslims could not be evangelized.

An Example of 'Interecclesial' Collaboration

We may note in more recent times the involvement of the Armenian Catholic Church in the founding of the Séminaire Éparchial Interrituel International Missionnaire 'Redemptoris Mater'. This was established in Cairo in 1995 and was under the auspices of the Maronites, the Catholic Copts and the Catholic Armenians. Mgr Boutros Taza, then Armenian Eparch of Alexandria, acted for the latter; he himself was to be elected Armenian Catholic Patriarch in 1999. In that same year, the seminary was moved to the Lebanon, probably to facilitate its operation.

As its title suggests, the Eparchial Seminary has a particular concern for the Eastern Catholic Churches in the Middle East, but also concern for those of the Maghrib and the Sudan. It is now the responsibility of the present Armenian Patriarch, Krikor Bedros XX Ghabroyan, elected in 2015 on the death of his predecessor, as well as the Maronite Archbishop of Beirut and the Greek Melkite Archbishop of Tyre. It is not known if there are any Armenian seminarians there at present, though the current parish priest in Buenos Aires, Gomidas López, born in Argentina, was trained there. Normally, Armenian Catholic candidates for the priesthood whose origins are in the Middle East would pursue the early years of their training at the minor seminaries in Aleppo or Bzommar and thence to the major Bzommar seminary (founded in 1747) and perhaps pursue higher studies at the Armenian College in Rome founded by Pope Leo XIII in 1885. Those who might be influenced by the Mkhitarists might be sent to the seminary in Bikfaya, Lebanon, and thence to the monasteries in Venice or Vienna.[17]

17 Mkhitar of Sebaste (Sivas) (1676-1749) was the founder of the monastic order that was later named after him and which was to prove by the many scholars it produced and by the assiduity with which its members pursued the retrieval of Armenian manuscripts probably the most widely acclaimed achievement of Armenian Catholicism. Cf. Nurikhan, *The Life and Times of the Servant of God Abbot*

However, there is at present, as in many other places, a vocation crisis in the Middle East. This is largely due to '… families emigrating, a declining birth rate; and a youth culture which is increasingly becoming devoid of Gospel values. The lack of unity among members of the clergy is both an obstacle and counter-witness, hindering a man from choosing the priestly life. At times, the human and spiritual formation of priests as well as men and women religious is inadequate.'[18] We may also note the recent restoration of the custom of having married clergy in the Armenian Catholic Church, the practice of clerical celibacy through Latin influence having become the norm by the end of the nineteenth century.

Armenian Catholic Membership of Catholic Organisations in the Middle East

The Armenian Catholic Church is a member of various Catholic episcopal conferences in the Middle East, all of which were established after the Second Vatican Council: the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land (1992); the Assembly of the Catholic Hierarchy of Egypt (1969); the Iranian Episcopal Conference (1980); the Assembly of the Catholic Bishops of Iraq (1976); the Assembly of the Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops of Lebanon (1970); the Assembly of the Catholic Ordinaries in Syria (1969) and the Conference of Bishops of the Catholic Church in Turkey (1979). The Armenian Catholic Patriarch is a member of the Council of Catholic Patriarchs of the East.[19] Thus though the Armenian Catholics are small in number,

Mekhitar: Founder of the Mekhitarist Fathers.

18 *Instrumentum* (June 2010), §22. The section concludes with harsh realism: 'The contemplative life … is noticeably absent in a majority of congregations of men and women in the Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris* in the Middle East.'

19 The Council, formed in 1990, brings together all seven patriarchates associated with the Middle East: Maronite, Chaldean, Syriac-Catholic, Melkite, Armenian, Coptic, and the Latin. The Council, according to its official statement, is meant to be 'a sign and instrument of patriarchal collegiality with the following objectives: (i) to coordinate the pastoral activity of the Catholic Churches of the Orient, (ii) to strengthen the future of Christianity in the orient, (iii) to consolidate the ties between the faithful of the Diaspora and their Churches, (iv) to foster ecumenical collaboration and interreligious dialogue, (v) to represent the Catholic Churches (MECC), and (vi) to promote, justice, peace, development and respect for human rights in the Middle East.'

they are given strength and influence by their participation in these representative bodies of the Catholic Church in the region as a whole; their involvement is therefore of no small importance and quite in contrast to the situation prevailing beforehand.[20]

Ecumenism: The Middle East Council of Churches

The Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) was founded in 1974 and has representatives from the Oriental Orthodox Churches, the Eastern Orthodox (Chalcedonian) Churches, the Catholic Churches, and the Evangelical Churches, including the Union of the Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East. One important activity of the MECC is performed by its Christian-Muslim Dialogue Committee.

The Catholic Churches joined as a group in 1990 and among them may be found the Armenian Catholic Church, whilst among the Oriental Orthodox may be found the Armenian Apostolic Church represented by the Catholicosate of Cilicia. Not unnaturally, there have been some difficulties in the past between these two Armenian allegiances, the leaders of which, since the 1930s, have found themselves almost cheek by jowl in Beirut. The MECC provides a setting for the possibility of reconciliation, bearing in mind how the intensity of such tensions 'wax and wane' over the years. However, as mentioned earlier, the proximity of Antelias to the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate could be somewhat intimidating, or at least there could be a sense of not being totally at liberty to act as a *sui iuris* Church might like. This is compounded by Rome's concern that relations with the Apostolic Church be as harmonious as possible.

20 We may note that the Conference of the Latin Bishops in the Arab Regions was established in 1965. 'In inter-ecclesial relations among Catholics … communion is manifested in each country by the various assemblies of patriarchs and bishops so that Christian witness might be more sincere, credible and fruitful.' *Instrumentum Laboris*, §55.

Patriarchs and Heads of the Holy Land Churches

It was in 1990 that the Greek, Armenian, and Latin patriarchs of Jerusalem finally came together in a more formal way with leaders of the other Christian Churches of the Holy Land to support each other and issue communal statements when the need arose. Prior to this development, the Greek patriarch's growing unease for matters concerning the Occupied Territories led, on his part, to a major change of policy: 'The pressure of the Palestinian *Intifada*, coupled with the change in Israeli priorities and policy making, led the Patriarchate to a major break with its tradition of cooperating closely with state policy in exchange for internal autonomy. In April 1987, Patriarch Diodoros joined other Church heads in signing a statement demonstrating their concern and anxiety over the state of affairs in the Occupied Territories and actually condemning Israeli policy in the matter.'[21]

What appears to have triggered this particular co-operation among Christian religious leaders in 1990 was the sudden occupation in that year of St John's Hospice in the Christian Quarter of the Old City by ultra-Orthodox Jews. The seizure of an unoccupied property of the Greek Patriarchate, was seen as indicative of a campaign to confiscate Christian property. A similar and very public dispute arose in 2005 whose origin lay with the then Greek Patriarch, Irenaios, who was accused of selling church property to Israeli investors—in particular, two hotels in the vicinity of the Jaffa Gate. In consequence of the serious opposition expressed by Palestinian Christians, the Holy Synod removed the patriarch from office, electing unanimously the present holder of the See, Theophilus III.

However, the struggle to reclaim the properties continues, a struggle which has larger implications for other Christians, including both the Armenian Catholic and Apostolic Churches. On 7 July 2020, a statement was issued once more on the matter, as a recent judgment by the District Court of Jerusalem had dismissed evidence demonstrating the Greek Orthodox case. A quotation from the statement summarizes the heart of the matter: 'We call on the Israeli government to act in order to safeguard the integrity of the Christian heritage and patrimony

21 Sotiris Roussos, 'The Patriarchate of Jerusalem in the Greek-Palestinian-Israeli Triangle: Is there a lace for it?' (2003), p. 4. <hcc.haifa.ac.il/Departments/greece/events/greek_orthodox_church/pdf/sotiris.pdf>.

in the Old City as well as the Holy Sites and the rights of the Christian Quarter of Jerusalem.' All thirteen Christian leaders of the Holy Land signed the statement, including the Armenian Catholic patriarchal exarch, Fr Nerses Joseph Zabbara, who added his signature on behalf of Krikor Bedros XX Ghabroyan. Such joint statements, largely initiated by the grander local Church leaders on matters concerning the social and political problems that beleaguer not only their own flocks, but also the majority Jewish and Muslim populations, are publicly seen to have Armenian Catholic support.

Another recent statement, issued on 7 May 2020, concerned 'Israeli Unilateral Annexation Plans', plans that caused wide international concern. Later, these plans were laid aside when formal relations with the United Arab Emirates were unexpectedly established in August, the third such relations with an Arab state, following Egypt (1979) and Jordan (1994). Earlier, again, a joint statement that spoke of President Trump's 'Deal of the Century' was issued on 30 January 2020. In addition, joint Easter and Christmas messages are issued in the name of the Patriarchs and Heads of the Holy Land Churches, the latest being issued on 20 April 2020, which concerned the Covid-19 Virus and consequent difficulties with public worship.

Furthermore, the existence of this influential group of Church leaders is also able to encourage and support such initiatives as the restoration of the Edicule within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, a project that was successfully concluded in 2017. An agreement for further renovations in the Church was signed in May 2019, between those responsible: the Greek Orthodox, the Armenian Apostolic and the Franciscan Custodians.

In contrast to the Armenian Catholic Church in the Holy Land, the Armenian Apostolic Patriarchate of Jerusalem has substantial importance, this being acknowledged when we take into consideration its monastic institution in the Armenian Quarter in the Old City and its long and consequential involvement in the major Holy Places. It would have had, for example, a decisive role, along with the Greek and Latin Patriarchates, in the closing of the Holy Sepulchre for 24 hours in protest at the Israeli settlers' occupation of St John's Hospice, the first such closure in 800 years and one which is understood as marking a turning point in the relations between the Churches and the

Israeli State.[22] Ariel Sharon and other Israeli politicians spoke openly in support of the occupation.

Reasons for Ecumenical Co-operation in the Middle East

The most recent example of ecumenical co-operation in the Middle East has been the establishment in Baghdad of the Council of Christian Church Leaders of Iraq in February, 2010. The Council consists of the fourteen Christian communities that were registered in the official Gazette *al-Waqa'e' al-Iraqiyeh* in January, 1982, and which include both the Armenian Catholic and Apostolic Churches. This particular detail is evidence of the desire of the traditional Christian Churches to exclude certain other Christian bodies that are seen by them to be, as elsewhere in the Middle East, a threat to their own flocks.

The following statements from the Press Release given by the Council succinctly present what would probably be the common agenda of all such attempts at co-operation between the Churches in the Middle East: 'The aim of the new Council is "to unite the opinion, position and decision of the Churches in Iraq on issues," related to the Churches and the State, for "upholding and strengthening the Christian presence, promoting cooperation and joint action without interfering in private matters of the churches or their related entities. […] The Council will be involved in activating dialogue and ecumenical initiatives among member churches, as well as with churches and heads of churches around the world. It will activate dialogue and relations with our Muslim brothers and sisters and promote the acceptance of the other. It will attend to the issue of Christian education, and the renewing of religious curriculum in public schools in coordination with concerned governmental institutions. It will work toward making a civil status law for Christians in Iraq, and will promote the participation

22 Michael Dumper writes of 'the covert support that the Likud government gave to the activities of Israeli settlers in the Old City and their attempts to penetrate the Christian quarters.' The occupation of the hostel 'can be seen as the defining moment in the relations between the Israeli government and the established Churches of Jerusalem with ramifications that are still being played out today.' What the incident revealed was 'the degree of support the settler movement in the Old City was receiving from official government sources.' 'The Christian Churches of Jerusalem in the Post-Oslo Period'.

of Christians in public life based on the rights of citizenship and partnership in building the nation, as a tent and a house for all.'"[23]

Ecumenical co-operation may help remove problems between the Churches. As an example, we may mention here the question of marriage. At one time the various communities, whether Muslim, Christian or Jewish, would have kept the celebrations of marriage largely within the confines of their own communities, and this would still be largely the case. Such a custom would apply also to the various constituencies within the wider Christian community. Thus, marriage between Chaldeans would have been the *desideratum*, or between Apostolic Armenians, and this would still be the expectation. However, due both to the greater level of education among all such groups and often to the very places of their education, as well as the porosity of new residential areas in the cities, there is certainly now much greater interaction among different Christians. In addition, the almost overwhelming Muslim cultural influence, and perhaps its more strident expression in recent years, has thrown Christians of whichever denomination more closely together; they are ever more keenly aware of being endangered minorities.[24]

Marriage between the Christian denominations might have been frowned on in the past, especially between Orthodox and Catholic, where, for example, the bride in question could be seen as lost to her own family and community, perhaps signified, it has been said, by the tolling of her local church bell on the day of her marriage elsewhere. However, such marriages have now become more acceptable; indeed, have had to become more acceptable. They would usually be more desirable than marriages between Christians and Muslims, unions that can produce difficult situations, often for the Christian spouse. In recent years, difficulties affecting mixed Christian marriages seem to have been largely resolved. The Catholic-Orthodox Accord reached in Lebanon on 14 October 1996, is an attempt to ameliorate those situations. Six Eastern Catholic Patriarchs and the representative of the Coptic Catholic Patriarch put their signatures to the agreement, along with those of the Syriac and Greek Orthodox Patriarchs of Antioch

23 Cf. WCC and *Ecclesia*.

24 '… Islamisation also penetrates families through the media and school, leading to an unconscious change in attitudes which is Islamic in character.' *Instrumentum*, §34.

and that of Aram I Keshishian, Catholicos of Cilicia. The Armenian Catholic Patriarch at that time was Hovhannes Bedros XVIII.

It was resolved that the bride could remain faithful to her own beliefs without having to convert to the groom's faith, that though the marriage would be celebrated in the groom's church, the bride's own priest could be invited by the presiding priest to participate in the ceremony, and, finally, that children of the union would be baptised in the Church of their father.

Concerns of the Armenian Catholic Church

There has been a move in some circles to remove certain Latin customs that have infiltrated Eastern Catholic religious life, both in the Liturgies and in popular devotional customs. The recitation of the Rosary, the keeping of novenas, processions of the Blessed Sacrament, or, within the churches themselves, the use of Stations of the Cross, of statues and confessionals. The question then arises should the Armenian Catholic Patriarch and his synod, if they so desire, try to persuade clergy and faithful to abandon these devotions and to have statues, some would say 'alien objects', removed and thereby reconnect with a more authentic Armenian spirituality. This would also create a greater resemblance to the practises and customs of the 'Mother Church'.[25]

However, to disturb intimate congregational or even family associations with these buildings and their contents can cause distress and even anger. Aidan Nichols has remarked in caution '… not every onslaught against 'Latinisation' can be justified. One important aspect of inclusion within Catholic communion is precisely openness to what other traditions within the Church can offer. If Westerners can learn from the riches of the East, should Orientals reject everything that originates in the treasury of the Christian West?'[26]

There is also the need to meet the requirements of very different communities throughout the diaspora and how to prevent their faithful from losing their particular ethnic, linguistic, and religious inheritance

25 Cf. the *Instruction* issued by the Congregation for the Oriental Churches in 1996: 'Pour l'Application des Prescriptions Liturgiques du Code des Canons des Églises Orientales'.

26 Aidan Nichols OP, *Rome and the Eastern Churches. A Study in Schism*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1992, pp. 100-101.

in societies where the temptation to become completely assimilated can be strong.[27] The visits of the patriarch, as 'Father and Head' of his Church, including one in 2009 to the faithful in Armenia and Georgia, contribute to some sense of cohesion, as do the pastoral gatherings held in recent years in Bzommar, including not only clergy, but lay men and women from all over the Armenian Catholic diaspora. This demonstrates a greater willingness than in the past to be open to the contributions that the laity of the Church may be able to offer the patriarch and his synod in terms of information and advice. The laity is no longer simply expected to 'arrange the chairs.'

The use of Classical Armenian in the liturgy can be a cause of difficulty, as few of the laity understand it, either in the Middle East or beyond. Despite occasional calls for the Liturgy to be celebrated in modern Armenian, either in its Eastern or Western variants, or for translations into local languages, there is a reluctance to abandon a sacral language that has so much significance for both Apostolic and Catholic Armenians. It has been one of the markers of Armenian identity throughout the centuries and was invaluable for the very survival of the people, often surrounded by military hostility or cultural antagonism. For the Armenian Catholics of the Middle East, though Arabic is often used by some worshippers, the central matter, the Epiclesis, remains in 'Krapar'. There is also the near example of the dominant Apostolic Church whose leadership refuses to countenance any alteration or compromise as regards this particular matter.

Diminishing of the Christian Population and its Consequences

A major reason for the establishment and growth in membership of the MECC and other ecumenical endeavours in the past few years, such as the Iraqi Council mentioned earlier, has been the departure of great numbers of Christians from the region due to the unstable and sometimes dangerous conditions to be met there. The question

27 For some difficulties faced by diasporan communities, cf. Bishop Vartan Boghosian, Emeritus Armenian Catholic Eparch of Argentina and Exarch for Latin America, 'The Eastern Catholic Churches in Latin America: Situation, Analysis and Perspectives for the Future', *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*. Vol. 40 (1999) Nos. 1-4, pp. 89-105.

of the general political situation in the Middle East, the continuing Israel-Palestinian confrontation which includes certain elements of the Arab world, as well as specific internal problems in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, are important factors contributing to that instability. This instability necessarily affects the economic situation, the sometimes parlous state of which urges emigration.

There is also the simplistic equation being made that Christians in the Middle East are natural allies of Western 'Christian' governments, whose policies are usually seen as anti-Arab or anti-Muslim, or both. In particular, until fairly recently, there was in the West almost unquestioned support for Israel, whose presence for many Muslims seriously challenges the now long-established *Dar al-Islam* in the Middle East. Are not Christians, including Palestinian Christians, despite denials, the fifth columnists of those governments? The growth of Islamic fundamentalism that often and conveniently judges the local Christians to be in collusion with the West, sees these communities as legitimate targets for their anger. Apart from the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) and the Arab-Israeli struggle, the following also have contributed to the diminishment of the Christian populations in the region and have also affected the Armenian Catholic Church: the 1952 revolution in Egypt and its aftermath; the 'socialist' policies pursued by the Syrian government of the 1960s; the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran and the ensuing and lengthy conflicts between Iran and Iraq; the two Gulf Wars; the two Palestinian *intifadas* (1987-1993; 2000-2005).

With the diminishment of the Armenian presence in the Middle East, and exacerbating it, comes the threat of closure of businesses, schools and cultural associations, the disappearance of local Armenian newspapers and magazines. This leads naturally to a loss of confidence and a greater awareness of being a vulnerable minority. To take one example to illustrate the communal tensions that could arise in these circumstances, the case of education could be, and can still be, a particularly fraught one. It is understood that the community schools are completely financed by the communities themselves. In some localities there can be schools of all three denominations, Apostolic, Catholic, and Evangelical, and so competition might be high between them in order to keep their particular institutions open. In addition to schools run by the Mkhitarists and the Armenian Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, there are others maintained in the region by Latin

religious orders, such as the Jesuits and Salesians, whose presence can also create competition.[28] These, too, would attract Armenian students. There would also be non-denominational schools and colleges where a good portion of the curriculum might be conducted in English, a much-desired commodity.

The temptation to leave for the West is powerful, especially for the educated young who seek not only freedom from doubtful regimes, and the sense of being regarded as incomplete citizens, but perhaps also from their own communities which they might consider as too close-knit and restrictive. Western values often challenge those of the more conservative environment of the Middle East, whether Christian or Muslim. The loss of such youth is inestimable for their communities.

The Synod on the Middle East (Rome, October 2010)

This exceptional Synod on the Middle East met to consider the state of affairs of the various Eastern Catholic communities in that region and how it might be possible to ameliorate their critical situation, something of which has been partially described above.[29]

Despite attempts not to politicize proceedings, some participants had voiced criticism of Israel.[30] The latter was seen by those critics to be the original key problem that had triggered the violence in the

28 The Congregation of the Armenian Sisters of the Immaculate Conception was founded by Patriarch Anton IX Hassounian in 1847. In the 1920s, they felt obliged to move their Mother House and Novitiate from Istanbul to Rome.

29 A collection of essays was published prior to the Synod, which wished to present the then current situation of the Catholic Church in the Middle East: *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East. Studies for The Synod for the Middle East*, Anthony O'Mahony and John Flannery (eds), Melisende, London, 2010.

30 Alexander Henley, *The Guardian* 29-10-2010: 'Time and again they turned the discussions—which the pope sought to keep to pastoral, not political, issues—towards the Palestinian question. Certain comments in the statements issuing from the synod have caused offence in the Israeli establishment, potentially shaking the fragile relationship on which the Vatican relies to fulfil its policy objectives in Jerusalem and other holy sites. Behind the platitudes, this synod showed that the old power struggle between eastern and western Catholic churches remains. Eastern patriarchs are also frustrated with the limitation of their power within the Catholic communion as a whole. Their authority is limited in Catholic canon law to local patriarchal territories in the Middle East. More than a century of emigration has, however, left large parts of their Eastern-rite congregations under the territorial authority of the "Patriarch of the West"—the pope.'

region, including, indirectly, the resurgence of the age-long hostility between Sunni and Shi'ite that had begun again in Iraq shortly after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003. However, no mention of Israel was made in the final document, though Proposition 9 points indirectly to Israel. That said, the religious and political situation in the region remains a deeply complex context which constantly experiences a changing dynamic which from the perspective of the Christians in the Middle East is difficult to navigate.

Forty-four propositions were finally presented to Pope Benedict XVI for his consideration, one of them concerned the possibility of sending Eastern Catholic married clergy to minister to congregations that lay outside patriarchal territories (No. 23). Another proposition concerned the question of patriarchal jurisdiction (No. 18), followed by one that particularly concerned the faithful located in the Gulf States (No. 19).[31]

The Arab Spring

Hardly had the synodal participants left Rome when the 'Arab Spring' commenced, first erupting in Tunisia in December 2010, and then spreading to Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Libya and elsewhere and, most particularly, as far as its Christian population was concerned, to Syria and Iraq. In March 2011, a civil war began in Syria involving President Bashar al-Assad's government on the one hand and various local rebel militia groups on the other. Each side was to have its supporters and critics, either moral or active, either domestic or foreign. This continues till the present day.

The chaotic aftermath of the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 did not permit the coalition forces to leave Iraq in significant numbers until after 2011. However, the Shi'ite-controlled government installed in Baghdad, led by Nouri al-Malik, proved more than unsympathetic to the minority Sunni population, a situation that finally contributed to the appearance in the north of the country of an extreme Islamist

31 On 6 August 2020, Pope Francis issued a *Rescriptum* that extended patriarchal jurisdiction over the entire Arabian Peninsula, thus including the Apostolic Vicariates of Northern and Southern Arabia, a move that is a response to propositions 18 and 19, and possibly proposition 23.

force, that of ISIS.[32] After the taking of Mosul in June 2014, and, a few days later, on 29 June, the declaration by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi of the establishment of a world-wide caliphate, came the swift taking of large tracts of territory giving encouragement and self-legitimacy to ISIS and its supporters for their Islamist mission.

This new development caused the flight of many thousands of Christians from their ancestral lands on the Nineveh Plains as well as from eastern Syria, many of whom fell victim to atrocities committed by the invading militants, as also did members of the Yazidi and Shi'ite communities.

However, the tide finally turned against ISIS with US, British, Russian and others' involvement at different levels as well as that of local Arab forces. The fall of Mosul to the Iraqi Army occurred in July 2017; and, later, in the same year, Raqqa—the *de facto* capital of the Islamic State since 2014—fell to Syrian Democratic and Kurdish YPG Forces. The Deir ez-Zor campaign was finally concluded on 23 March 2019. Further west in Barisha, in the Idlib province in Syria, Al-Baghdadi committed suicide on 27 October 2019. However, ISIS activities continue through the resistance shown in various localities by small groups of individuals, aided by the current confusion. Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi has been named the successor to Al-Baghdadi, though this claim to the Prophet's lineage is challenged by some. His whereabouts are unknown.

Reflections on Armenian Catholic Communities

Lebanon

Without question, despite the civil war and the consequent departure of many of its Armenian citizens, Lebanon still has the largest Armenian community in the Middle East with all three denominations present and active. The Apostolic Church has the greatest influence; the present Catholicos, Aram I, elected in 1995, is a noted figure on the international ecumenical stage, especially concerning the

32 ISIS: acronym for 'Islamic State of Iraq and Syria'. The latter is also known by the acronym ISIL: 'Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.' DAESH is the Arabic acronym for the latter. 'IS'—Islamic State—is yet another acronym, but one coined after the declaration of the caliphate's foundation. For purposes of clarity, this paper will mostly be using the first acronym.

World Council of Churches. Despite the occasional disagreement or theological dispute that may find voice in the local press, Apostolic, Catholic, and Evangelical individuals, whether religious or secular in their inclination, remain generally on good terms with one another. There was a common policy at the time of the war to remain steadfastly neutral. This formed a stronger bond between them, a bond that already existed as forebears of all three had suffered from the Genocide perpetrated in Turkey before, during and after the First World War, and which had caused their forebears' flight to safety in Lebanon.[33]

There is no attempt at proselytism. All three run schools, but there is no requirement for those seeking entry to be of a particular denomination; indeed, the same curricula may be found in all. However, one particular difference is in evidence as regards lay influence: the important role played by the Armenian Revolutionary Party in the local Apostolic Church is understood to be considerable. There is no equivalent to be found, either for the Catholic or Evangelical Armenian Churches.

Regarding the Armenian Catholic Church in particular, apart from the quasi-independent presence of representatives from both Mkhitarist monasteries of Venice and Vienna,[34] and the Armenian Catholic Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, the Catholic patriarch has at his disposal members of the Institute of Patriarchal Clergy of Bzommar, founded in 1750. Members of this Institute are to be found not only in Lebanon, but in many other Armenian Catholic dioceses and parishes throughout the diaspora.[35]

There are also a number of eparchial priests who owe responsibility to the Eparchy of Beirut, the Eparch being the patriarch himself, though assisted in its administration. There are eight parishes in Lebanon, including that attached to the Cathedral of Saints Gregory and Elias in the centre of Beirut. There are seven convents, as well as a number of schools, probably the most well-known being the Mesrobian, accompanied by a technical college of the same name. These are located in Bourj-Hammoud, a district

33 'In Lebanon, Christians are deeply divided at the political and confessional level and are lacking a commonly acceptable plan of action.' (*Instrumentum*, §34) These words do not seem to be appropriate for the Armenian community within itself.

34 The two Mkhitarist communities were reunited under one abbot in 2000, after a separation of approximately two centuries.

35 Cf. Terzian, *L'Institut Patriarcal de Bzommar*.

of a very Armenian character and where is to be found one of the parishes, that of Holy Saviour.

Kessab

Of particular interest is the parish of Kessab, which though in Syria, is cared for by the patriarchate in Lebanon, and not by the archeparchy of Aleppo. Both the church of St Michael the Archangel and its school, Al-Raja'ā, suffered damage during the sudden incursion and occupation by Islamist militants in March 2014, who had crossed over from nearby Turkey to accomplish this.[36] The Apostolic and Evangelical churches and schools were also victims of the occupation. All three churches were desecrated, though the Catholic was spared fire. Most of the population managed to flee, leaving their property to be looted. They could only return in July of the same year after the Syrian Army had freed the town.

The Armenian Catholic Patriarch, Gregory XV Agagianian (1937-1962), during a visit to Paris, was instrumental in preventing this small portion of the Syrian Sandjak of Alexandretta from being transferred by the French mandate authorities to the Turkish Republic in 1939. It may be for this reason that it was arranged that the patriarchate would take a special interest in Kessab. The cardinal may also have attempted to include Musa Dagh, another important Armenian community in the region.

Anjar

Another parish of interest is that of Anjar in the Bekaa Valley, most of whose Armenian residents are descended from those who had resisted Turkish assaults on their six villages on Musa Dagh in 1915. Almost bereft of food and ammunition, they had finally been rescued by a French cruiser and brought to safety at Port Said, Egypt.[37] Having returned to their homes after the war, and re-established their churches and schools, most decided to leave yet again when the region, as

36 From an examination of details of this incursion, it is unlikely that it would have been possible without the knowledge of Ankara.

37 Franz Werfel's historical novel, *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, published in 1933, brought the dramatic resistance and rescue to world-wide attention.

mentioned above, was ceded to the Turkish Republic in 1939. The refugees finally settled in Anjar where churches and schools of all three denominations are now to be found.[38] The Armenian Catholic Church of Our Lady of the Rosary and the Armenian Sisters at the School of Our Lady of Lourdes serve the present community in Anjar.

Syria

Of all the difficulties that have been faced in recent times by Armenian Catholics in the Middle East, both clergy and laity, as well as by those of the Apostolic Church, it could be argued that those resident in Syria have endured the most. Since 2011 the civil war has been causing suffering and destruction on the general population, both Muslim and Christian alike.[39] There have been similar occurrences in Iraq, but the Christians who have most suffered there have not been Armenians in the main; rather those belonging either to the western or eastern Syriac traditions, both Catholic and Orthodox. As mentioned earlier, involved in both states has been the grim appearance of ISIS, but Iraq was to meet the brunt of its immediate attention.

Aleppo

On 14 September 2012, the leaders of the three Armenian Churches in Aleppo, Apostolic, Catholic and Evangelical, met and issued a joint statement: 'As the bloodshed continues unabated in our dear country … what adds to our anguish are the unsuccessful attempts of presenting the Syrian Armenians [as] taking part in the armed battles of the current Syrian crisis or trying to actually drag them into such a conflict. We reiterate today that the peaceful co-existence that the Syrian Armenians have cultivated throughout the decades continues… and will definitely stay against all kinds of violence and armed collisions.'

The official position of 'positive neutrality' adopted by the Armenian community in Aleppo is reminiscent of the position the Armenians in Beirut claimed during the long years of the civil war

38 American Presbyterian missionaries began to establish their mission on the mountain in 1840, whilst Catholic Capuchin missionaries arrived some fifty years later.

39 According to the United Nations, 500,000 have been killed, 5.6 million refugees have fled the country and a further 6.1 million have been internally displaced.

in Lebanon. Despite the conflict that affected Aleppo in terms of loss of life and damage to property and the undoubted targeting of the Christian community, and the inevitable flight of some, there is also the will to remain. The Armenian Catholic Cathedral in Aleppo, built in 1840 and dedicated to Notre-Dame des Dons, and which in January 2015, had been the target of mortar-fire, was reopened by Archbishop Boutros Marayati, on Saturday 7 December, 2019. Among those present were the Grand Mufti of Syria and the Mufti of Aleppo. The Franciscan Church of St Francis had also been shelled, but has been repaired; it appears that Latin-rite Armenians usually attend Mass there.

The Apostolic cathedral of the Forty Martyrs, first consecrated in 1491, was severely damaged on 28 April 2015, once again the work of Islamists. It was re-consecrated by Catholicos Aram I on 30 March 2019. The First Armenian Evangelical Emmanuel Church, erected in 1923 and the seat of the Armenian Evangelical Congregation in Syria, was shelled by anti-government rebels on 17 January 2016, and had to be closed, but has since been restored. These are only four of the churches of the city that were damaged during the conflicts that erupted in Aleppo at that time.

In 2008, concerning the Armenian Catholic community, there were approximately 17,000 Armenian Catholics belonging to the Archeparchy of Aleppo. Since the start of the Syrian conflict, many have left the country: the *Annuario Pontificio* for 2020 gives the present figure for the eparchy as being 5,000.

Raqqa

The Armenian Catholic Church of the Holy Martyrs in Raqqa was subjected to desecration along with other churches in the city, after the latter fell fully into the hands of ISIS on 13 January 2014. The church had then been requisitioned as an office for the religious police, the Hisba, and was then used as a military headquarters, or, by some accounts, an Islamic recruitment centre. Following the proclamation in Mosul concerning the new caliphate, Raqqa was declared to be its capital. The city, however, experienced much destruction in the fighting to liberate it, which finally occurred on 17 October 2017. The Raqqa Civil Council is in the process

of restoring the church as an encouragement for the community to re-establish itself.

Damascus

The Armenian Catholics in the Syrian capital were first organized in 1763 and, exactly a century later, the first church was consecrated. The present church, whose dedication is 'Queen of the Universe', was opened in the Bab Touma district in 1959. A decade later, the first bishop was appointed. The Patriarchal Exarchate as such was established in 1984, the first exarch being Fr Kevork Tayroyan (1984-1997) who was succeeded in 1997 by the present holder of the title, Mgr Hovsep Arnaoutian. According to statistics, the number of Armenian Catholics of the city has remained virtually the same over the past few years (4,500), despite troubles from pockets of anti-government rebels in the capital. This may be explained by the arrival of refugees from Iraq and other parts of Syria, replacing those that leave. However, according to Pashaya, the total number of Armenians in the city in 2009 did not exceed 5,000.[40]

There is, happily, close co-operation on all levels between all three denominational allegiances. There are three Armenian Catholic schools, all in Bar Touma: the 'Nour-Louys' College, the 'Manor-Paros', and the 'Al Zouhour,' this last directed by the Armenian Sisters. Most Armenian Catholics in the city appear to be Arabic-speaking. Armenian political parties, unlike Lebanon, may not be active here or elsewhere in Syria, though the Syrian government in most respects has treated its minorities with consideration and therefore has found general support from them.

Kamishlié

This eparchy, which lies in north eastern Syria, was established in 1954, taking territory from the Archeparchy of Mardin in Turkey, the latter then becoming a titular see. Mgr Marayati, originally appointed Archeparch of Aleppo in 1989, was, in addition, appointed Apostolic Administrator of Kamishlié three years later. The priest *in situ*, and who

40 Cf. Pashaya, 'Problems of the Armenians of Syria: The Armenian Community of Damascus'.

has immediate care of the daily running of the eparchy, is Archpriest Antranig Ayvazian.[41]

Up to recent times, there had been six parishes operating in the eparchy, but by 2016, these, of necessity, had been reduced to two. One of the latter is centred at St Joseph's cathedral in Kamishlié itself. The city is on the border with Turkey and, along with Hassake to its south, is considered a Christian centre with approximately 2,500 faithful in its Armenian Catholic constituency. Along with the general Arab population may be found Assyrians and Kurds.

On 11 November 2019, Fr Hovsep Bedoyan, a married Armenian Catholic priest, ordained in 2014, and father of three children, was travelling by car from Kamishlié via Hassake to inspect the works on the Armenian Catholic church in Deir ez-Zor, Saint Gregory the Illuminator.[42] It had been severely damaged in the ongoing civil war, but was being restored with the help of *L'Oeuvre d'Orient*. He and his passengers were attacked; he later died of his wounds. ISIS claimed responsibility. The murder was regarded as a blow for the whole of the Christian community, but most especially for the Armenian Catholic.[43] The reduction in personnel may be noted: two male religious had been working in the eparchy, but by 2016, there was none. Of three female religious, Armenian Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, by the same year, there were two.

41 The 5th Armenia-Diaspora Conference held in Yerevan in September 2014, though meant to be concentrating on the question of the centenary of the Armenian Genocide to be marked the following year, inserted a special section in the programme to be devoted to the situation in Syria. Addressing the conference were a number of speakers from the region, both lay and religious; Archpriest Ayvazian was one of those. The late Armenian Catholic patriarch, Bedros XIX Tarmouni, was also present during the proceedings. In the final report of the Conference, however, no reference was made to the situation in Syria.

42 Mention of Deir ez-Zor would bring to mind the notable Armenian Genocide Memorial Church that had been consecrated there in 1991 by the Cilician Catholicos, Karekin II. It was destroyed on 21 September 2014, the perpetrators presumed to be members of ISIS.

43 At this juncture, it may be recalled that another Armenian Catholic priest, Fr Michel Kayal, whilst travelling by bus between Aleppo and Damascus on 9 February 2013, was kidnapped, along with a Greek Orthodox priest, Fr Maher Mahfouz. Some time later, en route to negotiate their release, Aleppo's Syriac Orthodox and Greek Orthodox Archbishops, Yohanna Ibrahim and Boulos Yaziji respectively, were stopped by foreign militants, possibly Chechens; neither the prelates nor the priests have been seen since.

Iraq

In 1914, there were approximately 300 Armenian Catholics in Iraq. With the growth of the community, and indicative of its stability, the archeparchy of Baghdad was founded in 1954. By 2003, the community had grown to 3,000, so that in 1999, a new cathedral was consecrated in honour of Our Lady of Nareg, replacing the older one of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, itself consecrated in 1938, and which continues to serve the community. Mgr Emmanuel Dabbaghian was Archeparch from 2007 till his retirement in 2017.

Under Saddam Hussein, Christians found protection, but with his demise, the situation changed dramatically. They, among others, have suffered considerably, including the Armenian Catholic community. Baghdad was the main focus for that community, but with the constant uncertainty and the real danger to life within the capital itself, many left for other lands. Though ISIS reached the city's vicinity, they did not attempt to take it as, among other concerns, they were already beginning to lose ground elsewhere, concentrating, instead, on committing individual atrocities within it.

Even before their appearance, Baghdad was the scene of kidnappings, ransom demands and murder as well as attacks on property and assaults on churches and other buildings, one notorious case being the terrorist attack on the Syriac Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of Salvation on 31 October 2010, when 58 faithful were killed, including two priests, and many wounded. The church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, along with a number of other churches, was the object of a bomb attack on 1 August 2004, but, fortunately, escaped serious damage. There was, however, a further attack on the church in April 2011. The two Armenian Catholic churches mentioned are the only ones serving the community in Iraq. With the flight of population, the Armenian Catholic school, Chouchan, in Baghdad, run by the Armenian Sisters, was obliged to close, as was the convent. Fr Nerses Zabbara had been appointed Administrator in 2016 and then, from 2016, Apostolic Administrator. In addition to this role he was appointed Patriarchal Exarch of Jerusalem and Amman in 2019.

At that time, many Armenians took refuge in certain parts of the north where it was felt that life was safer, either with the Christian communities on the Nineveh Plains or where Kurdish forces were in

control within the Autonomous Region of Iraqi Kurdistan. It appears that most Armenians had been more inclined to the latter alternative, as a number of small Armenian settlements are to be found in that region.[44]

According to the survey, *Life after ISIS 2020*, which covers those Christian-inhabited locations that had been occupied by ISIS, only 0.2 percent of the then population in the Nineveh Plains were Armenians (2019). In the town of Karamless (Karemlash) much less than 5 percent were Armenian-speaking. There had originally been many more, as well as in other towns on the Plains, including Qaraqosh, Their presence had been the result of flight from Baghdad and elsewhere, due to the disturbances following the fall of Saddam Hussein. With the imminent arrival of ISIS in 2014, a further flight was necessary, this time mostly to Erbil and Dohuk in the autonomous Kurdistan region. The Plains were liberated by Iraqi Security Forces in October, 2016, but seemingly, apart from Qaraqosh, only a handful of Armenians have returned to the Plains where traditionally the majority of its inhabitants follow Syriac Christianity.[45]

Concerning Mosul, severely damaged in its retaking, its two Armenian Apostolic churches had been destroyed: 'Holy Etchmiadzin' (1857) had been used as an Islamic court by ISIS, whilst the Prelacy nearby had been transformed into a prison. The other church, newly-built, had neither been consecrated nor dedicated when the city was captured. In 2018, there were only 3 Armenian families, reduced from 90 families in 2009, many others had already left by that year. There had been no Armenian Catholic church in the city.

As illustrated in Syria, there are still Christians in Iraq who wish to stay on their ancestral lands, provided that security is in some measure guaranteed; their religious leaders have been continually encouraging

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44 In recent times, Archbishop Avak Asadourian, Apostolic Primate of Iraq, consecrated three new churches in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq: St Vartan in Avzrog (2002), a totally Armenian village, but Kurdish-speaking; St Sargis in Havrez (originally, 'Hai Vrezh': 'Armenian Revenge') (2015); St Asdvadzadzin in Kirkuk (2016). However, in 2017, there were only 30 Armenian families residing in Kirkuk. Other Armenians are to be found elsewhere, but much reduced in numbers: Basra, Baqubah, Zakho, and Aghajanian. This last is an entirely new village near Karemless on the Nineveh Plains. It was founded by a local Assyrian benefactor, Sarkris Aghajan, and named after him. It, too, had been overrun by ISIS, but then retaken.

45 *Life after ISIS 2020: New Challenges to Christianity in Iraq. Results from ACN's Survey of Christians in the liberated Nineveh Plains June 2020.*

them to remain. The newly-elected patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, Gewargis III, was consecrated in Erbil in 2015. It appears that a decision has been made to make that city the seat of the patriarchate, thus finally moving it from Chicago.

However, the situation of the Armenians is rather different: their ancestral lands do not lie within the apparently safest region in the country, that of Iraqi Kurdistan, nor indeed elsewhere in Iraq. Even though their presence dates back many centuries, it has been concentrated in the cities, especially Baghdad and Basra. More numerous were those who arrived in Iraq in flight from the genocidal policies of the Ottoman government. For the indigenous Christians, on the other hand, their connection to lands and religious sites are of a more fundamental nature. For Armenians who lost their ancestral lands a century ago, emigration from a continually troubled country could be a much more tempting proposition.

Referring, once again, to *Life after ISIS 2020*, the document speaks of the 'high rate of emigration that has directly caused the rapid diminution in the Christian population since 2003. Approximately 57 percent of surveyed Christians said they had considered emigration, with the rate highest among young men. This is much higher than the rate for Muslim Iraqis, which is 31 percent according to Arab Barometer.' A factor that encourages Christian emigration, including that of Armenians, not only in Iraq, but elsewhere in the Middle East, is what has been termed 'chain emigration' where almost all have family members somewhere abroad who are willing to help and are familiar with 'the processes and commonly accepted grounds for refugee status in Germany, Australia, the US, and other countries.' According to the Armenian Embassy in Baghdad, prior to 2003, there had been 25,000 Armenians in Iraq; by 2017 there were 13,000.

Iran

The regimes of Saddam Hussein and Hafiz al-Assad, and his son, Bashar al-Assad—the latter succeeding his father in 2000—greatly imperfect as these regimes were, at least afforded some security for Christians who were able to function and even flourish. The situation in Iran presents a slightly different scene. Under Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi's government, Christians were also protected and felt

secure. However, with the 1979 revolution, followed by the shah's exile and the foundation of the Islamic Republic of Iran by the Ayatollah Khomeini, matters within the country changed dramatically. This was not due to any similarity with that often murderous environment associated with Iraq and Syria over the past two decades, but rather more the unease that the Iranian regime conjured for those that were not perfectly allied to it. The general unsettled economic situation as well as the uncertainty of future developments added to that unease. In addition, the eight-year war (1980–1988) waged between Iran and Iraq took its toll, with Armenians obliged to be involved on both sides. From 1979, the exodus has been dramatic, with approximately 100,000 Armenians leaving Iran.

Matters improved, however, after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 when his successor, the present Supreme Leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei, inherited power. The fall of the Soviet Union and the growth of important ties with Armenia have eased tensions for the community within Iran; the common border between the two states being greatly valued by Armenia in particular. Armenians still represent the largest Christian constituency, with present estimates ranging from 70,000 to a much higher figure of 200,000 faithful, with approximately 200 churches in various towns and cities.

The Armenian Catholics have a presence in only two localities: in Tehran, centred at the Cathedral of St Gregory the Illuminator, and in Royan, the latter on the southern Caspian Sea coast, in Mazanderan Province. The present eparch is Mgr Sarkis Davidian, who succeeded Mgr Neshan Karakeheian in 2015. Though the eparchy, established in 1850, is historically connected with Isfahan, as its official title indicates, there is today virtually no connection with that ancient city next to which the once prosperous Armenian settlement of Nor Julfa may still be visited.

Though the community in Tehran is now much reduced (the figure of 2,200 faithful has been given for 1990, whilst for 2020, the figure given is 500), the Armenian Catholic Sisters still manage the 'Institut Mariam' which caters for children from kindergarten to high school age.

The seventh Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani—elected in 2013—is known for upholding religious and ethnic minorities. His predecessor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, in power from 2005, had been a less sympathetic figure. Though the law protects Armenians and

other Christians, there are still severe restrictions. Any sign of mission or proselytism is strictly forbidden; no sign of an open Christian presence is permitted. Even to speak casually of one's belief could be misinterpreted. Hence, there pervades a sense of isolation, of existing in 'a ghetto'.[46] Furthermore, the Catholic Church has no legal status in Iran which also affects the Armenian Catholic Church. The Armenian Apostolic Church, due probably to its lengthy presence in the land, does have such recognition.

It is worthy of note that on 3 September 2018, the Iranian Mehr News Agency published an article, 'Armenian-Catholic church condemns US sanctions on Iran', in which it speaks of a document issued by the Armenian Catholic Church in Tehran that strongly condemns the sanctions as well as pointing out—in the words of the article—that in Iran Armenian Catholics 'freely express their religious beliefs and perform their religious rites', contrary to American accusations. The name of the eparch is not mentioned.

Egypt-Sudan

Armenians have been present in Egypt for many centuries and, before the arrival in large numbers of their co-nationals in Lebanon, formed the most important centre for Armenian cultural activities in the Middle East, outside Constantinople. Participation in Egyptian life was considerable: the first prime minister was the notable politician, Nubar Pasha. However, the 1952 revolution, led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, eventually caused many departures, to such an extent that the community has dwindled considerably.

An Armenian Catholic community was formed in Alexandria, even before the establishment of the Catholic patriarchate in 1742. The church of the Immaculate Conception still serves the small community in that city. However, the Eparchy of Alexandria, founded in 1886, is now based in central Cairo and, since 2004, has been led by Mgr Krikor Coussa. The cathedral, built in 1926, is dedicated to the Annunciation.

However, it could be said that the heart of the community is to be found in Heliopolis, a suburb created in the early twentieth century, not too distant from central Cairo. Initially, for wealthy Egyptians

46 Bernardo Cervellera, 'Christians in Iran: safe but in a ghetto' (II), *AsiaNews.it,* 31-3-2015.

and foreigners, it is still an affluent area, where numbers of Christian churches and schools may be found. The Armenian Catholic church of St. Therese, as well as a parish centre, serves the community. The Armenian Sisters first came to Alexandria in 1913, to Cairo in 1937, and finally to Heliopolis where they established a school in 1953.[47]

Sudan

There is an eparchial connection with Sudan, probably stemming from the Anglo-Egyptian period (1898-1954), but also from the early days of Sudan's independence, gained in 1956. Sudan once had a very flourishing Armenian presence, especially in Khartoum. At one time the Armenian Apostolic church of St Gregory, opened in 1967, had a congregation of some two thousand, consisting, not only of those whose forebears had fled from Turkey, but also new arrivals in the 1950s, seeking opportunities in the newly-independent state.[48] No Armenian Catholic church was established; probably, and not unusually, the faithful would have attended St Gregory's.

Gradually, the community decreased for political and economic reasons, as well as the imposition of Shari'a law in 1983. The lengthy and unsavoury presidency of Omar al-Bashir, which had begun in 1989, was finally overthrown in 2019, but it came too late to save any vital Armenian presence. The civil war with the peoples of the south led to the latter eventually gaining independence as South Sudan in 2011. Shari'a law was rescinded in April 2020. South Sudan has also been placed under the jurisdiction of the eparchy.

The Patriarchal Exarchate of Jerusalem and Amman

Patriarchal Vicars resided in Jerusalem from 1973, to be followed by the establishment of the Exarchate of Jerusalem in 1991, thus being understood as a missionary pre-diocesan jurisdiction. In 2001, the Exarchate was extended to include Amman, the capital of Jordan. It has two parishes, one being in the Old City of Jerusalem itself, centred at the church of Our Lady of Sorrows, at the Third and Fourth Stations on the Via Dolorosa. The exarch's residence is also

47 Cf. Meinardus, *Christians in Egypt*.
48 Cf. Sharma, 'Keeping Armenia Alive in the Capital of Sudan'.

located there, as well as a hostel. As mentioned earlier, the present exarch, appointed in 2019, is Fr Nerses Joseph Zabbara.[49]

The second parish is in Amman, the church dedicated to the Assumption, with a school attached, that of Ss Sahag and Mesrob. They are located in the Jabal Al-Ashrafieh district, colloquially termed, the 'Armenian Neighbourhood'. There are some 500 faithful altogether for both parishes. The Armenian Catholic presence in Jerusalem does not attract the sometimes hostile attention given by ultra-Orthodox Jewish theological students to the Apostolic seminarians when the latter process to the Holy Sepulchre from the Monastery of St James in the Armenian Quarter.

The 'Council of Church Leaders' in Jordan does not have an Armenian Catholic representative, due to the requirement of residency in the Kingdom. The Apostolic bishop of Amman, however, is a member. Christians in Jordan are secure under the patronage of the Kingdom and have no concerns about anti-Christian activities, as the government is alert to prevent such unwanted attentions. In 2018, the Templeton Prize was awarded to the Jordanian king, Abdullah II, for promoting harmony within Islam and between Islam and other faiths, including the Christian.

Turkey

All three Armenian denominations suffered considerable losses in terms of clergy and faithful, as well as property, during the Genocide perpetrated by the Young Turk regime. The Armenian Apostolic Church has now approximately 60,000 adherents, led by the recently-elected patriarch, Sahag II. The Armenian Catholic Church is led by Archbishop Levon Zekiyan, a noted scholar in and beyond Armenian circles, with approximately 2,500 faithful. Most Armenians are concentrated in Istanbul. The seat of the Patriarchate is located in Kumkapı in the heart of the old city, whilst the Catholic cathedral, also dedicated to the Virgin Mary, is located in Beyoğlu, once the centre of European life and diplomacy in Constantinople.

49 An interesting, but critical, study of the development of the Armenian Catholic shrine on the Via Dolorosa may be found in Ardézian, 'Aux origines de l'Église arménienne catholique de Jérusalem'.

The Armenian Catholic Archeparchy was created in 1830 when the Sublime Porte created the 'Katolik milleti'. It has a number of churches throughout the city. However, there are only four parishes which are fully active all the year, and six quasi-parishes which are only partially active, due to changes in population. One, for example, dedicated to the Assumption, is on Büyükada, one of the Princes' Islands, not far from the metropolis; it functions only in the summer when Armenians arrive for their vacation on the islands. The only church outside Istanbul is that found in Mardin, south-eastern Turkey. Dedicated to Mar Yusuf, it was once the centre of a thriving community, now virtually extinct. It was once the seat of an eparchy, the last holder of which was Ignatius Shoukrallah Maloyan, martyred in 1915 and beatified in 2001.

There are four schools: a large secondary in Şişli run by the Mkhitarists of Vienna; a primary in Bomonti, owned by their colleagues from Venice, but now entrusted to the laity; two primary schools run by the Armenian Sisters, one in Samatya, the other in Harbiye. There is also an Armenian Catholic hospital, Surp Hagop, located near Taksim Square.

Meeting in Baghdad

The general situation in Baghdad began to improve, especially when the Iraqi government declared that ISIS had finally been defeated. In 2018, to such an extent had normality returned to the capital that the annual conference of the Catholic Patriarchs of the Middle East was able to take place in the city in late November of that year. The theme that was to be considered: 'Youth Is a Sign of Hope in the Middle East Countries'. The six Catholic Patriarchs, including the Armenian, and a representative of the Latin Patriarchate participated in the event. The Chaldean Patriarch, Cardinal Louis Sako, opened proceedings, speaking of how emigration and religious extremism were serious challenges facing Christians in the Middle East. The Conference cautioned that though the very existence of Christians in the region was threatened, their faithful should continue 'to bear witness to the Lord Jesus amid a turbulent world interrupted by mighty waves.'

A meeting with young Iraqi Christians was held where the Syriac Catholic Patriarch Joseph III Younan spoke of the '… terrible legacy

that we have inherited in recent years. Today, many people want to leave because of the difficulties and pain created by takfiri terrorism and external interference.' He exhorted his young listeners, who had been expressing their concerns: 'If we want to be faithful and faithful to our fathers and grandfathers, we must remain steadfast despite all the challenges.'

The Conference also reminded the young people: 'In light of the difficulties and challenges you face in the midst of the current situation in the Middle East, and in light of the bleak migration that threatens your future and the Christian presence in the East as a whole, we stand by you. As we share the same present pain, we look forward to a bright future with your presence, and we assure you that we will work together to provide the foundations of your steadfastness and steadfastness in your land.'

Turkish Involvement in Syria

One section of the statement issued by the Catholic Patriarchs of the Middle East at the conclusion of their meeting in Baghdad was in regards to the then current situation in Syria. They expressed satisfaction 'with the stability in most parts of the country, where life has returned to normal, hoping that this will include stability in all of Syria.' They appealed 'to all decision-makers to work hard for the return' of displaced people and refugees, which they stressed 'will have a profound impact' on maintaining national unity 'so that Syria will remain the land of peace, freedom and dignity.' This optimism was to be shattered by Turkish direct involvement in northern Syria the following year.

Claire Evans, the regional manager for the Middle East of International Christian Concern, commenting on the murder of Fr Bedoyan shortly after its occurrence in November 2019, spoke of how he had joined 'a long list of Christian religious leaders who have been killed or disappeared since the beginning of the Syrian conflict. […] northeastern Syria was becoming a safe haven for religious diversity until Turkey invaded in October [2019], shattering that safety. The situation is a sad reminder that Syrian Christians are facing two threats: Turkey and ISIS.' She believed that 'Islamic extremists backed by Turkey were given free rein to target anyone who doesn't conform.

It is little wonder that we are seeing a reassertion and emboldening of ISIS within the past few weeks. We cannot make the mistake of thinking that ISIS is defeated and that Turkey's invasion will have no consequences for Christians.'

With the ostensible defeat of ISIS, a new danger began to be faced by the Syrian people. The Autonomous Administration of North and Eastern Syria, which had declared its unusually liberal constitution on 9 January 2014, had emerged out of the confused situation caused by the Civil War. Most Christian communities in the region had been living within its jurisdiction. However, in 2015, an alliance was formed between US forces and the YPG (People's Protection Units) in order to continue and strengthen opposition to ISIS at the time. This development alarmed Turkey which regarded the YPG as connected with the PKK (Kurdish Workers' Party), long banned in Turkey as a terrorist organization. In addition, Turkey was opposed to another Kurdish group, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) as well as the Damascus government.[50]

Finally, with the withdrawal of American troops from the region (6 October 2019), permission, according to Ankara, was given by President Trump for Turkey to continue within Syria the campaign against the remnants of ISIS. Concomitantly, this engagement would allow Ankara to remove what it considered continuing Kurdish threats to her security. Many Americans were to regard this latter intention as a betrayal of their Kurdish allies.

Ankara, also with tacit Russian support, launched an offensive on 9 October which sought, once and for all, apart from the destruction of ISIS, the expulsion of Kurdish forces of whichever group or party (of which there are many) and create a safety zone within Syrian territory south of the Turkish border and east of the River Euphrates, a region known as the Jezira, where most of the Kurds in Syria are concentrated and where it is proposed to resettle Syrian refugees at present within Turkey's borders.

However, the offensive and the fighting that ensued has displaced 300,000 from northern Syria and, furthermore, has encouraged ISIS to operate more freely. According to the US Defense Department general report on the situation (19 November 2019), the incursion

50 The SDF is an alliance of various opponents of ISIS, both Muslim and Christian, including some Armenians.

allowed ISIS to 'reconstitute capabilities and resources within Syria and strengthen its ability to plan attacks abroad.'

Later, the expansion of Turkish military involvement into Idlib province, north-west Syria, in early February 2020, prevented the Syrian Army taking back control of the last rebel-held areas within the province. The consequent clashes between the two forces enraged the Syrian Parliament to such an extent that, on 13 February 2020, it officially recognized the Armenian Genocide and those also perpetrated by the Ottomans against the Assyrian and Syriac communities. Two months earlier, on 12 December 2019, the US Senate itself had passed unanimously a resolution recognizing the Armenian Genocide, its members having concluded that Ankara was unjustified in its activities. However, the Trump administration refused to affirm the resolution.

To prevent a serious conflict developing between the two armies, a ceasefire was finally brokered on 6 March 2020, by the Presidents of Turkey and Russia, the former supporting rebel forces, the latter the forces of the Assad government. However, Turkey, it would seem, has less control over the various jihadist militants operating in the province, such as members of the Turkistan Islamic Party. The military developments in Idlib have caused another humanitarian disaster with civilian casualties and the flight of yet more thousands of refugees. This recent development must further undermine Christian confidence.

Most Recent Statistics for Armenian Catholics in the Middle East

Certain statistics concerning Armenian Catholics in the Middle East might prove of interest, as developing political circumstances have affected their numbers over the past few years.

The following figures, taken from the 2020 *Annuario Pontificio*, concern the Middle East where there are nine Armenian Catholic jurisdictions. In most cases figures from earlier years are also given to identify any notable changes:

- the Archeparchy of Beirut, the seat of the Armenian Catholic Patriarch -10,400 (2017:12,500; 1990: 15,000);
- the Archeparchy of Baghdad—500 (2017: 2,400; 2016: 1800);
- the Archeparchy of Aleppo—5,000 (2017: 7,000; 2016: 10,000; 2008: 17,000);
- the Archeparchy of Istanbul—2,500 (2016: 3100);
- the Eparchy of Ispahan, Iran—150 (1990: 2200);
- the Eparchy of Iskanderiya (Alexandria), Egypt—8,960 (2007: 6,000;1990: 6500);
- the Eparchy of Kamichlié, Syria—2500 (2017: 3,500);
- the Patriarchal Exarchate of Damascus, Syria—4500;
- the Patriarchal Exarchate of Amman and Jerusalem—500 (2005: 740; 2000: 280);
- The total is 35,010. Thus, since 2008 (56,000), there has been an apparent approximate loss of 21,000.

The vast majority of Armenian Catholics are associated with the Ordinariate for Eastern Europe based in Gyumri, Armenia, and which covers the Republics of Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine. as well as the Russian Federation, the figure given being 618,000. The figures given for those remaining in the Middle East, where the Church has its central organization, they represent less than 5 percent of the total world figure. In 2008, it had been 11 percent.

Future of the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate

In many parts of the Middle East, the Armenian Catholic Church finds itself under great pressure and appears to be in decline numerically. The relevant statistics, even though they cannot be totally exact, clearly illustrates this, as does the situation 'on the ground.' It is very likely that more Armenian Catholics will move from the region to safer lands, despite appeals by their religious leaders to remain and be steadfast.

The question arises as to the future of the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate itself as to whether it should remain or move again,

leaving Lebanon and centre itself elsewhere, possibly in Gyumri, the seat of the Ordinariate of Eastern Europe, within whose jurisdiction, again according to statistical data, is to be found most of the Church's faithful today.

However, there is a convincing moral argument that it should remain in Lebanon and gain strength from the influential presence of the Apostolic Catholicosate at Antelias. In addition, two other Eastern Catholic Patriarchates are present: the even more influential Maronite, representing the largest Christian group in the country, and the Syriac Catholic Patriarchate of Antioch, that had sought refuge, as had the Apostolic Catholicosate, from the sanguineous pursuits of the Young Turk regime. Though not numerically significant in the Middle East, the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate has symbolic importance; it was already well-established in Lebanon, in its Bzommar manifestation, some time before the arrival of the Cilician Catholicosate.[51] Its withdrawal from Lebanon could be a cause of disappointment, or even discouragement, not only for the other patriarchates, but for all other Christians, who make up 40 percent of the population.

Conclusion

This paper, among many other matters, has touched upon recent developments in Syria and Iraq in particular, where, during the last twenty years, the greatest threat to Armenian well-being in the contemporary Middle East has presented itself, whether to Catholic, Apostolic or Evangelical.

Apart from the often dire circumstances that afflict Syria and Iraq at the present time, Christian life in the Middle East often seems an uneasy affair at best: attacks on Copts in Egypt appear to be a fairly regular occurrence, whilst continuing problems beset the political and economic situation in Lebanon. Here, the recent massive and destructive explosion in the port of Beirut has added to the fear that the long-established and delicate balance of power which helps protect the interests of the state's various communities, whether Muslim, Christian or Druze, will be dismantled to the eventual disadvantage of the Christian population. Until fairly recently, the Christians together

51 Cf. Migliorino, *(Re)constructing Armenia in Lebanon and Syria,* p. 51.

formed the only Christian majority to be found among all the states in the Muslim Arab world.

Turkey has a particular place in Armenian sensibility, whether for those within or without its borders. For the former, there is the close and constant flickering of the 'Genocide Question' to keep attentions alert. President Erdoğan, however, has recently cast a shadow over Christian sensibility in general throughout the Middle East and elsewhere, thus causing further unease. This is primarily due not only to the armed incursions in northern Syria, from October 2019, and the consequent flight of thousands; it is also the concomitant activity of militant Islamists, including surviving and vengeful adherents of the ISIS school of thought. It is also his ungracious decision to revoke the museum status of Hagia Sofia in Istanbul and return it to its status as an active mosque. A few years earlier, the similarly-named former major Byzantine church in Trabzon, in the vicinity of his family's territory of origin, suffered a similar process, one that could be interpreted as having been a dress-rehearsal for the Istanbul event.

The more recent and similar fate that befell another Byzantine masterpiece in Istanbul, the church of St Saviour in Chora, the Kariye Museum, may likewise give encouragement to those who seek the expulsion of all Christians from the region. It could be seen and felt as a warning by many. We may here take note of the statement of appeal made by Theophilus III, Greek Patriarch of Jerusalem, concerning the status of Hagia Sophia (July 2020), in particular, its final paragraph: 'We hope and pray, for the benefit of all people of good will, and for Turkey as a nation with the potential to influence our entire region down a path of growth and mutual co-existence, that the present status of Hagia Sophia is respected and preserved.' This appeal, and many others, made no impression.

On the other hand, there are Christians, especially religious leaders, who have the intention of staying, come what may. We have also seen the appeal to Christian youth made by the Catholic Patriarchs at the 2018 Baghdad Conference: that, despite everything, they should stay and guard their inheritance of land and faith. However, the situation in Iraq continues unsettled where a new campaign against the remnants of ISIS has had to be launched by the government on 13 September 2020. This is a response to the number of attacks continually committed against security forces and civilians in various parts of the country.

Commenting on the sudden Turkish aerial bombing in June 2020, of an area near Zakho in Iraqi Kurdistan, the Chaldean Patriarch, Cardinal Sako, expressed his dismay: 'It is not known what Erdoğan wants. [...] We find ourselves having to face ever more serious problems, one after the other, in a spiral that takes your breath away and crushes all the people under the weight of fatigue and worry.'

Whether that weight of fatigue and worry will finally overcome the ever-diminishing Armenian Catholic faithful in the Middle East, remains to be seen. They have in recent times, along with their fellow Armenians, struggled in lands that have become a nightmare, or where further nightmares await; there is the fear that others in the region could become so, too. With the understanding that there exists a determination to destroy Christianity in all its forms as exercised by Islamist extremists in the Middle East and elsewhere, does not bring comfort. Courage to stay is required of them, but the long history of relations between Islam and Christianity in the region does not create confidence; complete trust has become a rare commodity. Nevertheless, as regards the Armenian Catholic patriarchate itself, it should resist any temptation to remove itself elsewhere, thereby encouraging its own constituency and giving moral support to all other Christians in the Middle East.

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EASTERN CHRISTIAN MYSTICAL TRADITIONS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECUMENICAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE: MASSIGNON, CLEMENT, KHODR AND DALL'OGLIO, WITH A PROTESTANT CONTRIBUTION.

Andrew Ashdown

Introduction[1]

The level of encounter and dialogue that took place between Christians and Muslims from the early centuries of the Islamic era until the twentieth century is well documented. In recent decades however, the rise of Islamism, political Islam, and Western political interventions in the Middle East have eroded that engagement and alienated adherents of the religions from each other. There has even been a shift in Christian self-identity amongst some Arab Christian denominations to a more assertive self-definition and a less accommodating engagement with Islam. Notwithstanding this, Christian communities in the region continue, out of their own ecclesial and mystical traditions, to make a positive contribution to religious and political discourse and to be a 'bridge' between communities amidst the complexity of the multiple internal and external forces which affect them. As O'Mahony writes,

> Samir Khalil Samir of the Pontifical Oriental Institute asserts that Middle Eastern Christianity is significant due to its cultural richness, its pride in apostolic origins that go back to the beginning of Christianity, its rejection of the term 'minority,' and its understanding of its vocation as a unifying bridge between cultures, civilizations and religions, both East and West.[2]

1 The research presented here is based upon my doctoral thesis on Christian-Muslim relations in Syria, University of Winchester, 2019, on Christian-Muslim relations in Syria, which will be published in November 2020 by Routledge, London: *Christian-Muslim Relations in Syria: Historic and Contemporary Religious Dynamics in a Changing Context*.

2 See K S Samir, *Role Culturel Des Chretiens Dans Le Monde Arabe*, Cahiers de l'Orient Chretien, Beirut, 2003.

This uniquely eastern ecclesial paradigm is important, not just because it represents 12 percent of the global Christian population, but because it includes Greek, Byzantine, Syriac and Latin traditions that create a longstanding plurality within Arab culture. This plurality goes back to the early Church Fathers who debated both amongst themselves and with emergent Islam. This paradigm of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue follows a continuous and on-going tradition for Eastern Christianity until the present day. The Patristic tradition is a living one and represents an eastern ecclesial and Islamic plurality that contemporary western theologians have struggled to embrace, preferring a more unified perception of the Arab paradigm. As Arab identity has become increasingly contested in recent years through the lens of different cultures, a rediscovery of eastern Christianity's tradition of diversity and engagement with Islam has the potential to release new opportunities for dialogue and understanding in the fractured interreligious context that exists today in the Middle East.

The work of Christian scholars during the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century has been instrumental in sustaining dialogue and providing a framework for strengthening and developing Christian-Muslim relations in an increasingly tense and fractured political and religious context. This article will bring into 'conversation' the thinking of four western and eastern theologians who have been active and influential participants in the contemporary development of Christian religious and political discourse, particularly as it relates to Christian-Muslim co-existence in the Levant in recent times. Each of these figures were able to discover a mutuality of understanding and respect through the mystical traditions of Islam and eastern Christianity, and that their approach offers new avenues for dialogue and reflection in interreligious discourse between Christians and Muslims today. The four are: Olivier Clement (1921-2009); Louis Massignon (1883-1962); Georges Khodr (b.1923), Metropolitan of the Eastern 'Antiochian' Orthodox Church; and Jesuit priest, Fr. Paolo Dall'Oglio (1954-). All four were profoundly influenced in their thought and spirituality by the mystical theology of eastern monasticism, and through it found a route into interreligious dialogue with Islam. For all these figures, a deep encounter and engagement with the 'other' was central 'to the healing of divisions between Eastern and Western Christians and of antagonism and warfare between Islam and Christianity during one

and half millennia,' and to a dialogical encounter with each other and a spiritual experience of God.[3]

Early Engagement with Islam

From the earliest days of the emergence of Islam, local Christians began to 'take on the outward trappings' of the culture of Islam and, through the adoption of Arabic as their liturgical and theological language in the first half of the eighth century, were able to undertake a distinctive theological and philosophical discourse with their Muslim interlocutors. This combined Greek philosophy with a distinctively oriental theological and philosophical understanding.

The existence of a specifically eastern discourse with Islam has long been under-recognised and under-studied in the West. Until recently, much study of the history of the Church in the East has been approached from a largely Western perspective. It is only in recent decades and thanks to the work of such scholars as Sebastian Brock, Kenneth Cragg, Sidney Griffith, Hugh Goddard, David Thomas, Anthony O'Mahony and Erica Hunter; and their engagement with Middle-Eastern Christian and Muslim scholars, that the specifically Eastern theological dynamic throughout the history of the Church in the Middle East, has come to the attention of scholars in the West.[4]

One of the earliest and most influential Syrian Christian theologians whose spirituality and theology was rooted in the Eastern context was John of Damascus (*ca* 676-749). Born into a prominent devout Christian family, his father held high public office under the Caliph of Damascus and prior to his ordination, John himself is said to have been an administrator to the Caliph. Educated under a monk named Cosmas, John was tutored in theology, became a monk at the Mar Saba Monastery in the Judean Desert and in response to the Christological controversies raging in the early Church and to the challenges of the

3 S Hugh-Donovan, 'Authenticity, Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue: Louis Massignon, Olivier Clement, Thomas Merton, Christian de Cherge—Radical Hospitality, Radical Faith', *Living Stones Yearbook* 2019 (pp. 1-39), p. 5.

4 In the UK, the Centre for Eastern Christian Studies at Heythrop College, London University (which closed in 2018) and the Living Stones organisation with its *Yearbook* (www.livingstonesonline.org.uk), have also contributed to this growing scholarship on Eastern Christianity.

Islamic movement, produced one of the greatest theological works in the history of Christianity—'The Fount of Knowledge'.[5] John was one of the staunchest defenders of the Chalcedonian cause in the East and of the veneration of icons. Writing in Greek, his works were being translated into Arabic by the tenth century and his contributions to Eastern Christianity embraced law, theology, philosophy and music. His liturgy is still being used in Eastern Christendom.

Following John of Damascus, Theodore Abu Qurra (ca750-820) was the first Christian theologian to write in Arabic. Like John of Damascus he defended the veneration of icons, responded to the doctrinal challenges of Islam and 'promoted the dogmas of the 'six Councils" which were to become the touchstone for Chalcedonian orthodoxy.'[6]

In the twelfth century, Paul of Antioch, a Greek Melkite Bishop of Sidon, corresponded with the great Muslim thinker Ibn Taymiyya in a letter notable for the way it sought to engage with contemporary Muslim thought. The writings of Ibn Taymiyya remain very influential in contemporary Islam and are used as a foundation for *salafi* and *wahhabi* theology. In the early Islamic era, Patriarch Timothy 1 (d. 823) an East Syrian Patriarch engaged in a now famous debate in Arabic with the Caliph al-Mahdi in Baghdad in 781, in which detailed discussion took place on the role of biblical prophets. Whilst concluding with a positive assessment of Muhammad, Timothy nevertheless denied his prophethood. All these encounters affirm the quality and breadth of early debate between Islam and Christianity; the knowledge that scholars had of each other's faith; and the importance of this dialogue for Christian-Muslim relations in the Arab world.[7] This dialogue took

5 See F Chase (transl.) (2015), *Saint John of Damascus. Writings,* Exfontibus Co., pp v-xxxviii.

6 See also translated by John C Lamoreaux, *Theodore Abu Qurrah* Brigham Young University Press, Provo, Utah, 2005. Other Christian writers who engaged in early discourse with Islam in Arabic include Theodore Bar Koni, an apologist of the Church of the East, who lived circa eighth century; Ibrahim al-Tabarani, a Melkite of the ninth century who argued against the prophethood of Muhammad and the divine authorship of the Qur'an; Abd al-Masih al-Kindi, an East Syrian in the early ninth century, who was equally dismissive of the status of Muhammad on moral grounds; 'Amra b.Matta, an East Syrian of the eleventh century who wrote the first Arab Christian encyclopaedia; Ibn al-'Ibri (d.1286), a Syrian bishop who wrote a history of Islam from a Christian perspective.

7 A work that outlines the contribution of several other Middle Eastern theologians is S Noble and A Treiger (eds), *The Orthodox Church in the Arab World, 700-1700.*

a number of forms: the use of letters; summaries of doctrine; dialogical accounts of encounter in a question and answer format; and open debate. The last of these may have 'provided the basis for many of the literary compositions written in Arabic and Syriac during the early Islamic period.'[8]

What is clear is that this dialogue was not a one-sided affair and whilst Christians sought to translate Aristotelian Greek thought into Arabic and Syriac to better explain their confessional formulas and ecclesial identity, many Muslims found themselves adopting elements of Hellenism into the intellectual framework of Islam.

The twentieth century saw a wave of political developments that have profoundly influenced Christian-Muslim relations in the region. The end of the Ottoman Empire; the carving up of the Middle East between French and British control from 1916 onwards; the creation of the nation states which in turn affected the communal balance of their residents; the development of political Islam; the establishment of the State of Israel and the subsequent Israeli/Palestinian conflict; the Civil War in Lebanon; the Iranian revolution; the invasion of Iraq; the events of the so-called 'Arab Spring'—have all contributed to the strengthening of *Shari'a*-based political Islam and the weakening of the Christian communities in the region. For all these reasons, a rediscovery of theological and mystical resources in both Eastern Christian and Islamic traditions that enhance the possibility of dialogue and understanding between the two religions has become increasingly desirable. The figures considered here have played a major role in recognising and rediscovering those historic resources.

Louis Massignon (1883-1962)

Western understanding of Christian-Muslim dynamics is indebted to the work of Louis Massignon (1883-1962). Brought up and educated in France, early encounters in Algeria, Morocco and Mesopotamia imbued in him a deep interest in Islamic spirituality and culture. A period of captivity in 1908 in Mesopotamia led to a conversion to Christianity.

An Anthology of Sources, Northern Illinois University Press, De Kalb, Illinois, 2014.

8 Sidney H Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque. Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam*, Princeton University Press, Oxford/Princeton, 2008, p. 103.

In 1919, Massignon was appointed Chair of the Muslim Sociology and Sociography at the College de France in Paris and in 1922 he published a 4-volume doctoral thesis on Al-Hallaj. Inspired by the example of St Francis of Assisi, Massignon became a Franciscan tertiary in 1931. He was moved by Francis' encounter with Sultan al-Malik in 1219 and in Egypt took a vow of *badaliyya,* placing himself 'in *substitution* and prayer for Muslims, desiring to bring about mutual respect and dialogue.'[9] It was not until 1949 that Massignon was received into the Greek Melkite Catholic Church and ordained a Greek Melkite priest in 1950. Laude writes:

> He became a Melkite priest in order to remain faithful to the Abrahamic transcendence, one of the highest witnesses of which was, for him, the Arabic language. Thus he remained within the Church, as an 'oriental Catholic', in a position of marginal, almost exiled, integration.[10]

Massignon was instrumental in raising the profile of Christian-Muslim dialogue within the Catholic Church and is believed to have made a decisive contribution to the Vatican II document, *Nostra Aetate.*[11] As Paolo Dall'Oglio writes: 'Louis Massignon is more than a teacher. He is a source of inspiration and an intercessor for my spiritual growth and my mission in the Islamic world.'[12] His influence however went far beyond Catholicism. The Shi'ite scholar Ali Shariati (1933-1977) who played a role in the revival of religious thought in Iran, studied

9 Stefanie Hugh-Donovan, 'Authenticity, Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue: Louis Massignon, Olivier Clement, Thomas Merton, Christian De Cherge - Radical Hospitality Radical Faith.,' in *Living Stones Yearbook 2019. Witness and Communion: Christian Theological and Political Thought in the Contemporary Middle East*, London, 2019, p. 20.

10 Patrick Laude, *Louis Massignon. The Vow and the Oath*, trans. E.Q Lohja, The Matheson Trust, 2011. p. xii.

11 See C S Krokus, 'Louis Massignon's Influence on the Teaching of Vatican II on Muslims and Islam,' *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 23, no. 3 (2012); Anthony O'Mahony, 'Louis Massignon: A Catholic Encounter with Islam and the Middle East,' in *God's Mirror. Renewal and Engagement in French Catholic Intellectual Culture in the Mid-Twentieth Century*, Fordham University Press, New York, 2015; C S Krokus, *The Theology of Louis Massignon. Islam, Christ, and the Church*. The Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C., 2017.

12 Paolo Dall'Oglio, 'Louis Massignon and Badaliya', *Aram: Society for Syro-Mesopotamian Studies*, no. 20 (2008), p. 329.

with him.[13] Massignon was acutely aware of the hardening of doctrinal thought in Salafist circles and the entry into politics of modern Islamism, particularly through the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Syria and in other parts of the Middle East.[14] Theologically, he viewed Christianity and Islam through the lens of the martyred Muslim mystic Al-Hallaj (857-922), seeing in him a parallel with Jesus.[15] He regarded suffering as a fundamental window into the nature and mystery of God, expressed both in Islam and Christianity and that our response to suffering should be one of hospitality, mutual compassion and commitment to 'the other'—the stranger.

Massignon's mystical thought is a constant dialogue between the 'imperative demands of otherness and the unifying demands of Love.'[16] Clement referred to Massignon's approach as the 'science of compassion.' Through putting oneself in the 'other's place' and taking into account the spiritual, intellectual, social and political experience of the other, one is able to open 'a space where language itself reveals the nature of pilgrimage as a way of going out of oneself in order to converge with another in the presence of the "Divine Absentee".'[17] In other words, Massignon recognised that the heart of God could be reached in the heart of the 'other'—outside of the Catholic Church and even outside of the Christian faith. This requires a lifelong 'living out' of the Christian faith, witnessing to God's love for the other, and seeing in the other, the child of God.

Massignon regarded Abraham as the model of this mutual hospitality on every human level. Through mystical engagement with each other—here he echoes the spirituality of Charles de Foucauld who influenced his thought—Massignon understood Islam as a mediator of Grace and a 'providential guardian of the Holy Places.' He sought to communicate this vision 'through scholarly work and through the

13 See A Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian. A Political Biography of Ali Shariati*, I B Tauris, London, New York, 2013. Shariati was a charismatic teacher who sought to blend Islam and Marxism and profoundly influenced the development of Iranian political Islam.

14 O'Mahony, 'Louis Massignon: A Catholic Encounter with Islam and the Middle East', p. 243.

15 *Ibid*., p. 235.

16 Laude, *Louis Massignon. The Vow and the Oath*, p. 144.

17 Hugh-Donovan, 'Authenticity, Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue: Louis Massignon, Olivier Clement, Thomas Merton, Christian De Cherge—Radical Hospitality Radical Faith', p. 5.

sodality of prayer (*badaliyya*)'[18] and saw in Islam 'a providential role, a charisma of Islam and therefore of its Prophet in the coming of the Kingdom of God,' that is 'in no way separate or separable from the role of Christ in the salvation of each man and woman.'[19] Furthermore, he believed that the Syriac Catholic rite, rooted in Eastern tradition, could help explain Islamic thought to the West. and that 'the healing of divisions between Eastern and Western Christians and of the antagonism and warfare between Islam and Christianity during one and a half millennia could flow from a spiritual experience of God, practised and lived by believers open to dialogical encounter with the other.'[20]

Massignon's contribution was not just spiritual and theological. He also played a significant role in the political administration of North Africa and Syria, arguing for a greater role for the Arabic language and the emancipation of Islam within modernity. Throughout his life, Massignon's practice of contemplation and engagement with people was rooted in the belief that God loves all equally and that through 'sacred hospitality' we could encounter the divine in the 'Other'.[21] This spiritual approach would receive a more than sympathetic 'audience' in Eastern Christianity, whose origins are deeply intertwined with the spirituality of the desert and its encounter with the Arab world.

Olivier Clement (1921-2009)

French Orthodox lay theologian Olivier Clement (1921-2009) was a profoundly influential writer in stressing the importance of the Antiochene paradigm in Christian-Muslim relations.[22] Clement

18 O'Mahony, 'Louis Massignon: A Catholic Encounter with Islam and the Middle East', p. 238.

19 Dall'Oglio, 'Louis Massignon and Badaliya', p. 332.

20 Stefanie Hugh-Donovan, 'Louis Massignon, Olivier Clement, Thomas Merton, Christian De Cherge: Radical Hospitality, Radical Faith', *A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 55, no. 3-4 (2014), p. 476.

21 Richard Sudworth, 'Responding to Islam as Priests, Mystics and Trail Blazers: Louis Massignon, Kenneth Cragg, and Rowan Williams', *ibid.*, p. 458.

22 Stefanie Hugh-Donovan has been instrumental in bringing to the attention of the academic and wider world of the importance of Olivier Clement. Her Doctoral thesis, completed at Heythrop College, University of London in 2015, was entitled 'Olivier Clement: French Thinker and Theologian of the Eastern Orthodox Church in Dialogue with Western Catholic Thought on Ecclesiology, Theology and the Identity of Europe', was the first complete study to describe the life and

was born and brought up in France in a family which was atheist and socialist. With no religious upbringing, his first encounter with religion was from an anthropological perspective as a student of history in Montpelier and then as a teacher in Paris. It was there that he encountered the spiritual renewal of the Russian Orthodox Church, was converted to Orthodoxy, and was profoundly influenced by the Eastern Orthodox theologians, including Paul Evdokimov (who coined the term 'interior monasticism'), Vladimir Lossky and Nicholas Berdiaev. As Hugh-Donovan writes:

> Regarding Christ through the lens of faith held up by Lossky and Berdiaev, Clement entered on a pilgrimage to the 'interior' of Eastern mysticism and experienced *metanoia,* 'the great 'turning round' of the mind and the heart, and of our whole grasp of reality.[23]

The Russian diaspora brought Eastern Orthodoxy into a new encounter with the West. Amongst the Russian writers who influenced Clement was Solzhenitsyn, who through years of suffering in prison was converted from Marxism to Orthodoxy and learned to discern the mystery of God in the human face. 'Solzhenitsyn judged that the problems of East and West were rooted in atheism and the decline of Christian faith and practice.'[24] This resonated with what Clement called the 'nothingness' of his own atheist background and the 'lost centre' in which 'the apparent absence of God' and the 'longing and understanding of God as our freedom' to which this led, ultimately led to faith. God's very silence 'renders us free.'[25] For Clement, the 'absence' of God in his daily upbringing, but the presence he found within the mystery of nature pointed the way to God himself. This apophatic approach echoed well with the mystical theology of the Patristic theologians that Clement would encounter through Orthodoxy.

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work of Olivier Clement who died in 2009. Her work forms the basis of this brief contribution on Clement. Hugh-Donovan had been a Research fellow at the Centre for Eastern Christianity at Heythrop College. She died in 2018.

23 Stefanie Hugh-Donovan, 'Olivier Clement: A Spiritual Journey,' *One in Christ* 53, no. 1 (2019), p. 144.

24 *Ibid*., p. 148.

25 *Ibid*., p. 149.

For Clement, 'relationality is part of the mystery of God and constitutes the vocation of the created being.'[26] Clement saw this relationality revealed first of all through the faces and emotional expression of ordinary people. This thinking was further influenced by Clement's study of the Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas who stressed that the 'face to face' encounter brings forth 'an ethical responsibility, that prioritises the other over the self.'[27] He understood this as most comprehensively defined by the theology of the Church Fathers, who recognised the presence of God's Spirit in all people. Eastern Christianity therefore offers resources for a rediscovery of dialogue and relationship between faiths and within humanity that have been under-recognised by Western Christians. Clement considered that 'the separation of Christian East and West led to rupture and disintegration.' Renewed encounter could once again lead Christianity 'into unity and communion.'[28]

It is this relationality, expressed first of all in Christian ecclesial unity, that forms the starting point for Clement's important work on interfaith dialogue. If the mystery of relationality as expressed in the Trinity is first constituted by God himself, then Clement believed that respect for each other: for fellow Christians; for people of other faiths, and for all human beings—is at the heart of God's purpose for humanity. He also saw the expression of this relationality in the diversity of the Christian Churches of the East; in the Christian mystical tradition as developed in monasticism; and in Islamic mystical tradition. Indeed Clement sees traces of the Trinity in the mysticism of Islam, for 'the Qur'an speaks of the Word and the Spirit of God, thus making a Trinitarian "space".'[29]

Clement cites the work of Massignon and Khodr as illustrating the unique Eastern Christian contribution to the Christian-Muslim

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26 Stefanie Hugh-Donovan, 'Eastern Orthodoxy and Muslim-Christian Relations between Europe and the Middle East: O Clement's Perspectives on Theology and Ecclesiology in the Christian Encounter with Islam,' *Living Stones Yearbook 2016. The Inter-Relationship between Religion and Politics in the Middle East*, p. 123.

27 'Olivier Clement: A Spiritual Journey', p. 163.

28 'Authenticity, Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue: Louis Massignon, Olivier Clement, Thomas Merton, Christian De Cherge—Radical Hospitality Radical Faith', p. 32.

29 'Eastern Orthodoxy and Muslim-Christian Relations between Europe and the Middle East: O Clement's Perspectives on Theology and Ecclesiology in the Christian Encounter with Islam', p. 126.

dynamic. Clement is deeply aware that Christians were first named as such at Antioch, and it is from the Eastern, 'Antiochene', cultural, social, religious and philosophical context that Christianity emerges. Clement was also aware of the spiritual and monastic revivals that have taken place in Eastern Christianity in recent decades, and considered that these, emerging from the same cultural and historical context as Islam, represented an opportunity for renewed interreligious discourse and understanding.

However, Clement warns of two faces of Islam of which Christianity needs to be aware when engaging in dialogue. These two 'faces' are represented by the respective writings of Mohammed Talbi (1921-2017), who regards pluralism as an essential characteristic of all religions; and Tariq Ramadan (b.1962), who regards the west as hostile to Islam and desires an Islamisation of the West.[30] As Hugh-Donovan writes:

> Talbi engages and takes interest in European thought and Christianity. For Ramadan, the west is a space for Islam to reassert its old dominance.[31]

Talbi considers that the Qur'an 'must be interpreted 'at this moment and in this place" and that pluralism is essential to modern globalisation.[32] Ramadan however, whilst proposing a degree of democratic elements and supporting equal citizenship, wishes to see Islam overcome Western modernity.

Clement believes that mutual respect must include mutual compassion and that both Eastern Christianity and Islam have the mystical resources to discover a space for dialogue. Eastern Christianity has had to engage with Islam for centuries in a way that western Christians have not.[33] It was only in the twentieth century and

30 Tariq Ramadan is grandson of Hassan al-Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood.

31 Hugh-Donovan, 'Eastern Orthodoxy and Muslim-Christian Relations between Europe and the Middle East: O Clement's Perspectives on Theology and Ecclesiology in the Christian Encounter with Islam', p. 137.

32 *Ibid*., p. 135.

33 For a reflection on how Orthodoxy has encountered Islam in recent decades, see A M Sharp, 'Modern Encounters with Islam and the Impact on Orthodox Thought, Identity and Action', *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 5, no. 1 (2014).

following Vatican II that the importance of this interreligious dynamic and Eastern Christianity's contribution to it was recognised. For this reason, John Paul II, deeply aware of the divide between Western and Eastern Christianity, declared that the universal Church 'needs to learn to breathe with 'two lungs'.' But more than this, given the complex contemporary dynamics within Islam as it grapples with how to engage with the modern world, the rise of political Islamism and increased Sunni-Shi'a tensions, the on-going presence and engagement of the diverse Christian presence presents a challenge and opportunity for dialogue and discernment, especially for strengthening the political, communal and religious space in which all communities can continue to coexist and flourish in the post-conflict context.

Clement, whose writings open to Western Christendom the roots of the Eastern Christian mystical tradition, represents a significant bridge between Western Catholicism and Eastern Christianity and shows how cooperation between the two offers spiritual resources both for Western Christianity and for deeper engagement with Islam.

Georges Khodr (b. 1923)

Of all contemporary Eastern theologians who have explored Christian-Muslim relations and dialogue and who have played a transformative role in Orthodoxy in Lebanon and Syria, perhaps the most influential has been Georges Khodr, the Antiochian Orthodox Metropolitan of Mount Lebanon. Over the space of fifty years, he has written countless articles (mostly in Arabic), in which he 'rekindles and reawakens the Christian theological flames of the early centuries that present the primordial and the simple Christian message of divine love.'[34] His writings are rooted in the Patristic heritage of the Eastern Church and influenced by the mystical theology of the early Fathers, in whom he finds a theology in which the relationship of Christians and Muslims is enhanced and enriched by a common understanding of the 'Other'. For oriental Christianity, the Church Fathers represent a foundation for Christian faith and understanding because they are closest to the teachings of the apostles and because they 'bring spirituality and

34 Sylvie Avakian, 'The Mystery of Divine Love in the Apophatic Theology of Bishop George Khodr,' *Theological Review*, no. 33 (2012), p. 39.

theology together' in a way that allows for the Divine Mystery to be revealed to and within all of humanity.[35] Avakian writes:

> The notion of divine mystery and the unknowability of God, the pneumatological paradigm, the importance of human response to divine love and grace, through which the divine image would be actualized, Khodr's anthropological and universalist position, according to which, it is the whole of humanity that together form the divine image, his insistence on 'secularization': all these elements together contribute for a Christian theology that has a genuine potential to meet the Other, not only for the sake of meeting or accepting the Other, but for the sake of a genuine maturity in Christian faith and for self-knowing.

As the Christian denomination in the region with the most numerous adherents, the Antiochian Orthodox contribution to Christian-Muslim relations in the region is important. Deeply rooted in the Byzantine tradition, the Orthodox Church was deeply impacted by the advent of the Ottoman Empire and the imposition of the *millet* system, which, despite its limitations allowed a certain flourishing of the Christian communities. Roussos attributes the 'outstanding economic and social record of the Christian minorities' in the nineteenth century to 'their participation in expanding sectors of the economy, the foreign protection they enjoyed, their favourable situation following various reforms in the Ottoman Empire and Egypt, their Western education and the help they acquired from their co-religionists outside the region.'[36] Following the collapse of the Ottoman State however, the Antiochian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch had to renegotiate its status in a context that was overwhelmingly Muslim. This involved celebrating and affirming its indigenous Arab identity and promoting secular nationalism in order to secure equal status with Muslims.

35 *Ibid*., p. 66.

36 Sotiris Roussos, 'Eastern Orthodox Chrstianity in the Middle East,' in *Eastern Christianity in the Modern Middle East*, Anthony O'Mahony and Emma Loosley (eds), Routledge, Oxford/New York, 2010, p. 108.

The identity of the Eastern Orthodox community in Syria is complex. It forms part of the Byzantine Orthodox world but sees itself as indigenous to the Arab world, has an Arab Patriarch and prefers the designation 'Antiochian Orthodox' rather than 'Greek Orthodox'. More numerous in Syria than in Lebanon, the Orthodox have 'walked a thin line between Arab-Syrian nationalism and Lebanon's uniqueness as a place where East and West could meet on an equal footing.'[37] Having previously sought to indigenise its theological contribution within the culture of the Arab world in order to establish its Eastern identity, it is an identity that is once again being contested and debated in the light of the rise of political Islam and Islamic extremism.

In the 1940s, Georges Khodr was instrumental in developing an 'Orthodox Youth Movement' which sought a move away from ethnic Orthodoxy and a renaissance of the Antiochian Orthodox Church through its spiritual life. The movement set up educational centres throughout Lebanon and Syria and these helped in the formation of a new generation of clergy and religious leaders. It also led to a resurgence in monasticism and to the establishment of new centres of theological study. Most notably Balamand University in Lebanon, founded in 1988 by Patriarch Ignatius IV Hazim, has become a leading educational institution in the Middle East.

Khodr was born in Tripoli, Lebanon in 1923. His childhood and youth were spent in an Islamic quarter of the city, an experience that came to symbolise for him the 'coming out' of the Christian communities from their ghettoes in the Arab world, into full participation in the life of their countries.[38] Khodr believed that Christians should be fully a part of the Islamic World with equal rights and dignity and that they should know their compatriots through a deep relationship with and participation in their life and faith.

The basis of Khodr's apophatic theology, (following Gregory of Nyssa, Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor) is the 'impossibility of describing the essence of God', which remains an 'incomprehensible mystery.'[39] In one of his most influential articles, Khodr writes: 'If obedience to the Master means following him

37 *Ibid*., p. 114.

38 Sylvie Avakian, *The 'Other' in Karl Rahner's Transcendental Theology and George Khodr's Spiritual Theology*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main, 2012, p. 103.

39 'The Mystery of Divine Love in the Apophatic Theology of Bishop George Khodr', p. 41.

wherever we find traces of his presence, we have an obligation to investigate the authentic spiritual life of non-Christians.'[40] Thus, starting with the Mystery of God as Creator, the mystery of God in Christ and God as Spirit, Khodr explores the implications for God's and our relationship with all humanity, one of the most significant of which allows for the possibility of the hiddenness of Christ within other faiths. (Here, Khodr echoes Karl Rahner's Transcendental Theology). Khodr maintains that the only name given to God is 'Love' (1 John 4:8) and if so, then it is love that expresses the divine work in Christ and in relation to the 'Other.'[41] 'Love,' he states, is 'the Cradle of Faith'.[42] Moreover, echoing Maximus the Confessor, he speaks of the 'deification' of humanity through this Divine Love, bringing humanity into union with the divine and so breaking down the barriers that exist in humanity. For him, echoing again the early Fathers of the East, faith, spiritual experience and transformation take priority over reason.[43]

At the core of Khodr's theology lies a reflection on what he calls the 'Economy of the Spirit'. It is this 'economy of the Spirit' which makes the presence of Christ possible and the living of authentic spiritual lives 'possible for all human beings, regardless of any religious restrictions.' [44] He writes: 'The Spirit operates and applies His energies in accordance with His own economy and we could, from this angle, regard the non-Christian religions as points where His inspiration is at work.'[45] If that is so, then Christ cannot be 'owned' by some people and not by others and we have a duty to discern Christ in others.

Avakian identifies five major themes that resonate through Khodr's position on interreligious dialogue and relations.[46] First, the human

40 George Khodr, 'Christianity in a Pluralistic World—the Economy of the Spirit,' *The Ecumenical Review* 23, no. 2 (1971), p. 118-19.

41 Avakian, 'The Mystery of Divine Love in the Apophatic Theology of Bishop George Khodr', p. 43-44.

42 This is the title of an article by Khodr. *'Al-Mahabbah Matrahan Liliman'* ('Love: A Cradle of Faith'), *An-nahar.* 15.05.1999. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 50.

43 Avakian, *The 'Other' in Karl Rahner's Transcendental Theology and George Khodr's Spiritual Theology*, p. 109.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 121.

45 Khodr, 'Christianity in a Pluralistic World—the Economy of the Spirit', p. 125-26.

46 Avakian, 'The Basics of Interreligious Dialogue in Metropolitan George Khodr's Theology. Judaism and Islam from the Perspective of an Oriental Christian.'

being is made in the image of God and therefore all human beings are of infinite value. Second, the work of the Holy Spirit cannot be confined to the boundaries of the Church and Christians cannot claim exclusive ownership of the Truth. Thirdly, the Word is present in every existing thing and the creative energy of God is revealed in his people.[47] Fourthly, we cannot know the full mystery of God, but can only encounter him through spiritual prayer and reflection. Lastly, the final consummation will involve the removal of all ugliness and wickedness and bring salvation for all. Meanwhile, the Church is called to be the sign of God's love for all his people. For these reasons, Khodr believes that 'only within a secularized state Christianity might have the potential of an actual existence and coexistence with other religions.'[48] For only under a civil rule deprived of all exclusivist inclination, can sectarian prejudice be overcome.

Khodr criticises Western theology for its exclusive dogmatism and believes Eastern Christianity's mystical approach to theology represents a truer reflection of Christian theology and spirituality. 'We are called to be Christians, not Crusaders,' he writes.[49] Often, he uses a methodology in theological dialogue that takes steps towards Islam. For example, in order to facilitate understanding with Muslim scholars on the subject of Incarnation and recognising that Muslims understand the Qur'an to be the Word of God, he says 'Christ is our Qur'an'.[50] Khodr urges a 'new type of religious conversation … not those so-called ideological conversations limited to concepts and doctrines where none regarded and addressed his partner in reality, but genuine dialogues, from one open-hearted person to another.' For, he writes: 'we may be outsiders to one another in dogma, but none are outsiders to humanity and to

47 Whilst some may view this suggestion as implying a pantheistic approach, it is a reflection of Justin Martyr's Patristic theology of the Divine 'Seed of the Word' (Spermatikos Logos) present in humanity. For Justin Martyr, the use of reason, even amongst people without faith, is the work of Christ the Logos, present even if unknown.

48 Avakian, 'The Basics of Interreligious Dialogue in Metropolitan George Khodr's Theology. Judaism and Islam from the Perspective of an Oriental Christian', p. 193.

49 George Khodr, 'I Have Called You Friends,' *The Muslim World* 71, no. 3-4 (1981), p. 176.

50 G Khodr, 'Al-Kalimah wal-jasad' ('The Word and the Flesh'), *An-Nahar*, 29.03.1987. Quoted in Avakian, *The 'Other' in Karl Rahner's Transcendental Theology and George Khodr's Spiritual Theology*, p.180.

the God with whom we have to do.'[51] For Khodr, the pervasiveness of Western thought and civilisation is spiritually destructive, since the West tends 'to consider man as the centre of the universe.'[52] However, Eastern spirituality, particularly that of the desert with its spirituality of detachment and pursuit of truth, is the place where the spiritual life can become 'incarnate in history as a movement, ready to be transmitted by utilizing the instruments of knowledge, even politics itself' in the service of humanity.[53] Khodr believes that whilst 'European societies are faltering because they have fallen into the sin of the builders of the tower of Babel,' Eastern culture and spirituality have the capacity to 'help Europe to transcend itself' and to be spiritually renewed in the service of humanity.[54]

Khodr's theology and writings have both theological and political relevance, especially for Christianity's engagement in the Middle East. As regards Lebanon particularly, with its confessional constitution, he has often affirmed the need for Christians to be actively engaged within society and community-development. Whilst he acknowledges that the confessional status of the Lebanese Constitution often pitches religious groups against each other, resulting in each bidding for power and influence over the other,[55] he believes, faith communities should work together for the freedom, equality and needs of all people. This approach, rooted in the riches of Patristic theology and 'in a theological-philosophical language that is neither alien nor exclusive to any of the followers of the two religions' clearly has continuing relevance in the region and could continue to be helpful for Christian-Muslim relations in post-conflict Syria.[56]

In December 2017, I had the privilege of meeting with Bishop Khodr at his home in Lebanon. He was deeply reflective and not optimistic about the current prospects for the development of interreligious relations and dialogue. Echoing others with whom I

51 Khodr, 'I Have Called You Friends', p. 163-64.

52 Metropolitan Georges Khodr, *The Ways of Childhood,* St Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York, 2016, p. 97.

53 *Ibid*.

54 *Ibid*., p. 103.

55 For a helpful exploration of this issue, see: Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Rahel Fischbach, 'Interfaith Dialogue in Lebanon: Between a Power Balancing Act and Theological Encounters,' *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 26:4 (2015).

56 Avakian, 'The Mystery of Divine Love in the Apophatic Theology of Bishop George Khodr', p. 67.

have spoken, he was disappointed at the lack of depth in Christian-Muslim dialogue in recent years. One of the reasons he suggests is that 'contemporary Islam is complete in itself. All contemporary Islamic thoughts are justifications of the truth of Islam'. Additionally, 'many Muslims feel deeply and profoundly that the West is orientated against them.' Speaking from decades of engagement with and reflection on the subject, Khodr continued with a message that I believe is both challenging and has lasting relevance:

> We as Christians are not courageous enough to face this reality. We are not hopeful enough to see that sometime Islam could evolve in a way that could make itself more engaged in human destiny and the suffering of humanity. I feel that Christians too are still rooted in hierarchies, priesthood and old allegiances of theology. We lack a real theology of engagement with the world. The situation is very difficult. Many Muslims and many Christians forget that God is not thought; God is love. It is our duty as Christians to reveal the love of God in our dealings with others and with the world. This is what we can teach our Muslim friends. If we look back to the Christians in the first century, we can rediscover something of our faith. They were concerned with society. They were mixed with the population while keeping the faith. They lived the gospel. To be witnesses of the gospel in our daily lives—this is the way forward.[57]

Khodr's spiritual and theological legacy and influence remains strong in Eastern Christian circles in Lebanon and Syria. Presented with the level of sectarian violence unleashed during the Syrian and Iraq conflicts, his theology looks even more challenging, especially as many Christian communities wish to strengthen their sense of Christian identity. and yet, it is recognition of the diversity that Khodr's theology embraces that makes his contribution of lasting relevance to the religious landscape in the region.

57 Interview with Bishop Georges Khodr. Broumanna, Lebanon, 1 December 2017.

Fr Paolo Dall'Oglio SJ (b. 1954-)

In the field of Christian-Muslim relations in Syria in recent years, few have been more influential or controversial, than Paolo Dall'Oglio, an Italian Jesuit priest who founded the Community of Al-Khalil at Mar Musa Monastery, a community rooted in the Syriac Catholic tradition. Deir Mar Musa al-Habashi (The Monastery of St. Moses the Abyssinian) lies in the cleft of a mountain in the desert east of Nebek, 80 kms north of Damascus. The monastery itself is believed to date from the sixth century but had lain in ruins for centuries before Paolo visited it in 1982. Paolo was ordained a priest in the Syrian Catholic rite in 1984, having received a degree in Arabic language and Islamic Studies. The PhD that he was awarded in 1989 was entitled 'About Hope in Islam'.

In 1992, Paolo founded the mixed ecumenical community of 'Al-Khalil' (the friend of God) at Mar Musa and dedicated his life to restoring the Monastery and establishing a centre for Muslim-Christian dialogue. Following the restoration of the monastery in the 1990s (including the Church with its beautiful eleventh or twelfth century frescoes), the Monastery became a centre for Christian-Muslim encounter and hospitality; a place where Christians and Muslims from all over the world would meet together and learn from each other. Paolo identified something crucial within Syrian Christianity—that monasticism in its Christian sense is deeply Syrian and is an Eastern religious tradition with which Islam has been familiar from its earliest days. It therefore offers a distinctly Eastern Christian platform for inter-religious dialogue and engagement, with which Eastern religious culture can relate.

Paolo was a critic of the Syrian Government and was expelled from Syria in 2012; but returned to the country and was kidnapped by 'Islamic State' fighters in Raqqa on 29 July 2013, whilst apparently trying to act as a negotiator between opposing groups of Islamist and 'Islamic State' fighters. Rumours have circulated that he was executed shortly afterwards, but though these rumours are believed to be credible, they are unverified.[58]

58 Fr Paolo recounts his own story and experiences in G De Montjou, *Mar Mousa. Un Monastere, Un Homme, Un Desert*, (Albin Michel, Paris, 2006.

I stayed at Mar Mousa twice prior to the conflict. The many foreign visitors present reflected the fame both of the monastery and of its founder. The services, conducted in Arabic and Syriac, included elements of Islamic and specifically sufi influence. The monastery represents a good example of monastic revival in the Eastern tradition, which has been taking place in recent decades in Syria, Iraq, Palestine and Egypt. It is an 'ecclesial expression of the Syrian Catholic Church', following the Eastern Catholic tradition, deeply influenced by the eremitical tradition of Charles de Foucauld and the religious ideas of Louis Massignon and seeking to reinvigorate the Christian encounter with Islam in a form with which Islam has been familiar since its emergence in the seventh century .

The depth with which Paolo, emerging from a Western ecclesial tradition embedded the community in the Eastern ecclesial Arab landscape and entered into dialogue with Islam is almost unique. At the heart of this experiment in Christian-Muslim encounter was the liturgy, which was performed in both Syriac and Arabic. As Dall'Oglio writes:

> The cultural and religious intention of the monastery was to find and rediscover some essential aspects of ancient monasticism in the region. The re-founding of the community is due to the conviction that this monasticism is one which early Islam knew, frequented, respected and protected ever since the seventh century.[59]

For Paulo, deeply influenced by Massignon, the monastery sought to become a place of genuine encounter between Islam and Christianity; an encounter linking both spirituality and politics. This link, which represented a unique contribution in the Syrian ecclesial context, he believed was found in two concepts: that of '*ta'arruf*' or 'getting to know each other', 'through knowledge, experiential understanding and unconditional love';[60] and through '*badaliyya*' (mystical substitution).[61]

59 Paolo Dall'Oglio, *Amoureux De L'islam, Croyant En Jesus*, Les editions de L'Atelier, Paris 2009, p. 25. My translation of the original in French.

60 Edith Ali-Dib, 'Inter-Religious Dialogue in Syria: Politics, Ethics and Miscommunication,' *Political Theology* 9, no. 1 (2008), p. 107.

61 For a discussion on 'Badaliyya' see: Paolo Dall'Oglio, 'The Idea of Badaliyya (Mystical Substitution) in the Life and Thought of Louis Massignon,' *Living Stones Yearbook 2019*, London, 2019.

These could be achieved through an inculturated hospitality, theological dialogue (in the language of Arabic), through solidarity with the Muslim community and through ecumenical worship and mystical communion. At an event held in Beirut in 2018 to commemorate Fr. Paolo's work, Fr. Salim Daccashe, a Jesuit Rector in the United States said:

> The great question for Paolo Dall'Oglio … was: What does Islam tell Christians? By the same token: Towards what does Christianity lead? Following Charles de Foucauld and Louis Massignon, his two great spiritual masters, Paolo thought that the Muslim religion, by the mystery it posed for Christians, pushed the Church towards greater radicalism in the imitation of Christ, towards more humility, spirit of acceptance and service.[62]

Striving to put these principles into practice, the community has been instrumental in the fields of interreligious dialogue and community service since its founding. It was not however always easy. The first planned interreligious conference was cancelled by Syria's Catholic authorities and it was the then Grand Mufti, Kuftaru who persuaded Fr. Paolo to persist. Even then, Paolo 'found it difficult to recruit speakers, either Christian or Muslim' and those that did attend in 2006 repeatedly 'strayed into international politics.'[63] A critique of his pastoral and interreligious engagement might be that in an attempt to be true to 'orthodoxy', he prioritised Sunni Islam over other expressions of Islam.[64] Could it be suggested that, despite the depth of his engagement, like other Westerners, he struggled to adequately grapple with the plurality of Islamic expression? These difficulties illustrate the complex challenges and limitations of trying to undertake successful inter-faith conversations in Syria and elsewhere.

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62 http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Fr-Dall'Oglio,-the-extreme-sacrifice-of-a-radical-witness-of-Christ-to-build-bridges-towards-Islam-45440.html Accessed: 1 January 2019.

63 Ali-Dib, 'Inter-Religious Dialogue in Syria: Politics, Ethics and Miscommunication', p. 109.

64 This echoes Massignon's work who critiqued Shi'ite and Alawi Islam and prioritised Sunni Islam. See also A O'Mahony, 'Louis Massignon: A Catholic Encounter with Islam and the Middle East'.

Since the start of the conflict, when few have been able to visit, the members of the monastery have continued their lives of prayer, even in the absence of Paolo and have focussed on community service, especially amongst the internally displaced in the area.[65]

In May 2018, I revisited Mar Mousa and spent a night at the monastery. A few members of the community had remained at the monastery throughout the time that the area was occupied by militant groups and workers had also stayed to protect the monastery. The members of the community were reticent about talking about what happened during that time, but acknowledged that when militant fighters visited the monastery, it was a difficult experience. Speaking of the role of the monastery, one of the members said:

> After what happened in this country, the Church should be showing people the love of Christ more than at any time before. As Christians, we have a responsibility to explain that this conflict is not about Islam. Christians and Muslims have always lived together, though not always perfectly. Many Muslims tried to help the Christians and protect them in this area. If the Church is to operate, we have to give a good witness and be positive. Today there is a separation between the hierarchy of the Church and the people. Many young people are fed up with doctrine and theories and high level spiritual goals. We are living life on the ground and the whole society has been deeply damaged. There is also fear. Many people, Christians and Muslims are afraid of the power of the mosque. Many people say: 'I am afraid that my friend of today is going to be my enemy of tomorrow'. and there is a growing disillusionment especially among young people with religion and Churches and hierarchies. There is a need for spiritual transformation in both Christianity and Islam. We want to continue to be a place of hospitality and a place of dialogue. But we

65 A complementary discussion on 'kinship' between Christian and Muslim worship can be found in Catriona Laing, 'A Provocation to Mission. Constance Padwick's Study of Muslim Devotion', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 24, no. 1 (2013).

> have realised that dialogue can sometimes be not only painful but very costly indeed.[66]

The experience and popularity of Mar Mousa as a place of interreligious encounter, particularly prior to the conflict suggests that the Christian monastic model of hospitality which is well established in Syria, provides a safe 'space' for dialogue in religion and politics. How Mar Mousa meets that challenge in the light of the changed post-conflict social, cultural and religious demographic in Syria, in a spirit of reconciliation and service and without the leadership of Paolo, will require careful discernment in partnership with members of all communities.

An Arab Protestant contribution to interreligious discourse

These Catholic and Eastern theologians make an invaluable contribution to theological discourse in Eastern Christianity. But we must not forget the historical, theological or ecclesial significance of the role that Arab Protestants play within the Eastern ecclesial and interreligious landscape. Although numerically small compared to other ecclesial groups, the contribution of Arab Protestant and Evangelical Churches, whose presence in the region dates to the early nineteenth century, to religious discourse in the Middle East should not be underestimated. Protestant and Evangelical Arab Christians have been termed a 'double minority'—a 'numerical minority within a Muslim majority' and 'a minority within a Christian minority.'[67] Nevertheless, their contribution to religious discourse, education and health provision, economic and political participation are significant. There has historically been a problematic relationship between the Protestant Churches of the Middle East and those of the Eastern

66 Interview at Mar Mousa Monastery, 3 May 2018. These views echo similar comments made by Christian laity and leaders in other parts of Syria . See also a video of one of my interviews at Mar Mousa, May 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ewd6SNNy2M

67 Mitri Raheb, 'Protestants,' in *Christianity in North Africa and West Asia*, Mariz Tadros Kenneth Ross, Todd Johnson (eds), Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2018, p. 269.

and Orthodox traditions. Questions of identity arise at the interface between Eastern Christian and reformed Western tradition. However, ecumenical relations have much improved in recent years.

In 2006, Dr George Sabra, Principal of the Near East School of Theology in Beirut, wrote an important article confronting this issue.[68] Entitled 'Two ways of being a Christian in the Muslim context of the Middle East', Dr Sabra discusses the dilemma of being Christian in a predominantly Islamic context. He suggests that there have been broadly two ways in which Christians have responded to this reality. The first he sums up in the phrase 'Avoid estrangement with Muslims at all costs.' This results he suggests, in an openness to the Islamic context and a desire to find common ground for sustaining coexistence. The second he sums up in the phrase 'Save Middle Eastern Christianity at all costs.'[69] This affirms the distinctiveness of Christianity in relation to Islam and seeks to preserve Christian freedom and identity. These two responses to Islam have only been possible he says because there is a third 'player'—the 'Western' factor. Sabra reminds us that 'Western' influence is nothing new. Even in the time of Jesus, Middle Eastern society was influenced by Greek philosophy and language and since the fifth century, the Eastern Churches have been divided by the Byzantine Christological controversies.

Helpfully, Dr Sabra describes these two positions as 'Arab Christian' and 'Eastern Christian' respectively.

The 'Arab Christian' position, which has tended to prevail until recent times, underlines the sense of self-identity with Arab culture, history and Islamic civilisation. It has been associated with the Oriental and Orthodox Churches and has supported Arab nationalism. It has tended towards an anti-Ottoman, anti-Western and anti-Zionist position. For example, it was a Greek Orthodox Syrian Christian, Michel Aflaq (1912-1989) who helped found the Ba'ath Party in Syria and a Lebanese Greek Orthodox Christian, Antun Sa'adeh (1904-1949) who founded the Syrian National Socialist Party. Dr. Sabra identifies Bishop Georges Khodr, who describes Eastern Christianity as being 'outside the West, not only doctrinally but also

68 George Sabra, 'Two Ways of Being a Christian in the Muslim Context of the Middle East,' *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 17, no. 1 (2006).
69 *Ibid.*, p. 44.

politically and civilizationally',[70] as being a leading defender of the 'Arab Christian' position.

The 'Eastern Christian' position, which has come to the fore in recent years, particularly amongst Protestant Churches, holds to the 'freedom and integrity of the Christian existence in the Middle East' and underlines a 'critical distance from Islam and Islamic culture and traditions.'[71] It emphasises Christianity's distinctiveness in the face of Arab and Islamic identity and establishes 'a sense of identification and continuity with the West,' which means that East and West are not in conflict with one another and that 'Eastern Christians' are more 'at home' in the worldwide Christian family. A leading proponent of this position, Charles Malik (1906-1987), a Lebanese academic and philosopher, stresses that the relationship between East and West is historic, not imported and that Western civilizations have left a lasting 'imprint' on Eastern Mediterranean culture and history. This pro-western attitude is reflected in sympathy towards western politics, a connection with the 'West' that has led to ecumenical and interreligious tensions and to suspicion of those who hold to this 'Eastern Christian' position. However, at the same time, most Eastern Christians remain proud of their Arab ethnicity and grapple daily with the complexity of possessing multiple identities in a diverse historical, cultural and religious context.

Sabra suggests that the 'Arab Christian' position, which prevailed for most of the twentieth century, has been challenged by the rise of Islamism. He writes: 'Those Christians who have engaged in and promoted Christian-Muslim dialogue in the last three decades or so have, by their own admission, suffered great disappointment and frustration. The Islamist fundamentalist resurgence is like a huge wave that has engulfed the results of the old dialogue and set the clock back many years.'[72]

Bearing these factors in mind highlights the need for an authentic Arab/Eastern Christian contextual theology in defining the vital place and role of Arab/Eastern Christians within the Middle Eastern cultural,

70 Quoting from G Khodr, 'Al-masihiyya al-arabiyya wa al-gharb', in *Al-masihiyyun al-arab: dirasat wa-munaqashat*, Elias Khoury (ed.), Mu'assasat al-Abhath al-Arabiyya, Beirut, 1981, p. 106.

71 Sabra, 'Two Ways of Being a Christian in the Muslim Context of the Middle East', p. 46.

72 *Ibid*., p. 51.

religious and political context. These two 'ways' of Christian self-identification represent different lenses through which the Christian communities see themselves. But they are not mutually exclusive. As Sabra says, both outlooks have 'some truth' and therefore remain part of the dilemma of being Christian in the Muslim context.

That dilemma reflects for Protestant Christians what might be termed a 'cultural disorientation' between Western and Eastern Christian identities. A Jesuit scholar of Coptic origin, Fadel Sidarouss, argues that as a Church with Eastern origins, Western Christianity inherited an 'alterity' which enabled it to develop a natural dialogue with other philosophies and with modernity. However, having for centuries adopted a Christian 'culture', the Western Church has not, like the Eastern Church, had to engage with a different 'other' in its midst. Thus, 'when they enter into relationship with an other—we think here of Islam—they do so in an apologetic and defensive rather than dialogical manner.'[73] By contrast, the Eastern Church has existed for centuries within plurality and this inherited reality gives Eastern Christianity an inherent ability to engage with the 'other' and a natural capacity to build bridges.[74]

Without question, as we have seen in the above discussion, the Western Churches are bearers of westernised ecclesial structures and theological traditions, some of which sit uncomfortably with those of Eastern Christianity. The latter's Patristic traditions and spirituality of the desert with their emphasis on hospitality and engagement with alterity offer rich resources for interreligious dialogue in the Middle Eastern context. This tension represents a dilemma for Protestants indigenous to the Middle East whose origins lie within that cultural, historical and social framework. The Protestant Churches stand in an ambiguous position, on the one hand existing apart from western society and in an eastern culture, whilst on the other standing at the

73 A O'Mahony, 'Christianity in the Wider Levant Region: Modern History and Contemporary Contexts,' in K C Ellis (ed.), *Secular Nationalism and Citizenship in Muslim Countries*, *Minorities in West Asia and North Africa*, 2018, p. 70. See also F Siadarouss, 'Pour une Theologie contextuelle dans l'Orient Arabe contemporain', *Quo Vadis, Theologia Orientalis? Actes du Colloque Theologie Orientale: contenu et importance*. Textes et études sur l'Orient Chrétien, No. 6, 2008, CEDRAC, Université Saint Joseph, Beirut, pp. 215-237.

74 For a helpful collection of essays on these matters, see K C Ellis, *Secular Nationalism and Citizenship in Muslim Countries. Arab Christians in the Levant*, Palgrave Macmillan, Villanova, Pennsylvania, 2018.

confluence of Western theology and philosophy. This means that they can become alienated from Arab culture and from Eastern Christianity. One scholar suggested to me that as carriers of Western ecclesiology within an Eastern ecclesial context, eastern Protestants might be regarded as possessing a 'self-alienating ecclesiology' which creates a natural ecclesial tension in both theology and structure with other Churches in the region, that is felt by clergy and laity alike. Attempts to overcome this ambiguity and identify ecclesiastically and culturally are exemplified by the self-presentation of many Protestant Church leaders in the Middle East, who, when in company with Eastern Church leaders and at formal events, often adopt 'Patriarchal'-like traditions in dress and custom in an apparent assertion of their equality of status.

Protestant Christianity, with its emphasis on Incarnational theology brings huge benefits to the region in the fields of education and social welfare. Eastern Christianity, with its Trinitarian theological roots and affinity to mysticism is gifted in reflecting relationality amidst plurality and complexity and depth of spirituality in the midst of struggle. In recent years, the Eastern Churches have also made significant strides in the fields of monasticism, theological training and Christian education. The two wings of Christianity and their theological approaches are of course related to each other and each bring strengths that could enhance and complement the other. What blessings could be wrought if the two 'wings' of Christianity saw each other not in competition with each other, but rather as each bringing vital contributions from varied but complementary theological and spiritual reflections of the same Christian tradition to the Christian presence in the region.

Despite theological and ecclesial tensions, relations between religious leaders remain good. Ecumenical meetings and conferences are regular and the Middle East Council of Churches plays a key and increasingly important role as a platform for Christian witness both within and beyond the region.

Conclusion

This article has briefly considered the contribution of four contemporary theologians from both the Western and Eastern traditions who have rediscovered and unravelled for the Churches

the capacity for Eastern Christian theological and mystical traditions to engage with Islam and enhance dialogue and understanding. Massignon believed that Islam could be a 'mediator' of divine grace and that the hospitality of the desert, expressed through *badaliyya*—the substitution of oneself out of love for the well-being of others—represents a model for encounter and dialogue. This profoundly influenced the thought and ministry of Paolo Dall'Oglio and the monastic community that he established at Mar Mousa in the hills above Nebek as a place of Christian-Muslim dialogue, rooted in *ta'arruf*—deep engagement with 'the other'—in Syria.

In recent decades, Eastern theologians have explored these themes. Bishop Khodr in Lebanon has led the way in developing an indigenous theology of Christian- Muslim dialogue. At the heart of his theology, rooted in the Patristic tradition, is the pneumatological paradigm which, echoing Justin Martyr's teaching of the 'Seed of the Word' in humanity, understands the creative Word of God to be present in all things and the human being in the divine image. We are called to be channels of the grace and love of the Holy Spirit and to recognise the divine that is in the 'other', which renders inter-religious dialogue an imperative. Echoing Khodr, the Chaldean Bishop of Aleppo, Antoine Audo affirms that Eastern Christians are of global importance, both as the descendants of the first Christians and because of their experience as fellow citizens with the Muslim community since its founding. For Audo and Khodr, dialogue is none other than the work of the Kingdom and our vocation as Christians is to be a bridge between people. Eastern Christianity as located within the cradle of religions and rooted in Arab culture, offers a model to the global Church for the Christian-Muslim dynamic. Some of these contemporary eastern Church leaders have become akin to modern 'Church Fathers,' echoing the Patristic writers and providing modern context to the deep wells of cultures and traditions that make up the Antiochene paradigm. For all these leaders, Eastern Churches and their theological and spiritual traditions play a vital role in relating to other faith communities in peace-building, reconciliation and meeting the pastoral, spiritual and humanitarian needs of the people. Engaging with alterity and particularly with Islam is inherent in Eastern Antiochene Christianity. In a world in which that Christian-Muslim encounter is becoming ever more complex, Antiochene Christianity therefore offers a crucial resource to global Christianity.

Space does not allow a detailed analysis of the contributions of these interlocutors. Their words summarise well the vision and different perspectives of the key issues facing interreligious dynamics and offer a platform for future study and for enhancing religious peacebuilding.

Despite the diversity of the Christian landscape in the Levant (Catholic, Orthodox, Oriental and Protestant) and the shift in self-identification (Arab Christian vs Eastern Christian) that some Christian communities have been making in recent years in relation to the wider religious and political context, there is significant commonality in the issues and possible responses that different Church communities identify. This article has highlighted some of the ways in which Christians from these diverse traditions have grappled both with their Eastern identity and theological origins and the unique challenges of the contemporary regional context. There remains a commitment to the preservation and improvement of interreligious relationships, but given the level of suffering, destruction, and fragmentation of society experienced in Syria and Iraq in recent years, priority has been given to the humanitarian response and the restoration of positive relationships. Certainly, awareness of and pride in Eastern Christian identity has been heightened in recent years by events in the region, but Arab identity itself in relation to religion has become contested given the rise in militant Islam.

Religious identity is a part of Middle Eastern culture and society, but the issue of disillusionment amongst many young people with established religion as a whole has emerged in recent years. Cynicism and disillusionment with religious institutions and matters of faith amongst the young is a matter of concern for religious leaders of all persuasions, but could be viewed as an understandable reaction to the level of violence experienced and suffered in recent conflicts and will need to be handled with sensitivity and understanding by religious leaders and ordinary members of all communities.

All Christian denominations agree that the dynamic engagement between Christianity and Islam in the early centuries had a lasting, mixed and evolving influence on the relationship between the two communities. A re-reading of the Christian contribution to the development of Arab and Muslim civilisation will help understanding of the indigenous roots of Christianity that pre-date Islam within the region. For the Orthodox and Oriental Churches, the monastic

movement, the spirituality of the desert (and particularly the theme of hospitality that emerges from it) and Patristic theology offer a key to reconnecting with the spirituality and culture within which early Christianity engaged with Islam and to challenging the exclusivity of the militant Islam that has come to dominate some elements of recent Islamic resurgence and the ideology of most of the militant factions in the Syrian conflict. Similarly, a recovery of the recognition of Arab plurality in both religion and culture and Eastern Christianity's capacity to engage with that plurality offers further potential for grappling with the post-conflict context in Syria and the changed communal dynamics in the region. This could be an important focus for future study and dialogue, and Massignon, Clement, Khodr and Dall'Oglio have given us important resources for moving that study forward.

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KENNETH CRAGG: RESPONSE TO POLITICAL ISLAM IN MODERN IRAN

Christopher Brown

Bishop Kenneth Cragg, who died in 2012, wrote over forty books since his foundation volume, *The Call of the Minaret*, was published in 1956. Cragg might be regarded as as a poet, with a wide imagination and deep roots in English history and culture in all its various facets. He is seen as a significant religious thinker in the Anglican tradition, bringing a lifetime of reflection and experience to the relationship between Islam and Christianity. For this reflection I will refer to some of his earlier works and also consider two of his later volumes, *The Tragic in Islam*, published in 2004 and, *The Qur'an and the West*, published in 2006. His works are not an easy read. One analogy compares him to a gifted and challenging composer whose works require serious listening, where the key frequently changes and the 'tunes' are not immediately apparent. But the reward comes with study and concentration.

'Evangelical faith was the breath of our being, deep but not demonstrative, assured but not boisterous'[1] is how Kenneth Cragg describes the atmosphere of his family home in Blackpool during his childhood. His father had a shop and the family walked three miles every Sunday to attend Christ Church, presumably passing on their way other churches offering a rather different tradition in worship and theology. At the church the tradition was firmly rooted in the Protestant inheritance of the Church of England, with the Authorised version of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer as its pillars. His evangelical zeal found expression in some local preaching engagements and assisting at the annual mission on the Blackpool sands. It was there that he heard William Temple, at that time Bishop of Manchester, who made a profound impression on him. The mission and other experiences made

1 K Cragg, *Faith and Life Negotiate: A Christian Story-Study*, The Canterbury Press, Norwich, 1994, p. 21.

him realise that his own faith and local church were part of something much larger and truth may even find a place in other traditions.

Before he progressed to Jesus College Oxford in 1931, the seeds had been planted of a firm faith, and although this had been in the uncritical ambience of Christ Church, Blackpool, already there is a strong sense of someone embarking on a lifelong journey. He loved Oxford and his time was taken up between his study of history and the Christian Union. Whilst waiting for the results of his finals, he bought a copy of Constance Padwick's *Temple Gairdner of Cairo* with little realisation of the major part the author and her hero would play in his own future.

After training and ordination, whilst serving his curacy, he continued his theological studies and made a successful submission for the Ellerton Theological Essay Prize to Oxford in 1937, on the subject of 'The Place of Authority in Matters of Religious Belief'. The focus of the essay appears to have arisen from the sometimes harsh experience of the disputes taking place within the Church concerning the place of scripture, how it is to be interpreted and applied in contemporary situations. The seeds sown by his reading of Constance Padwick led him to offer himself for work with the British Syria Mission, which had a strong focus on education and welfare.

After a very important formative period in Beirut where he taught in the Bible College and became attached to the American University of Beirut where he taught philosophy, he and his wife ran a hostel for Arab students. They both made lasting friendships during this period, leading to a love of Arab culture and language.

Also during this time he studied Arabic and began his life-long study of and commitment to Islam and its relationship to Christianity. His philosophical studies led to a high level of competence and the award in 1947 of a further Oxford prize—the T H Green Moral Philosophy Prize on 'Morality and Religion.' By this stage serious academic study beckoned, not as some abstract activity, but arising from his experience and love for the people he met in Beirut and his increasing competence as an Arabist and student of Islam. He returned to Oxford to study for his D.Phil.[2] This major work for his doctorate

2 'Islam in the 20th Century: The Relevance of Christian Theology and the Relation of the Christian Mission to its Problems' D. Phil. Thesis, Oxford University, 1950. Unpublished.

confirmed his credentials as a theologian and partly reveals some of the main influences upon him at this time. By 1950 when he completed his thesis, it is clear that the *Lux Mundi*[3] essay by Charles Gore on the doctrine of Kenosis, or Christ's voluntary self-limitation, based on Philippians 2: and 2 Corinthians 8:9, played a considerable part in his theological understanding. This concept, which incorporated the suffering of the Spirit within humanity recurs in Cragg's thinking through many of his books. For example in his early and important work, *Sandals at the Mosque*[4] he writes, 'What room then for aught save humility in a situation at once so involved in the lowliness of God in Christ by the Spirit? Outside a comparable lowliness the Christian has no valid status. His being in reconciliation and in ministry hinges upon the self-giving of God. All his relationships must be in the truth of his own inner Christian existence'.

All Cragg's subsequent books have been shaped by his initial substantial thesis. Commenting on *The Call of the Minaret*[5] published in 1956, Bard Maeland, writes, 'Already in this study there is present an impressive interest in modern and contemporary Muslim intellectual activity, an overview of the relation between religion and political/social issues … this initial work of Cragg may be characterised as a fundamental and strategic study in Christian mission to Muslims.'[6] It is very significant that this work came *after* his experience in Beirut and the drive and energy it required seems to have been provided by that initial contact with the people of the region. The political upheavals of the time, following the Second World War and the establishment of the State of Israel, helped shape the book that has been described by Hugh Goddard as 'still highly significant and worthy of the most serious consideration by Christians who wish to think about Islam.'[7]

After his appointment in 1956 as a residentiary canon of St George's

3 *Lux Mundi* A 'Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation', (ed.) Charles Gore 1889.

4 *Sandals at the Mosque—Christian Presence Amid Islam*, SCM Press, London, 1959, p. 87.

5 *The Call of the Minaret*, OUP, Oxford, 1956 (2nd ed.) London, Collins, 1986.

6 Bard Maeland, *Rewarding Encounters—Islam and the Comparative Theologies of Kenneth Cragg and Wilfrid Cantwell-Smith*, Melisende, London, 2003.

7 Hugh Goddard, 'The Significance of *The Call of the Minaret* for Christian Thinking about Islam', in *A Faithful Presence. Essays for Kenneth Cragg*, David Thomas with Claire Amos (eds), London Melisende, 2003, p. 93.

Cathedral in Jerusalem, he spent three hectic years travelling the vast area of the Middle East covered by the Anglican diocese. This included visits to Iran and contact with Shi'a Islam. Lasting friendships were formed and he was able to deepen his knowledge of Islam and the fast moving political scene in which the church had to function.

There followed a period as warden of St Augustine's College Canterbury and teaching in Nigeria and Cambridge. Cragg was consecrated Assistant Bishop in the Jerusalem Archbishopric in February 1970 and spent about three years in Cairo. He resigned in 1973 on principal, believing strongly in an indigenous ministry with the appointment of an Egyptian bishop. After further academic and pastoral appointments he moved to Oxford in 1981. To describe him as 'retired' would only reflect the barrenness of categorising people according to their status as pensioners!

This brief sketch illustrates his lengthy commitment to the Christian faith and its relationship with the Muslim world. It is a story full of variety and engagement with many people and cultures over a very long period. Also, as Christopher Lamb comments, it shows how the Anglican Church, for whatever reasons, has not been 'well organised to make maximum use of a man with the particular combination of gifts that he possesses.'[8] In view of the substantial level of immigration by Muslims to the UK, it is particularly regrettable that his skills were not used more effectively in the task of building bridges with the growing Islamic community from the 1970's. Possibly this was because his expertise had led him to be identified with what was perceived to be a narrow and specialist area of concern. Or it could be that his rare scholarship threatened those who were more comfortable in the territory of domestic church affairs and the niceties of Christian history and biblical study. His very presence challenged those who did not really want to engage with the challenges of the modern and rapidly changing world. Islam, for most, remained an unknown and unfamiliar world, suitable for missionaries and the like, but not of central importance to the domestic church terrain. Perhaps also, hovering somewhere in the wings, has been the traditional suspicion of the English establishment of the academic and intellectual. Cragg's learning has been in territory at once unfamiliar

8 Christopher Lamb, *The Call to Retrieval: Kenneth Cragg's Christian Vocation to Islam*, Grey Seal Books, London, 1997 p. 3.

and also therefore often threatening. But, in spite of these setbacks, his works now provide many valuable and timely insights in our current engagement with Islam.

A glance at the index of any of Kenneth Cragg's many books reveals a mind fed by an eclectic range of sources, some from obvious theological wells of learning, but just as many from the world of literature and poetry. The range is enormous and he has the ability to make links between less than obvious minds, which, perhaps even unknown to themselves, are touching upon similar areas of human insight and endeavour. His ability to engage in what has become known as 'the art of lateral thinking' is very considerable and often challenges the reader to reflect on a passage if it is to reveal its full value. Yet for all his learning, he is a very English thinker, nurtured on the classics, and from his Oxford undergraduate days, steeped in English history. He has been described as the Louis Massignon of Anglicanism. I am not competent to judge whether this is accurate, but certainly he resembles Massignon in the 'deep symmetry between his writings, his acts and his beliefs'. He, like Massignon, is concerned with authenticity and with making subtle links between Islam and Christianity at a deep level.

Something of the spirit of the man is to be found in this passage from 'Sandals at the Mosque'.

One of the deepest truths of Christianity is the endless regressive character of human self-centredness, making men proud of their humility, complacent that they are penitent, satisfied that they are orthodox. We are always tending to involve ourselves in the distinctiveness of what we preach. We have need to remember Thomas of Canterbury's question when he first realised that even martyrdom might be self-regarding:

> Is there no way in my soul's sickness
> Does not lead to damnation in pride … ?
> Can sinful pride be driven out
> Only by more sinful?
> Can I neither act nor suffer
> Without perdition?[9]

9 *Ibid.*, p. 100 quoting T S Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral* 1945.

Cragg continues this passage with the comment, 'The only emancipation from the entail of the selfish is to seek a wholeheartedly servant-status, in which the self is truly transcended … '

This Christology did not lead him to join the Christian socialists, but it does penetrate all his thinking and engagement with Islam. Having been exposed in his childhood to a rigid theological system, he now shared with F D Maurice[10] a suspicion of any system, which seemed to claim the answer to all questions. Also he dislikes any attempt to define too tightly theological insights, which by their very nature are more likely to be understood by the use of poetry, metaphor and elliptical language.

When teaching his students philosophy in Beirut, Cragg used a book by the American liberal thinker, W E Hocking, *Types of Philosophy*,[11] which included the theme of 'reconception' which invited all faiths to rethink their basic convictions, 'preserving their cores of truth but expanding to include the insights of others'. Christopher Lamb notes that Cragg later came to criticize this approach from Hocking, but it clearly influenced his early thinking, and, even as late as 1977 he finds 'its spirit is admirable.'

So we see that Cragg came to his Christian faith through the formative influence of a conservative Evangelical atmosphere, later tempered by further study and experience. But the core of his faith is based upon a continuing relationship with the living Christ, a presence he finds not in dry academic speculation, but rather in a series of encounters with others, mainly within the dynamic of the Christian/Islam encounter. He describes this relationship in a thousand different ways, using every device of literature and allusion, sometimes almost to the point of impenetrability, but based on the belief that it is possible and right to attempt to do so. Commenting on this, and drawing on a number of sources, Lamb writes, 'The difficulty of language about God, as Cragg sees it, is that theologians suppose that God is reluctant to be named or described, and the confidence he calls for is in God's willingness to be addressed by the creatures he has made himself responsible for.'[12] But it could be conjectured that his emphasis on a personal relationship with Jesus would make it difficult for him to relate

10 Frederick Denison Maurice 1805-72. Anglican theologian and social reformer.
11 *Ibid*., p. 22.
12 *Ibid*., p. 29.

to Islam, or they to him. This would ignore the supremacy he gives to the doctrine of God as Creator—in itself seen by him as a sort of *kenosis*, a free self-giving of supreme power. This means, of course, says Lamb, 'he can attempt to relate directly to Islam through the Qur'an with its vivid and consistent portrayal of … "The Lord of the Worlds", who constantly sustains us in being.'[13]

Another key theological principle held by Cragg is his emphasis that the work of the Holy Spirit continues and therefore he 'urges a dynamic and not simply a static approach to doctrine'[14] He is quite clear that the Spirit speaks in other faiths, and particularly Islam. He writes in *Sandals at the Mosque*, that the book was specifically written to repudiate views expressed in reviews of his first volume, *The Call of the Minaret*, which suggested there could be no meeting of any meaning between the two religions. 'Whether or not we draw them together in spiritual meeting, they belong together in spiritual truth'.[15]

The Person of Christ is central to Cragg's theology. He does not espouse the 'theocentrism' of John Hick and others who propose that the focus for Christians should move from Christ to the centrality of God. He writes, 'The gospel through and through is about God. But it is about God in dimensions and via indices which are nowhere else reached or read as they are in Jesus as the Christ and the Christ as crucified for love of man.'[16] Even with this degree of conviction, he still rejects the term 'unique' as being applied to Jesus because he sees it as hostile in tone. He believes in the reality of religious diversity, not in the sense of 'religious pluralism' as applied to Hick and others, but rather as an acknowledgement of the fact of difference and that there can be no over-arching theological concept, which will embrace all faiths. Much theological speculation he regards as premature, leading towards closure, which is not ours to determine.

Arising from his own faith and essentially his experience, he believes that we will only find the way forward with other faiths if we take seriously the notion of *hospitality* as being at the heart of the Gospel, and the dynamic of 'proceeding'—the very word theology uses of the Holy Spirit.[17]

13 *Ibid*., p. 51.
14 *Ibid*., p. 56.
15 K Cragg, *Sandals in the Mosque*, p. 20.
16 K Cragg, *The Christ and the Faiths: Theology in Cross-Reference* p.323 and cited by Christopher Lamb, *The Call to Retrieval*, p. 71.
17 K Cragg, *The Christian and Other Religion*, 1977, p. 105.

This concept of *hospitality* colours his whole approach to the role of the missionary. This *hospitality* is not only about meeting people and discussing their ideas. It also demands the 'hospitality of the Christian mind to the true intentions, the inner heart of Islam itself'[18]. God cannot be turned into an academic topic, to be studied from afar and followed by some sort of evaluation. He regards any such activity as 'a blasphemous, and indeed also a ludicrous impossibility'.[19] This *hospitality* can only be exercised through face-to-face contact, through real engagement, through relationship, which is at once rewarding *and* costly.

Cragg also comes to his theological task as an Anglican bishop, with a clear view of authority, which in his own life has been tested. Both in Jerusalem and Canterbury, he accepted the authority of his archbishop, although in the former case he had more sympathy with the decisions being made, than he did with the latter.

He sees the task of the Christian in the world of Islam as that of an ambassador, one who is representing another country, in his case the religious 'other', but one who must learn the local language and customs in order to be understood. Credibility and authority in such a situation have to be earned. They will not be ascribed just because of a title or label given by another country and culture.

At times Cragg's use of language can seem to be elliptical and difficult to penetrate. In his introduction to *The Event of the Qur'an, Islam and Its Scripture* he writes, 'There are not simply meanings and words: there are meanings and words and people. There is not only content and form: there is content and form and audience … the collective human hearing imposes its own necessities of awareness and interpretation.'[20] He is here discussing the interpretation of the Qur'an, but it could equally be applied to any situation where deep truths are trying to be communicated through the limitations and inadequacies of all human language. In compelling language he tells us 'There is no prophecy, honoured or otherwise, without a country of the mind. Muhammad's country had its character … But in a profound way it also made a homeland of the heart that has endured these fourteen centuries.'[21] The classic Cragg combination is shown here. Mind and

18 Christopher Lamb, *The Call to Retrieval*, p. 101.

19 K Cragg, *Sandals in the Mosque*, p. 68.

20 *The Event of the Qur'an: Islam in Its Scripture,* Oneworld Publications, Oxford, 1971, p. 19.

21 Cragg emphasises the importance of the historical context of the foundation of

heart, dedicated to an enterprise of hospitality and faithfulness, which has produced a unique contribution to the world of dialogue and understanding.

The wish by some to fit those engaged in inter-religious dialogue into the paradigm of 'exclusivist', 'inclusivist' or 'pluralist' does not work in the case of Cragg.[22] He is a good example of someone who cannot be so easily categorised, being in some sense 'exclusivist' in his sense of personal salvation and the central position of Christ in God's redeeming work; 'inclusivist' in his desire to find God's redeeming presence, and the work of the Spirit, throughout creation; and 'pluralist' in his recognition of the truth and presence of God to be experienced in other faiths. Perhaps the time has come to abandon these definitions, which tend to separate and divide, rather than heal and restore.

Because he has written so extensively it would be possible to assume that Cragg has a rather academic approach to the challenge of what he calls 'frontier theology'.[23] Nothing could be further from the truth. The final chapter of *Sandals at the Mosque*, 'Present with the Peace of God' is an intense personal testimony to his faith and commitment to the Church. The Church 'exists to give, not to get; to preach, not to strive; to welcome, not to proselytize'.[24]

The Qur'an

In the *Event of the Qur'an*, first published in 1971 and re-issued in 1994, Cragg writes, 'Certainly the Qur'an did not, and does not, exist in order to be "interesting". It was, and is, a living summons asking a personal response and requiring a corporate participation … the Qur'an can never be authentically known in neglect of the sensitivities, the emotions, the spiritual property in it, of Muslims. There have been pursuits of western scholarship unhappily careless of these courtesies … A scholarship that exempts itself from the patient toils of due relationships is liable to forfeit in real intellectual achievement what it may attempt in bare analysis.'[25]

Islam: *The Event of the Qur'an: Islam in Its Scripture*, p. 19.

22 Both Lamb and Maeland attempt to classify Cragg as an 'Inclusivist'.

23 K Cragg, *Sandals in the Mosque,* p. 139.

24 K Cragg, *Sandals in the Mosque*, p. 142.

25 K Cragg, *The Event of the Qur'an: Islam in Its Scripture,* p. 20.

This summarises well his attitude towards the Qur'an over a period of almost seventy years. He has not only made a life-long study of Islam, but also engaged with the culture of Muslim countries, Sunni and Shi'a, building relationships with the people for whom the Qur'an is the centre of their faith. The Qur'an 'is a document of faith looking for a faith to receive it. The scholar must be alive to it as such … to enquire genuinely into the Qur'an is to live with the life of Islam.'[26]

It is in this spirit that Cragg explores the meaning of Islam, in its Sunni and Shi'a manifestations. He does not make any attempt to reduce the impact of this faith in its attitude or effect on Christianity. There is no watering down of the claims of Islam, that is, the total abrogation of the Christian faith, with no Crucifixion, Resurrection or redemption through Christ. The respect he has for Islam would not allow him to distort their faith to suit some liberal 'pluralist' agenda, which would prefer to avoid the tension inherent in difference. If a Muslim wishes to learn the truth about Jesus the Prophet, then for them, there is no point in going to the Gospels because these are corrupted, but rather to the Qur'an which is the pure and final Word of God.

From the time of St John Damascene onwards some Christians have described Islam as a 'Christian heresy', but 'for Muslims the "Christian heresy is Christianity itself."' Islam arrived to correct the Christian "distortion" of Jesus and of God.[27]

Cragg largely attributes this perception by Islam to the failure of the Christian Church. 'It was a failure in love, in purity, and in fervour, a failure of the spirit.' The version of Christianity known to Islam Cragg describes as 'imperfect', and this led to an opposition, which still persists with the 'pure faith' as he understands it. From a Christian point of view this is seen as a tragedy, because much of the Muslim opposition to Christianity is against a faith they have never effectively known. He writes, 'The state of being a stranger to the Christ of the Christians has been intensified by further failures of love and loyalty on the part of institutional Christianity in the long and often bitter external relations of the two faiths through the centuries'. He regards it as no less than a tragedy in the history of the relationship between the two faiths that

26 *Ibid*.

27 K Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret* p. 219. Same reference for quotations in following paragraph.

fixed positions were adopted early and even today there are those who see little point in trying to build bridges of understanding.

Cragg's focus is on the modern world and how Christians and Muslims engage with the post-Enlightenment development of secularism and agnosticism. In doing this, he does not depart from doctrinal orthodoxy, as defined and protected by the Church over the centuries, but finds within this tradition an openness and richness, which can engage with other faiths in a quest for the truth.

Cragg claims his mission is to Islam, not just to individual Muslims. But there is no sense of him wanting to persuade others of the superiority of his faith in some polemical sense. He is concerned with relationship, which can only come through the possibilities presented by extensive contact and listening to the 'other'. His focus in on the challenge Islam makes to the Christians, and from his earliest days he has been driven by a desire to share his personal experience of the love of God as he finds it in Jesus.

His books all have the same basic theme—that by working in and through the interface between Christianity and Islam, which implies a profound knowledge of both faiths, and by using every device of language, imagination and scholarship, it is possible to find a path of peace where we can learn from each other things about the nature of God.

Shi'a Islam and Iran

We shall seek to consider more specifically Cragg's engagement with and understanding of the Shi'a and Iran. Cragg writes in *Muhammad and the Christian*, 1984, 'For to study Islam, both in its history and its theology, is to encounter the most resolute and unperturbed of all faiths in placing trust, and finding pride, in political religion'.[28] He continues in this chapter to give a detailed description of the social and political conditions, which prevailed, in Mecca before Muhammad set out for Medina. Cragg strongly believes that the spiritual, as represented by prophecy and institutions, has to do with the political order, but it must retain liberty and spiritual independence. The thrust of his engagement with Islam is to try and understand the historical and religious context

28 K Cragg, *Muhammad and the Christian*, p. 32.

in which the Islamic state arose. He is suspicious of the use of power to advance spiritual values, considering it a contradiction of the very nature of God as revealed in the suffering Servant. The understanding of suffering and rejection reflected in the early Shi'ah history and culture provides a 'minority verdict against Sunni "victoriousness"'.[29] He has an eirenic approach which cannot accept the use of force in trying to impose a religious faith.

Cragg, as an Anglican bishop, is well aware of the complexities of the relationship between Church and state. As an historian he knows how fraught this has been at times and also how valuable in giving the Church a voice in political affairs without forming a separate political party. He does not shirk from the tensions inherent in political comment, but these are made from outside any particular political affiliation.

In *The Tragic in Islam* Cragg devotes a whole chapter to the Shi'a experience. He writes, 'The divide between the Sunni and the Shi'ah expressions of Islam is the most significant and the most enduring of crucial "separatism"—the very term which carries the literal sense of the word *shi'a*. Its origins belong to the very genesis of Islam.'[30] He beavers away at the relevant texts, denying any simplistic parallel with the Catholic/Protestant divide. It is the experience of the Shi'a which defines suffering over the centuries in Islam. He writes, 'Shi'ah Islam is, supremely, a sharp minority verdict inside Islam against the characteristic triumphalism of Sunni Islam with its strongly—Quranic—enthronement of "success".'[31] The continuing sense of defeat and frustration among the Shi'a stems from the earliest days of conflict over the succession following the death of Muhammad. Although the deaths of Ali, Hasan and Husain are usually seen as the key moments in the division, Cragg says that conflicts over the caliphate were only one element in Shi'a separatism. The split was latent in the evolution of Islam as far back as the Hijrah from Mecca to Medina. 'By dint of the Hijrah, Islam, as a trans-tribal faith, became the setting for inter-tribal conflict.'[32]

The long denial of the Caliphate to Ali, murdered in the fifth year of his rule, led to deep umbrage and outrage among the

29 K Cragg, *Ready for Response*, p. 143.
30 K Cragg, 'The Shi'ah Experience' in *The Tragic in Islam*, Melisende, London, 2004, p. 88.
31 K Cragg, *The Tragic in Islam*, p. 89.
32 K Cragg, *The Tragic in Islam* p. 91.

community, Arab in culture, where the hereditary principle was deep in the Abraham-Ishmael theme. The hostility towards the Shi'a was found in the Umayyad ritual of the cursing of Ali from Mosque pulpits. Husain's tragic bid for the succession in 680 with his fated journey to Kufa completed the dark cycle of suffering. Cragg writes, 'The half century of victimisation and frustration since the death of Muhammad to the massacre of Kabala was, as it were, a baptism of sorrows from which Shi'a Islam drew both the tenacity of its despair and the salvific theory of the Imamate and its "redemptive" martyrology. These were no mere compensation for external forfeiture of success: they were to become a pregnant counter version of the heart of Islam.'[33] Through this early experience of suffering, the Shi'a became acutely aware 'that there is more to being human than unpitying pursuit of success … .The keenest theology is the one most alert to the tragic,' writes Cragg in a footnote.[34]

For seven decades or so after the massacre of Karbala, the soul of the Shi'a were reckoning with that tragedy and it gave to them the ultimate mystery of suffering—of suffering as they read it, undeserved and unrequited. Cragg writes,'Its drama ushered them into the utmost reach of human anguish and with it the direst of religious burdens. It sent a crescendo of horror even around the Sunni world, chastising that inveterate "cursing of Ali". It was, in its very different idiom, the Golgotha of Islam.'[35]

After describing in some detail the brutality of the Sunni towards the Shi'a after the battle, with Husain's head being sent for display in Damascus, Cragg ponders whether Husain's own attitude of mind had contributed to the disaster. He seems to have been very half-hearted in his preparations for battle and to have had no appetite for the 'gore of battle and the cunning of conspiracy.'Thus there emerged a kind of 'triumph of the weak' in the moral reproach that Karbala long breathed out against Umayyad Islam. So, in the face of most readings of the history, Cragg asks whether there wasn't a 'victory through suffering'? The theme of penitence emerged after the battle among some of the

33 K Cragg, *The Tragic in Islam,* p.95.
34 K Cragg, *The Tragic in Islam,* p. 94 footnote.
35 K Cragg, *The Tragic in Islam*, p. 99.

followers of Ali. They developed a deeply religious quality of this will to self-reproach, and this was a new experience in Muslim terms.[36]

The long term consequences of this divide remain with us. The Passion Plays that commemorated the battle at Karbala were marked by 'the Penitents' self-flagellation and even a willingness to be killed in order to expiate rather than merely to prevail over their enemy. Cragg believes this brought a new perspective into the Islamic mind through the Shi'a response to Husain's death. 'It was a different sort of "blood for blood" from the familiar "blood revenge" of the Qur'an's *lex talionis*, a blood now given for a blood stolen.'[37] This blood veneration was of different order from any death and sorrow Muslims had earlier known.

The intensity of these emotions developed in Shi'a Islam a compulsive place for ritual and liturgy. These were alien to the mind and mood of Sunni Muslims and were set to become the very heart-beat of the Shi'a community. And so for the Shi'a soul, Islam means the commemoration of 'the House of Sorrows'.[38] Cragg draws parallels between the image of Fatima as the suffering mother and the Virgin Mary in Christian devotion. Fatima is the holy mother of sorrows, duly vindicated in the great beyond.

We cannot understand the Shi'a unless we grasp the cosmic inclusiveness of Husain's suffering and death which means even the Islamic 'Isa, the Christian Jesus, was also aligned with the ultimate paradigm he anticipated. 'He (Jesus) is even reputed to have visited Karbala with his disciples, where they were stopped in their tracks by a lion who refused to let them pass unless they cursed the slayer of its future victim.'

Cragg comments that in Shi'a piety Gethsemane can approximate to Karbala as Jesus, like Hussain, was ill-used, despised, and repudiated for his witness in God's name to an obdurate world. Dwelling on the Qur'anic references to the crucifixion, Cragg's interpretation leads him to comment that 'Christians ought never to be reporting that the Qur'an denies the crucifixion'.

So what then does Cragg make of Shi'a Islam? He writes, 'How then should the rest of Islam in their Sunni majority, or the wondering

36 K Cragg, *The Tragic in Islam* see p 100-104.

37 K Cragg, *The Tragic in Islam* p. 104. Cragg is increasingly concerned to address the consequences of *Lex Talionis* in human relations.

38 K Cragg, *The Tragic in Islam*, p. 105-112 for further quotations on this page.

world beyond Islam, assess this high Shi'a drama, homing in with such emotion on Karbala, its antecedents and its sequel? Was it a culmination of tribal tensions among the Quraish, deeply present in the rise of Islam and the Quraishi context of Muhammad? Or should the cynic, distant alike in sympathy and comprehension, assess the whole as 'a construct of compensation' for a cycle of failure? Or were the Shi'a close to reading intrinsic elements of the human experience which, however handled, are the stuff of theology and the web and woof of religion? That last question takes us to the very nature of Shi'a faith's drama. Was it 'redemptive'? What can 'redemption' mean?' The Shi'a answer these last questions in the affirmative, but to be 'redemptive' is not the same as to be 'vicarious'.

The Sunni mind rejects 'saviours' but the Shi'a would challenge this rejection of the vicarious in life. Vicarious suffering is plain to see, but then the question arises, was 'suffering because of' really 'suffering on behalf of'? That, according to Cragg, 'will depend on whether there is a will to reconciliation, to a forgiveness, both given and received, and not one without the other.' But the suffering of Karbala did not bring enmity to an end but enhanced it through the Shi'a cursing of Yazid as the hallmark of their grief and revulsion.

Can the discordance between Sunni and Shi'a ever be healed? Cragg looks for inspiration to the Meccan period of Muhammad's prophethood with its travail and tribulation. The suffering prophet here is 'bearing' evil and reference is made to the words on prophecy in the Book of Wisdom chapter two. The Shi'a in their intense cherishing of Karbala, and all else belonging to *Bait al-Ahzan*—the House of Sorrows—were reaching for the utmost measure of a suffering prophethood. The prompting of these words of Cragg was the tragic contemporary scene in Gaza, a focus of tragedy and suffering. He believes that the tragic sense of life is the common territory of the religious quest for meaning.

In his book, *The Qur'an and the West*,[39] Cragg graphically points to the consequences for an *Umma* or the Church when its focus becomes its own power and survival. It becomes the object of its own mission leading to rigidity and a concern with power and status. He draws parallels between the mutual cursing of the Sunni and the Shi'a with the treatment of the scholar-translator, William Tyndale, by the scholar-

39 K Cragg, *The Qur'an and the West: Some Minding Between,* London, Melisende 2006.

chancellor, Thomas More.[40] The side with the power, the Church, used violence to destroy the powerless who suffered exile, imprisonment and death. Such passions and enmities litter the centuries and lead in Cragg's view, to a religious animus which is used to justify for example the treatment of the Palestinians by Israel.

These struggles down the centuries and very present in today's world, always assume that the evil is all in the other party. But any adherence to a particular version of the truth, which is achieved by imposition or threat, is of little value. It is only in being defenceless that faith is truly commended.

Kenneth Cragg is sometimes thought of as being detached from politics and to do so would be to ignore his very contemporary critique of many aspects of the political scene. What he is suspicious of is the misuse of power. He quotes the famous dictum of Lord Acton in a letter to the Bishop of London, 'power corrupts and that absolute power corrupts absolutely'.[41] He believes that 'its exercise is likely to further its own self- interest, especially that of its own continuity. Things political can so readily take all else into their sphere, religion most of all as a tool to wield'.

Iran

In *Am I Not Your Lord?*[42] published in 2002 as a direct response to the attack on New York the previous September, Cragg ranges wide in his political analysis. He comments that there are serious violations of human rights and personal liberties in the Islamic world stemming from dissensions over the very meaning of Islam itself. Following the collapse of Communism, the West now found a ready target in the Islamic story, past and present.

He writes, 'Nowhere was this more apparent than in its confrontation with the Iranian Revolution. The Ayatollah Khomeini and President Reagan traded their "great Satanisms".'[43] Writing in 1994 in *Returning*

40 K Cragg, *The Qur'an and the West: Some Minding Between*, p. 59.
41 K Cragg, *The Qur'an and the West: Some Minding Between*, p. 63.
42 K Cragg, *Am I not your Lord? Human Meaning in Divine Question*, Melisende, London, 2002.
43 K Cragg, *Am I not your Lord? Human Meaning in Divine Question*, p. 206.

to Mount Hira[44] Cragg comments that Iran, although never colonised by the West, had its modern history chequered by interventions and manipulation from that source. Before the revolution, there was a deep resentment at alien influences, which festered beneath the surface, and all too readily the masses became captive to the clerics. The West was then seen as a plague, which set out to corrupt and disfigure the Iranian scene and soul.[45]

The Qur'an and the West has been written in part as a direct riposte to the crude description of *Islam and the West* epitomised as a 'clash of civilisations' in the work of Samuel Huntingdon. Cragg believes it was a mistake to proclaim a 'war on terrorism' since the more appropriate language would have been to use the language of 'criminal conspiracy' which required a Worldwide response.

An Iranian thinker who interests Cragg is Ali Shari'ati who saw Muhammad in part as a 'populist', pioneering a 'laicisation' of Islam, throwing off the tyranny of the clergy and the monopoly they claimed over the interpretation of the Qur'an.[46] Clearly Cragg feels some affinity with this movement, comparing it to similar struggles in Europe to make the Bible available to the laity for them to interpret for themselves. But he knows that Ali Shari'ati was pitted against a rugged and entrenched establishment and his views can hardly have been said to have prevailed. Shari'ati's logic led him to a commitment to social justice in Iran during a time of major political upheaval. His emphasis was squarely on the Meccan period. He wrote of Muhammad, 'His mission consists only in conveying the message … For it is the people themselves who are responsible … His mission being completed men are free to choose.'[47]

Cragg writes, 'What, though, of the implications for "democracy", that supposed panacea the USA hopes to export and implant, with its blessing, on the Arab East? What of any "God of the electorate", in universal suffrage, as "the masses" somehow in authority?' He asks how a sane, durable, political enlistment of 'the masses' is to be achieved? It

44 K Cragg, *Returning to Mount Hira: Islam in Contemporary Terms*, Bellew Publishing, London, 1994.

45 K Cragg, *Returning to Mount Hira: Islam in Contemporary Terms*, p. 132.

46 K Cragg, *The Qur'an and the West*, pp. 21-22 and 199 ff. to appreciate the extent of Cragg's engagement with contemporary political issues.

47 Ali Shari'ati, *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies, An Islamic Critique*, trans. R Campbell, Berkeley, 1980, p.113.

is hardly credible to adopt the American model asserts Cragg, where the processes of democracy can be suborned by wealth and money, by lobbies and powered interests, by media manipulation.

He rejects any notion that 'theocracy' is a true interpretation of any part of the Qur'an although he acknowledges that some have tried to do so to suit their own pursuit of power. The translation of the precepts of the Qur'an in electoral terms is uncertain. It is not at all clear that 'government by the people' fits with the notion of our subject status before God. But in the current conflicts, Cragg considers that none of us are 'innocents abroad' but are the 'compromised at home'. 'The West should forbid itself a "tourist" style politics, presuming to endow others with the nobler arts of democracy. All are violating the authority of their most cherished religious symbols.'[48]

He is extremely critical of American policy in the Middle East, particularly in its relations with Israel, where the extensive support given is phenomenal and unprecedented and directly contravenes George Washington's prescript about 'foreign relation' of 'no passionate attachment'. Putting it bluntly, he believes America has taken leave of its senses and the main aim of world peace should be to hope for a saner mind of America.

The central challenge to the Muslim community throughout the world as Cragg sees it, is whether in their diaspora they see themselves as an aggressive entity set to politicise the world on their own terms, or is it a religio-ethical, social expression of humanity co-existing and co-activating the public scene, the global economies, the ecumenical reality? *Dar al-Islam*, the place where Islam holds political power, could be either of these, but which way it travels will depend on a present assessment of those two founding cities, Mecca and Medina, as to whether Islam is a message or a regime. Is Muhammad primarily a preacher whose message was his mission, or a presiding leader with an army? Is *Jihad*, that much interpreted 'endeavour for Allah' an inward struggle for personal integrity as the only commendation of Islam, or a martial enterprise of empire and control?

Cragg believes that religious faith could and should renounce all power-complex and physical militancy without abandoning political

48 K Cragg, *The Qur'an and the West*, pp 196-203.

duties. This by no means implies the abandonment of the political field and he challenges the presence of Western troops in Iraq, pointing out the way that country's army was used by the West only two decades ago to attack Iran and also the inconsistency of the treatment of the nuclear issue in Iran when Israel is a nuclear power with American support. Analysing in some detail the current position in Iraq and Iran he concludes that it is difficult to take assurances of American 'good faith' with other than deep scepticism.

Surveying the current scene, he rejects the idea of a 'clash of civilisations' in favour of the notion of a 'clash of wrongs'. He condemns the violence on both sides and suggests that the only way forward is to seek integrity and sincerity in our relations with each other. In a moving passage he gives an exegesis of the concept of 'sincerity' in Islam, concluding, 'But, as with the integrity tradition of the West, all rests with the will to be "sincere before God". "Clash of Civilisations" can only take us to futility and gloom. A "Concern over Wrongs" might bring us to know the truth of ourselves and to turn that truth to our deliverance by its very telling of the shame.'[49]

Kenneth Cragg has spent a long life engaged in an encounter with Islam and although his roots are to found in an Anglican evangelical tradition, there is a sense of someone on a journey, making fresh discoveries and asking new questions as he proceeds. At times he has been accused of failing to understand the essential political dimension in an Islamic state, but his latest books focus sharply on a series of political questions concerning our own society, our involvement with current wars, the challenge to Muslims learning to live as citizens in countries where they are in a minority.

A man of peace, he does not shrink from using prophetic language in his sometimes searing analysis of the current state of relations between nations. He is recognised as a leading academic and Arabic scholar, who has made an enormous contribution to our understanding of Islam. He is concerned mainly with the present, although he does not lack a sense of history. But, while recognising that academic studies need to be dispassionate, he believes that 'passion is inseparable from their authenticity'.

49 K Cragg, *The Qur'an and the West*, p. 203, and the final words of this penetrating critique of the current conflicts in the Middle East.

His writing, although sometimes difficult to penetrate and always inviting further study, arises from the heart of his own experience of involvement and engagement with Islam and Christianity, always seeking to find areas of commonality and shared insight rather than conflict and rejection.

In his journey of exploration and encounter, he has followed his own dictum; 'Christian theology is safest when it is most concerned, not to be safe, but to be articulate'.[50] Engagement can never be merely a question of tactic, but should be motivated by the 'impulse to reverence, tactfulness, tenderness, care, sensitivity—in a word, to humility'. This humility is to be expressed in frankness and the business of honest theological translation. In this task he remains a Christian theologian, but one who is willing to share his own sense of God's presence with him in Christ and to listen to the experience of others finding the love of God transmitted to them through other channels.

The imperative for Cragg throughout all his activities has been to painstakingly explain the meaning of the Gospel with a dedication to the disciplines of learning and listening. He rejects the counsel of despair in the current ethos of violence, believing that patience and sanity will prevail in the recognition that we all answer the question, '*Am I Not Your Lord?'* in the affirmative.

A personal encounter with Kenneth Cragg reveals his strong sense of vocation, which derives from his belief in the trusting and lasting friendship of his Lord. In his own words, 'If God undertakes us in redemptive purpose and redemptive love, we must undertake each other in comparable terms. If we affirm that "God is love" then "love one another" must closely follow.'[51]

50 K Cragg, *Sandals at the Mosque,* p.88.
51 K Cragg, *Faith and Life Negotiate*, p. 259 ff.

KENNETH CRAGG AND THE WISDOM OF THE SUFIS

David Derrick

While Kenneth Cragg has been recognized as a leader in the field of Christian-Muslim studies, his interest in Sufism (the mystical tradition of Islam)[1] has received little attention from other academics. The purpose of this essay is to demonstrate the developing involvement with Sufism in his books and articles

Kenneth Cragg (1913-2012) was born in the working-class resort of Blackpool, Lancashire, where his father was a back-street shopkeeper. Cragg refers to his religious upbringing in the Church of England's conservative evangelical wing as being, 'the breath of our being, deep but not demonstrative, assured but not boisterous'.[2] Scholarships took him to Jesus College, Oxford where he read for a BA in Modern History.

Cragg was ordained an Anglican priest in 1936 and went to Lebanon in 1939, to begin his missionary service, under the auspices of the British Syria Mission. In Lebanon he met Charles Malik[3] then

1 W Stoddart, *Sufism: the mystical doctrines and methods of Islam*, Thorsons Publishers, Wellingborough, 1976, p. 11. A useful article dealing with the problems of methodology in approaching Sufism is: D P Brewster, 'The study of Sufism; towards a methodology', *Religion* 6(1) 1976, pp. 31-47.

2 K Cragg, *Faith and Life Negotiate:A Christian Story-study*, Canterbury Press, Norwich, 1994, p. 21.

3 Philosopher and diplomat, Charles Habib Malik (1906-1987), founded the philosophy department at the American University of Beirut. He was also a theologian who successfully reached across religious lines to his fellow Eastern Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholics and Evangelicals alike. He represented Lebanon at the San Francisco conference at which the United Nations was founded. He served as President of the Economic and Social Council and as Chair of the Third Committee during the 1948 debates on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Mr Malik was a major force in the debates surrounding key provisions of the Declaration. He also played a critical role in explaining and refining some of its basic conceptual issues. He returned to his academic career in 1960 and lectured

Head of Department of Philosophy at the American University of Beirut. On Malik's departure to become Lebanon's Ambassador to the USA, Cragg took over as acting Head of the Philosophy Department. Forced to leave Lebanon in 1947 because of the rising violence, prior to the formation of the State of Israel, he returned to Jesus College, Oxford, and was awarded his doctorate in 1950.[4] In 1951 Cragg was appointed to the chair of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the Hartford Seminary, USA, a Protestant institute to train missionaries and mission scholars. In 1956 he published his seminal book *The Call of the Minaret*.[5] In 1961 he became Warden of St Augustine's College, Canterbury. Following its closure, he was consecrated in 1970 as assistant bishop in the Jerusalem Archbishopric. Bishop Cragg died in 2012 at The College of St Barnabas (a home for retired clergy) just a few months short of his hundredth birthday, having published some seventy books and many articles.

Few writers would link Anglican Evangelicalism with any form of mysticism. More popularist than academic in its approach, Bruce Macpherson's book *On Christian Mysticism: A Conservative Evangelical Perspective*, portrays mysticism in a negative light. In his Introduction he warns that, 'Christian mysticism is a cancer subtly invading Christianity, and it needs to be unmasked.'[6] He dismisses Sufism in a short paragraph and claims that 'The Sufi seek a worldwide Islamic Caliphate.'[7] Whereas Winfried Corduan in his book, *Mysticism: an evangelical option?* finds a modest place for mysticism, linking it to a form of mysticism present in the New Testament.[8]

Regarding Cragg's evangelical background, James Tebbe in his doctoral study on Cragg, observes that:

> Cragg claims continuity with and a debt to his Christian upbringing in this tradition. His autobiography [inter alia]

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on human rights at universities in the United States.

4 K Cragg, *Islam in the 20th Century: The Relevance of Christian Theology and the Relation of the Christian Mission to its Problems*. PhD, Jesus College, Oxford, 1950.

5 K Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1956.

6 B N Macpherson, *On Christian Mysticism: A Conservative Evangelical Perspective*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017, p. ix.

7 Macpherson, *On Christian Mysticism*, p. 115.

8 W Corduan, *Mysticism: An Evangelical Option?*, Wipf and Stock Publishers Eugene OR, 2009, pp. 138-139.

> clearly establishes that link.[9] Though he writes of the freedom of thought which education gave him, that freedom did not take him in a direction which was discontinuous with his background. When he went to the Middle East it was with a clearly evangelical mission. Though he could not side with the most extreme forms of evangelicalism, he did maintain enough ties and identity to be invited to contribute to books that represent the evangelical position. Thus, evangelicals themselves have claimed him. …
>
> … It is not just evangelicals who have claimed him, but scholars also have tended to categorise him as an evangelical.[10]

The main problem in researching Cragg's engagement with Sufism is that, apart from one book,[11] he has written little that deals exclusively with this subject. What he has composed, is scattered throughout his books and articles. This essay, in following chronologically the published work of Cragg, tracks in turn, the chronological development of his own understanding of Sufism which led to his appreciation of the wisdom of the Sufis.

The first time that Cragg writes on the subject of Sufism is in his doctorate thesis, 'Islam in the 20th Century: The Relevance of Christian Theology and the Relation of the Christian Mission to its Problems'. Here he presents Sufism in a positive light,

> The tendency has been to discredit Sufism as superstitious and heterodox and yet it remains a fact that it represents some of the most religiously vigorous parts of Islam. (p. 91)

Writing in 1953, a review of the book, *Islam in Ethiopia,* by J Spencer Trimingham,[12] Cragg further demonstrates this positive aspect of Sufism:

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9 K Cragg, *Faith and Life Negotiate.*

10 J Tebbe, 'Christian Scriptures in Muslim Culture, in the Work of Kenneth Cragg', PhD, St. John's College, Nottingham, 1997, pp. 27-28.

11 K Cragg, *The Wisdom of the Sufis*, Sheldon Press, London, 1976.

12 John Spencer Trimingham (1904-1987) renowned scholar on Islam in Africa. He was Professor at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut, Lebanon. He wrote numerous works on Islam and Eastern Christianity.

> As for the Dervish orders in Sufism, … these also have been adapted to suit the mentality of the people. None of the orders originated in the region, but were carried there from outside as centres of propaganda and as cults filling the void left in the African heart by the rigidity or formalism of Islam.[13]

Trimingham is also of the opinion that while Orthodox Islam[14] is of paramount importance to the lives of Muslims in Ethiopia, its influence on the deeper life of the spirit is correspondingly weak.[15]

Returning to Cragg's thesis, he explains that his research is:

> …not confined to strictly theological writing, of which there is relatively little, but seeks to survey the mind of Islam where-ever it is read, in leading exponents. It is limited, however, to the two main fields of Arab Islam and Indian Islam. (p. iv)

Part of Cragg's methodology was to identify twenty 'leading exponents' (exemplars) of Islamic thought and culture. Of the twenty 'leading exponents' of Islam that Cragg identifies, only Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1905)[16] and Sayyid Amir Ali (1849-1928) are shown as being influenced by Sufism.

Cragg suggests that 'an adequate biography' of Muhammad 'Abduh is C C Adams', *Islam and Modernism: A Study of the Modern Reform*

13 K Cragg, 'Islam in the Horn of Africa: Review of Islam in Ethiopia by J Spencer Trimingham', *International Review of Mission* 42(165) (1953), p. 100.

14 Sunni Islam is sometimes referred to as 'orthodox Islam', although some scholars view this translation as inappropriate. See further K G M Oglu, 'Basic principles distinguishing orthodox Islam from Sufism', *Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs. Journal* 9(2) 1988, pp.245-250.

15 J S Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, Barnes and Noble, New York, 1952, p. 226.

16 Muhammad 'Abduh (1848-1905) the Egyptian reformer who was a pupil and friend of Al-Afghani. He is best known for his *Risalat al-Tawhid* (*The Theology of Unity*), *Tafsir al-Manar* (*The Manar Commentary*) and *Rashid Rida* (incomplete). His key theme is that, as modernity is based on reason, Islam must be compatible with it. His 'modernity' involved a return to an idealised past. From, N Robinson, "Abduh, Muhammad', *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, E Craig and O Leaman (eds), Routledge, London, 2002, 1: pp. 6-8. http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ip/rep/H049. Accessed 09.09.2020.

Movement Inaugurated by Muhammad 'Abduh.[17] This was reissued in 1968 by Russell and Russell and is the edition used herein.[18] Cragg notes that Adams takes many of the biographical details from 'Abduh's *Risalat-at-Tawhid*, (a treatise on Unity originally written in Arabic, and translated into French by B Michel and Mustafa Abd-ar-Raziq, Paris, 1925). Cragg and Ishaq Musa'ad[19] published their own English translation, *The Theology of Unity,* in 1966.[20] The *Introduction* describes the book as

> a modern theological work that has played a conspicuous part in the twentieth century development of theological activity within the faith of the vast majority of his fellow countrymen.

Cragg's thesis duly notes that, with regard to Islam, Adams comments on 'the present failure of the liberalising movement really to enter the vital field of theology'. (p. 29) Yet, it is in this field that Cragg shows the importance of Sufism to 'Abduh's theological development and is an exception to his initial observation that there exists 'relatively little' of such writing. Cragg sketches out 'Abduh's formative influences. (p.138) An uncle of 'Abduh's father introduced him to the Sufi sect of Shadhali,[21] from which "Abduh derived that intense moral sensitivity which some have regarded as the mainspring of all his activities.' In his early twenties he 'fell under the spell of Jamal-ad-Din … The advent of Jamal-ad-Din into his world both moderated his Sufi excesses and liberated him from intellectual frustration.' (p. 138)

Cragg relates that:

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17 C C Adams, *Islam and Modernism: A Study of the Modern Reform Movement Inaugurated by Muhammad 'Abduh*, Russell and Russell, New York, 1933. (Adams was a member of the Faculty of the School of Oriental Studies of the American University, Cairo.)

18 For a succinct summary of Abdu's life and work see: O Amin, 'Muhammad 'Abduh the Reformer', *The Muslim World* 36 (2 April 1946), pp. 153–155. (This is also cited in Cragg's thesis.)

19 Ishaq Musa'ad studied at St Augustine's College, Canterbury, where Cragg was Warden. Their meeting resulted in this translation.

20 K Cragg, and Ishaq Musa'ad, *The Theology of Unity*, Kuala Lumpur, Islamic Book Trust, first published by Allen and Unwin, London, 1966, 2004.

21 This Sunni Sufi order was founded by Abul Hasan Ali ash-Shadhili of Morocco in the 13th century.

> His ['Abduh's] first sustained work belongs to this period of direct contact with Jamal-ad-Din[22] and of the Khedive Ismail's[23] efforts for modernisation in Egypt. It is a treatise on Mysticism which evidences 'Abduh's penetrative powers of theological thought, his enthusiasm for philosophy and his expository gifts.' (*Risalat al-Waridah*, Cairo, 1874, reprinted in *Tarikh* Vol II, p. 1-25) (p. 139)

However, it was his Sufi inspired morality that set 'Abduh apart from his fellow Muslims. Cragg observes that:

> His genuine consciousness of the Divine in human life, his Sufi background and his moral fervour made him know that if religion and society were vitally related, the renewal of the former could only redeem the latter, if it was genuine and sincere, an end and not a means. His thesis always was that the true Islam, freed from un-Islamic accretions, was perfectly reconcilable with modern thought and conditions. (p. 146)

In his thesis, Cragg notes that Lord Cromer[24] called him an agnostic which Cragg saw as a mistaken verdict 'save in the technical sense that 'Abduh held there were definite limitations to the competence of reason.' (p. 146) While Cragg gives the reference, he does not give this quotation, which concisely sums-up 'Abduh 's critics:

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22 Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-97) was a prominent Islamic political leader and philosopher of the nineteenth century. He dealt with the subjugation of the Muslim world by the Western powers and devoted much of his life to liberation, independence and unity of the Islamic world. Noting the relative decline of the Islamic world he provided a philosophical theory and history that could produce a modernism appropriate to Islam.' From E Craig, *Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Routledge, London, 2000, p. 13.

23 'Ismail Pasha (1830-1895) was the charming but spendthrift pasha and khedive of Egypt during the decade prior to British occupation.' From: https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/history/egyptian-history-biographies/khedive-egypt-ismail. Accessed 09.09.2020.

24 Evelyn Baring, 1st Earl of Cromer, also called Sir Evelyn Baring (1841-1917), British administrator and diplomat whose 24-year rule in Egypt as British agent and consul general (1883–1907) profoundly influenced Egypt's development as a modern state. (Britannica: https://www.britannica.com/biography/Evelyn-Baring-1st-Earl-of-Cromer. Accessed 10.09.2020.)

> I suspect that my friend Abdu [sic], although he would have resented the appellation being applied to him, was in reality an Agnostic. His associates, although they admitted his ability, were inclined to look askance at him as a 'filosouf.' Now, in the eyes of the strictly orthodox, one who studies philosophy or, in other words, one who recognises the difference between the seventh and the twentieth centuries, is on the high road to perdition.[25]

Cragg's thesis thus endorses Sufism in its representation of some of the most religiously vigorous parts of Islam and provides a moral compass for Muhammad 'Abduh. This may be seen as being somewhat pragmatic. There is, at this early stage in Cragg's career, little comment by him on the mystical side of Sufism. His deeper appreciation of Sufism, its theology and spirituality had yet to evolve.

In Cragg's *Translator's Introduction* to the *Theology of Unity,* he again stresses the importance of Sufism in 'Abduh's life:

> … he was gifted with an attractive personality—which the reader must remember, if he cannot always detect, in the more arid portions of the Risâlat, and it was this which enabled him to sustain his intellectual mission through all the massive inertias of the Azhar mind and to win the title of Al-Ustâdh al-Imâm, 'the master and guide'.
> He owed it in part not only to the tenacity by which he was able to outlive the rigours of his early Azhar days, but also to the Süfi influences of his uncle, Shaikh Darwish, which left their mark in his instinctive piety and his spiritual resilience. Al-Afghâni's activism did the rest, weaning him from possible enervation in mystical asceticism, but without sacrifice of the finer sensitivities that belonged with it. The sense, too, of Europe, which his travels gave him, and the contacts he enjoyed with French culture, and even in Brighton with Herbert Spencer, saved him from the narrow

25 E B E Cromer, *Modern Egypt*, Vol II, Macmillan, New York, 1909, p. 180. (A 'filosouf', meaning a person who studies philosophy, especially one who develops a particular set of theories, from Arabic *failasuf*.)

> perspectives of turban and text and their confines of tradition and commentary.[26]

Here Cragg shows his disdain at the excesses of Sufi mystical asceticism but does not elaborate on this topic. R A Nicholson (1868-1945), the eminent English scholar of both Islamic literature and Muslim mysticism, wrote in his work*, The Mystics of Islam*, (first published in 1914) that the earliest Sufis were ascetics and quietist rather than mystics:

> An overwhelming consciousness of sin, combined with a dread—which it is hard for us to realize—of Judgment Day and the torments of Hell-fire, so vividly painted in the Koran, drove them to seek salvation in flight from the world.[27]

Salvation was ensured by fasting, praying and pious works.

In *Counsels in Contemporary Islam,*[28] which Cragg published in 1965, Chapter 3 is entitled 'Muhammad 'Abduh, Arab pioneer, and two successors'. Here he places more emphasis on 'Abduh's Sufi background. He notes that 'Abduh had a 'fond attraction for the emotions and sanctities of Sufi practice', from which Jamal al-Din largely weaned him, although, 'the Sufi strain in his make-up remained as an underlying quality sustaining a deep personal piety which was not the least of his remembered legacies.'[29]

The other person researched in Cragg's thesis, who saw Sufism in a positive light, was Sayyid Amir Ali.[30] Cragg concentrates his attention

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26 Cragg and Musa'ad, *The Theology of Unity*, pp. 10-11.

27 R A Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, Ancient Wisdom Publications, Bloomington, Indiana, repr. 2007, p. 3.

28 K Cragg, *Counsels in contemporary Islam*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1965.

29 K Cragg, *Counsels in contemporary Islam*. p. 33.

30 Syed Amir Ali (1849-1928) was a judge, political, social reformer and Islamic scholar who wrote several books on Islamic law. He was called to the bar at the Inner Temple, returning to the Calcutta High Court. He retired to the UK in 1904, launching the London Muslim League in 1908 to support Muslim representation. He withdrew in 1913 as the League was becoming too radical. Founded a project to build a mosque in London in 1910 and founded the Red Crescent Society as the Red Cross had failed to support Turks and Arabs attacked by Italians in 1909. It 1901 he became the first Indian to be appointed to the Privy Council. From:

on Ali's book, *The Spirit of Islam*[31] which illustrates most of his ideas. Writing as a Shi'ite, Ali calls upon the whole of Sunni Islam to cast off its hindrances and renew the free, essential rationalism of Islam.[32] Cragg demonstrates that Ali affirms:

> … that Islam is progress itself and the social or other evils with which historians have charged it never in fact belonged to its true spirit. His aim is not a mere effort to establish a harmony between Islam and modernity, but to assert that no real disharmony exists. This tour de force, however, self-assured, involves highly debatable suppositions about what Islam actually is. (p. 349)

The concluding chapter of *The Spirit of Islam* deals with mysticism in Islam and, far from denouncing it, traces its origins to the Prophet himself.

> The wonderful mysticism which forms the life and soul of modern Persian literature owes its distinct origin to the esoteric significance attached by an important section of the Moslems to the words of the Koran. The elevated feeling of Divine pervasion with which Mohammed often spoke, the depth of fervent and ecstatic rapture which characterised his devotion, constituted the chief basis on which Moslem mysticism was founded.[33]

For Ali, the desire for a deeper and inward sense in the words of the Qur'an came not from a need to escape from the rigour of texts and dogmas, but from the conviction that those words meant more than intended. Cragg argues that:

> This conviction, combined with a deep feeling of Divine pervasion, a feeling originating from and in perfect accordance with the teachings of the Koran and

http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/makingbritain/content/syed-ameer-ali Accessed 09.09.2020.

31 S A Ali, *Spirit of Islam*, S K Lahiri and Co, Calcutta, 1902.

32 Ali, *Spirit of Islam,* p. 416.

33 *Ibid*.

> the instructions of the Prophet, led to the development among the Moslems of that Contemplative or Idealistic philosophy which has received the name of Sufism, and the spread of which, among the western Mahommedans, was probably assisted by the prevalence of Platonic ideas. (p. 417)

Ali warns that while Sufism in Islam, like its mystical counterpart in Christianity, has been 'productive of many mischievous results', the benefits are too great to be ignored. (p. 418)

Cragg's thesis evaluates Ali's influence as follows:

> This discerning, and not uncritical, welcome for the 'inner light of Islam' is refreshing, but the author leaves us in doubt as to how far he has faced the consequences of his approbation or seen the tensions inseparable from mystical spirit cohabiting with orthodox religion. It may be wondered whether here also the writer's goodwill and enterprise have not incurred apologetic issues in disposing of them. (p.363)

This tension between the mystical and the orthodox is a theme to which Cragg frequently returns, not only with regard to Islam but also Christianity. For example:

> Islam, however, is not the only faith where there are irreconcilable tensions between theology and religion, or rather, between orthodoxy and devotion.[34]

It is clear that Cragg has read widely on the subject of Sufism and sees it as a positive influence both in Islam generally, and in the lives of particular Muslims. While he admits that there have been excesses which have caused some reformers to denounce Sufism, he does not allow such matters to negate the view so clearly expressed in his thesis, that Sufism has played an important and beneficial role in the development of the inner life of Islam.

34 K Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, p. 104.

Cragg makes frequent use of the term orthodox throughout his writing, and is sometimes coupled with Islam, e.g. 'orthodox Islam', but he seldom, if ever, actually defines it. Often, he uses it as an adjective for something that is ossified, staid, or overly clinging to tradition. For example:

> The orthodox mind in any realm of belief is apt to be temperamentally unsuited to the exacting requirements of its own defense. It is liable to be impatient with all that differs or contends, and to be satisfied with dismissing it as unbelief. It tends in some senses to overconfidence and timidity, either assuming that error needs only to be denounced, or else, by contrast, hoping that it can be safely ignored.[35]

The orthodox is usually shown as being something negative, obdurate or intransient. It may equate with Sunni Islam, or with extreme forms traditionalism or fundamentalism. But he tells us that:

> there are orthodox Sunnite or Shi'ite academies at Lucknow, Calcutta, Jaunpur, Vellore and numerous other centres.[36]

He defines Shi'ah as follows:

> Shi'ah: the followers, initially, of 'Ali, fourth Caliph: the segment of Islam which 'seceded' from the Sunni, or 'orthodox', majority in respect of authority, exegesis, politics and devotion.[37]

However, Cragg does gives historical reference for the origin of orthodox doctrine:

> Mu'tazilah. A group and school of theologians, strongest in the ninth century A.D., who pressed speculative matters

35 K Cragg, 'The Intellectual Impact of Communism upon Contemporary Islam', *Middle East Journal* 8(2), 1954, p. 132.

36 Cragg, K. (1965). *Counsels in contemporary Islam*. p 139.

37 Cragg, K. (1984). *Muhammad and the Christian: A Question of Response*. Darton, Longman & Todd, Limited. London, p. 166.

> about the Qur'an and human free will far beyond the position that later (and largely in reaction against them) came to be the orthodox doctrine.[38]

Resulting from Cragg's work at Hartford Seminary, and his experiences in the Middle East and the Muslim world in Beirut between 1939 and 1947, his first book, *The Call of the Minaret*, (1956) was well received. A third edition was published in 2000 by Oneworld Publications, Oxford, and reprinted in 2003.[39] Hugh Goddard's article,[40] 'The significance of *The Call of the Minaret* for Christian Thinkers about Islam' (2003), published in a *Festschrift* to honour Cragg's ninetieth birthday and his vocation to Muslim-Christian relations.[41] Goddard delineates its genesis and the process which lead to the writing of Cragg's book, before outlining and commenting on its content and assessing its (continuing) importance. Not all reviews were positive and Cragg's second book *Sandals at the Mosque*[42] was written partly in response to some of the criticism of *The Call of the Minaret*.

In the first edition of *The Call of the Minaret*, there are a number of references to Sufism and a short piece on Sufism in the section *Prayer and the Religious life in Islam* entitled, *Sufi illumination and its literature: "In Thee have I trusted"*. Here he explores: Sufism and its relationship with Muhammad; Sufi saints and intercessions; Sufi and its relationship to dogma. Later in the book he considers: God's relationship to man; and suffering in Islam.

Cragg glosses over the belief in Al-Nur al-Muhammadi, sometimes called the Muhammadan light:

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38 Cragg, K. and R. M. Speight (1988). *The House of Islam*, Wadsworth Publishing Company, Belmont, California, p. 130.

39 The book is still in print (it has its own page of the publisher's website—https://oneworld-publications.com/the-call-of-the-minaret-pb.html Accessed 09.09.2020.)

40 Hugh Goddard is an Honorary Professorial Fellow at the Alwaleed Centre, The Centre for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World based at the University of Edinburgh, with research expertise on Christian-Muslim relations.

41 H Goddard, 'The significance of *The Call of the Minaret* for Christian Thinkers about Islam' in *A Faithful Presence: Essays for Kenneth Cragg*, D R Thomas and C Amos (eds), Melisende, London, 2003, pp. 79-94.

42 K Cragg, *Sandals at the mosque*, SCM Press, London, 1959.

> There exists, it is true, a permanent and vigorous tendency to hypostacize in Muhammad the Divine light. The religious belief in Al-Nur al-Muhammadi has given to much Sufi, and other, devotion a relationship to Muhammad which comes close to deification, in implication, if not in fact. But these attitudes, wherever they occur, and recur, have no status in orthodox theology and all that they imply is roundly repudiated.[43]

He does not elaborate on this aspect Sufi and Shi'a metaphysics which play an important role in both Sufi and Shi'a concepts of sainthood.'[44] Cragg gives most of his scholarship and comment over to Sunni tradition.

Of saints and intercessions, Cragg observes that:

> Intercession is much more widely believed in Shi'ah Islam, and belief in the saintly efficacy of holy founders is one of the main factors in the cohesion of Sufi orders. There are also strong traditions of Muhammad's own practice during life in visiting the cemeteries, often by night, to seek from God the forgiveness and the welfare of the dead.[45]

Cragg breaks from this exploration of Sufism to deal with pilgrimage, before returning to his theme, with a brief history of Sufism, which he introduces as follows:

> If Shi'ah Muslims represent a plea for greater immediacy of the soul to truth than Sunni Islam provides, the same is true of the long and deep tradition of mysticism, the Muslim forms of which are known as Sufism.[46]

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43 K Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, p. 104.

44 'The doctrine appears in the writings of such early Sufi writers as Sahl al-Tustari and Hakim al-Tirmidhi and was later developed by Ibn al-'Arabi and his school. The concept plays an important role in both Sufi and Shii concepts of sainthood *(walayah)*', J L Esposito (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, OUP, Oxford, 2004, p. 237.

45 K Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, p. 113.

46 K Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, p. 134.

Once again, Cragg stresses the importance of Sufism, claiming that in later centuries Sufism 'did more to conserve and perpetuate Islam that did orthodoxy itself.'

Cragg notes that Sufism traces its origins back to the Prophet, who is seen as 'the supreme exponent of disciplined mystical ecstasy'. Following from this, the Qur'an can be viewed 'as the greatest product of the Sufis approach. … Muhammad is the exemplar of the path.'[47]

Cragg, aware that Sufism has been reproached by modern reformers, sees that:

> Yet even these critics, Muhammad 'Abduh, for example, and Iqbal,[48] have themselves owed not a little to Sufi influence in their upbringing.[49]

For Cragg, Islamic mysticism has inspired the greatest devotional literature in Islam and gives as examples:

> the celebrated poetess Rabi'ah (died A.D. 801); Al-Hallaj,[50] the Persian writer (crucified in A.D. 922); Al-Ghazali, himself; Ibn al-'Arabi "the greatest mystical genius of the Arabs" (died in Damascus in A.D. 1240); his contemporary the famous Jalal al-Din Rumi, author of the immortal *Mathnavi*.[51]

Cragg's writing become almost ecstatic as he extols the virtues of Sufism as seen through these writers.

> Here the student may find in their most eloquent expression the characteristic Sufi intensities: the yearning after the knowledge which is absorption; the joy of penetration beyond the shell of selfish selfhood into wholeness; the price of discipline and the meaning of

47 K Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, p. 135.

48 Sir Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) appears in Cragg's thesis as a prominent poet and great Muslim philosophical thinker.

49 K Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, p. 135.

50 This is an early reference by Cragg to Al-Hallaj, who was Louis Massignon's inspiration and the mainstay of his investigation into Islamic mysticism.

51 K Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, p. 135.

> temptation; the purity and poverty of the ardent spirit; the disinterestedness of valid love; the stations and states of the progress of the soul; the anticipations of illumination and the climax of *fanā'* [52] where the soul transcends itself and its search in passing into love.[53]

Cragg completes this section in *The Call of the Minaret*, with a brief description of the organization of Sufism into various Orders and outlines their rituals. This has been extended in the 2000 Third Edition, to include more of the history and organisation of Sufism.

In *The Call of the Minaret* Cragg shows Sufism's function within Islam as a whole, rather than the more pragmatic and limited role he ascribed to it in his thesis. He is beginning to appreciate its mystical role in enabling the soul to gain union with God. This is quite a step forward for someone from an evangelical background, with its suspicion of anything unbiblical.

Published in 1969 as part of *The Religious Life of Man* series,[54] Cragg's book *The House of Islam*, tries:

> to keep a balance between a true and worthy appreciation of the essential faith, and an honest open realism about its fortunes in the tumult of the world. The doctrinal and the actual, the ideal and the empirical, must always judge and address each other.[55]

In the *Introduction*, Cragg explains that his aim is to 'study the religious life of this great *Dar al-Islam*, the name meaning *House of Islam'*. Part of this study was to answer such questions as:

> Who are the Sufis, the mystics, and what was the secret of their origin and of their persistent role in Islam?

52 'Fana: Passing away. In Sufi Islam, refers to the desired state of mystical annihilation of self, which is the state just prior to experiencing union with God.' J L Esposito, *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, p. 80.

53 K Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, p. 135.

54 Frederick J Strong (Series Editor), *The Religious Life of Man*. The intention was to introduce the world's major religious traditions.

55 K Cragg, *The House of Islam*, Dickenson Publishing Company, Belmont, 1969, p. vii.

> And, within all these enquiries, the question: Who is the Muslim?[56]

Cragg is covering old ground but adds much greater detail to what he has written in the past, particularly that relating to the sources and what he considers are achievements of Sufism. However, in this book, Cragg develops his exploration of Muhammad's experience of the revelation of the Qur'an, the *Rasuliyyah*, the state of being sent. In Cragg's PhD thesis, he explores the possibility of separating Muhammad's authority resulting from his role in the revelation of the Qur'an, from that of the person of Muhammad. In *The Call of the Minaret* Cragg demonstrates that Amir 'Ali's *The Spirit of Islam*, reverts to the traditional and orthodox view of the revelation of the Qur'an to Muhammad and 'insists throughout on the instrumentality of the Prophet, not his initiative; on his being the agent not the originator.'[57] Cragg constantly has challenged this view which has gained him much criticism from Muslim writers.

In the *House of Islam*, Cragg asks,

> Can we assume, in Muhammad's own experience, something at least of the patterns later followed by Islamic mysticism, known as Sufism, in the centuries beyond? Such patterns of self-abstraction require, and serve, a cutting off of the sense world so that, undistracted, the spirit may await the visitation of the word.[58]

Shabbir Akhtar, the Faculty of Theology and Religions at the University of Oxford and Visiting Senior Research Scholar at the Centre for Muslim-Christian Studies, Oxford, has long been one of Cragg's most vociferous critics. In his article*, An Islamic model of revelation*, he notes that,

> Certainly, the Islamic tradition, taking its cue from the Qur'an has seen Muhammad as no more than a mouthpiece, if a sentient and intelligent one. Cragg

56 K Cragg, *The House of Islam*, p. 4.
57 K Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret,* p. 92.
58 K Cragg, *The House of Islam*, p. 23.

> sees this model of revelation—'mechanistic' in his terminology—as at once puzzling and unnecessary.[59]

Suggesting that Muhammad may have received the revelations as a result of a Sufi-like practice of contemplation, allows for the possibility of a rational explanation of the origins of the Qur'an other than the purely miraculous.

In 1976 Cragg published a book totally dedicated to Sufism, *The Wisdom of the Sufis.* Although the bulk of the book is a compilation of stories, poems and sayings from various Sufi sources, there is a twenty-six-page introduction with the ubiquitous title, *The Wisdom of the Sufis.*

Cragg's intention is that the book should be:

> 'A friend to know the sign' which neatly phrases the intention of this short annotated anthology of Islamic Sufism … The selection that follows has been determined by a desire to relate Islamic mysticism fairly to the total context of Muslim faith and life.[60]

He admits that anthologies will have their biases, but adds that his bias is unconcealed, namely:

> A preference for the intelligible, a love for the lyrical and the expressive, and an ambition for relationship across frontiers of allegiance within the current time.

And he gives this caution:

> Sufism often attracts admirers from outside. But the first duty of the Way is to disconcert admiration.[61]

Cragg informs that:

> The wisdom of the Sufis lies in finding out the loneliness

59 S Akhtar, 'An Islamic model of revelation', *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 2(1) 1991, p. 97.

60 Cragg, *The Wisdom of the Sufis*, p. 6.

61 Cragg, *The Wisdom of the Sufis*, p. vii.

> of the egotistical self and attaining the community of the essential self.[62]

He adds that while Sufis may generally agree with this statement, it is its interpretation which causes conflict. Cragg, in attempting to interpret the statement, reveals his own 'mysticism' or perhaps as some might prefer, his own spirituality. He chooses as a starting point a frequently quoted verse from the Qur'an 'Am I not your Lord'[63], which is followed by the affirmation, 'Yes! Indeed. We acknowledge it.' (Surah 7.172) Cragg explains that the meaning of this verse is that everyone, even before being born, is pledged to a mystical relationship with God. The mutual love of God and man is the basis for Sufism. The selection of readings in his book are Cragg's attempt to relate Islamic mysticism to Muslim faith and life. In doing so it is a guide towards union with God.

To start the reader on the road to this union, he relates a number of Sufi anecdotes which illustrate some of the absurdities and paradoxes of life. Having taken us thus far along the road, Cragg states that mysticism in the Islamic tradition is far more than these stories and it demands more of the student. It is sometimes difficult to know with which voice Cragg is speaking. The narrator becomes the guide, or sometimes the observer, and at other times, the critic. His occasional use of the pronoun 'we' also suggests that this is a joint enterprise.

Cragg has divided the collection of stories, poems and sayings into the following sections: 1. 'I'—The Self-Desirous; 2. 'Thou'—My Lord-Desiring; 3. 'We'—In Unitive Desire; 4. 'Thou Lord of The Worlds'. These sections are synonymous with the stages which most Sufis pass through on their way to Unity with God. Cragg leads us along this path, from the 'problematic self', through penitence and contrition and into 'soul-peace in God'. The fourth stage is a quotation from the Qur'an, 'Thou Lord of the Worlds' (Surah 1:1-3), which Cragg admits not all Sufis follow. It is the ultimate unity, existence beyond individuality.

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62 Cragg, *The Wisdom of the Sufis*, p. 3.

63 Some translators use 'Sustainer' rather than 'Lord'. Yusuf Ali translates the verse as, 'Am I not your Lord (who cherishes and sustains you)?' They said: "Yea! we do testify!' AY Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qu'ran*, Amana Publications, Beltsville MD, 2004. *Am I not your Lord?* is also the title of another of Cragg's books published in 2002 shortly after the destruction of the World Trade Centre in New York. However, this is outside the scope of this essay.

This is a state which puzzles Cragg, as it seems to him that to bring about this state the 'real' world is left behind. Cragg asks how can we identify what is unreal and the Real? He notes that for the Sufi, 'the road to the Real is upward to transcendence.'[64] Cragg questions this and suggests that having escaped beyond nature and history, the path on reaching the goal turns the journey back to home. He asks,

> Do we rightly identify the great by uncontaminated seclusion and exaltedness? Or is the great, by its nature, in love with the world? [65]

Cragg favours the latter question, which if accepted, means that 'the lowly is transformed by the discovery and the eternal may dwell in the light of common day'. Hence 'The Way', or 'The Path', flows two ways. To put it in terms of Christian Theology, we live in a Realised Eschatology,[66] the Kingdom of God is already here, and realised, if we have the eyes to see it. For Cragg, the wisdom of the Sufis gives us that insight.

It is perhaps in this book that one can perceive Cragg's main attraction to Sufism. It is their poetry which acts as the vehicle for their wisdom. He writes of Rumi's extensive poem, the *Mathnavi*, as being a 'vast treasure house of poetical devotion in the Persian tongue and the Sufi tradition.'[67] His own love of poetry shines through all of his writings, from quoting the lyrics of John Lennon to the lines of the metaphysical poet John Donne. Often these quotations are purposefully chosen to impart a mystical dimension to the point or observation that he is making. Poetry not only illustrates and illuminates theology and dogma, but for Cragg, poetry is almost synonymous with them. For example, Christopher Lamb's book, *A Policy of Hope: Kenneth Cragg and Islam,* demonstrates that Cragg sees a unity between the poet and the natural world, the latter of which Cragg likens to the work of a poet. 'If Kepler[68] described his scientific work as 'thinking God's thoughts

64 Cragg, *The Wisdom of the Sufis*, p. 28-29.
65 Cragg, *The Wisdom of the Sufis*, p. 29.
66 See for example C H Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, Nisbet, 1936; C T Craig, 'Realized Eschatology', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 56(1) (1937), pp. 17-26.
67 Cragg, *The Wisdom of the Sufis*, p. 5.
68 Johannes Kepler (1571-1630), German astronomer, mathematician and astrologer.

for him', perhaps the poet can say the same.'[69] The opening to Chapter One, *Poets in the Telling*, of Cragg's book, *The Christian Jesus*, begins, 'Poetry is the first and last resource of Christian faith. Doctrine only intervenes.' He further adds, 'Faith can better admit of argument when its vision has been seen.'[70]

James Tebbe in his study on Cragg, notes:

> He [Cragg] is also a poet[71] or at least an artist with words whose, imagery goes beyond straight logic. Yet … this is more a factor to consider than a quality to assess. Recognising this helps us in assessing his theological approach.[72]

With Cragg's great interest in the poetic use of language, it is not surprising that one of his attractions to Sufism was through the Sufi poets. The figure of Al-Ghazali (c. 1058-1111), the Persian philosopher, mystic and occasional poet, was one of the first to be mentioned in *The Call of the Minaret* where Cragg saw a bridge between Al-Ghazali and the philosopher poet Muhammad Iqbal.[73] The command, 'Be fashioned after the fashion of God', which Cragg sees as a summary of Al-Ghazali's message, was often cited by Iqbal. Although Iqbal was not a Sufi, he did admit to mystical experiences.

> Sufism and mystic consciousness constituted an important theme in Iqbal's work, yet his views on Sufism have been the source of considerable controversy. Although he criticised the activities of certain Sufis for encouraging passivity and straying from the action-oriented message of Islam, as well as for being incapable of receiving any fresh inspiration from modern thought and experience,

69 C Lamb, *A Policy of Hope: Kenneth Cragg and Islam*, Melisende, London, 2014, p. 26.
70 K Cragg, *The Christian Jesus: Faith in the Finding*, Alpha Press, Brighton, 2003, p. 11.
71 See for example K Cragg, *Poetry of the Word at Christmas*, Churchman Publishing, Worthing, 1987; J M Townsend, 'Cragg and Tolstoy. Review of Poetry of the Word at Christmas by Kenneth Cragg', *The Expository Times,* 99(11) (1988), p. 347; K Cragg, *The Lowly Lintel: Poetry of the Word at Christmas*, Melisende, London, 2006.
72 J Tebbe, 'Christian Scriptures in Muslim Culture', 1997, p. 27.
73 K Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, p. 63.

> he remained keen to demonstrate the validity and importance of mystic consciousness.[74]

Cragg's attraction to the Sufi poets can also be seen in his frequent use of Sufi quotations throughout his work.

In 1978, Cragg published with the Open University, *Islam and the Muslim*.[75] Written as an Inter-faculty Second Level Course Book, it included a section entitled *The Mystics of Islam*. This covered: The Origins of Sufism; Sufism and selfhood; The liberty of the mystics; Sufism and cultic patterns; Sufism and divine unity. This is mainly a commentary on what is generally agreed to be the historical and spiritual background of the Sufis. The text invites students to answer a number of questions for themselves, such as, 'What is the self?' Cragg gives a specimen answer, and leaves the student with this open question: 'Was the ecstasy of the unitive state an end in itself, or was it a periodic alternation with mundane living, like the pendulum of a clock?' Here he seems to have moved away from the position he adopted as shown earlier in *The Wisdom of the Sufis*.

As seen in Cragg's other work, he uses Sufism to question the traditional and orthodox view of the Qur'an and Muhammad by asking a number of questions, such as, 'Was not our Prophet himself a contemplative?' And again, he uses Sufism as a foil against the straitjacket of dogma. He ends the section with this paradox: 'Religion cannot well be identified with its mystics: but it cannot well survive without them.' Sufism and its relationship to Mohammad is explored further in Cragg's book, *Muhammad and the Christian: A Question of Response*.[76]

Writing almost up to his death in 2012, Cragg continued to make Sufi references in his books and articles.

This essay has attempted to show the development of Cragg's involvement with Sufism. Cragg has not made an in-depth study and analysis of Sufism, as had Louis Massignon,[77] with whom Cragg has been

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74 I S Sevea, *The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal: Islam and Nationalism in Late Colonial India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012, pp. 15-16.

75 K Cragg, *Islam and the Muslim*, Croom Helm with Open University Press, London, 1978.

76 K Cragg, *Muhammad and the Christian: A Question of Response*,.

77 His *magnum opus* on al-Hallaj, written for his *doctorat d'état* in 1922, continued to be developed throughout his life. (The final French edition, published posthumously by Massignon's son Daniel Massignon in 1975, was translated into English by Herbert

likened. Massignon became very involved, as an observer through study and text, in Sufism which became an important factor in his own faith. In fact Cragg makes it clear in *The Wisdom of the Sufis*,[78] that he does not value the 'highly technical analysis of the terminology used in early mystical writings in Islam,' as developed by Louis Massignon.[79] While Cragg clearly delights in the metaphor and imagery that is present in Sufi literature, (in which he is clearly well-read), he is less enthusiastic in walking fully along their path. Although he warns of the excesses in Sufi practices, he shows that Sufism can provide its adherents with a moral compass, and delineates 'Islamic mysticism as an area where the Christian could find 'sympathy' and the Muslim escapes from the arid rigorism of Sunni dogma.'[80] However the question remains to what extent did Cragg accommodate an understanding of Sufism to his own spirituality—but that is another study for another occasion.

Mason in four volumes: *The Passion of al-Hallaj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*.)

78 Cragg, *The Wisdom of the Sufis*, p. 9.

79 J Waardenburg, 'Louis Massignon (1883–1962) as a Student of Islam', *Welt des Islams* 45(3) (2005), p. 317.

80 K Cragg, 'Temple Gairdner's legacy', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 5(4) (1981), p. 166.

ISLAMIC BELIEF AND PRACTICE

Ian Latham†

[This paper, which had been given as a lecture by Brother Ian Latham, aimed to serve as an introduction to some of the principal themes and main elements of the Islamic faith. Brother Ian offered his reflections as a sort of primer; presented in a straightforward and unambiguous way for those with little experience or knowledge of the subject. He had hoped that this brief introduction might stimulate the reader to enquire further and more deeply, especially noting some correlations with Christian thought. Ian understood, both from an intellectual and pastoral point of view, the need for Christians to have an awareness of the religious frameworks and ideas which underpinned the religion of the Muslim world especially at a time of political upheavals which directly impacted Muslim-Christian relations. The thrust of what follows applies mainly to the Sunni world and does not necessarily always apply to the other major branches of the faith, notably the Shi'a. Reading Brother Ian's text the reader will note his engagement with the scholarship of Louis Gardet (1904-Toulouse, 1986) in particular his work of high synthesis *L'Islam, religion et communauté*.[1] Gardet was one of the founding members of Ian's religious order The Little Brothers of Charles de Foucauld beginning in French North Africa Algeria in the interwar period. Ian was also deeply aware of the Dominican scholars of Cairo at The Dominican Institute for Oriental Studies or IDEO (Institut dominicain d'études orientales) and the Dominican Studium at Toulouse where the Little Brothers studied including Brother Ian. The late Maurice Borrmans evokes this context in his study, *Louis Gardet: Philosophe chrétien des cultures et témoin du dialogue islamo-chrétien (1904-1986)*.[2] Two previous papers by Brother Ian 'Christian Encounters with

1 Louis Gardet, *L'Islam, religion et communauté*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 2002.

2 Maurice Borrmans, *Louis Gardet: Philosophe chrétien des cultures et témoin du dialogue*

Islam in History and Modern Times: Some Theological Reflections' and 'Mary in the Qur'an and Islamic Tradition' have appeared in the *Yearbook* in 2015 and 2017-2018.]

The one fundamental profession of faith: the shahada

> There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God *(la ilah illa Allah wa Muhammad rasul Allah)*

Basic Belief

> O believers, believe in God and His messenger, and the Book he has sent down on His messenger and the Book he has sent down before. Whoso disbelieves in God and His angels, and his Books, and His messengers, and the Last Day, has surely gone astray into far error (Q 4:136; cf. 2:177 and 285).[3]

1 God. 'The Qur'an is one long preaching on God'[4]. God is, above all, LORD over all: Lord because Creator, and so Judge.

> Surely upon Us [God] rests the guidance, and to Us belong the Last and the First.

This sura (92) has just mentioned God's creation of man and woman, and continues with a 'warning' of the Fire of judgement. The accent is on God's Lordship over all beings and all actions and happenings.

> God is One, Unique: Say, He is God, One … Equal to Him, none (Q 112).

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islamo-chrétien (1904-1986), Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2010.

3 Quranic quotes are mainly after A J Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted. A Translation*, first published London, 1955.

4 Louis Gardet, *L'Islam*, p. 53.

> God is the All-merciful, the All-compassionate (Q 1 The *Fatiha*).

'The title "al-Rahman" centres the thought on the mysteries of God's "Mercy", the title "Allah" on His fathomless "Unicity".'[5] Another almost synonymous title is *'al-Haqq'*, the 'True and Real'.

2 God's prophets/messengers. God, in His mercy, sends prophets to 'announce' that God is Lord, to 'warn' of the Last Day, and to 'guide' in the right way. 'Say, I am only a warner: there is no god but God (Q 38:65).'

There have been, at intervals, many prophets, all with the same basic message: 'Say, I am not an innovation among the Messengers.' There are the 'Biblical' prophets from Adam to Jesus, especially Abraham, Moses, Mary and Jesus, and the prophets of other peoples, such as Salih and Hud, sent to Arabian peoples (Q 11:25 Noah; 11:50 Hud).

A simple prophet *(nabi)* simply announces, a prophet-messenger *(rasul)* summons a people, sometimes giving Scriptures (as Moses).

3 God's angels. They are spirits, obedient to God, whose function is to adore and especially to transmit God's messages. A named angel is *Jibril* (Gabriel), the angel of the 'descent' of God's Word:

> Say: 'Whoever is an enemy to Gabriel [is 'infaithful']—he that brought it down upon thy heart, by the leave of God, confirming what went before … (Q 2:97; cf. Q 26:193).

All revelation is *one,* and this text *confirms* Muhammad's message.

Iblis, Satan, is the great tempter, who refused to bow down before Adam, and then tempted Adam and his wife (Q 2:34):

> We said to the angels, 'Bow yourselves to Adam': they bowed, save Iblis, who waxed proud, and so became an unbeliever … Then Satan caused them to slip …

5 *Op. cit.*, p. 60.

The *jinns* are invisible 'elemental beings', some good some bad. Often cited (Q 55:14), Muhammad is sent both to humans and to them. We can compare them to elves and other similar beings. Muslims recognise the danger of exaggerating their importance.

4 The Resurrection and Future Life. The 'Day of Judgement' is the 'Day of Resurrection' *(yawm-al-din, yawm-al-qiyama):* it is a key, and frequent, subject of Qur'anic preaching. All human actions will be 'weighed' and their value 'seen' by one and all:

> Whoso has done an atom's weight of good will see it, whoso has done an atom's weight of evil will see it (Q 99:7).

Individual responsibility before the Just Judge alone counts, and 'vain is the intercession of intercessors' (Q 74:48). But Muhammad can intercede, with God's permission, for believers who have sinned to shorten their punishment (and the same is possible for other prophet-messengers for their communities). This is the Ash'arite view (*credo* of the fourth Hijra century) of the Qur'anic texts (Q 2:225; 20:109).

The joys of Paradise and the pains of Hell are those of 'created goods'—a garden with flowing water, the flames of fire—which are understood by most 'literally', but with the 'how' unknown.

There is a 'vision of God', granted 'intermittently' as a 'sighting', as the 'most elevated of pleasures' (al-Ash'ari). It is the 'supreme victory', the 'extra reward' (Q 9:72; 10:26; cf. Q 75:22).

5 The Qur'an. 'The Qur'an and the *Sunna* (the "beaten path/practice", "customs" of the Prophet), that is the religion *(din)*', so declared the great Ibn Hanbal (d. 241/855; a pious and traditional jurist, founder of a 'school' of much influence, both past and present).[6]

The Qur'an (*iqra',* recite) contains God's 'revelation' *(wahy):* a word-for-word dictation 'sent down' on the Prophet and proclaimed by him. It is the 'Book' *(al-kitab),* the 'Warning' *(al-dhikr),* and the 'Law' *(al-shar')*. It must be received as a whole.

6 *Op. cit.*, pp. 41, 177, 188, 193, 207, 243.

The *sunnat al-nabi* (customs, way of living and acting of the Prophet) completes the written Qur'an. It is composed of the 'Traditions' *(hadith,* pl. *ahadith)* of the Prophet, or stories of his acts, as handed down by a chain of transmitters *(isnad).*

These 'sayings and acts' of Muhammad enjoy, in the common opinion, a kind of extended prophetic charism of revelation, as a concrete complement and explicitation of the Qur'an.

6 The Divine Decree: qadar. A *hadith* mentions 'the Divine Decree for the good and the evil, the sweet and the sour', meaning that all, both nature and human acts, are 'decreed' by God. For the Qur'an states: 'God has created you and all that you make/do' (Q 37:96). But the Qur'an also supposes human choice and responsibility: 'Today each soul shall be recompensed for what it has earned' (Q 40:17).

For the elaboration of this difficult theme, one needs to take account of the Semitic approach, stressing God's All-mighty power and Sovereign will (cf. 'God hardened Pharaoh's heart', Ex 11:9-10), and of the various traditional replies to this question in Islam.

Its practical importance is to stress the believer's need of remembering that all is in God's hands, and so the need for a 'surrender of self to God' (for 'we are Muslims', *'nahnu muslimun"),* whatever life may bring in the way of bitter or sweet. And, paradoxically, the appeal to God's 'determining decree' concerning human acts is meant to, and does, stimulate effective action.

The philosophical question of human freedom, as the theological question of divine predestination, remain, for the Muslim as for the Christian: they can only be avoided by a 'weak' sense of God.

The five Pillars of Islam

A *hadith* declares:

> The Messenger of God has said: Islam is built on five [pillars]: the *shahada* (witness), the *salat* (ritual prayer), the *zakat* (legal almsgiving), the *saum* (fast of Ramadan), and the *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca).

1 The *shahada*: 'I bear witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God' . This is the human response to God's own self-witness: 'I indeed am God: there is no god but I' (Q 20:14). Faith (iman), connoting confidence in the security of the one confided in, is essentially an act of witness. The believer, mu'min, witnesses that God is mu'min, Faithful in Self-witnessing.

This act of witness, *shahada,* expresses the 'being' of *a Muslim*. Duly pronounced, with a sincere heart, it constitutes a person a Muslim. Constantly used in daily life, it is, with slight changes, a form of both ritual and personal prayer. At the hour of death, it is prayed with especial fervour. And, finally, it makes one a *shahid,* a true witness, as far as martyrdom if need be.

2 The *salat*. The 'ritual prayer' constitutes a 'liturgy'. It is made *five times a day,* preceded by ablutions, and consisting of short prayers of praise coupled with bows and prostrations, in the direction of Mecca and always in Arabic. It is a community act, in which all adults are summoned to participate, in the Mosque (only required, and by men only, on Fridays) or in any suitable place, made 'sacred' in some way, as by a mat.

Examples:

Rabbana laki 'l-hamd (Lord, to you be praise).

Allahu Akbar (God [alone] is great [the greatest])

The underlying motive is the 'adoration' of God, but also an 'intimate conversation' with God. This requires a 'pure intention' and a sense of 'recollection'. It is the first 'good action'.

The prayer of petition, *du'a,* is also recommended: 'I hear the request of the suppliant' (Q 2:182); and 'the prayer of the sufferer is heard, even of the unbeliever' (a *hadith)*. Similarly, all forms of non-ritual prayer are favoured, especially by the Sufis (followers of the mystical path in Islam).

3 The *zakat*. This 'prescribed almsgiving' *(zakat)* is accompanied by a 'voluntary almsgiving' *(sadaqa)*. The first is from the root *zka*, to purify (for almsgiving *'purifies'* the giver: Q 9:103). The second from the root *sdq,* evoking justice and solidarity (offerings are for the 'poor and needy, those who join [Islam], those [in combat] on God's way', and travellers': Q 9:60). These practices, from Abu Bakr (first caliph) onwards, have been progressively codified.

As the obligation of 'ritual prayer' encourages the virtues of piety and the reverential fear of God, so these forms of 'giving' are a stimulus to generosity and mutual aid in the 'community'.

3 (b) The *saum*. The fast of the month of Ramadan (the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar) originates in the Qur'an, and is explained in detail in the *ahadith* and legal schools (as with other 'laws').

> The month of Ramadan, wherein the Qur'an was sent down to be a guidance to the people, and it is a clear sign of Guidance and Salvation. So let those of you who are present at the month fast. And if any of you be sick, or on a journey, then [fast] on other days: God desires ease for you, not hardship … (Q 2:185)

The strict fast, from day-break to night-fall, involves abstention from food, drink and sexual relations, and now from smoking. But at night all is allowed: the atmosphere is one of joy.

It is at once an act of community witness, of the *umma* as such, and the expression of a personal intention of combating the passions and drawing closer to God.[7]

The final night, *laylat al-qadr,* the night of Destiny, is the culmination. It is truly 'a Blessed Night' (Q 44:3).

> Behold, We sent it [the Qur'an] down on the Night of Destiny. What shall teach thee what is the Night of Destiny? The Night of Destiny is better than a thousand months. In it angels and spirits descend, by leave of their Lord, at every command. Peace/Salvation *(salam)* it is, till the rising of dawn (Q 97).

On this Night the whole Qur'an is chanted in the Mosque, while on other days of Ramadan the birth of Husayn, grandson of the Prophet, the death of 'Ali, his son-in-law, the death of Khadija, his first wife, the battle of Badr and the taking of Mecca are celebrated.

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7 Al-Ghazali, d. 505/1111, *Ihya 'Ulum al-Din*. See Louis Gardet, *L'Islam,* pp. 258-267, 395-401, 403, 404.

4 The Hajj. The pilgrimage to Mecca, which should be performed at least once in one's life, is based on the final pilgrimage of the Prophet, in year 10 of the *Hijra*. Muhammad's words and acts are the 'prototype' of the prayers and rituals that believers are called to reproduce.

The pilgrimage commemorates the sacrifice of Abraham (Mount Moriah becomes Mount 'Arafat near Mecca), and the whole Qur'anic cycle of Abraham is evoked. The Ka'ba ('cube'), the 'black stone', in the centre of Mecca, is seen as a heavenly stone sent by God on the earth as a sign of the *mithaq*, the 'primordial pact', which recalls the 'natural religion' in the heart of all humans ('Am I not your Lord?'—'Yes, we witness [that You are]!'). The temple around this 'black stone' is said to have been built by Seth, and later rebuilt by Abraham and his son Ismael, the son of Hagar (Q 2:127). The pilgrimage effaces all sins, constantly reminds the pilgrim of the Lordship of the One God whose final prophet is Muhammad, and, if sincerely practised, leads to a renewal of faith and life. Above all, perhaps, it is a living sign of the strength and unity of all believers, as equal 'brothers' in the one *umma* (community).

As the 'great invocation' *(labbayka)* recalls:

> You call us, we are here, O God, we are here!
> We are here, there is none beside You, we are here!
> Praise and good deeds are Yours, and empire! There is none but You!

5 The *jihad*. The *jihad*, the 'effort/struggle/combat *on the road of God'* (it is essential to add this last phrase), is not a personal duty, but a *community obligation*. Its aim is to spread the reign of God's rule, which is in principle applicable to all human beings. The 'armed struggle', one form of *jihad,* is not chosen for itself!

> Fight in the way of God with those who fight with you, but aggress not: God loves not the aggressors … Prescribed for you is fighting, though it be hateful to you … But it may be better: God knows, you know not (Q 2:185 and 210).

Only, then, defensive wars are legitimate. But the *mujahid,* the combatant in the 'authorised' *jihad,* offers his life in sacrifice as the

supreme *shahid,* witness for God: his/her death is blessed above all, effaces all faults, and opens the doors of Paradise.

On returning from fighting, Muhammad said: 'The little *jihad* is over; now we have the great *jihad,* the combat of the soul'. And *jihad* can also apply to the struggle against poverty and injustice.

Qur'anic Prayers and Passages

1 'al-Fatiha' *(The Opening: Sura 1)*

> In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate
> Praise belongs to God, the Lord of all Being, the All-merciful, the All-compassionate, the Master of the Day of Doom.
> Thee only we serve; to Thee alone we pray for help.
> Guide us in the straight path,
> The path of those whom Thou has blessed, not of those against whom Thou art wrathful, nor of those who are astray.

2 The Verse of 'the Throne' (2:255)

> God—there is no god but He, the Living, the Everlasting.
> Slumber seizes Him not, neither sleep.
> To Him belongs all in heaven, all on earth.
> Who shall intercede with Him save by His leave?
> He knows what lies before them, what after them, they comprehend of His knowledge only what He wills.
> His throne comprises the heavens and the earth, and their preserving does not weary Him.
> He is the All-high, the All-glorious.

3 Sura 112

> In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate
> Say: 'He is God, One,

God, the Impenetrable.
He has not begotten, nor been begotten. Equal to Him, not one.

4 The first revelation (Sura 96)

Recite: In the Name of thy Lord who created, created Man of a blood-clot.
Recite: And thy Lord is the Most Generous, who taught by the Pen,
taught Man that he knew not.

5 Mary (Sura 19.24-25)

Nay, do not sorrow:
See, thy Lord has set below thee a rivulet. Shake also the palm-trunk, and there shall come tumbling upon thee dates fresh and ripe. Eat, therefore, and drink, and be comforted.

6 The Story (Sura 28:88

And call not upon another god with God; there is no god but He. All things perish, except His Face. His is the Judgment, and unto Him you shall be returned.]

7 Jesus (Sura 3.49)

I have come to you with a sign from your Lord:
I will create for you out of clay as the likeness of a bird, then I will breathe into it, and it will be a bird, by the leave of God.
I will also heal the blind and the leper,
and bring to life the dead, by the leave of God …
So fear you God, and obey you me.
Surely God is my Lord and your Lord;
so serve Him—this is the straight path'.

8 Muhammad (his childhood, Sura 93)

> In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate
> By the white forenoon and the brooding night!
> Thy Lord has neither forsaken thee nor hates thee,
> and the Last shall be better than the First.
> Thy Lord shall give thee, and thou shalt be satisfied.
> Did He not find thee an orphan, and shelter thee? Did He not find thee erring, and guide thee? Did He not find thee needy, and suffice thee?
> As for the orphan, do not oppress him,
> and as for the beggar, Bold him not;
> and as for thy Lord's blessing, declare it.

9 Good example (Sura 33:21)

> You have a good example in God's Messenger for whoever hopes for God and the Last Day, and remembers God oft.

10 Abraham (Sura 3:95)

> Say: 'God has spoken the truth, therefore follow the creed of Abraham, a man of pure faith and no idolater'.

11 Noah (Sura 11:45)

> Noah called to his son, who was standing apart, 'Embark with us, my son,
> and be thou not with the unbelievers!'
> He said, 'I will take refuge in a mountain … '
> And the waves came, and he was among the drowned.

12 Moses (Sura 28:38-40)

> Moses said to Pharaoh, 'My Lord [God] knows well who comes with guidance from Him and shall possess the Ultimate Abode; surely the evildoers will not prosper.' And Pharaoh said, 'Council, I know not that you have

> any god but me!.. I think Moses' god to be a liar!' …
> And he waxed proud, he and his hosts.
> Therefore We cast them all into the sea: the end of evildoers!

Islamic Origins

What is our 'view-point'? In a dialogue perspective, we can—and should, I think—try first to 'see', and 'enter into', the Muslim approach to the origins of Islam. We can then look at how the Christians of that period, directly affected by the first wave of Muslim expansion, 'experienced' these same events.

1 'Our magnificent Muslim monotheism'! I quote a youthful memory of John Paul II.[8]

Before Muhammad was the 'time of ignorance' *(jahiliyya)*. Then the 'One-and-only God' was unknown or mis-known, and the Arabic peoples had no 'written Word'. The Jews and the Christians had such a 'Word', but it had become 'altered and falsified'.

Muhammad, a respected caravan trader from the mainly trading city of Mecca, 'a sterile ('unsown') valley' (Q 14:37), married to a rich widow, Khadija, knew the ancient polytheist sanctuary of the Ka'ba, a centre of pilgrimage for the Arabian peoples.

At about the age of 40, Muhammad retired to a cave in the nearby mountain of *Hira*. There he 'experienced' a being (later recognised as the angel Gabriel) who said 'Recite' *(qar')*. Hence the Sura:

> Recite! In the name of thy Lord who created, created man from clots of blood. Recite! Thy Lord is the Most Generous, who taught by the pen, taught Man what he knew not.

Implied is the affirmation the Muhammad is 'God's messenger', called to channel and transmit a 'message' (*rasul Allah)* that will be 'written'. This message, beginning in its essentials now, is completed

8 *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, London, 1994, p. 92.

by flashes of further prophetic messages, and after being written piece by piece (on fragments of parchment, bark, papyrus) is later 'collected' without error in the existing Qur'an. This text written in Arabic, taken as a whole and in each of its verses, is in the literal sense *'Word of God',* of which Muhammad is a pure channel and transmitter.

2 'The Qur'an is the answer!' This is the slogan of the present Algerian FIS ('Islamic Revolutionary Front'). Taken in its basic meaning, it well represents the 'centre' of the Muslim religion and community; the two, religion-community, were for Muhammad, and remain for all Muslims, inseparable *(din wa-daula).*

While it progressively 'descended' upon the Prophet, the Word itself is 'one', seen as identified with the 'Word' as a divine attribute *(Kalima),* of which 'fragments' fall on Muhammad.

The message is simple and direct, as expressed at the beginning and near the end of the Qur'an:

> Praise belongs to God, the Lord of all Being, the All-merciful, All-compassionate, the Master of the Day of Judgement.
> Thee alone we serve, thee alone we pray for help … (Q 1)

> Say: 'He is God, One *(ahad),* God the Impenetrable *(samad),*
> not begotten and not begetting, equal to Him—none'. (Q 112)

It is at once an Announcement: 'Your God is One' (S 37:4), and a Warning: ' Woe to the deniers of the Day of Doom' *(yaum al-din:* S 83:10). But the accent is on the transcendent Presence of the All-mighty, All-knowing but All-merciful God. Hence the summons *(da'wa)* to be a true 'Muslim', one who 'surrenders oneself (totally and confidently)' to the One Living God, and so to practise 'Islam', the personal act of self-surrender and, consequently, the religion and community so constituted.

Note that the words: *Islam, Muslim* and *Salam* have the same Arabic verbal 'root' *slm,* 'handing (oneself) over'. The common translation 'submission' gives the wrong 'feeling' [we can compare, without

identifying them, the psalmist's word: 'Lord, into your hands I commit my spirit', Ps 38:5; cf. Jesus' last word: Lk 23:46].

3 A new era begins: the Hijra. Accepted as a prophet by some, the 'Companions', Muhammad, when opposing the cult of 'associated' deities in the Ka'ba, leaves for an oasis area to the north, later called 'Medina' ('The City [of the Prophet]'), where he has some 'Helpers'. This 'exodus' or 'emigration' is the *beginning* of the *new (and final) age of human history.*

Why? Because God's final Word to humanity is now beginning to form a human 'community' centred upon, and formed by, that 'Word'.

This Word, though given first to the Arabic peoples (Q 3:110), is from the first a universal message for all peoples.

> You are the best *umma* [community, nation] ever raised up for mankind, bidding to honour, forbidding dishonour [good/evil *(ma'ruf/munkar)*], believing in God. (Q 3:110.)

This key text indicates, implicitly, three things: Islam as a constituted religion *is* the community (umma); this *umma,* while beginning in Medina, is *universal;* and the task of this umma as a community is to bring about the *reign* of God's [Qur'anic] Law. This immense 'task', with its 'outward' thrust (a *Hijra*), demands an immense 'struggle', both effort and combat: effort in the community as a whole, combat against the opposing forces *(jihad).*

4 'Fight in the way of God … but aggress not' (Q 2:190). The *'jihad',* a community obligation of Islam, is the 'active' side of the 'exodus' movement. God's Word as forming God's community must expand to realise in the world God's purpose. And this involves effort and combat by the community as such.

For all human persons are created as 'Muslims', and this basic orientation must be 'summoned' to be actualised by the 'call' to believe in God's true and final message through Muhammad.

By the *mithaq* ('original pact'), the 'children of Adam' (all human beings) are asked, before their embodiment, 'Am I not your Lord?', and they reply, 'Yes, we testify' (Q 7:170). As a Muslim friend told me: 'A baby's first word, whatever their race, is 'A A A Allah!': a popular story to illustrate this Qur'anic truth.

Prophet-Messengers are sent at various times to various peoples to 'summon' them to belief in the One God and the Day of Judgement. Muhammad is the 'seal of the Prophets', the prophet whose message rectifies, completes and so finalises ('seals') the one Word of the One God. For God's Word, in essentials, has never varied.

This 'summons', if addressed to peoples having a Prophet-Messenger and Scriptures, allows them to continue to practice their religion, provided that they accept to pay tribute and to obey Muslim rule and laws (if taken with arms in hand, their condition will be more severe). They become *dhimmi,* 'protected' citizens. There can be, and often was, a reasonable 'convivium', with Christians and Jews having important posts in government service and in cultural fields, including inter-faith discussions at the caliph's court.

If, however, those 'summoned' to believe were ' idolaters', there should be, in principle, an obligation to convert to Islam. This prescription often remained theoretical, as in the case of the Mughal rule in India (sixteenth/seventeenth century).

In modern times, the armed *jihad* may be replaced by some form of 'missionary witness', or by community efforts to eliminate poverty or improve education. In any case, the pious Muslim will try to ' interiorise' the jihad as a moral and spiritual struggle, in line with the *hadith* (saying of Muhammad): 'We've returned from the little *jihad* to engage in the great *jihad,* the struggle of the soul'.

Can we explain the present-day so-called 'suicide-bombers'? It is important to understand their underlying *motivation*. While the jihad is not an extermination of enemy 'unbelievers' (as in the biblical 'holy war 'with its policy of the *korban* holocaust), the motives are those of a 'holy combat'. The combatant, *mujahid,* is the one who 'makes an effort' ('on the way of God', being understood), and, by that very fact, offers one' s life in sacrifice. Such a one is a privileged 'witness' *(shahid):* their death is, says the treatises, blessed above all, effacing all faults and opening the doors of Paradise. It is the perfection of the *shahada*.

But the authentic *jihad,* while historically involving armed combat, must both be proclaimed by the community and must respect the key distinction of defensive/offensive campaigns and in all cases the rules of war. Finally, its object is 'to establish the laws of God', not to exterminate the enemy.[9]

9 Gardet, *Islam*, p. 132-4.

5 'The earth is ours …' This striking formula sums up well the Muslim self-confidence. It expresses at once the physical fact of 'trampling the ground', and the sentiment that the 'the land so conquered' is the result of God' s gift to the Muslim community. The Muslim historian Baladhuri (d. 279/892), in his famous work *The Conquests of Countries,* recounts:[10]

> The general Iyad conquered Raqqa [northern Euphrates] … , and said to the people: 'The Land is ours, we have trampled it and conquered it'. But he confirmed their usage of the land on condition of payment of the land tax … He also imposed on the people of the *dhimma* (statute of protection) the capitation tax *(jizya* poll tax) … A peace treaty was made whose text is as follows. In the name of Allah the Compassionate the Merciful: Iyad son of Ghanm accords to the inhabitants of Raqqa safety for their persons, their property, their churches provided they pay the poll tax and commit no aggression, on condition of building no new places of worship, neither ringing bells nor holding processions of the Resurrection or the Cross. God is witness and God's witness is sufficient.

The Muslim self-image is built on the success, truly astonishing, of the 'Conquests', on the high level of culture rapidly achieved (Baghdad soon became the centre of the civilised world), and on the spread of the Islamic faith in the One All-ruling God.

Was not the 'success' of Islam a 'proof' of its God-given truth? And was not the failure of the Christian Empire (of Byzantium)1, as of the Persian Zoroastrians, a proof of their 'abrogation' by the victorious Muslims? For To God belongs the Command before and after, and on that day the believers shall rejoice in God's help. He gives victory to who He will, He is the Mighty One, the Merciful. (Q 30:2-4)

10 Al-Balādhurī, *The Origins of the Islamic State: translation with Annotations Geographic and Historic Notes of the Kitāb Futūḥ al-Buldān of al-Imâm abu-l'Abbâs Aḥmad ibn-Jâbir al-Balâdhuri*, trans. Philip Khuri Hitti. Columbia University Press, New York, 1916, pp. 271-72.

The Origins of Islam

1 The Hijra. Islam places its beginning in the 'emigration' of Muhammad and his 'companions' from his 'home' place of Mecca to the oasis of Yathrib, later called Medina ('City of the Prophet'; *Madinat al-Nabi).*

> And those who emigrated, and were expelled from their habitations, those who suffered hurt in My way, and fought and were slain—them I shall surely acquit of their evil deeds, and … admit them to gardens under which rivers flow (Q 3:190).

Notice the link between 'emigration' and 'struggling' (suffering, fighting), and the context of both 'in the way of God'. So:

> Whoso emigrates in the way of God will find in the earth many refuges and plenty; whoso goes forth from his house an emigrant to God and His Messenger, and then death overtakes him, his wage shall have fallen on God (Q 4:100).

And

> Those who believe, and have emigrated and struggled with their possessions and their selves in the way of God, and those who have given refuge and help [the 'Helpers' of Medina]—these are friends one of another (Q 8:70).

This 'emigration' involves poverty: the 'poor emigrants' emigrate 'even though poverty be their portion', for they are 'seeking bounty from God … and helping God and His Messenger' (S. 59:5).

And this 'emigration' is 'in the way of God': of the 'one God' who revealed Himself to Muhammad and, through him, to the community of 'believers'. Let us look at these two Suras, 96 and 112:

> Recite *(qar', iqra'):* In the Name of thy Lord who created, created Man of a blood-clot. Recite: And thy Lord is Most

> Generous, who taught by the Pen, taught Man what he knew not.
>
> Say: 'He is God, One *(ahad)*, God the Impenetrable *(samad),* who has not begotten, and has not been begotten, and equal to Him is not any one.' And as there is one God and one Messenger, so there is one 'community of believers'.
>
> 'You are the best community *[umma]* ever brought forth among men, ordering good and forbidding evil, and believing in God (Q 3:110)'.

Al-Islam, din wa daula: 'Islam is religion and 'city'. In Islam, there one community, at once and inseparably, religious and civil. Hence there is no 'Church', no religious community with its sacred ministers and rites, and, equally, there is no independent civil society, with its own civil laws and various civil customs. There is only the *ummat al-nabi,* the 'Community of the Prophet' (*umma* probably from *umm,* 'mother'), also called *al-jama'at al-mu'minin* (or *al-islamiyya*), the 'assembly or union of believers (or 'of Islam').

This community, *umma*, is the *dar al-islam*, the 'house [world] of Islam', as opposed to the *dar al-harb,* the 'house of war'. There can be the *dar al-sulh,* the 'house of reconciliation' with those who are monotheists without being Muslims. But the basic distinction is radical: between those have 'emigrated'—and who are called to 'struggle' to establish the reign of God's Justice as revealed in the Qur'an—and those who have not done so. For the true *umma* is also the *dar al-'adl*, the 'house of justice', where God's Laws become the human laws of the community.

2 The *umma*. This word, this concept has, from the beginning, and through the centuries of the *Hijra,* 'caused the Muslim heart to vibrate'.[11] Why? Because it expresses the ideas of 'togetherness' and 'brotherhood' founded upon the common faith-witness to the one God; *bismillah al-rahman al-Rahim:* 'In the Name of God the Compassionate, the Merciful' (cf. Sura 1).

11 Gardet, *L'Islam*, p. 274.

The foundation of this 'life together' is the Qur'anic 'recital', or 'preaching', of the One God as 'Lord' of all life, which becomes a 'code of life', both spiritual and civil: *one* 'preaching' and so *one* 'code' for all. Muhammad's message, when accepted, drew together the warring tribes of Arabia, the clan conflicts and the social classes. The Qur'an declares, 'All the believers are brothers' (S. 49:3). And later, a *hadith* (traditional saying) will say:

> Men are as equal among themselves as the teeth of the weaver's comb: no difference between White and Black, between Arab and non-Arab, except for the degree of their fear of God.[12]

All deliberate racism is a betrayal of Islam, for the 'call of Islam', the da'wa, received and accepted, renders all persons equal. This, justly, has always been a source of Muslim pride. We can add, with Louis Massignon, that Islam as a 'theocracy' is a 'lay and egalitarian theocracy': lay, because there is no priesthood, and egalitarian, because the 'caliph', at first elected, is the 'lieutenant' of God, who alone holds power, and all authority *(hukm)* must be accompanied by 'consultation' *(shura):* 'Consult them in the decision'(Q 3:159).

This *social* sense of togetherness and brotherhood finds its high-point in the social acts of the *five pillars:* the common witness to the oneness of God and His Messenger *(the shahada)*; the common ritual prayer (salat), especially on Fridays behind the *imam;* the legal alms *(zakat);* the fast of *Ramadan;* and the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, the famous *Hajj,* which is the clearest and highest expression of 'belonging' to the *umma*.

3 The 'pact'. The *Hijra* was accompanied by a 'brotherhood-pact' by which the 'emigrants', Muhammad and his companions, were 'allied' to their supporters in Medina, called the 'helpers', in a pledge called the 'pledge of war'. It was a 'mutual guarantee' of protection and support (*awliya* and *nasr),* traditional in Arabian tribal society, but with the radically new element of common faith in the One God who was invoked as the ultimate 'Guarantor' of the pact. In fact, it

12 Gardet, *Islam,* p. 276.

was a pact based on 'Islam': 'submission' to God, but also to the new umma founded on the Messenger's word and his leadership 'on the way of God'.[13]

4 Islam, *din*, *iman*. Islam is the religion *(din)* of the *muslims* (same verbal root as *islam*) who respond by faith *(iman)*.

> Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed my blessing upon you, and I have approved Islam for your religion (Q 5: 3) .

The word 'Islam' means self-committal (rather than 'submission'): first the act of total self-committal to God, in line with the preaching of Muhammad, and then the 'religion' so constituted, that is the practice of the precepts demanded by the Qur'an, which cover both the religious and the civil sphere. Religion *(din)* has not the general sense of the *link* between man and God, but rather the sense of *obligation to be discharged* (cf. the Qur'anic expression, *discharge the religion)*. For the verbal root *dana* indicates paying a debt, and so either the *obligation* to pay, or the *judgement* following the non-payment (cf. Qur'anic *Day of Judgment).*

Faith, *iman*, is, again, a specifically Islamic notion. The root *iman* evokes the twin ideas of 'entrusting oneself to' another, and the resulting 'security' (there is a typically Semitic holding-together of two opposing ideas, fragility and security). It is essentially an act of *witness.* The person of faith *(mu'min)* witnesses to God as made known. This human witness is the response to God' s witness to God. So the Qur'an calls God faithful : *Allah mu'min* (Q 59:23), which a well-known scholar, Jurjani, explains as meaning that God witnesses to His own truthfulness, to His own self:

> Indeed I am God, [there is] no god but I (Q 20:14).

And the tradition adds: faith continues even in Paradise.

This faith-witness is expressed above all in the shahada: *I witness that there is no god but God, and I witness that Muhammad is God's Messenger.*

13 Alfred-Louis de Prémare, *Les Fondations de l'Islam: entre écriture et l'histoire, l'univers historique*, Seuil, Paris, 2002, pp. 86-87, and n. 4.

As a point of comparison, Christian faith is a 'supernatural gift from God' by which we have 'a foretaste of the knowledge that will make us blessed in the life to come'.[14] For by faith we *share* in the knowledge by which God knows God's self : God's inner identity and plans are *shared with us*, for 'the invisible God … addresses us humans as God's friends' so that we may 'thus become sharers in the divine nature.'[15] There is a similar attitude of confident 'submission' and of 'willing assent', but the 'object' revealed is quite different: God's inscrutable and impenetrable Godhead, or God's personal mystery and plan. And so the nature and role of 'faith' is equally distinct: a God-given virtue of the intelligence destined to grow and deepen, or an act of sincere witness to the greatness of God the Creator and Judge, which gives dignity to man as a creature of 'mud and blood' (Q 96:2), and which fulfils his destiny as one called to believe (Q 7:172) as a child of Adam and who, by believing the final Messenger, receives the reward of those who have at least 'an atom of faith in the heart' (the minimum requirement to escape Hell and enter Heaven, according to a hadith).

5 The 'summons to believe': *al-da'wa*. One of the earliest *hadith* (transmitted by 'Umar, the second 'caliph') states:

> I [Muhammad] have received [from God] the order to combat men until they say, 'There is no god but Allah'. Whoever says, 'There is no god but Allah' will have his property and person safe.[16]

What is this' combat'? It is explained in the Qur'an, Sura 9:111:

> God has bought from the believers their selves and their possessions against the gift of Paradise; they fight in the way of God—they kill and are killed; that is a promise binding upon God …

The verb used is *jihad* or *qital:* what exactly is *meant?* The root *jihad* indicates ' effort ' or ' struggle' .The key concept is that the Community

14 Catechism of the Catholic Church 179 and 184, quoting Thomas Aquinas.
15 *Dei Verbum* 2, Pope Paul VI, 1965.
16 Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad* IV 8.9; quoted in Prémare, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

as such must always pursue the effort to extend on earth the 'rights of God and men' prescribed in the Qur'an, primarily the right of the one God to be witnessed to and adored. The 'struggle' is therefore 'in the way of God'. Of course, as Muhammad experienced, this struggle may well involve fighting, 'killing and being killed'. A proclamation *(da'wa)* of Islam is made. If the people are those with a prophet and scriptures (Jews and Christians), a pact may be made guaranteeing their cult, their institutions and their possessions, provided they pay tribute and accept the Muslim State. If they resist with arms, they can still keep their religion, but they become 'protected people' *(dhimmi),* allowed but with many restrictions. But if they are 'idolaters', conversion to Islam is in principle demanded (though in fact often not applied, as notably under the Moghuls in India).

This *jihad is a duty of the Community as such*. Only the Community leader can order it (by calling a general levy, for example), and it is only obligatory in one part of the *dar al-islam* at any one time. In the contemporary world, there has been a tendency to replace the armed struggle with 'missionary activity', or with a political 'campaign' to eradicate poverty or ignorance.

In no sense is *jihad* a war of extermination, such as the biblical *herem,* the destruction of every living person and animal (Jos 6:17) . Its aim is exactly the opposite: the establishment of God' s laws. If war is involved, many treatises detail the 'rules of war', which are applicable both in wars 'in the way of God' and in ordinary wars. Such rules are adapted to time and place, and therefore changeable.

The pious Muslim has always 'interiorized' the notion of *jihad,* in line with the *hadith* reporting that the Prophet on returning from a military expedition said:

> We have returned from the little *jihad,* now we must undertake the great *jihad,* the struggle of the soul.

And the Sufis have always emphasized the 'great *jihad*' as the interior struggle against the vices and passions (eg. Ghazali).[17]

17 See Emmanuel Pisani, 'Al-Ġazālī et le Jihād. Contrepoint à La Thèse D'Alfred Morabia', *Études Théologiques et Religieuses* 94.1 (2019), pp. 151-68.

6 Islam's self-image. Pride is probably the dominant note of the Muslim character. The Muslim is proud of his/her strong and simple faith in the one God and Lord of all, whose Name is constantly on their lips: *Bismillah, al-Hamdu l'illah, Insh'allah* … The Muslim feels affection for the human life of God' s final messenger: his love of children, his concern for his wives, his fairness to friend and foe, his energy, his occasional lapses soon repented. The Muslim has a special feeling for the *umma*, a feeling of belonging, a sense of brotherhood, a desire to participate in the common struggle. The Muslim delights in the beauty of the Qur'an, which conquered some of the first believers: to be a Muslim, it has been said, is to live within the 'sound of the Qur'anic recitation'. Perhaps above all, the Muslim is convinced that all other faiths are 'abrogated' with the coming of Muhammad and the 'descent' of the Holy Qur'an, God's eternal and final 'word'. In particular, Christianity has unjustly attacked Islam through the crusades, has occupied much of the world through colonial imperialism, and has led to the growth of secular humanism, destroying faith in God and moral values! Islam reigns, for 'God is great! Allah *akbhar*!

'Sergius/Bahira': fact or fiction?

Both Muslim and Christian 'apologists' refer to a Christian monk, named either Bahira or Sergius (or both), who would have met Muhammad as a young man and spoken with him. But the two stories, while having something in common, differ considerably in detail—and above all in intention!

1 The Muslim account. According to Ibn Ishaq, the first biographer of Muhammad (*Sirat Rasul Allah*, d. 150/767, which is preserved in Ibn Hisham and Tabari), Muhammad, while on a trading trip to Syria with his uncle Abu Talib, met the Christian monk Bahira at Busra in Syria. Relying on the description of the 'future prophet' which he found in his sacred books, the monk recognised 'the seal of prophethood between his shoulders in the very place described in his book', And the monk added: 'Take your nephew back to his country and guard him carefully against the Jews, for if they see him and know about him what I know, they will do him evil.'

Ibn Ishaq (and after him, the Prophet's biographers Ibn Hisham and al-Tabari) is here referring to two biblical passages taken as predicting the coming of Muhammad as a prophet, in fact as the final Prophet-Messenger. In Deuteronomy (18.15,18-19), Moses prophesies, 'The Lord my God will raise up a prophet like you to whom you must listen' [Moses has a key role in the Qur'an, and is taken as a 'model' by Muhammad]. And in John's gospel, Jesus announces 'the coming of the Paraclete, whom I will send' [The Greek *paracletos* is similar to the Greek *periclytos,* meaning the Praised, the Illustrious, in Arabic *Ahmed,* the name of Muhammad]. The Jews, with the Torah, and the Christians, with the Gospel, would either have 'manipulated' or 'misinterpreted' the texts, which originally foretold the coming of Muhammad. However Bahira, a Nestorian presumably, would have recognised their true meaning, and further would have received the gift from God of recognising the 'sign' of the final prophet and witnessing to this. In fact, he is seen as an example of one of those Christians warmly commended in the Qur'an (5:82-84):

> You will surely find that the nearest in friendship to the believers [the Muslims] are those who say, 'We are Christians'. For among them are priests and monks, and these people are not inflated with pride. When they hear what has been sent down on the Messenger, you see their eyes overflowing with tears because of the truth they recognise. They say, 'Our Lord, we believe, so write us down with the witnesses. Should we not believe in God and the Truth that has come to us, and be eager that our Lord should admit us [to Paradise] with the righteous people [Q 5: 82].

2 The Christian version of the history of 'Sergius'. The same monk is usually called 'Sergius' (while knowing his Muslim name 'Bahira'). But he is considered 'a heretic', and while it is admitted that he influenced Muhammad, he did so by passing on his 'heterodox' opinions [such is the opinion of the al-Hashimi/al-Kindi correspondence]. This was incorporated in a Christian apocalyptic vision of history in which Islamic rule, due to 'our sins' , would 'soon' be replaced by the victory of 'God's proper people'.

According to other versions, Sergius repented of his errors, explained what he understood to be the Nestorian doctrines to Muhammad in Mecca, and was responsible for the favourable judgement on Christians in the Qur'an, *Al-Ma'idah* 5:82, which is understood as referring to the Nestorians! But before Muhammad could become a Nestorian, the monk Sergius died, and his teaching was distorted by two learned Jews, 'Abd Allah ibn Salam and Ka'b al-Ahbar, who were responsible for the errors in the Qur'an![18]

3 What could be the truth, if any, in these two accounts? There are clear apologetic and polemical intentions on both sides, and the Christian 'finale' beats all records for the improbable! But the two Jews mentioned certainly existed (one converting to Islam in the lifetime of Muhammad, the other after his death). And there is no reason to doubt the existence of the Nestorian monk Bahira/Sergius, nor his contact with Muhammad.

We know that Muhammad accompanied his uncle on trading journeys to the 'Sham' (Syria and Palestine). And we know that he continued these commercial expeditions when married to Khadija, until around his fortieth year. He would clearly have met Christians during these travels. And he may have stayed, at times, in monasteries (as many Muslims did later, and as the Qur'anic verses quoted above may suggest). In any case, there were certainly Christians among his early 'companions', as well as Jews, some of whom were 'educated' persons (literate and learned). And there were certainly both Jews and Christians living in the Mecca-Medina area, and others who would visit Mecca for the great festivals.

There is, therefore, every possibility for Muhammad to have had contact with Jewish and Christian stories and beliefs. This could be implied by the verse in the Sura of the 'Bee', Q 16:103:

18 Sidney Griffith situates Eastern Christian thought on Muhammad in the encounter with Islam in 'The Prophet Muhammad, his scripture and his Message according to the Christian apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the first Abbasid century' in: *Arabic Christianity in the Monasteries of Ninth Century Palestine*, Variorum, London, 1992. Griffith offers a further wide ranging studies on Eastern Christian encounter with Islam in *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic: Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period*, Variorum, London, 2002 and his synthesis in 'Christians under Muslim rule' in T Noble and J Smith (eds), *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008, pp. 197-212.

> We know that they [the opponents] say, 'A mortal taught him'. But the man to whom they allude speaks a foreign tongue, while this is eloquent Arabic speech.

In fact, the key argument for the divine origin of the Qur'an is the following 'challenge' *(tahaddi)*:[19]

> And if you are in doubt on that We have sent down on Our servant, then bring a sura like it, and call your witnesses [your idols], apart from God, if what you say is true. (Q 2.23)

4 The real 'question' behind the debate. Whether or not 'Bahira' was a real person (probably he was), and whatever exactly he said to or about Muhammad (there could be elements of truth in both the Muslim and Christian versions), there were certainly other persons, both Christian and Jewish, with whom Muhammad was admitted by the Muslim tradition to have been in close contact. For example, after the Hijra the Muslims first followed the Jewish customs of praying towards Jerusalem and of the 'Ashura fast, and the custom of repeated prostrations is most probably of Syrian Christian origin. Again, 'in Mecca there Christian slaves, Christian merchants and even itinerant Christian monks.'[20] Perhaps also a certain Waraqa ibn Nawfal, a Christian who could read Hebrew, and probably Aramaean, and who is said to have confirmed Muhammad's first 'message' as linked with a vision of an angel.[21] And, of course, in Medina, Muhammad was confronted with a large Jewish community and with many Christians, to whom many references are made in the Qur'an.

The real underlying question, then, is the role of Muhammad as a prophet and the consequent nature of the Qur'an. If the Qur'an is 'untreated' (the Ash'arite, and most common, thesis), how can the points of contact with the Hebrew and Christian scriptures be explained? And if Muhammad had knowledge of Jewish and Christian stories, can he be called a true prophet? For the Muslim, the 'sign' which authenticates the Qur'an is its wonderful literary quality,

19 Louis Gardet, *L'Islam*, pp. 77, 254.
20 Jacques Jomier, *How to Understand Islam*, SCM, London, 2012, p. 5.
21 *Ibid*., p. 9.

which was claimed to be 'inimitable' (2:23). To which is added the claim that Muhammad was 'illiterate', and had not therefore read or studied other scriptures.

From the Christian point of view, we can make two remarks. 'As has often been said, Christianity is centred on a Person, Jesus; Islam is centred on a Book, the Qur'an.'[22] Both believe in God and God's Word: Muslims in the Word-made-Book, Christians in the Word-made-Flesh. Do not Christians refer to the Bible as 'the Word of God'? Yes, in a secondary sense: for, as St Augustine says,

> One and the same Word of God extends throughout Scripture … and resounds in the mouths of all the sacred writers, since He who was in the beginning God with God has no need of separate syllables—for He is not subject to time.[23]

> It is the *presence* of the Word-made-Flesh in scripture that enables us to all it, by extension, 'Word of God'. The point is echoed by St Bernard who speaks of the 'Word' of God, 'not a written and mute word, but incarnate and living'.[24] (CCC 108).

The text of the Qur'an (like every authentic prophetic text, but in a supreme degree) is 'revealed' in the precise sense that is as though dictated 'word for word' to the prophet, whose role is simply to repeat faithfully the message received. 'Islam does not make the distinction, as in Christianity, between scriptural inspiration and revelation.'[25] Both imply, in the Christian perspective, a co-operation between God and man, but in different degrees (the human agent can be an 'instrumental cause', speaking God's words as 'given' , or a 'second cause', acting on their own initiative, and so looking for and collecting information, recording it with this or intention and so on). Even in the case of 'revelation', we would take account of the 'colouration' given to God's message. So the Qur'an is regarded by the pious Muslim, in the

22 Gardet, *L'Islam*, p. 41.
23 CCC 102.
24 *Ibid.*, 118.
25 Gardet, *L'Islam*, p. 42.

words of Louis Massignon, 'as a supernatural dictation recorded by the inspired prophet.'

The Sufis: Islamic Mysticism

1 The nature and origins of Sufism. The Sufi doctrine and practice, *tasawwuf*, is probably called after the coarse woollen cloth, *suf*, which followers wore, as a sign of simplicity (in reaction to the wearing of silk and ornaments), and also maybe of purity, *safa*, in the search for God according to God's *word* given and *'recited'* in the Qur'an.

For Islam, God, *Unique and One,* speaks to human beings through his prophets, so that they may recognise and adore God, and be guided in the right way. But God does not reveal God's self, which remains 'hidden from all eyes', an inaccessible and impenetrable mystery.

The Sufi movement is born of 'an *intense longing* to enter into this *hidden mystery* of God and to live from it'.[26]

2 Is Sufism a part of 'mainline' Islam? The early Sufis saw themselves as following the example of Muhammad and some of his early companions, in their simplicity of life, in their night vigils, and in their continual remembrance of God. Their one aim was to *'interiorise'* the Qur'anic message.

> We indeed created man, and We know what his *soul whispers within* him, and We are *nearer* to him than the jugular vein. (Q 50:51)
>
> I am near to answer the call of the caller, when he calls to Me, so let them *respond to Me*. (Q 2:182)
>
> Has not the time arrived for the Believers that their hearts in all humility should engage in *remembrance of God* and of the Truth which has been revealed to them … (Q 57:16)

26 *Ibid*., p. 42.

> Call upon the Lord, *seeking his Face* … seek not the pomp and glitter of this life. (Q 18:28; cf. Q 26:88-89).

We can see here a 'call' to go beyond the revealed 'word', and to *discover,* in some way, the hidden 'Speaker' of that spoken word.

At first this 'journey' was accepted in the early Islamic community, but, as it developed, it became contested, so that it was both attacked as non-'Islamic' and so persecuted, and defended as an authentic element, as the 'spiritual Islam'. Ghazali, a vigorous defender of Sufism, is one of the most venerated doctors of Islam.[27] And the works of the great Sufis are regularly reprinted. But the official review *Al-Azhar* of the Grand Mosque of Cairo declared recently that 'there is no such thing as 'Muslim mysticism'.

3 The doctrine and practice of the Sufis. When looking at some concrete examples of Sufism, we need always to remember that we are in the context of Islam, with its basic affirmation *(the shahada):* 'I bear witness that there is no god but GOD, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of GOD' *[la ilah illa Allah wa Muhammad rasul Allah].*[28] As the Qur'an declares: 'Verily, I am GOD—there is no god but I: so serve Me' (Q 20:14). God is one, unique: we can 'witness' to God, and we can and must express this witness by obeying God's law. In fact this witness constitutes human identity, in the words of a contemporary Muslim philosopher, M Aziz Lahbabi. And, concretely, for the Muslim, we cannot separate the witness to the one God from the witness, although secondary, to Muhammad's role as his final Messenger. But God's 'mystery' *(ghayb)* remains *inaccessible,* as it was for Muhammad himself, who stopped at the threshold in his 'nocturnal ascension'. How, then will the Sufis proceed?

4 Hasan of Basra (74/692-110/728). Hasan is considered by some Sufis as their 'ancestor', Muhammad being the 'originator' of

27 See the studies by the Dominican and Catholic scholar based at the Institut dominicain d'études orientales (IDEO); Emmanuel Pisani, 'Abū Ḥāmid Al-Ġazālī (m. 1111)', *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* N 169.2 (2015), pp. 287-305; 'L'approche Humaniste d'Abū Ḥāmid Al-Ghazālī (m. 505/1111)', *Studia Islamica* 109.1 (2014), pp. 117-46; 'Le Christ Musulman du Radd Al-ǧamīl attribué à Al-Ġazālī', *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 136.3 (2014), pp. 453-68.

28 J Jomier, *How to Understand Islam*, p. 52.

their spiritual line. Hasan was known for following and propagating the 'science of the heart' *('ilm al-qulub*): '*Converse with your hearts* and maintain them, for they are quick to rust …' ; 'Ah! If only I could find life in your hearts, but I see nothing that loves'.

What should be in the heart? 'Sorrow' and 'piety'. 'Continuous sorrow *(huzn)* in this world makes a pious act fertile.' And 'a grain of true piety is better than a thousand bushels of prayer *(salat)* and fasting *(ruzah)*' (a Persian term) [considered here as 'ritual acts'].

This 'piety', so treasured, is inspired by a 'passionate desire *('ishq)*'. A key saying *(hadith qudsi)* of Hasan is this:

> As soon as My dear servant's first care becomes the remembrance of Me, I make him find happiness in remembering Me. And when I have made him find happiness and joy in remembering Me, he desires Me and I desire him *('ashiqani wa 'ashiqtuhu)*. And when he *desires Me and I desire him, I raise the veils* between him and Me, and I become a cluster of knowable things *(ma'alima)* before his eyes.
> Such men do not forget Me, when others forget Me. Their word is the word of the prophets, and they are the true saints. When I wish to inflict a calamity upon the inhabitants of the earth, they are the ones I remember in time to *spare the earth* that calamity.

There is the human effort (negatively) of rejecting what is evil and unnecessary in this world, and (positively) of 'remembering God' as always present; and then there will follow the God-given joy in God, and the God-given desire for God. Notice that this 'desire', better 'desiring' (it is a verb), is *mutual*, and that the *initiative* is in God's hands. This leads to a certain *'unveiling'*: a kind of 'knowing' of the hidden 'mystery'. And this is accompanied, as a natural consequence, by an intense *concern for the world* with all its sufferings and calamities.

In practice, how is this 'done'? Another 'saying' tells us:

> These servants' hearts are contrite, their pains do not trouble them, their needs are light, their souls continent. They endure with patience, like a long rest, the few days

> that are left them. They pass the night in *silent attentiveness*, awake for prayer; tears run down their cheeks, and they implore the Lord, 'Rabbuna! Rabbuna! …'

There is something here, perhaps, that recalls the attitude of Mary Magdalen: her 'night vigil and waiting' at the tomb of Jesus. But the key difference is equally striking: Mary cries *'Rabbuni'* to the risen Jesus. And yet, is not the *same Lord* addressed?[29]

5 Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya of Basra (97/713-185/801). Traditional accounts relate how Rabi'a was born of poor parents, and on their death, in a time of famine, she was sold into slavery. Her mistress, however, seeing her night vigils, released her. For a time she was a flute player, but she repented of this, and went to live in a cell in seclusion.

> Rabi'a used to pray all night, only dozing lightly before dawn, when she rose, saying in deep fear, 'O soul, how much longer this sleeping and waking? Soon you will sleep so much until the trumpet call of the Resurrection calls you to awake'

And a visitor to Rabi'a in her old age records: 'When I entered Rabi'a's presence, she was an aged woman of eighty years, brittle as a dried skin; it seemed that if you touched her, she would crumble to pieces, In her house were only a reed mat, a clothes stand, a pitcher of water and a sheep's wool skin beside her bed and place of prayer … She never vaunted herself, never asked for anything.'

The great theme of Rabi'a is the *love of God (mahabbat Allah)*. In what sense? The following story tells us: One day Rabi'a went out into the streets of Basra, carrying a pitcher of water in one hand and a flaming torch in the other. When asked where she was going, she answered, 'I am going to drown the flames of Hell and to set fire to Paradise, so that God may be adored and loved only *for Himself* and not

29 Abū Saidd b. Abi 'l-Hasan Yasār al-Basrī, often referred to as Hasan of Basra (Hasan al-Basrī, 642-15 October 728) for short, or reverentially as Imam Hasan al-Basrī in Sunni Islam, was an early Muslim preacher, ascetic, theologian, exegete, scholar, judge, and mystic. Louis Gardet, *L'Islam*, pp. 231, 235, 236.

for any rewards.' She sang, over and over again, the praises of *disinterested love (hubb)*, love for the other as such, and not only *'ishq*, passionate desire. For example:

> As for the love of desire, it is that I am occupied with thinking of Thee alone, to the exclusion of all other.
> And as to the love of which Thou art worthy, ah! may the veils fall, and may I see Thee.[30]

Rabi'a was questioned about Love *(mahabbat)*. 'Love', she said, 'has emanated from pre-eternity to post-eternity and found no-one competent to imbibe even a draught of its sherbet. When at last Love reached the Truth, the maxim alone remained: *'He loves them and they love Him'* (Q 5:54)'.

> A company of famous men visited Rabi'a. She asked them, 'Why do you worship God?' 'Seven levels of Hell exist, through which all must pass in shock and terror', one replied, Another said, 'There are sublime abodes of beauty in Paradise where peace and happiness are guaranteed'. Rabi'a responded, 'Only a bad slave is devoted to his master through fear of punishment or desire for reward.' 'Then what is the cause of your worship of God?', they inquired; 'Have you no covetousness [desire]?' *'The neighbour first, then his house',* replied Rabi'a, quoting an Arabic proverb. 'Is it not sufficient that we are commanded to worship Him? Should we cease to adore Him were Heaven and Hell non-existent? Should He not rather be adored beyond all mediation?'

One more story. To test Rabi'a's piety, a group of visitors came in and argued: 'Every single virtue has been showered on the heads of men: the Girdle of Noble Beneficence, the Crown of Chivalry are only given to men. Besides, no woman has received the gift of Prophecy. So what is all your vaunting?' 'True, true,' replied Rabi'a with equanimity, 'but vanity, egotism, selfish conceit and I am your Lord Most High have never risen from a woman's bosom, nor has any woman ever been an abuser of children.'[31]

30 Gardet, *L'Islam*, pp. 231, 235, 239.
31 *Ibid*.

6 Abu Yazid Bistami (d.264/877), according to popular accounts was born in the north-east of Persia, the grandson of a Zoroastrian. While travelling far and wide as a pilgrim and preacher, he ended his days as a 'sheikh' (head of a Sufi brotherhood) in his home town of Bistam. In his ardent research for God as 'One', he progressively 'annihilated' both his 'images' of God and of God' s attributes and his 'awareness' of his own mental processes, to find the reality of the absolute 'One'.

> As a child, hearing that the Qur'an says, *Be thankful to Me, and* to *thy parents,* he said to his mother.'I cannot be manager in two houses at once … Either ask for me from God, so that I may be entirely yours, or apprentice me to God so that I may dwell wholly with Him.' (Although his mother says, 'My son, I resign you to God', Taifur (his nickname) later recalled, 'In pleasing my mother, I attained all that I sought in my many acts of self-discipline and service').

Later:

> Once Abu Yazid was going along the road with a heavily laden camel. 'Poor little camel', someone cried, 'it's really cruel.' Abu Yazid, hearing these words repeated over and over, at last replied, 'Young man, it' s not the camel that lifts the load.' The man looked, and saw that the load was actually a full span above the camel' s back, and that the camel felt no weight at all. 'Glory be to God!', he exclaimed. 'If I conceal from you the true facts about myself, you reproach me' said Abu Yazid, . 'If I disclose them to you, you cannot bear the facts. What can I do?

A comment. This is not a 'miracle' story. It's told to show that God is the cause of every act: the one and only real cause. So the camel is not 'bearing' the weight, *only God 'bears' the weight* on the camel's back. Further, Abu Yazid is hinting that the same is true of his own actions: God is their real and only cause.

And further still, as we shall see, God is the only real cause of 'myself': 'I gazed upon God … Then from God I gazed upon myself

…, and I saw my being by God's light … I said, "Lord God, what is this?" He said, "All that I am, and none other than I." *He annihilated me from my own being*, and made me to be everlasting through His own Everlastingness. He disclosed to me His own Selfhood, unjostled by my own existence'.

Another quote from the same passage: 'When I reached Unicity—and that was the first moment I gazed upon Unity—for many years I ran in that valley on the feet of understanding, till I became a bird whose body was of Oneness, whose wings were of Everlastingness.'

And he concludes: 'I reached the level of Not-being, passing from the "No" into the "No" by the "No" …How? I shook off my "I", as a snake sloughs off its skin, and seeing my essence, *I was 'Him_…*'

In these states of ecstasy, Bistami: would exclaim, 'Glory to me, how great is *my glory*.' Returning to himself, reflecting on his experience, he was alarmed and unsatisfied, retaining his ardent faith in the One God of Islam until the end.[32]

7 Al-Husayn Ibn Mansur al-Hallaj (244/858-309/922). Born near Bayda in Fars (Iran), Hallaj, was known as the 'carder of consciences' (*hallaj* means '[cotton] carder'). Again, accounts of his life record that he lived for a time in Baghdad, went several times to Mecca as a pilgrim and as a hermit, travelled as a missionary as far as the border of India, and returned to Baghdad where he preached the love of God. There he was imprisoned, tried a first time and exposed on a pillory; then imprisoned again, and after long judicial debates, he was condemned to death, scourged, exposed on the gallows and executed.

The two central accusations were a 'saying': 'I [am] the Truth' (whose normal meaning is 'My "I" is God'); and, it was said, he wished to 'destroy' the pilgrimage to Mecca (in fact he said, 'One should turn seven times round the Ka'ba of one's heart'.)

Clearly Hallaj had no intention of wishing to abolish the Meccan pilgrimage, a key 'pillar' of Islam. His intention was to seek the *interiorisation* of this religious practice (much as the Hebrew prophets sought to interiorise the external ritual sacrifices).

Did he proclaim, *ana l'Haqq* ('I [am] the Truth')? Yes; he did not deny it. While using a formula like those of Bistami, his intention was to insist that God is not only the object of our thoughts and desires,

32 Gardet, *L'Islam*, pp. 231, 235, 265.

but also, in a way, the *subject*. This could imply an annihilation of the self in God (as Bistami), or an identification with God (which would be blasphemy) . But it could also mean that God draws us *from within* to *'union'* with God's self.

Did this create a problem in the Muslim community? Yes; it did according the Doctors of the Word and of the Law. Their opposition centred on the question of the *'love of God'*, and this was the basic reason for the condemnation of Hallaj.

Hallaj claimed that the *'essence of the Essence of God is Love'*, and he used to proclaim this, to all and sundry, in the markets of Baghdad. While using the word *'ishq*, literally 'desire', he employed it to signify not only the human desire for God, not just an attribute of God, but God's very *'essence'* (*'ishq dhati,* 'essential desire').

Here are some passages from his poems.

> I embraced with all my being all Thy Love, O my Holiness! You have revealed yourself to me so that it seems that it is You who are in me … There's no more separation from You, Since I've known that nearness and separation are all one for You. For me, if I'm alone, your absence remains a being together, for Love seeks and finds … [33]

And

> Night of Separation, long or short, what matters! If only it is Him, my Friend, whom I hope for and remember. Here am I, accepting, if You wish, my death—dear Death-giver, what Your choice chooses, I too choose.[34]

For Hallaj had a deep sense of compassion of suffering with and for his people, of offering prayer and sacrifice of self for his community, including for those who condemned and killed him.

> I weep before You the souls whose 'witness' [himself] is leaving for the 'Beyond' of the Eternal Witness.

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33 After *Le Dîwân. d'Al-Hallaj. Traduit et présenté par Louis Massignon*, Documents Spirituels N° 10, Éditions des Cahiers du Sud, Paris, 1955, *Muqatta'at* no. 30, p. 66.
34 *Op. cit.*, *Muqatta'at* no. 23, p. 59-60.

> I weep before You for the hearts so long have been watered by the oceans of Wisdom.
> I weep before You for the divine Word which so long has vanished and whose memory in minds is as nothing.[35]

He recited this rhythmical prayer on the eve of his passion, and he added: 'Kill me, my faithful companions, for in my death is my life.'

What, exactly, is the root cause of this bitter conflict? It is the basic affirmation of Islam: God is One, the Inaccessible and the Impenetrable. God reveals his subsistent 'word', which 'descends' on His Prophets, but He does not reveal Himself in His intimate Life. So God is the object of adoration, not of love. For love supposes a certain 'concordance': a similarity, and there is no similarity between the Creator and creatures. But the Sufis, Hallaj in particular, desire to go *beyond* their explicit faith, with the urge to *enter* the hidden, and forbidden, mystery of God. Muhammad, in his famous 'night-ascension' *(isra')* to the throne of God, passes through the levels of Hell and of Paradise, but stops at the Lote-Tree which marks the 'limit', at 'two bow-shots' from the hidden Essence *(lahut)* (Sura 53:9,13). Hence the horror at Hallaj's reference to God's Essence as 'Love', and, perhaps worse, as a Love that could be *'shared'* (participated) with His creatures. Hallaj's martyrdom remains, says Louis Massignon in his *Passion of al-Hallaj,* 'a question constantly placed at the heart of the Muslim community'.[36]

8 Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 672/12730). Rumi is the most famous Persian mystical poet. He lived in a time long after the first flowering of Sufism and its maturity in the second and third centuries of the Hijra era. This was followed by a period of *conscious reflection* on the lived experience of the early Sufis, by way of collections of texts (by

35 *Op. cit.*, *Qasida* vi, pp. 24-26.

36 Louis Gardet, *L'Islam*, pp. 72, 75, 92, 232, 234-237, 239, 240, 242, 243, 413. Louis Massignon, *La passion d'al-Hosayn-Ibn-Mansour al-Hallaj, martyr mystique de l'Islam, exécuté à Bagdad le 26 mars 922: étude d'histoire religieuse*, Geuthner, Paris, 1922. (English Translation: *The passion of al-Hallāj: mystic and martyr of Islam*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1982); *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane*, Geuthner Paris, 1922 (English Translation: *Essay on the origins of the technical language of Islamic mysticism*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1997).

Farid al-Din 'Attar, for example), of detailed technical analysis (as in the *Risala* of Qushayri or the *Qut al-Qulub* ('Food for hearts') of Abu Talib al-Makki), and of learned study (as by the great Ghazali, philosopher and mystic). Such works are still studied and commented. And Ghazali, known to the Latin Middle ages, is read both by Muslims and Christians (his *Apology,* trans. W M Watt, is easy to read and truly delightful).[37]

Rumi's great work is his *Mathnavi,* a veritable *'poetic summa'* of some 47,000 verses, a masterpiece of Persian literature. Full of fables, symbols, allegories, this work sings the *intoxication* of the love for God. The worldview is one *beyond* constituted religions. The mystical state is achieved through *transcendental imagination*, which goes beyond the 'cage' of the body and the 'concepts' of reason to be *'indwelt and moved'* by Another.

> Day and night, one sleeps to the things of the world, like
> A pen in the hands of God;
> The person who does not see the hand, attributes the writing to
> The pen, to its own movement.

Rumi's world has three levels: the senses, which grasp the world around us and the literal sense of the revealed word (the Ka'ba or *Jesus on the donkey*); the creative imagination, which seizes the inner meaning of things and revelations (the Ka'ba of the heart, the *Jesus* within); and the ultimate reality, 'formless', like the ocean or the sky but without the images. So, for Rumi, the Godhead is present in each human being as an Image is present in a mirror. And the place of this Presence is the 'theophanic imagination' (Henri Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi*). It would be better to say, I think, '*through* the theophanic imagination', for the 'image' as a 'form' must be passed beyond, to the ultimate 'formless'. So Rumi declares:

> Hold on to the skirt of His grace, for suddenly He will
> Flee; but do not draw Him as an arrow, for he will flee from the bow.
> What images does He play at, what tricks contrive! If
> He is present in form, He will flee, He Will flee by way

37 W Montgomery Watt, *The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali*, London, 1952.

of the spirit.
Seek Him in the sky, and He shines from the water like the moon's reflection; jump in the water and He flees up to heaven.
Call Him from the placeless and He points you to the place;
seek Him in the place, and *He flees to the placeless*.[38]

Commenting, Corbin justly adds: 'The Incarnation, on the other hand, is hypostatic union: it occurs *in the flesh*.'[39]

9 The 'Brotherhoods' *(turuq).* From before the sixth century of the Hijra, the Sufis circles of the early period became organised into more formal 'brotherhoods'. Some continued the great traditions of the past, others adopted a variety of beliefs and practices under local influences and from sources outside Islam.

We can note two factors: the role of the spiritual leader, the *shaykh* or *murabit* (sheikh or marabout), and the practice of *dhikr,* remembrance of the Most High through the repetition of a rhythmical formula, for example: *la ilah illa Allah* (there is no God but God), or more simply: *subhan Allah* (praise to the [transcendent] God).

These repetitions are sometimes accompanied by rhythmical bodily movements (as with the Mevlevis). Of course, we find such practices in Christianity (the Jesus prayer) and in other religions, and the early Sufis practiced the *dhikr,* together with *fikr* (reflective meditation). But they never, as happened later, considered this 'technique' as causing automatically, of itself, union with God. As Hallaj affirmed: 'It is *You, my 'Seducer*', it is *not my dhikr* which has seduced me': And later, the philosopher-mystic Ghazali recognised that the 'spiritual states' achieved by the regular practice of *dhikr* need to be 'surrendered' to God's Mercy which alone could lead to the 'beyond' of authentic union. Louis Gardet comments: 'This shows clearly how a 'spiritual technique' can become dangerous, as soon as we make use of it as though we had found a *substitute* for the "gift of God"' (cf. Jn 4:10).

38 Gardet, *L'Islam*, pp. 238, 309.
39 *Op. cit.*, pp. 161, 225, 233, 238, 245.

10 A few comments and questions. It is good to conclude with a brief summary of the typical Muslim ways towards mystical experience, and a comparison with our own Christian experience, that of the great mystics such as St John of the Cross—and that of ourselves!

As we have seen, the Muslim search for the living God is centred on the Qur'anic message that God is One, the Unique, and there is no other. There are, then, historically, two approaches towards union with God: the way of 'witness' and 'love', that of Hasan al-Basra and Rabi'a, culminating in Hallaj; and the way of '*identity*' and '*nescience*' (non-knowledge), that of Bistami. Either God 'witnesses' to Himself in the heart of the Sufi, and the Sufi becomes 'one' with God through a '*shared love*', while remaining distinct. Or God is seen as '*absorbing*' the mystic into His own 'oneness' of being, which is experienced as the '*annihilation*' of all thought processes and ultimately of the thinking self as substantially different.

As Christians, are we not in a different spiritual world? We approach God *through his Son,* Jesus, and we are called to *share* the life of God *in his Spirit,* as his sons and *daughters.* In the words of St Augustine of Hippo, we are '*sons in the Son'*. As St Paul had already said, we are *'no longer servants(slaves) but sons and so 'heirs"* (Gal 4:4-6). 'Heirs' with Jesus of all *God's 'riches'*. St Paul constantly reminds us that, therefore, we have '*free* access' *(parrhesia)*: God in his intimate personal life is 'open' to us, and we should have 'confidence', even 'boldness', in approaching God (as the CCC 2778 so aptly says: 'this characteristically Christian expression implies childlike simplicity, filial trust, joyous assurance, humble boldness, the certainty of being loved'). And we have been given, and know, the 'way': Jesus in person in his life, death and risen life, that we share through baptism and the eucharist.

Our prayer, then, is it not simply our personal and conscious *response to* this 'gift of God' (Jn 4:4:10)? In Luke's gospel, we see Jesus praying to God as 'Father' ('Abbe' as Mark tells us: 14:36), and we hear Jesus *handing over* this prayer of his, his own unique prayer, to us his disciples, so that with Him we too *can enter* into this familiar, childlike, intimacy with the 'Lord of heaven and earth' (Lk 10:21-22). By the exercise of faith, hope and love, gifts of the Holy Spirit at work within us, we are enabled to *share the knowledge, desire and love that is ' in' God,* and so to become, as St Peter says, 'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Peter 1:4). Mysticism is simply the normal development of our basic Christian

being. Sadly, it is not, we have to admit, the 'normal', in the sense of 'most common', development! Perhaps because, as St Peter says, we have not allowed the 'divine power' to enable us to 'escape from the corruption that is in the world' (2 Peter 1:3) . Or, as St Paul repeatedly says, we must 'die with Christ' in order to share his 'risen *life'* and so 'walk in the Spirit' (cf. Gal 5:24-25 and 6:15-16).

We can find traces of both ways, that of union as identity in oneness, and that of union through and in love, in the Christian tradition, just as we can find examples of efforts towards union through creative imagination beyond all concrete religions. Brother Charles, clearly I think, adopted spontaneously the simple way of 'Jesus-Love': to pray *with Jesus* and in *the Spirit of Love.* It was both his way of prayer, and his basic attitude at all times.

Can we, then, learn from the Muslim Sufis? Certainly. We can admire their total 'gift-of-self' to the one living God, and their heartfelt compassion towards their fellow Muslims, the poor in particular, and indeed towards all people. We can marvel at their 'piety': their constant and whole-hearted concentration on the 'one God', the source of all mercy and all good.

Should we aim to 'copy' this or that in their attitudes or practices? Personally, I think not. Their particular way of seeking God is formed by their specific belief, which while agreeing with us on belief in the one true and living God, is distinctly different in the 'way' that Gods communicates Himself to us, and so in the 'way' that we are called to return to Him. But we can, as did Brother Charles, try to 'emulate each other spiritually', as 'brothers and sisters' together on our pilgrim way to the one God of us all.

'Spiritual emulation' is not a term used by Brother Charles, but, to my mind, he clearly exhibits this intention. For example, having received a visit one day from two Muslim 'marabouts', who arrived leading donkeys and walking on foot, he wrote to his 'bishop': 'We travel on camels, they with donkeys. We ride, they walk. Are we not disciples of Jesus, the poor man, while they are disciples of Muhammad? Their conduct makes me reflect … Are they not teaching us!

Similarly, while Muslims pray *'Allahu akbar'* five times a day (and more if they wish), are we not challenged to be regular in prayer, particularly in the prayer of gratuitous praise? But should we not, in line with our 'gift from God', pray *'Our Father in heaven …' ?* Brother

Charles says that he was tempted to use Muslim prayers (and at first did so), but that he later considered it inappropriate.

A final comment! As St Augustine said: 'our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee'. Is not this true of all human beings? Are not *all* 'illuminated' by the Word (cf. Jn 1:9).[40]

How did the non-Muslims experience the Muslim onquests?

1 The basic facts. Following the death of Muhammad in 10 H/632, there was an astonishing burst of Muslim expansion. After the brief recovery of power in Arabia under Abu Bakr, the ten-year caliphate of 'Umar, 634-644, saw the conquest of Byzantine Syria and Egypt, and of Persian Iraq and the west of Persia itself, with raids going further east and west. By the end of the first Hijra century (732 AD), the little state of Medina had become the Arabic-Muslim Empire stretching from the south of Gaul to the Indus, and two centuries later Baghdad was the centre of the civilised world (following the progressive decline of the once glorious Constantinople, centre of the Christian East), only matched by the glory of Cordoba, the ' pearl of the universe'.

In 661 the Umayyad hereditary dynasty held the caliphate in Damascus. It was essentially an Arabic Empire with Byzantine influences. After a century, in 750, the 'Abbasid caliphs ruled in Baghdad for some 500 years until 1258 in a context of Iranian culture. Salah al-Din defeated the 'Latin' crusaders from the 'west' (1095-1270), but the Mongols from the 'east' destroyed Baghdad (1258), and the caliphate re-formed in Egypt.

2 The shock. The ancient and cultivated Empires of the Byzantine Orthodox Christians (to the west) and of the Zoroastrian rulers of

40 Ariana Patey, 'The Life and Thought of Charles de Foucauld: A Christian Eremitical Vocation to Islam and His Contribution to the Understanding of Muslim-Christian Relations within the Catholic Tradition', Heythrop College, University of London, 2012; A Patey, 'The Legacy of Charles de Foucauld', *Living Stones Yearbook*, 2014, pp. 187-199; Ian Latham, 'Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916): Silent witness of Jesus in the face of Islam', in *Catholics in Interreligious Dialogue: Studies in Monasticism, Spirituality and Theology*, A O'Mahony and Peter Bowe OSB (eds), London, 2006, pp. 47-70.

the Persian Empire (to the east) were overwhelmed by the invasion of 'Saracen' armies from central Arabia.

We have the letters and sermons of Sophronius (c. 560-11 March 638), a monk from Damascus, who was elected Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem in 633.[41]

> May God give strength to our Emperors to break the pride of all the Barbarians, especially the Saracens, who because of our sins have suddenly drawn up against us, with much pillage and cruelty … [letter to the Pope of Rome and the Patriarch of Constantinople].

> 'Abomination of desolation', the Saracens … sack the towns, destroy the fields, burn the villages, ruin the holy monasteries, defeat the Roman armies, win victory after victory … and boast of conquering the entire world imitating their leader … [sermon].

The conquerors are called variously: 'Saracens' (tent-dwellers); 'Ishmaelites' (sons of Ishmael), Abraham's son by the servant Hagar who was driven out into the desert; 'Hagarenes' (sons of Hagar), who failed to receive the 'promise' made to Abraham's 'heir' and become the desert nomads. These terms, repeated by Christian writers, indicate clearly how they saw and interpreted their conquerors. They were seen to be pillaging nomads, and were understood in the light of biblical references to Ishmael son of Hagar (Gn 16-17; Gal 4:21-31). There is no use of the term 'muslim', with its resonance of 'salaam' , peace [perhaps the Muslims themselves only used the word later].

While Sophronius was Orthodox and wrote in Greek, Thomas the Presbyter wrote in Syriac and was a Jacobite (monophysite), from northern Iraq (near Harran); his brother, the monk Simeon, was killed during the 'conquest', and he himself was an eye-witness.

> In the year 945, Interdiction VII, Friday 4 Shebat [4 February 634], at 9 hours, took place the combat of

41 See Cardinal Christoph von Schönborn OP, *Sophrone de Jérusalem: vie monastique et confession dogmatique*, Beauchesne, Paris, 1972.

> the Romans [Byzantines] and the Tayaye [Arabs] of Mahomet, 12 miles to the east of Gaza, in Palestine. The Romans fled, abandoning the governor, who was killed by the Tayaye. Some 4,00 poor Palestinian peasants were killed, Christians, Jews and Samaritans. The Tayaye devastated the whole region. And in the year 947 … , the Tayaye advanced across all of Syria. They went down to the territory of the Persians and conquered it. They went up the mountain of Marde. They killed many monks at Qedar and Bnata. There died Simeon brother of Thomas the Presbyter [Marde, Qedar and Bnata are in the plateau between the upper Tigris and Euphrates (now in SE Turkey), between Edessa and Nisibe, Christian centres of learning and monastic life].

What was the effect? The Christians and Jews who submitted were left in peace and allowed to worship, but with restrictions:

> And 'Iyad gave them the following written text: In the name of Allah the Rahman the merciful. 'Iyad b. Ghanm granted to the inhabitants of Raqqa … safety for their persons, their goods and their churches … , on condition that they pay the poll-tax and do not commit any aggression, nor build new places for worship, nor celebrate in public the feasts of the Resurrection or the Cross, nor ring church-bells.
> For, said the general 'Iyad, 'the land is ours, we have trampled it and won it.'[42]

Tamim al-Dari, an Arab Christian from Palestine who became a Muslim through meeting Muhammad, and who as a merchant supplied him with a fine horse and also with wine (until it was forbidden!), and a chair (a novelty from Sham/Syria-Palestine!), and oil for the lamps in the mosque, describes how the poll-tax worked:

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42 Al-Balādhurī, *op. cit.*, pp. 271-2.

> Our religion *(din)* arrived to displace the night', as the Prophet said. And I know from my own family. Those who adhered to Islam *(aslama)* obtained goods, honour and glory. But those who persevered in infidelity *(kufr)* knew humiliation *(dhull),* a state of inferiority *(saghar)* and the poll-tax *(jizya).*

An Armenian writer, Sebeos, writing about 660 and claiming to learn from eye-witnesses, recounts the fall of a city, Dwin, in 640:

> The army of the lshmaelites devastated the region … , pillaged the country, took much booty and captives … We learnt from 'Arabian' prisoners who were present at these events ['Arabian' here refers to the region around Nisibe].

Jacob of Edessa (c. 640-5 June 708) who was one of the most distinguished of Syriac Christian writers is another witness. Monk in Qenneshre [Qinnasrin] and Alexandria, then Jacobite bishop of Edessa (al-Ruha), and Syrian scholar, he records that 'Mahomet went as a merchant in Palestine and Arabaya (Nisibe region) and Phoenicia'. And this, we know from Islamic sources, was true of all the leaders of the conquests to the 'North'.[43]

3 The Dome of the Rock. Under the caliph 'Abd-al-Malik (685-705) was constructed the famous Muslim building in Jerusalem (on the site of the ancient Jewish Temple). On the south face of the octagonal support, we find the inscription:

> In the name of Allah the Merciful, the Compassionate—there is no god but Allah who has no associate. Say: Allah One, Allah the Compact. He has not engendered nor been engendered, and equal to Him not one.

Another text on the Dome reads:

43 A-L de Prémare, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

> It is Him [God] who has sent his Messenger with the direction and religion of the truth [Islam] to be victorious over all religions, against the 'associators'.

This is a public affirmation in Jewish and Christian territory of the 'victory' of Islam, as *the one true religion*, which has superseded and, more, abrogated all other religions. We find this formula, with slight variations, on coins of 697, and on other monuments built soon after, for example the mosque of 'Umar II in Bosra (Syria) of 707.

And, of course, this text constitutes the Sura 112 of the Qur'an. The two keys words are 'One' *(ahad)* and 'Compact' (or 'everlasting', *samad)*. The affirmation-negation 'One-not one' is the expression of the decisive comparison of the Creator with every creature.[44] The word *samad* indicates 'without a crack', 'impenetrable', and so 'compact', 'full','with no empty space'.[45] It completes the definition of the divine Unity, implying that nothing can be 'added' within God or to God (so excluding, at first, the pagan deities of Mecca, and then the Christian mystery of the Trinity).

Postscript

The emergence of the Muslim tradition occurred over time marked by encounter and confrontation with other religious traditions. The primary other for Islam was the Jewish tradition where their relations determined much of their religious character and ritual difference. However, the above reflection offers a personal overview of the main features of the Muslim tradition and how at points it engaged with Christianity in history and religious exchange. These excursions into the religion of Islam is based upon the life and experience of Charles de Foucauld and the scholarship of Louis Gardet—an appreciation of Muslim spirituality as studied and reflected upon for a wider Christian audience. These reflections continue to be influenced by

44 Gardet, *L'Islam*, pp. 55-57.

45 [E Lane, *Lexicon*, renders *samad* as 'Lord; because one repairs, betakes himself, or has recourse to him in exigences; … without whom no affair is accomplished; … Being that continues forever; … solid; not hollow … .' Eds]

the committed scholarship by Brother Louis Gardet inspired by a vocation of Charles de Foucauld (+1916):[46]

46 Louis Gardet et le P. Anawati, préface de Louis Massignon, *Introduction à la théologie musulmane, essai de théologie comparée*, Vrin, Paris, 1948; Louis Gardet, *La pensée religieuse d'Avicenne*, Vrin, Paris, 1951; Louis Gardet, *Expériences mystiques en terres non chrétiennes*, Alsatia, Paris, 1953; Louis Gardet, *La cité musulmane, vie sociale et politique*, Vrin, Paris, 1954; le P. Jacques Jomier, Louis Gardet et le P. Anawati, *L'Islam, par Youakim Moubarac*, Collège théologique dominicain, Saint-Alban-Leysse (Savoie), 1956; Louis Gardet, *Connaître l'islam*, Fayard, Paris, 1958; Georges Chehata Anawati et Louis Gardet, *Mystique musulmane: Aspects et tendances, expériences et techniques*, Librairie philosophique, J Vrin, Paris, *Études musulmanes*, 1976; Louis Gardet, *L'islam. Religion, et communauté*, Desclée De Brouwer, Paris, 1967; Louis Gardet, *Dieu et la destinée de l'homme*, J Vrin, Paris, 1967 ('Les grands problèmes de la théologie musulmane'); Louis Gardet, *Les hommes de l'islam, approche des mentalités*, Hachette, Paris, 1977; Mohammed Arkoun et Louis Gardet, *L'Islam: hier, demain*, Buchet-Chastel, Paris, 1978.

JEAN-MOHAMMED ABD-EL-JALIL

Sister Agnes Wilkins OSB

1 Introduction

Jean-Mohammed Abd-el-Jalil, before his conversion, lived Islam fervently from the inside without any thought of leaving it behind. He had a completely Sunni Muslim background and education in his native city of Fès, Morocco and only really knew Christianity as a foreigner in a foreign land. It was as a young man in France, where he had been sent on a government bursary to study at the Sorbonne in Paris, that he discovered Christianity. From the start it was a faith in exile and this, over and above the difficulties a Muslim may experience converting to Christianity in any circumstances, was undoubtedly a great strain for him, since he never ceased to love his native land and did not take French citizenship. His permanent exile was not lessened by the fact that he did not marry but went on to become a celibate Franciscan priest. Perhaps due to these circumstances his life was always characterised by a certain fragility, which will become evident as we explore his life story.

2 The Sources

Mohammed Abd-el-Jalil (he only prefixed his name with 'Jean' when he became a Franciscan) was born in Morocco in 1904 and died in France in 1979. For any knowledge of his personal life between these two dates we are indebted to the painstaking work of Françoise Jacquin, and Maurice Borrmans (a Missionary of Africa, formerly 'White Fathers') who at the time of writing was resident at the Pontifical Institute for the Study of Arabic and Islam, in Rome), who have gathered together his letters and

published them in two volumes, which is particularly valuable since Jean-Mohammed himself spoke little about his personal life.[1] Maurice Borrmans has also compiled a small book containing the one short piece of autobiography written by Jean-Mohammed himself, as well as various recollections of people who knew him, and a few letters to himself.[2] He has also written a book about Jean-Mohammed along with three others whom he considers to be prophets of the dialogue of Christianity with Islam, namely, Louis Massignon, Louis Gardet, and Georges Anawati.[3] The main source for the first half of this chapter is the correspondence of Jean-Mohammed with his friend and fellow convert Paul Mehmet Mulla -Zadé, which allows us to follow the process of his conversion, both his struggles along the way and the joy of discovery. For the second half of the chapter which deals with his life as a Franciscan, his academic career, the spiritual crisis which culminated in a potentially disastrous trip back to Morocco, and the final fifteen years of his life when he suffered greatly from the effects of cancer of the tongue, the following will be used: the books he wrote to facilitate the dialogue of non-Muslims with Islam; these are *L'Islam et Nous* (1938), and *Aspects intérieurs de l'Islam* (1949) some notes and lectures from the *Institut catholique,* the Catholic University of Paris, where he taught from 1936-1964; and finally his brief return to Morocco as recorded by a friend, Alfred-Louis de Prémare.[4]

3 Life as a young man in Morocco and France

Morocco, where Mohammed was born in 1904, was at that time a French protectorate. His forbears came originally from Andalusia, but

1 *Mulla-Zadé et Abd-el-Jalil: Deux frères en conversion Du Coran à Jésus, Correspondance 1927-1957, rassemblée, introduite et annotée par Maurice Borrmans*, Les Editions du Cerf, Paris, 2009 (henceforth *Mulla-Zadé)*, and *Massignon/Abd-el-Jalil; Parrain et filleul, 1926-1962, Correspondance rassemblée et annotée par Françoise Jacquin, Préface par Maurice Borrmans*, Les Editions du Cerf, Paris, 2007.

2 *Jean-Mohammed Abd-el-Jalil, Témoin du Coran et de l'Evangile,* Les Editions du Cerf; Les Editions franciscaines, Paris, 2004 (henceforth *Témoin*).

3 Maurice Borrmans, *Prophètes du dialogue Islamo-chrétien; Louis Massignon, Jean-Mohammed Abd-el-Jalil, Louis Gardet, Georges C Anawati,* Les Editions du Cerf, Paris, 2009 (henceforth *Prophètes*).

4 *Le Retour de Jean-Mohammed Abdeljalil au Maroc*, in *En Hommage au Père Jacques Jomier op*, Editions du Cerf, Paris, 2002, pp. 321-341.

had been in Morocco for four centuries.[5] Mohammed's father, to whom he was greatly attached, has been described as the *calife* of the *pacha* of Fèz, which suggests a high ranking government official.[6] Mohammed himself only says that he came from a 'poor but honourable family', which was nevertheless very pious and observed strictly the Muslim faith and all its customs.[7] This included making the pilgrimage to Mecca with his parents in 1913/14 when he would be only nine years old.[8] In a letter to his friend Mulla-Zadé we discover further that his father had more than ten children, only three of whom survived; these being himself, his younger brother Omar, and a younger sister.

3.1 A painful father/son relationship

His father had a particular affection for Mohammed, perhaps especially because as a child he had been seriously ill for some years and had to have several operations (he does not say what for).[9] He also said that his father had a particular fondness for him since, in contrast to his younger brother, he was strongly inclined to piety. There is no doubt that this affection was reciprocated, in the strong bonds that Mohammed had for all his family. And as he was drawn to Christianity these did not lessen, but by his own admission grew stronger, which made the final break all the more painful.[10] This strengthening of affection could be attributed to the fact that he knew he was always going to be separated from his family, since he was going to live in a permanent state of exile in France (he never assumed French citizenship). Arguably it could also be partly attributed to a growing sense of the reality of being 'in Christ', that phrase which is scattered throughout St Paul's epistles; it is a Christian reality which can deepen not only family bonds, but those with every human being, and indeed the whole of creation.[11] Whatever

5 *Prophètes* p. 54.

6 This is a recollection of someone who knew him well in France, Mlle Faguer, as confided to Maurice Borrmans, *Témoin,* p. 59.

7 From his own mini-biography, *Témoignage d'un tard-venu à l'Eglise*. See *Témoin* p. 18.

8 *Prophètes*, p. 55

9 *Mulla-Zadé*, p. 30, in a letter dated 22 October 1927.

10 *Ibid*.

11 To give one example among many; 'the peace of God which is beyond our understanding will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.' (Philippians

the reason, however, there is no doubt that the grief his conversion caused his father was a lifelong sorrow which he frequently refers to in his letters to Mulla-Zadé. In one letter, for instance, he confesses that 'some of his letters have broken my heart, and many times I have had to rush to church to offer to the Lord, with my tears, the fragile pieces of my heart.'[12] It is in this context that he makes a very rare negative reference to Muslims, that is, that 'my father and the majority of Moroccan Muslims do not know the meaning of tolerance.'[13] Unfortunately his fellow Moroccan students in Paris made matters worse by reporting to his family that he was 'mad'. Mohammed's father wrote demanding that his son should return home, but he steadfastly refused. However he admitted to Mulla-Zadé that this particular letter caused him acute distress; a distress heightened by the fact that his father was seemingly inconsolable and wrote to him every day.[14] He wrote to his father henceforth every Sunday, but as time went by he received no reply. His brother Omar, who respected his decision to convert to Christianity and kept in contact all his life, wrote to him to confirm the rupture with their father.[15]

3.2 Further education in Morocco and France

Ironically it was his beloved father who unwittingly created the circumstances that would lead to his son's conversion to Christianity. It happened as follows: when Mohammed's early formation in a 'Koran school' was completed, his father did not want him, or Omar, to go to a secular school, so he sent them to the Franciscan École Charles de Foucauld in Rabat, on condition that the Muslim identity of the boys be respected.[16] It was the headmaster, Père Clément Etienne, who became

4:7 NJB). For a full discussion see James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle,* T &T Clark, Edinburgh, 1998, Ch.15 *Participation in Christ*, pp. 390-412.

12 *Mulla-Zadé*, p. 114, letter dated 30 April 1928.

13 *Ibid.,* p. 49, in a letter dated 15 November, 1927.

14 *Ibid.,* p. 107, in a letter dated 18 April, 1928.

15 *Ibid.,* p. 123, in a letter dated 6 June 1928, to Mulla-Zadé reporting the contents of the letter from his brother.

16 The details of his schooling are confused; this is information given to Maurice Borrmans by Roger Devouge, whose family found lodgings for Mohammed, see *Témoin p55.* However the Franciscan headmaster of this school, Père Clément Etienne, wrote in a letter to Mulla-Zadé that he only lodged there, at his own

something of a confidant and father figure to Mohammed, and was to be instrumental in having him and Omar sent to France for further study. Noticing how gifted Mohammed in particular was, he brought him to the attention of Marshall Lyautey,[17] insisting that he should be encouraged towards higher studies in Paris. In due course this came about, the two brothers being sent together. Omar did in fact become the Minister of Agriculture in the newly independent Morocco, but for Mohammad the future did not unfold at all as planned. It was Père Clément, the headmaster, who found accommodation for Mohammed in France through the kind instrumentality of good friends of his who may well have been influential in the matter of the young student's change of faith.[18] In any case they certainly gave him a sympathetic environment. In his own short biographical sketch Mohammed recounts how he was given a government grant by special recommendation of Lyautey, the Resident General, which obliged him to obtain a degree in the Arabic language for the purpose of teaching, although he was personally more drawn to philosophy. He was not content, however, with only the courses at the Sorbonne and managed to obtain special permission to study at the Institut Catholique, the Catholic University of Paris, despite the fact that he was not only a strict Muslim, but hostile to all forms of Christianity; though he was honest enough to admit that he understood it only superficially.[19] He has given more information about this (obviously not meant for the public domain) which is that his purpose was to study Christianity in its own citadel in order to find new arguments to combat it.[20] We learn moreover from Père Clément, who knew his family, that he was a disciple of a certain Sheikh Mohammed Abdou (1849-1905), and along with many other young Moroccans, a follower of the Wahhabite movement.[21]

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request, but he daily attended the state school, the *lycée Gouroud*. See Mulla-Zadé, p. 259.

17 Hubert Lyautey (1854-1934), the first Resident General in Morocco, which office he held 1912-1925.

18 This information was given to Maurice Borrmans by Roger Devouge, son of Mme Devouge who became Mohammed's godmother at his baptism. He recalls how his father (now dead) and Père Clément had been wartime friends. It was they who found him accommodation; they were all staunch Catholics. See *Témoin*, p. 56.

19 *Ibid.,* p. 22.

20 Information given to some young Franciscans after his entry into the Order. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

21 In a letter to Mulla-Zadé, in *Mulla-Zadé* p. 260. A footnote further explains that it was the fundamentalist teaching of Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al Wahhâb (1703-1791), who inspired this movement, which became the official doctrine of the Kingdom

What then, brought about so great a change in him? A staunch Muslim and a highly gifted student, he was among a few élite young men whom Lyautey had in mind to take over the reins of a future independent Moroccan government, and Mohammed was seemingly happy with this prospect. In fact he confided to the daughter of his landlady in Paris that he was destined to be the private tutor of the future sultan's children.[22] He was to be in the Faguer household, living as a member of the family, for two years, so they got to know him quite well. Mlle Marguerite Faguer has recalled how he said at table one day, 'I know of a few Christians who have become Muslims, but for a Muslim to convert to Christianity - that is impossible.'[23] It must have been a considerable shock to his system when this very thing happened in his own life not long afterwards.

4 Conversion

There are some significant encounters on Jean-Mohammed's journey to conversion; these being in particular his instructors at the *Institut Catholique,* Louis Massignon and Jacques Maritain before his conversion, and Paul Mehmet Mulla-Zadé as he progressed towards baptism. Their various roles in the process will become clear as Jean-Mohammed's story unfolds.

Mohammed's conversion to all appearances was very sudden and unexpected, but in fact it could be argued that there was a certain amount of preparation, or at the very least favourable circumstances that helped facilitate so great a change. He had of course been following courses in Christian theology etc. at the *Institut Catholique*, and among his teachers were the famous Louis Massignon and the philosopher Jacques Maritain, both of whom attracted him greatly. Massignon in fact was to become his godfather at his baptism, but his relationship with Maritain unfortunately came under some strain.[24] It was not

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of Saudi Arabia.

22 This was Mlle Marguerite Faguer, the daughter of Mme Faguer. See *Témoin*, p. 58.

23 *Ibid*.

24 This was because he tried to influence him too much, first by making him read the whole of Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, which he could not get on with, then by trying to persuade him to become a Dominican or a Jesuit; Orders which had a more 'intellectual' bent than the Franciscans. Jean-Mohammed dwells at

these eminent professors, however, who persuaded him to convert to Christianity, though it is likely that along with the sympathetic hosts with whom he was lodging, they played their part. He himself compares his experience to St Paul, and that in two ways: like Paul he had been very hostile in his attitude to Christianity; and his conversion experience, like Paul's, had a certain 'out of the blue' character, though in both cases whether this was actually the case can be questioned.[25] The possible influence of Mohammed's Catholic hosts, his studies and the Catholic professors who taught him have been mentioned; in a comparable way St Paul was living a disciplined, God-orientated life as a Pharisee, and may well have been influenced by the martyr Stephen's Christ-like death by stoning, at which he was reputedly present.[26]

The actual event of Mohammed's conversion unfolded as follows: on Christmas night in 1926 he attended the traditional Catholic midnight mass with Mlle Marguerite Faguer and her mother, his landlady Mme Faguer. Marguerite has described what happened as '*foudroyante*' (like lightning), adding that his decision to become a Christian was taken very quickly with no hesitation or doubt.[27] It would appear that at some stage during the mass the celebrant led a procession to the crib where symbolically the congregation would pay homage to the newly born infant Jesus, as they brought to mind the actual event of his birth in Bethlehem two thousand years ago. Mohammed was observed spontaneously to join this procession.[28] As has been noted, he was always very reserved about his spiritual life, but he did speak about this event a little, as the anniversary approached, in a letter to his friend and confidant Paul Mehmet Mulla-Zadé. His decision was taken, he wrote, 'at the feet of the Infant God, with tears and a full heart.' He felt strongly that this Child wanted him for himself, and he was, he said, 'full of joy and loved him passionately.'[29] This was obviously some kind of mystical experience which could not adequately be put into words, but it is striking to note that the God

length on other difficulties in his mini-biography. However he retained a lifelong affection for him, *Témoin*, pp. 20-33.

25 His admission of hostility has been recalled by young Franciscans to whom he spoke, as likewise his comparing himself with St Paul, *Témoin*, p. 66.

26 Acts of the Apostles 7:55-60.

27 *Témoin*, p. 59.

28 *Ibid.,* p. 63.

29 In a letter dated 23 December 1928, *Mulla-Zadé*, p. 147.

he perceived as calling him appeared under the form of a small and vulnerable child in extremely humble circumstances; a total contrast to the God he would have been familiar with as a Muslim. In Islam God is always utterly transcendent, great, with no admixture of anything human.[30] This 'sudden' conversion, as already noted, may not have been as sudden as it appeared, though undoubtedly it *was* so on the level of his emotions. His response was also immediate; his heart was totally committed and faith was instantly awakened on a deep level. However it took some time for his reason to catch up with his faith, and in this too a comparison can be made with St Paul who after his conversion experience, as a result of which his life had been turned upside down, spent three years in Arabia.[31] He needed time to absorb and come to terms with what had happened, and it is highly likely that it was during this 'desert experience' that his great theological themes were germinating. Mohammed's life too was undergoing a profound change, and he could not discard overnight the firmly held convictions which as a Muslim had been part of him from early childhood. He struggled with what Islam had taught him to believe without question and it was some time before he was ready to take the definitive step of asking for baptism in the Catholic Church. We are fortunate therefore to have available the volume of his correspondence with the Turkish convert Paul Mehmet Mulla-Zadé which allows us to trace something of his transition from Islam to Christianity.

4.1 The Abd-el-Jalil/Mulla-Zadé correspondence

Paul-Mehmet Mulla-Zadé, born in Ottomon Crete in 1881, was twenty three years older than Mohammed and already a priest and professor of Islamology in Rome when they were put in contact with each other. This happened through the instrumentality of Père Clément, Mohammed's former headmaster in Rabat. The exchange of letters which ensued is deep and rich; a record not only of two men from Islam facing together the doctrinal difficulties of Christianity and the problems of living in a totally new culture far from their families, but

30 See, for instance, Kenneth Cragg's commentary on the muezzin's daily call to prayer, in *The Call of the Minaret,* Ch. 2, 'God, there is none save he', pp. 29-60.

31 See his letter to the Galatians Ch.1:16-18.

also of a very engaging spiritual friendship between two manifestly holy men. Interesting as this may be, the present study must confine itself specifically to the exchanges about Mohammed's conversion to Christianity. Maurice Borrmans claims in his Introduction that by their own admission the conversion of these men owed nothing to proselytism, but that in both cases it was solely the result of a long intellectual search. The latter part of this assertion is undoubtedly substantially true; the intellectual search was very earnest, but as has been noted above, there may well have been a little subtle 'proselytising' going on at the *Institut Catholique.* Christianity is after all, intrinsically missionary in character as is Islam. It is remarkable to note also in this correspondence that there is barely any trace of depreciative language about Islam; they both cared too much about what they had left behind and longed to bridge the great gulf of misunderstanding between Christianity and Islam. They had a deep love for all Muslims, but especially for their families whom they knew endured much pain on their behalf.

4.1.1 Doctrinal struggles; Muhammad and Jesus etc.

Mohammed's first letter is not written until 1 October 1927, some ten months after his conversion experience at midnight mass the previous Christmas. During that time he was at the *Institut Catholique* and no doubt reading avidly. He began his letter by stating that before January of that year (1927) he thought no Muslim would have cause to change his religion, but now his Muslim convictions were shaken. He was seriously studying the Catholic religion, he said, beginning with the relevant sacred texts.[32] This seemed to him the obvious place to start his enquiry, which immediately confronted him with the Muslim doctrine of *tahrif*; the 'falsification' of their Scriptures by Jews and Christians. For Mohammed, the immediate issue was that he believed, rightly, that he could not accept anything about Christianity if the Scriptures were not reliable. He gives to Mulla-Zadé a list of several books he has been reading around this

32 Perhaps in today's ecumenical climate one needs to make an apology for Mohammed's constant use of the term 'Catholic religion': it needs to be born in mind that he was writing in predominantly Catholic France, well before the ecumenical movement, especially evident at Vatican II, had really manifested itself.

subject.[33] He comes to the conclusion that there is no falsification, as he understands the matter. But what, he asks, of the Qur'anic assertions to the contrary, and those of the most competent authorities in the Muslim world? He goes on to say, moreover, that as a result of his reading he has reached the conclusion that Christianity is superior to the religion he has been practising, chiefly on account of the superior morality and sanctity of its founder. Neither he, nor Mulla-Zadé in his response, spell out what they mean by this, refusing to make facile comparisons between Muhammad and Jesus. Their respect for Islam means they retain their respect for its Prophet. Jean-Mohammed amply demonstrates this by keeping the Prophet's name when he enters the religious life. However, there is a fundamental difference between the two 'founders' which must strike any convert from Islam. Muhammad was undoubtedly a religious man, but he was also a politician and a warrior, occupations not always conducive to holiness. Jesus, according to Christianity, is the Word of God, and everything he did or said on earth, as recorded in the Gospels, manifested the divine - and hence, perhaps, in their eyes, his greater holiness. Moreover, according to Christian doctrine, he willingly laid down his life for the redemption of mankind, which could only be described as 'heroic sanctity' according to the manner of his death. Christianity stands or falls by the person and actions of Jesus Christ, whereas for Islam the Book takes precedence over the man Muhammad. And how, he continues, if one admits the existence of a personal God endowed with every perfection of Wisdom, Goodness and Justice, could this same God permit an error as beautiful as Catholicism?[34]However, he is still full of doubt, feeling the need to explain the truth of these matters to himself as well as to demonstrate it to others.[35] And he can only do this if he comes to believe in the God-Man which for a Muslim,

33 These include several books by Auguste Joseph Alphonse Gratry (1805-1872), priest, theologian and professor at the Sorbonne, especially *Les Sources* (1868), and *La Philosophie du Credo,*(1861), and by Léonce de Grandmaison (1868-1927), Jesuit and theologian, *La Religion Personelle* (1927), and by Eugène Duplessy (1860-1939), canon of the Chapter of Notre Dame, Paris, *Apologétique* (1924).

34 Many might think they have cause to question such as assertion about Catholicism today. But see, for instance, Karl Rahner's essay, 'The Church of Sinners', *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 6, pp. 253-269, in which he makes the point that sin is at the heart of the Church's meaning, and she is made up of sinners from top to bottom. In the end she is compared most beautifully to the woman taken in adultery in John's gospel (Ch. 8:1-11).

35 *Mulla-Zadé*, p. 16.

he says, is very difficult. He cites two reasons for his own difficulty, namely his profoundly Muslim education, and the weight of fourteen centuries of Muslim tradition pulling him away from this truth. He asks his correspondent if he can throw any light on his path. In the same context he asks Mulla-Zadé to explain to him what he can of the Trinity. As a doctrine he claims it does not shock or offend him; he simply cannot honestly say that he believes in it.[36] Finally he broaches the topic of the mission of Muhammad. He believes him to be sincere, neither an imposter nor subject to hallucinations. What does Mulla-Zadé think? To conclude this first letter he reports that the Scriptures are the backbone of his daily reading. He is most impressed, he says, by St Paul whom he compares to Muhammad, except that Paul has 'more than he has' being, as he sees it, a colossus of faith and charity in action, and one of the strongest arguments in favour of Catholicism.[37]

4.1.2 Hesitations and doubts

In this first letter Jean-Mohammed has touched on many of the major doctrinal differences between Christianity and Islam; 'falsification' of the Scriptures, the divine/human status of Jesus Christ, the prophethood of Muhammad and his standing in relation to Christianity, and at first it may seem surprising that Mulla-Zadé does not give an immediate response to these urgent questions. He attempts, rather, to meet Mohammed where he is on a more human and spiritual level. Later in a second letter Mohammed confesses to being strongly attached to the 'transcendence' of Christianity and its founder, but at the same time he feels on the edge of a fearful precipice between two worlds, and he is afraid of going forward with too much haste. He has, he says, embarked on a search which engages his whole being, having committed himself to what he knows will be long years of anguish and suffering. (He could not know how true this would prove to be, but he undoubtedly knew great joy and peace as well.) He considers his spiritual formation to be rudimentary, quite unequal to the task before him. However, he admits that he does sometimes experience a great calm amidst his difficulties, something he has not found in the

36 *Ibid.*, p. 17.
37 *Ibid.*, p. 17-18.

'old explanations' (presumably from Islam), and even in the explanations given him by his 'very dear master and friend' Louis Massignon.[38]

In his first response to Mohammed, Mulla-Zadé rightly puts all the dogmatic difficulties in their proper place. 'Dogmas', he says, are like seeds sown in the soil of our souls in this present life. Nourished by the sap of faith, they are destined to grow towards the light of our future life where they will blossom in flowers of great beauty for our contemplation.' He continued:

> The light they shed on our life even now can lead to faith, but they are not to be confused with faith itself, which is something more and something quite other. It consists in catching some of the rays which emanate from that source of light which is revelation; faith is to bathe in that predominantly obscure light. It is essentially to confide oneself to the Inaccessible, the Invisible, the Incomprehensible, who communicates with us by grace under a veil which accommodates itself to our present situation … it enlightens our intelligence so that we can know God and follow him through the shadows of our earthly existence, and so prepare to meet him face to face in heaven.'[39]

This is a very well expressed description of faith and the role it plays in relation to reason.

In this first letter to Mohammed, Mulla-Zadé shares much about his own human and spiritual journey to give him encouragement, then simply exhorts him to take the time he needs for his own life-changing decision to mature. He must experience at leisure the new reality of the Church he intends to join. He needs to read the Gospel on his knees (at least in spirit) to allow his relationship with Jesus Christ to grow for, he says, the end of all our searching is to be able to abandon ourselves to him who will become our friend, and even more, our new being. 'For me to live is Christ', he says, quoting St Paul.[40] Christian conversion, he continues, is simply to attach oneself

38 *Ibid.,* p. 29.
39 *Ibid.,* p. 24.
40 Letter to the Galatians, Ch. 2:20.

with all one's being to Christ, and through him to the intimate life of the Trinity.[41] The question of Muhammad the Prophet of Islam is dealt with only briefly in a postscript to the main letter. Mulla-Zadé admits that there is a great deal of controversy about him among scholars but for present purposes it is not necessary to pursue these matters. Like Jean-Mohammed, he believes him to have been in good faith, but his doctrine and life do not bear the stamp of transcendent sanctity that he sees in the life and doctrine of Jesus Christ. He speaks of Muhammad's 'mission', in inverted commas, which seems to cast some doubt on its authenticity, though he admits he is not sufficiently abreast of the scholarly debates to make an informed judgement. However, one thing he can say is that the Prophet of Islam's doctrine has been a vehicle of grace and salvation for innumerable Muslims, taking some to the highest levels of contemplation and heroic charity. Nevertheless he considers that both Muhammad and his followers remain in 'invincible ignorance'.[42]

4.1.3 Towards Baptism: more problems

Largely thanks to this very rich correspondence with his Turkish friend and mentor, Mohammed soon grew sufficiently in his convictions to ask for baptism. For some time yet, however, he kept on struggling to come to terms with difficult Christian doctrines such as the Trinity and the Incarnation, and the crucifixion of Jesus. To help him Mulla-Zadé frequently recounts to him how he experiences these mysteries in his own spiritual life. Mohammed eventually arrived at this dilemma: either Jesus is God and Christianity the Truth, or he is not God and Christianity is a monstrosity.[43] He used to think, he said, that all these matters were historical problems based on the authenticity (or not) of the Scriptures, and in fact he had secretly hoped to discover that the Christian Gospel was not authentic; a belief that he and all Muslims

41 *Mulla-Zadé*, p. 25.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 27. Thomas Aquinas made the distinction between ignorance that is 'vincible' and therefore blameworthy, and 'invincible', which is guiltless, *S. Th* 1a 2ae, q. 19, a. 6. See John Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology: A Study of the Roman Catholic Tradition*, p. 193, especially note 60.

43 *Mulla-Zadé*, p. 47.

imbibed with their mother's milk. But it did not take long to come to the contrary conclusion.[44]

There were quite severe consequences for Mohammed's proposed conversion, but fortunately he was able to confide to Mulla-Zadé his immediate practical worries. How, for instance, was he to tell his father about his conversion, what was he to do with his life as he could not return to Morocco, and not least how to cope financially as his government grant would be stopped. He was given the advice and practical help he needed in all these matters. Mulla-Zadé told him, for instance, about his own very difficult relationship with his father due to his conversion; on what proved to be his final visit to his family home in Turkey, he kissed his father goodbye on his departure, but his youngest brother who had been deputed to take him to the boat on which he was to sail, was instructed to tell him that his father could only curse him so long as he insisted in following his present course.[45] At a later date, at Mohammed's request, he helped him draft a letter to his own father with the news of his imminent baptism.[46] Mohammed's financial difficulties were resolved thanks to a certain Monseigneur Eugène Beaupin,[47] a Catholic activist and author with a particular interest in young people, to whom he applied for help. This enabled him to remain in France and complete his studies, and above all to keep his peace of mind. As Mulla-Zadé commented, 'Divine Providence will not abandon one who has so generously abandoned himself to God. Your brothers in the great Catholic family that you are entering will make up to you for all you are missing from the Protectorate.'[48]

He was also given advice about further reading to aid his spiritual life. This included the spiritual classic *Treatise on the Love of God* by St Francis de Sales, which served to stress that the fundamental charism of Christianity is love; love within the Trinity, then as manifested in the life of Jesus Christ, and then to be shared with all humanity. 'All dogma leads to the one statement; God is love', wrote Mulla-Zadé.[49]

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44 *Ibid*.

45 *Ibid*., p. 52, in a letter dated 20 November 1927.

46 *Ibid*., p. 75.

47 Eugène Beaupin, (1877-1945), was chaplain to *Jeune Garde,* and 'animator' of *Comité catholique des amities françaises* and the *Union catholique d'études internationals*. His books are still available in French.

48 *Mulla-Zadé*, p. 75. Letter dated 8 January 1928.

49 In a letter dated 12 January 1928, *ibid*. p.79.

Mohammed was finally baptised in the Franciscan College of Fontenay-sous-bois, near Paris, on 7 April 1928 (Holy Saturday, the day before Easter Sunday). Louis Massignon was his 'godfather', a role he took very seriously as the two grew over the years from mutual respect into close friendship.

4.1.4 Jean-Mohammed's mission after baptism

A new phase was beginning in Mohammed's life, but he did not leave his Islam behind.

Maurice Borrmans has described him as a 'prophet' in the dialogue with Islam, and so he was if we think of prophecy in the biblical sense of one who not only sees the future but also witnesses and speaks out for what he believes. The prophet goes ahead of the rest of us, as 'one who has been given insight into the world of the divine, which is hidden from the rest of men'.[50]

After his conversion, Jean-Mohammed devoted his whole life, insofar as the framework of his Franciscan religious life allowed, to facilitating the dialogue with Islam, not through engaging with it directly, but through his writings, his life as a priest, and the very special prayer called *badaliya* which he learned from his godfather, Louis Massignon. Massignon was ever on the look-out for anything that would make a connection between Christianity and Islam, and *badaliya* served that purpose very well for him. The Arabic word *badal,* (substitution), originally meant literally taking the place of another who had fallen on the field of battle or deserted the army. Deriving from this, certain Islamic traditions taught that the world owed its salvation to the presence of *Abdal*, that is, men and women who by their sanctity turned away from humanity the evils that threatened them from Satan or the vengeful justice of God.[51] However it was through his study

50 Johannes Schildenberger, in *Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology,* entry on *Prophecy*, Sheed & Ward, London, 1970. Prophecy is an area which will need some investigation later as Christians and Muslims see it rather differently. This is particularly the case as it concerns the Prophet Muhammad. Can Christians accept him as a genuine prophet?

51 Louis Massignon, *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane*, Vrin, Paris, 1954, p. 132, as quoted by Jacques Keryell in *Louis Massignon: L'Hospitalité Sacrée*, nouvelle cité, Paris, 1987, p. 389.

of the Sufi mystic Al-Hallaj (d.922) that Massignon appropriated the idea more deeply.[52] It was in the context of the Sufi mystic's life that he came across the Arabic word *badal* which means 'the acceptance and endurance of the sufferings of another'. The idea became the focus of a movement founded in Damietta, Egypt, by Massignon and his Egyptian Melchite friend, Mary Kahil.[53] The foundation was very much influenced by the fact that it was in Damietta where St Francis had his famous encounter with the Sultan Malik-al-Kamil during the Crusades, when he tried to convert him to Christianity[54] and in this same spirit Christians who were minorities in Muslim lands would pray for their fellow countrymen, and beyond that for all Muslims. Although the *Badaliya* meetings took place in Cairo, Jean-Mohammed, resident in Paris, was fully involved spiritually, and in fact it was through him that his godfather came into close contact with the Franciscan spirituality which inspired the movement. Massignon made his vows as a Franciscan tertiary in February 1931, taking the name Abraham.[55]

4.1.5 Conversion: the Inner struggle further described

The final stages of Mohammed's conversion process need some analysis before we proceed to the rest of his life story. What enabled him to take that final plunge? What was his deepest motivation that enabled him to overcome all the obstacles in his path? What follows demonstrates how profoundly difficult it is for Muslims to accept the Christian doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity. The main difficulty seems to be that it goes so strongly against all they have been taught since childhood through the Qur'an, which they believe to be the actual words of God, 'the eternal Word of God made accessible to human beings

52 For Massignon, Al-Hallaj was a Christ-like figure, with whom he developed a very personal relationship. He believed it to be largely through his influence that he returned to the practice of the Catholicism which in his youth he had abandoned.

53 For Mary's part in the story see Keryell, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-132. For a full account of the origins of the movement, see *Louis Massignon: Badaliya au nom de l'autre (1947-1962), presenté et annoté par Maurice Borrmans et Françoise Jacquin*, Les Editions du Cerf, Paris, 2011.

54 For one account of this see Ernest Raymond, *In the Steps of St Francis*, Rich and Cowan, London, 1945, pp. 213-227.

55 See *Massignon/Abd-el-Jalil: Parrain et filleul (1926-1962),* Les Editions du Cerf, Paris, 2007, p. 68.

in time'.[56] Mohammed's experience not only helps us to appreciate from a Christian perspective what long familiarity may have caused us to take for granted in our own faith, but gives a privileged glance into the Muslim soul as it encounters the most challenging aspects of Christianity. In Mohammed's case, it is not just the theological and spiritual problems he has to deal with, but also a change of culture, a break with his family, severe financial insecurity, and the problem of how he will spend the rest of his life in a foreign country.

The most difficult questions for a convert Muslim are undoubtedly those which surround the person of Jesus Christ, and it is perhaps in this that for the first time in his life Mohammed came across something his highly gifted intellect could not grasp, despite prolonged study. One advantage of Islam is its simplicity; at least where the doctrine of God is concerned.[57] In a letter to Mulla-Zadé he says, for instance:

> My faith in Jesus Christ is not strong. Do I even have any? If I do, it is very confused. … I do not feel capable of answering in the affirmative, with all my heart and in calmness of spirit, the simple question: Do you believe in Christ? I have asked myself the question many times, but invariably strong emotion grips me and I feel troubled. However, this goes when I am at prayer.[58]

Could this be because in prayer he is leaving his reason behind for a while? Mulla-Zadé replies suggesting various reasons for his troubled state, while at the same time reassuring him in the following words that he is not in the least worried about him:

> We always have grave misgivings before any big decision, even on a purely human level and subconsciously you

56 *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims*, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, prepared by Maurice Borrmans, transl from French by R Marston Speight, Paulist Press, New York, 1990, p. 47.

57 As Kenneth Cragg has said, 'Islam is readily intelligible and entirely simple', whereas for Muslims 'Christianity is finally unintelligible and collapses under its own intricacy', a view he has found expressed frequently in literature. See *The Call of the Minaret*, p. 277, from a section entitled 'Interpreting the Christian Doctrine of God'.

58 *Mulla-Zadé*, p. 59, in a letter dated 10 December 1927.

> are probably thinking of the unknown sufferings which await you, or perhaps it is the break you are making with a long past and a whole world [of Islam, presumably]: then there is the felt experience, not in the least blunted, of the sacrifice which underlies even the smallest act of faith. In this, reason always has to dispossess itself and stretch out towards the God who reveals and beg for his light.[59]

He also reminds him that 'what he is embarking on is the work of a lifetime; conversion to Christianity is only the beginning. With the Apostles he must keep saying "Lord, increase our faith", until Christ is formed in him. Incorporation into the Church through baptism will give him many graces he cannot know at the moment.'[60] He considers Mohammed to be ready for baptism, and prolonged indecision will compromise his progress towards further understanding.[61] For some discussion of the theology of the God-Man he is advised to talk to his former headmaster, Père Clément. Mulla-Zadé describes his own understanding thus: 'God united himself with a human nature … in order that we might become like Him. This is the essence of a mystery that never ceases to fill me with wonder.'[62]

In his response, dated 27 December, that is two days after the feast of Christmas which would have recalled for him his first conversion experience, Mohammed has to admit he still does not feel ready to go forward. He spent the Christmas holidays at the Franciscan Scholasticate where young friars would receive their theological formation, and admits that while with them he experienced great peace and had no problem worshipping with them; in fact it was a great support to him. He paid homage on his knees to the Infant in the crib as he had on the occasion of his conversion, 'but', he confesses, 'despite your judgement, which I respect, I do not think I am ready.'[63] He does not feel 'solid' enough on several points which he feels indispensible for joining the Church. Moreover he is concerned about his moral lapses (he does not specify what they are), and deep-seated faults. Nevertheless like Mulla-Zadé he realises he must make

59 *Ibid.,* p. 61.
60 *Ibid.*
61 *Ibid.,* p. 62.
62 *Ibid.*
63 *Ibid.,* p. 66. Letter dated 27 December 1927.

a decision soon, and begs that he might continue the correspondence with him to that end.

In response, Mulla-Zadé draws Mohammed's attention to the fact that he is looking at doctrines in isolation, depending solely on his reason, whereas he should consider them in the context of the whole Church, a reality he has experienced in the liturgy he loves, and his prayer life. The divinity of Christ is something he has already experienced. This [spiritual] life he experiences has a principle, the river has a source, the fire a hearth, this divine effect has a proportionate cause:

> You know it is Jesus Christ … you have heard in the Gospels the authentic echo of his voice, in which he declares himself to be Son of Man and Son of God. Theology is nothing but 'fides quaerens intellectum' [faith seeking understanding]: the God-Man is both possible and appropriate… it is divinely reasonable, it is simply God making himself ours so that we can become His - nothing remains for you but to adhere to the head as you adhere to the body - and I dare to affirm that you belong to the Church as much as the most fervent Christian. [64]

In the end Jean-Mohammed has to make an act of faith without the benefit of actually seeing the Risen Christ, and touching the wounds of his body as did the apostle Thomas.[65]

In his next letter, only a few days later, dated 4 January 1928, Jean-Mohammed reports that after a long discussion with his local spiritual director, Charles Thellier de Poncheville (who had been recommended to him by Mulla-Zadé) he is convinced that nothing now separates him, and nothing *can* separate him, from Jesus Christ, not even what he perceives as his severe moral failures.[66] He is now ready for baptism, and simply mentions to his friend what he now describes as 'minor

64 *Ibid.*, p. 69. The Church is considered in Catholic theology to be the continuation of Christ's body on earth; this is the source of all her sacramental life. He himself is the Head.

65 Jn. 20:24-29. Mohammed is no doubt meant to bring to mind the final verse, *Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe*.

66 *Ibid*. p. 71. He is alluding to St Paul's letter to the Romans 8:31-39.

problems', such as the suspension of his bursary, and how he is going to tell his father.

In his reply Mulla-Zadé advises him once more not to tire himself in scrutinising dogmas. He must adhere to the Church, through her to Christ, and through him to the Father, who is one with him in the Holy Spirit. Say to yourself, he says: 'As a Muslim, I believed that God is One, but it was a numerical unity, abstract, cold, inert; as a Christian, I still believe in the Unity of God, but it is personal, concrete, living; a richness of life at the heart of the one God; a sublime unity, conscious, embraced and loved.'[67]

This is striking in that it gives us an insight into how a Muslim and a Christian might perceive the Oneness of God. A Christian who is not a convert from Islam may well sense the contrast, but would not say it; nor, one would imagine, would these two except in the confidence of a private letter. Jean-Mohammed's response to Mulla-Zadé's advice not to tire himself scrutinising dogmas is to open the Gospels and read them without all the prejudices of his Muslim background, then to turn his prayerful attention to the 'birth of the Man born on a handful of straw in a cave.'[68] Although one might think this mystery equally incomprehensible on the rational level, it gave him the peace he needed; it was, after all, the Child in the manger that first drew him to Christianity. He goes on to explain his devotion to St Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897), the enclosed Carmelite nun who was canonised in 1925, by the fact that, according to the Carmelite tradition, she was Thérèse *de l'Enfant-Jésus.*[69]

The conclusion we must draw from this account is that it was personal attachment to Jesus Christ (which is at the basis of all conversion, even within Christianity) which enabled him to pass over from Islam to Christianity. It was this alone that enabled him to make the necessary act of faith, and have the courage to go forward. He was baptised at Fontenay, near Paris, 7 April 1928.

67 *Mulla-Zadé*, p. 77-78, in a letter dated 10 January 1928.
68 *Ibid.*, p. 90, in a letter dated 30 January.
69 *Ibid*.

Not surprisingly, problems came in the wake of this event, but they are not directly relevant to present concerns, so we leave them aside. The question of marriage had arisen before his conversion and caused him some anguish, especially as once again he had to go against his father who required him to marry someone in Fès, a Muslim, which at this delicate stage in his spiritual journey he did not want. He then fell in love with 'a very Christian French young lady', in Paris, but when the moment of decision came he definitively renounced marriage and decided, if he converted, that he wanted to enter the religious life.[70] 'I am becoming more and more certain that Jesus does not want me in the world', he wrote in January 1929 to Mulla-Zadé.[71] However he went on to complete his doctorate at the Sorbonne which was on the Muslim mystic 'Ayn al-Qudât al-Hamadhâni, before entering the novitiate of the Franciscans where his spiritual formation took place. He completed this in 1931, going on to do further theological study until 1935 in preparation for ordination to the priesthood. At this stage the question arises as to why he joined the Franciscans, an Order not renowned for its intellectual bent, as opposed to the Jesuits or Dominicans where one so intellectually gifted might, it could be argued, feel more at home. But in this regard one of the friars who knew him has said that 'he was drawn irresistibly to Francis of Assisi.'[72]

5.1 A Franciscan vocation

Why then, did St Francis attract this former Muslim so strongly? St Francis (1181-1226) was the son of a rich cloth merchant of Assisi who lived an extravagant life typical of his class until, after a long illness, he felt a call from God and renounced his former life to live in abject poverty, only to be disowned by his father, rather as Jean-Mohammed had been, though for different reasons.

70 *Ibid.*, p. 261, in a letter dated 19 August 1927, from Père Clément to Mulla-Zadé, giving details of Mohammed's life as he asks Mulla-Zadé to enter into correspondence with him.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 151.

72 This was Frère Joel Colombel, in the Preface to *Témoin*, p. 8.

Francis went on to gather around him a band of followers who became the core of the Franciscan Order. It was he who in 1223 arranged the first Christmas crib, a now universal Christian practice; coincidentally it was at the crib one Christmas night that the young Mohammed's conversion took place, as described above.

Francis was also the first known saint to receive the stigmata.[73] This in itself would be enough to draw Mohammed to the Franciscans, representing as it does the passion of Jesus Christ in a way which would probably have been denied in his Muslim past. It happened to St Francis as follows: after his unsuccessful attempt to convert the Sultan in Damietta during the Crusades, he withdrew and made a month's retreat on Mount Verna, his hermitage, in Italy. He was praying that he might experience in his own person what Christ experienced on the cross; he was thinking mainly of the love with which he laid down his life, but he also, unexpectedly, received the physical wounds of crucifixion in his hands , feet and side, which he bore until he died about two years later.[74] The feast of this event is kept in the Franciscan Order on 17 September, the day Jean-Mohammed chose to enter the novitiate in 1929. In his own short biography Jean-Mohammed recounts a conversation with one of his professors (not named), who asked him why he did not want to be a Dominican. He answered simply, 'I love St Francis, for his love of Christ, and for his burning witness before Islam and the Crusades.'[75] He is referring to the famous incident in Damietta, Egypt, when Francis boldly entered the Saracen camp to try and convert the Sultan Malik-al-Kamil to Christianity.[76]

We may conclude that Jean-Mohammed was drawn to the Franciscans on account of the strong emphasis on the poverty of Jesus in his birth and childhood, and his human suffering and glorification at the time of his passion, death and resurrection, both of which portray God in a quite different way from the Islam Jean-Mohammed had previously known, and not least because of Francis' passionate love for

73 There is much written on the life and spirit of St Francis. These bare facts are obtained from the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church,* p. 632 and p. 1544.

74 This information obtained from a conversation with Franciscan sister. It is recorded in detail in the early annals of the Order by St Bonaventure and St Thomas of Celano.

75 *Témoin*, p. 27.

76 See, for instance, Father Cuthbert OSFC, *Life of St Francis of Assisi*, Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1914, pp. 278-281.

Jesus Christ which led him to renounce his privileged background for a life of poverty. The daughter of Jean-Mohammed's landlady, Marguerite Faguer, has also given us the information, based on her conversations with him, that he knew 'the pride of Islam', and entered the Franciscans through humility; he wished 'to hide himself in the humility of Christianity'.[77]

5.2 Priestly ordination and mission

After his years of theological study, Jean-Mohammed was ordained a Catholic priest in 1935. His commemorative card of this event, which he would distribute to his community and friends, is very revealing of how he saw his vocation as integrating in himself his new found Christianity and the Islam to which he owed so much of his religious formation, and still loved. The design on the front is of a large fish[78] on whose back is a basket of bread and a bottle of wine, which as Jean-Mohammed explains beneath the picture, is taken from a 2nd century crypt in the Roman catacombs. Arabic script surrounds it to form a circle (in itself a symbol of completion), which he explains is taken from the Qur'an (5.114), and could have been a prayer uttered by Christ at the request of his disciples: 'O Allah our Lord, send us from heaven a Table set (with viands), that there may be for us - for the first and last of us - A solemn festival, and a sign from Thee'.[79] The commentators affirm, adds Jean-Mohammed, that this text was materially fulfilled, and the Table which was sent from heaven bore bread and fish. On the reverse side of his card he has placed the Greek letter *Tau* at the top. This resembles the capital letter 'T' and is a symbol of the Cross, no doubt partly disguised in this way so as not to cause offence to any of his Muslim friends who may have seen it. After this he has four short paragraphs, freely arranged by himself, from the prophet Isaiah (one of the biblical prophets absent from the Qur'an):

77 A personal recollection given to Maurice Borrmans. See *Témoin*, p. 61.

78 An ancient symbol of Christ and of the Eucharist (the Greek letters form an acrostic 'Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour). It is found frequently in the catacombs, ancient Christian cemeteries situated underground in Rome.

79 This is the translation of Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Quran,* text, translation and commentary, pub. Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, Pakistan, 1987 (edition cited 1988 reprint). Jean-Mohammad has translated it into French.

> I have called you from the far corners of the earth … I have taken you strongly by the hand, and I will help you. Do not be afraid. Even though mothers may forget, I will not forget you. I have loved you with an everlasting love, and have compassion on you. I will make rivers flow on the bare heights and springs well up in the valleys; I will change the desert into a lake and the arid ground into a fountain of water. Do not be afraid. I have called you by your name. You are mine. And I, your God, love you.

It is rather remarkable that Jean-Mohammed, a former Muslim, feels he can use the word of God in this free manner, so different from how he must have learned to treat the Qur'an. Underneath the scriptural text he has the following, 'Words of God in Isaiah (41-54) addressed to the Patriarch Saint Abraham, the Father of Believers', but has inserted in the margin in his own handwriting, 'addressed *to all the descendants of the Patriarch Saint Abraham*.'[80] By this it could be argued that he meant to indicate that he sees his priestly vocation as including a hidden ministry to Muslims, for whom Abraham is so important as a prophet and model.

5.3 Academic career: publications

In 1936, quite soon after his ordination to the priesthood, Jean-Mohammed was invited by Mgr Baudrillart, the rector of the *Institut Catholique* in Paris, to teach Arabic language and literature there, later to be supplemented by Islamology. Thus began a long academic career which he undoubtedly loved and which did not end till 1964 when he developed cancer of the tongue, which effectively brought to an end all his speaking activities. He published quite soon in French *A Brief History of Arabic Literature.*[81] His main concern during this time, however, was to facilitate dialogue and understanding between Muslims and Christians, and for this he has

80 Italics and translation mine.

81 *Brève Histoire de la literature arabe,* Maisonneuve, Paris, 1943, 310 pages. Re-edited in 1946, with the word *brève* dropped from the title. See Maurice Borrmans, *Prophètes* p. 178.

left us a rich resource in his writings He published many articles, mainly in French, but also in German and Spanish, languages in which he was fluent. His first work in this area was *L'Islam et Nous*.[82] The posthumously reprinted edition of this work contains a piece he was asked to write in preparation for the Second Vatican Council, entitled *Islam at the Time of the Council,* first written in 1964. It may be noted here that he, along with his better known godfather Louis Massignon, was responsible for the positive attitude towards Islam that we find in a major document produced by the Council, *Nostra Aetate*, which has had a profound effect on the way the Catholic Church relates to non-Christian religions, especially Judaism and Islam. His next major work, produced in 1949, *Aspects intérieurs de l'Islam,* was an expansion and development of *L'Islam et Nous*.[83] A year later he published *Marie et l'Islam*.[84] The many articles he published during this time of his academic career are listed in the long bibliography prepared initially by Père Christian Eugène o.f.m. (later supplemented by others) which enables us to appreciate the depth of his scholarship and the breadth of his interests.[85] A personal high point of all his efforts in the sphere of Christian/Muslim dialogue was a private audience he was granted with Pope Paul VI on 14th May 1966. The latter had written to him expressing an interest in his work, and it was through this connection that he became an advisor for the council texts. The pope also assured him that he prayed with him in spirit every Friday (the Muslim 'Sabbath') for his Muslim brothers.[86]

6 Psychological/Spiritual Crisis: the return to Morocco, 27 April-15 May 1961

This episode in Jean-Mohammed's life is recounted by the French Islamologist, Alfred-Louis de Prémare,[87] who claims to be a direct

82 First written in 1938, reprinted by Les Editions du Cerf, 1981.
83 Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1949, 235 pages, 2nd edition in 1949.
84 Beauchesne, 1950, 92 pages.
85 See *Témoin*, pp. 163-172.
86 *Ibid.*, p. 49. This was a practice, to be described more fully later, that he embarked on with Louis Massignon and others, as part of his 'mission' to Islam.
87 Alfred-Louis de Prémare (1930-2006) spent his childhood in Morocco where his

witness of the events he relates in a chapter of the book *En Hommage au Père Jaques Jomier op.* [88] It was intended to be incorporated into a complete biography of Jean-Mohammed which never in fact materialised.[89] However it still has great value for the light it throws on his ongoing conversion experience. What is of particular interest is whether we can ascertain from this episode whether Jean-Mohammed really was tempted to go back to Islam, and in the light of any judgements made on this issue, to ask how it fits in with his life-long conversion experience.

6.1 The flight

The bare facts as they stand do not redound to his favour. At the time of this episode Jean-Mohammed was not in good health and was resting at the Franciscan house in Cimiez, Nice, in the south of France. Also at this time the Algerian War of Independence was at a particularly difficult stage, which caused him considerable anguish.[90] Moreover he was also suffering badly from depression, a condition to which he was prone.[91] These are mitigating circumstances but the fact remains that he called his brother to come to him urgently and the two left for Morocco the next day, 27 April, Jean-Mohammed giving no indication to his superiors of what he was doing, and pointedly leaving his religious habit behind. This is a very serious offence for someone who has taken a vow of obedience, and would easily have been interpreted as a clear statement that he had abandoned the religious life, and in his

father was a magistrate. He studied Arabic language and literature at the University of Rabat, and went on to become a scholar of Islamic origins, especially the Qur'an. He is best known for his work, *Les Fondations de l'Islam: Entre Ecriture et Histoire,* Seuil, Paris, 2002.

88 Editions du Cerf, Paris, 2002, pp. 321-341. Henceforth *Hommage.*

89 *Hommage*, p. 321.

90 De Prémare reports that there had just been an attempt by some French generals to take power between 22 and 27 April. *Ibid.,* p. 327. Independence for both Morocco and Algeria was gained about this time; Morocco in 1956 and Algeria in 1962. It caused great anguish to Jean-Mohammed and his godfather Louis Massignon, who loved these countries. See, for instance, Mary Louis Gude, *Louis Massignon: The Crucible of Compassion*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, USA, especially Ch. 8, *The Road to Independence in Morocco* (pp. 183-213), and Ch. 9, *Algeria, the Ultimate Suffering* (pp. 214-248).

91 *Hommage*, p. 326.

case it would be normal to assume that he had gone back to his native Islam. It must be said, however, that his brother as a Muslim would not understand the seriousness of this; his concern was for his brother's restoration to full health, and he would think that to embrace Islam again would be a great comfort to him.[92] In fact it was he who was responsible, to ease his brother's transition to Morocco after an absence of thirty five years, for the article which appeared in a daily newspaper announcing his homecoming. This article extolled Jean-Mohammed's great intellectual gifts and achievements, and added how wonderful it was that 'God had guided him; he has returned to his religion, and has declared himself a Muslim'.[93] Other newspaper articles followed suit and were even reported in France. One reminded readers that the king himself, Mohammad V, had given special permission to him to return to his country, if he so wished, and take his place at the heart of Muslim society. There would have been no difficulty in this; Jean-Mohammed was welcomed into the heart of his family with whom he still had close bonds despite his exile in France, and there was no shortage of job offers, or prospects of marriage.

6.2 Re-conversion begins

How did Jean-Mohammed react to all this, and how did he feel finding himself at last in his beloved homeland, among his close family? It seems at first he was completely unapproachable. A Lebanese Jesuit tried to contact him through a brief note addressed to Omar, his brother, but the latter replied that he could not even at the moment give it to him, since he was undergoing 'une crise vraiement insupportable'.[94] This was in the first two or three days after his arrival. A little later de Prémare called at his brother Omar's house in the hope of seeing him, but he was not in. However de Prémare left a letter and Jean-Mohammed contacted him later by telephone. He was anxious to inform de Prémare that he was still the same; he had not changed, and that all was well.

92 The events as they unfolded are kept in a daily diary by de Prémare, see *Hommage*, pp. 329-341.

93 *Ibid.,* p. 329. This was on the front page of the newspaper. Omar Abdeljalil, being a government minister, was a person of some importance in the country, and the return of his brother in this manner would be of great public interest.

94 *Ibid.,* p. 332, 'a truly terrible crisis'.

He was just very tired. However, he continued, he had left France 'in an irregular manner', and as soon as he was better he intended to return.[95] De Prémare took it upon himself to inform the superior of the Franciscans in Morocco of this (it would have been very difficult for Jean-Mohammed to do this himself, not least because of his poor state of health and fragile mental condition). Thus his superior in France was informed and his situation was soon regularised.

6.3 The return

After this, Jean-Mohammed did not delay his return to France. Père Jean-Bosco Offret, the superior of the Franciscans in Morocco, went to Nice especially for the purpose of welcoming him and easing his re-entry into his community in France. Fortunately for our assessment of this episode de Prémare has reported the main lines of the conversation Jean-Mohammed had with Père John-Bosco after his return to France. 'Jean-Mohammed', he said, 'returned to France in a completely shattered state; somewhat worse than he was when he set off on his ill-fated journey. He had hardly recognised the Morocco of his youth as it had changed so much. Moreover he had been in a state of "nervous depression", as a consequence of which he had had doubts about the Church, his faith, and even Christianity itself.'[96] 'As everybody has', was Père Jean-Bosco's own very revealing comment on the situation. 'Jean-Mohammed', he went on, 'had been aghast when he saw the newspaper articles. In France he had been very homesick for Islam and his native country, but once there he found that he was "a hundred times more Christian".'[97] Jean-Mohammed's' crisis', it would seem, as Père John-Bosco hinted, was nothing unusual. At the beginning of a conversion to another religion, or for a Christian at the beginning of religious life, there is normally a lot of fervour and enthusiasm, but it does not last; inevitably aridity and doubt sets in, in order that faith may become stronger and less dependent on the senses. In Jean-Mohammed's case it would be compounded by the fact that

95 Telephone conversation reported, *ibid*., p. 334.
96 *Ibid*., p. 338. The translation is mine, with omissions.
97 *Ibid*.

he was living in permanent exile from a country he had left behind in initially painful circumstances, from his family whom he had not seen for a very long time, and from the Islam which he still loved. In a state of ill health and after so many years away from Morocco, his homesickness suddenly became overwhelming. Without a doubt he could only have done what he did believing it was right for him to go back to Islam. His brother, of course, would wholeheartedly agree. But the reality of actually being 'at home' soon convinced him that he had made a terrible mistake, and in fact his faith at the deepest level had not been affected at all.

On his return to France it was necessary for Jean-Mohammed to spend some time in a sanatorium in Switzerland to recover his health. His faithful brother stayed there with him for a whole month, as also for a time did Père Jean-Bosco Offret. To sum up this episode in the light of his conversion, part of a letter from his superior in Paris to de Prémare can be quoted: 'He spoke explicitly of a second conversion, more complete than the first … and he was clear that he had never been shaken in his Catholic faith on the deepest level.'[98]

7 The final fifteen years: redemptive suffering

It took Jean Mohammed several months to recover his health sufficiently to allow him to resume his teaching, but he finally went back to the *Institut Catholique* in the autumn of 1961. It was about this time that he prepared a document for the Council Fathers of Vatican II (which began in 1964), as they wanted to draw on his expertise to draft the document *Nostra Aetate*, which was to have such far reaching consequences for the Catholic Church's relations with other religions, especially Islam and Judaism. We are much indebted to Jean-Mohammed, as also to his friend and godfather Louis Massignon, for the positive tone of this document.[99]

98 *Ibid.*, p. 341, my translation.

99 Jean-Mohammed's text was prepared at the request of Mgr Etchegaray, a French bishop. It is not dated but it is thought to have been prepared in August 1964. It is reproduced in full in *Témoin*, pp. 111-128.

Sadly Jean-Mohammed's teaching career was soon to come to an end as he was diagnosed with cancer of the tongue in October 1964. In a letter to a Dominican friend (we are not told who) he wrote:

> I am undergoing an apprenticeship in poverty just where the Lord gave me so many gifts —conferences in Arabic, French, German, Spanish and English; also teaching contemplatives in these languages … the cancer has been cured but the consequences remain such that my former activities are impossible and I cannot eat normally. [100]

It seems in fact that from this time until his death in 1979 he lived as a virtual hermit, unable to partake either in the day to day life of his Franciscan community, or the academic work of the *Institut Catholique*. Even the academic work he did in the solitude of his cell was very limited, though he did keep in contact with friends through correspondence. The faithful Mlle Faguer reports bluntly that his suffering was terrible. He could hardly eat anything, being dependent entirely on liquid nourishment; he was almost completely deprived of sleep which left him very weak and unable to bear the slightest noise … he used to go down to the chapel, all alone, in the night, to say mass.[101] How, one wonders, did all this affect his spiritual life? From what we know it would seem that he bore his sufferings valiantly with great patience and even joy. Maurice Borrmans corresponded with him regularly during this time, and visited once a year. In one letter dated 3 May (year not recorded), which would be around Easter, Jean-Mohammed wrote: 'Since my baptism (1928) and my ordination (1935) I have not had a more "authentic" Easter than this year. I am sure the Lord has permitted this trial … and will bring great good from it for the continuation of my mission.'[102]

100 This is reported by Maurice Borrmans, *ibid*,. p. 51. We are not given the date of the letter.

101 As reported to Maurice Borrmans, *ibid*., p. 62.

102 *Ibid*., p. 51.

7.1 Mission

Undoubtedly, his 'mission' would be that to which his whole life had been dedicated since his conversion; namely doing all he could to facilitate dialogue and understanding between Christians and Muslims, but now the emphasis would be mostly on prayer, that is, *badaliya*, which would mean intercessory prayer for Muslims and offering his sufferings for them in what he would describe as 'redemptive substitution'.[103] He himself had been on the receiving end of such prayer in a very real way before his conversion, so he knew its value. He describes, for instance, in his very short biography, how among photocopies given to him in 1960 by the daughter of Maurice Blondel (through whose influence Paul-Mehmet Mulla-Zadé was converted to Christianity) was one about her father who, when he began to lose his sight in 1927, offered this trial for Jean-Mohammed who at that time was groping his way towards Christianity:

> that I, a young student, impetuous but rigid in my views, upon whom, many remarked, the gaze of Jesus fell as it did on the rich young man in the Gospel ,[104] might 'see'; see with the eyes of the 'heart' (in the biblical sense), who this Jesus of Nazareth really was; he whom I admired and loved as a prophet only, inferior to Mohammad and surpassed by him. But the following year I asked to be baptised.[105]

7.2 Legacy

Jean-Mohammed died after a great deal of suffering on 24 November 1979. Despite the fact that he had lived for so long apart from normal Franciscan life, it was recognised that he was still very much a part of his community. A fellow Franciscan, Frère Joel Columbel, who knew him personally, speaks of 'rays of light and holiness which came to us from that source, the *Umma*, which he never betrayed or offended.'[106]

103 This is also the opinion of Maurice Borrmans, *ibid.*, p. 52.
104 Gospel of Luke, Ch. 18;18-23.
105 *Ibid.,* p. 21.
106 *Témoin*, p. 8, in the Preface.

The same Franciscan, at his funeral, spoke of him as a 'gift', and a 'sign' from God, someone who was free in both traditions, Islam and Christianity.[107] What is this 'gift', and of what is he a 'sign? His was a very special vocation which he lived in great fidelity, often through great suffering, to unite two very different traditions at a deep spiritual level within himself, and as such he is a 'sign' to all involved in this most difficult of dialogues, that it can be done on the deepest level; but also that there is a great deal in Islam that Christians (and others) can learn to love, despite the seemingly irreconcilable differences on the rational/theological level.

8 Conclusion

The life of Jean-Mohammed Abd-el-Jalil, though for the most part lived within the confines of his own religious community of Franciscans in Paris, remained deeply rooted in his native Morocco; an exemplary and very fervent Christian, he remained a Muslim to the core, and has opened to us all the riches (and otherwise) of that great religion.

Finally we ask if, and how, he is remembered in Morocco. Has he been forgiven? Have his efforts to promote mutual understanding had any impact on the Muslims who were so shocked at the time of his conversion? It would seem that some little progress has been made in this direction. A recent weekly Moroccan journal, for instance, speaks of him as a 'brilliant student who seemed set for an outstanding career, who chose to become a priest, and lived as a martyr, rejected by his own people', but in fact was given a mission 'to explain Islam from a very tolerant angle, which was very rare in those days.'[108] The article concludes with a quote from another Moroccan journal, *Al Nas-Info,* (February 2007), 'We have treated Mohammed Abd-el-Jalil unjustly. We need to ask his forgiveness, and restore him to the place he deserves in the Moroccan memory.'

107 *Recueil Jean-Mohammed Abd-el-Jalil, Nouvelles: Institut Catholique de Paris,*(no. 3, June 1980) *Homélie â la messe des obsequies*, p. 7.

108 *Zamane*, June 2011.

SERGE DE BEAURECUEIL, OP: SCHOLAR AND DISCIPLE OF 'ABDULLĀH ANṢĀRĪ OF HERAT (D. 1089)

Minlib Dallh, OP

Since the death of the Dominican friar Serge de Laugier de Beaurecueil in March 2005, several articles and books appeared, paying tribute to his premier scholarship on 'Abdullāh Anṣārī and his 'passion for Kabul'.[1] His unique path in the footsteps of the master of Herat is an example of how a Dominican friar welcomed the hospitality of the Muslim other. The renowned French scholar of mystical Islam, Louis Massignon (d. 1962),[2] once described his encounter with the medieval Sufi martyr Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 922) in the following terms, 'My study of al-Ḥallāj's life and work was passionate, encompassing, demanding, and full of awe …, but the endeavour did not yield the secret of his heart. On the contrary, al-Ḥallāj plumbs my heart and probes it even now.'[3] Albeit cautiously, I want to depict the Ḥanbali Sufi 'Abdullāh Anṣārī's[4] influence on Beaurecueil in comparable terms. Beaurecueil felt deeply within his soul and being a connection to the master of Herat, who lived almost a millennium before him. Beaurecueil's life parallels Massignon's erudition in mystical Islam, it is reminiscent of the life of Charles de Foucauld among the Tuaregs of Tamanrasset, and it encompasses the ethical dimension of interreligious encounter.

1 Jean Jacques Perénnès, *Serge de Beaurecueil: la passion de Kabul*, Cerf, Paris, 2015; see also Minlib Dallh, *The Sufi and the Friar, a Mystical Encounter of two men of God in the Abode of Islam*, SUNY Press, New York, 2017; MIDEO also IDEO, 'Bibliographie de Serge de Beaurecueil, O.P.' in *Les Fondateurs de l'IDEO.* (www.IDEO.org.)

2 Jacques Waadenburg, 'Louis Masssignon (1883-1962) as a Student of Islam', *Die Welt des Islam*, 2005, vol 45. No. 3, pp. 312-42.

3 Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj*, trans. Herbert Mason, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1994), p. xv. See also Marie Louise Guge, *Louis Massignon: Crucible of Compassion*, Notre Dame University Press, Indiana, 1997, p. 112.

4 Anṣārī is one the most significant Hanbali Sufis of the classical period of Islamic history. His oeuvre stands as one the most representative of the formative period of the mystical dimensions of Islam.

He sought to live an authentic Dominican life in the most unlikely city, Kabul. This paper explores Beaurecueil's spiritual, pastoral and intellectual paths in the abode of Islam.

A Premier Scholar of Anṣārī

Born into a Catholic Parisian and aristocratic family, Beaurecueil joined the Dominican province of France in 1935. After a year of novitiate in Amiens, he was sent to the stadium of Le Saulchoir de Kain, now part of Tournai in Belgium, where the province of France took refuge after expulsion from Flavigny-sur-Ozerain (Côte d'Or) in 1905. At Le Saulchoir, Marie-Dominique Chenu (d. 1990) selected George Anawati, Jacques Jomier and Beaurecueil to become the founding members of the Dominican Institute of Oriental Studies/Institut dominicain d'études orientales in Cairo (IDEO).

The IDEO was built upon the original idea of the Dominican biblical scholar Marie Joseph Lagrange (d. 1938). Later, Antonin Jaussen (d. 1962) supervised the construction of an impressive priory and Chenu secured the location for the foundation of the IDEO. For decades, many friars managed to make Dominican scholarship on Islam and Muslim civilization one of the best in Catholic world. To this day, the IDEO remains a premier institution for many scholars of Islam around the world.

In his case, Beaurecueil arrived in Cairo in 1947 without a specific field of research in Islam. His confrère Anawati opted for classical Islamic philosophy and Jomier chose contemporary Islamic thought and modern Qur'anic commentaries as their areas of scholarship. Beaurecueil turned to the mystical dimensions of Islam. However, how did he embark on the study of the life and work of 'Abdullāh Anṣārī of Herāt? Tradition has it among the Dominican friars in Cairo that Anawati prompted Beaurecueil to have a conversation with Osman Ismā'īl Yaḥyā (d. 1997). At the time Yahyā was a student at the University of al-Azhar, a regular reader at the library of the IDEO, and a close friend of the Dominican friars. According to Jean Marie Mérigoux, Yaḥyā told Beaurecueil, 'Who am I to counsel you about Sufi masters? I can say this much: by far two Ṣūfī masters have influenced me

most: Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 1309) and 'Abdullāh Anṣārī of Herāt (d. 1089).'[5]

Beaurecueil took Yaḥyā's advice seriously and consulted Massignon who wrote back, 'Do not hesitate. Anṣārī is crucial to mystical Islam and no one has seriously studied his work. A few years ago, I spent a night long in prayer vigil at his tomb in Herat.'[6] Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh al-Iskandarī was not an option because an Iraqi Jesuit, Paul Nwyia (d. 1980), was already working on Ibn 'Aṭā's oeuvre with remarkable expertise. Beaurecueil concluded, 'it would be unwise to tread the same path … I settled for Anṣārī.'[7]

Following this crucial conversation with O Yaḥyā, Anṣārī's life and work took centre stage and the IDEO provided the indispensable environment to launch his studies. At the outset, the endeavour was riddled with difficulties and hurdles. First, there was little scholarly research in Western languages on Anṣārī's life and works. Arabic resources on the master were disappointing and sparse. While Anṣārī was popular and revered in the Persian-speaking world, he was neglected in Arabic scholarship. Second, manuscripts attributed to the Pīr of Herāt were in desperate need of editing. Finally, Cairo's intellectual circles of the time held mystical Islam in contempt. To make matter worse, the spectacle of popular Sufism unsettled many Muslims. Nonetheless, Anṣārī was an intriguing figure and his theological and mystical Ḥanbalism gave his teachings a certain attractiveness.

Beaurecueil undertook his studies with such zeal and discipline that he overcame his prior lack of knowledge of Islamic mysticism. The environment of the IDEO mirrored the scholarly lifestyle of the studium at Le Saulchoir. The rigorous intellectual discipline and the

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5 Jean Marie Mérigoux, 'Un mystique dominicain …,' in *Sources*, 2. Also Pérenneès, *Georges Anawati*, 129. See also IDEO, 'Bibliographie de Serge de Beaurecueil, O.P.' in *Les Fondateurs de l'IDEO.* (www.IDEO.org.) Pérennès describes Yahyā's relationship with the Dominican friars in Cairo in *Georges Anawati,* p. 129 and pp. 154-55. While a student at al-Azhar, and at the invitation of Anawati, Yahyā used to spend the last ten days of Ramadan at the Dominican priory in Cairo. On both parts, Yahyā (a guest) and Anawati (a host) gave a theological account of practices of welcoming and hospitality toward the religious other. See Morelon, 'Osman Yahyā (1919-1997)', *MIDEO* 24 (2000), pp. 441-447.

6 Serge de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja 'Abdullāh Anṣārī (396-481 H. / 1006-1089), Mystique ḥanbalīte*, Imprimerie Catholique, Beyrouth, 1965, p. 12; see also Mérigoux, 'Un mystique dominicain …', *Sources*, p. 3.

7 Mérigoux, 'Un mystique dominicain …', *Sources*, p. 2.

expertise of his early teachers were decisive. Fortunately, a year after his arrival, Cyprian Rice (d. 1966), an English Dominican, arrived at the IDEO. He was an excellent Persian scholar and became Beaurecueil's teacher. During the following years, Beaurecueil worked to acquire the tools he needed to excel in his research, namely, fluency in Arabic and Persian.

Even though Cairo's Muslim intellectual circles were not interested in Islamic mysticism, Yaḥyā al-Khachab, professor of Persian studies at the University of Cairo, was well acquainted with Persian Sufism. He became a major intellectual partner of the friar. But he still had to learn how to edit ancient manuscripts. Providence came through when Professor Pierre Nautin (d. 1997), one of the best patristic scholars, stayed at the IDEO while working on the manuscripts of Didymus the Blind (d. *c.* 398), the great Alexandrian theologian of the early church. Under the tutelage of Nautin, Beaurecueil learned the techniques of editing ancient manuscripts. The historian Dominique Avon writes:

> Professor Nautin gave Beaurecueil a precious gift. He taught him the techniques of editing ancient manuscripts. Nautin's teachings were instrumental to the friar's successful task of untangling the complex web of manuscripts attributed to Khwāja 'Abdullāh Anṣārī, such as the *Stages of the Wayfarers*. His edition and translation of this treatise is considered the best in any western language.[8]

In the course of seventeen years, Beaurecueil edited, translated and commented on most of Anṣārī's mystical works. At the beginning, the assignment seemed insurmountable:

> What a task! Relying upon Arab and Persian sources that I must track, I had to reconstruct the life of a man in his time and place, to follow the itinerary of his experience and thought, and to unleash his quintessential ideas. In addition, I had to edit, study, and translate his work, and to monitor its interpretations, and the influence Ansari had upon his later commentators. Like a puzzle, the endeavor

8 Dominique Avon, *Les frères Prêcheurs d'Orient*, Cerf, Paris, 2005, p. 727.

> was both tedious and exciting. Although I lived in Cairo, in my mind I was in Herat for hours every day.[9]

Indeed, the endeavour was vast and as Nahid Angha rightly remarks, ' 'Abdu'llāh Anṣārī's spiritual and literary expertise covers an extensive domain from spiritual and religious teachings to works of literature and poetry, from exegesis of the Qur'ān to the stations of the spiritual journey, devotional invocations and biographies of Ṣūfīs and teachers.'[10]

More than any other scholar in the West, Beaurecueil edited Anṣārī's Persian and Arabic mystical treatises. In terms of Persian mystical history, Anṣārī was a pioneer in many ways. He was the first to produce in local Persian dialect a short mnemonic treatise on a difficult and complex subject matter like Sufism, namely, *Ṣad maydān* ('The Hundred Grounds').[11] Prof. Nasr Allah Pūrjavādī writes, 'Ṣ*ad maydān* remains the first independent and single classic written in Persian to address stations and the levels of *sulūk*, the inner journey.'[12] Ravan Farhādī agrees with Pūrjavādī and adds, 'His [Anṣārī's] *Hundred Grounds*, retains its importance as the first didactic treatise on Ṣūfīsm to be written in Persian, and specifically intended to serve as a mnemonic manual for mystics.' Likewise, Anṣārī's *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya* ('The Generations of the Ṣūfīs') and *Kashf al-asrār* ('Unveiling of the Secrets') are both pioneering works in Persian mystical tradition.

Above all, Beaurecueil's translation and edition of Anṣārī's *Munājāt* is his finest contribution to the master's spiritual insight. The *Munājāt* are celebrated for their literary beauty and striking spiritual wisdom. These intimate monologues with God in the form of aphorisms are the fruit of deep spiritual experiences and mystical inclinations. These 'gemlike, perfectly polished sayings'[13] were used as prayers for their artistic

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9 Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants de Kaboul*, Cerf, Paris, 2004, p. 30.

10 Nahid Angha, 'An Annotated Translation and Examination of the Essential Mystical Teachings in 'Abdullāh Anṣārī's (396-481/1006-1089) *Ṣad maydān* (The Hundred Fields)', PhD dissertation, University of Exeter, December, 2006. See published monograph, *Stations of the Sufi Path: the One Hundred Fields* (Sad Maydan) *of Abdullah Ansari of Herat*, Archetype, London 2010.

11 Ḥujwīrī's *Kashf al-maḥjūb* ('Revelation of the Mystery') in Persian and Qushayrī's *Risāla* in Arabic were also early works on the meaning of key Sufi terms.

12 Quoted in Angha, 'An Annotated …', p. 53, from Naṣr Allāh Pūrjavādī, *Isālat-i Ṣad maydān,* p. 142. Angha notes that Pūrjavādī and Mullā'ī have written extensively on Anṣārī in Persian.

13 *Ibn 'Ata' Illah/Khwaja Abdullah Ansari: The Book of Wisdom and Khwaja Abdullah*

quality, their exquisite wisdom and the spiritual comfort they bestow on wayfarers. In its Persian rhyming prose and rhythmic quatrains, the *Munājāt* speak of the wisdom of a searching and at times disheartened and yet hopeful mystic. These intimate conversations with God are the Pīr of Herāt's spiritual and poetic *chef-d'œuvre*. They have maintained an unprecedented level of popularity among rich and poor, Ṣūfīs and ordinary believers, and have served as lyrics for songs and a cash crop for many calligraphers and scribes throughout the centuries. In Herat, the birthplace of the master, they are as popular as the Qur'ān itself.

Years of scholarly endeavour included study travels. In 1954 Beaurecueil travelled to Afghanistan to collect and photograph a significant amount of manuscripts, and above all accomplish his first pilgrimage to the tomb of Anṣārī near Herat. On 6 January 1956 he arrived in Herat:

> On the morning of January 6th—on the feast of the Epiphany—I lay my eyes on Herat which was illumined by a lovely sunrise and a piercing cold. The city was completely different from Kabul. There were lines of conifers fencing the avenues, green pastures, a broad horizon, rooftops made of small domes placed side by side, pieces of trampled walls, gray pigeons and a majestic citadel opened to the blue sky.[14]

During this first visit, in Kabul and Herat, he took the opportunity to meet with many native scholars of Anṣārī. It was then that the idea of spending an extended period of time in Kabul was born. Seven years later in 1962, Beaurecueil was invited there to take part in the commemoration of the 900th anniversary of Anṣārī's death. After the festivities, the University of Kabul invited him to accept a position to teach the history of Islamic mysticism and the techniques of editing manuscripts. Beaureceuil recalled his feelings, 'I returned to Cairo for my last winter where I thought I would live the rest of my life. Little did I know that seventeen years in Cairo were just a chapter, a crucial training ground for another adventure, an unpredictable one. I was

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Ansari, Intimate Conversations, Victor Danner and Wheeler M Thackston (eds), Paulist Press International US, New York, 1979, p. xiv.

14 Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, p. 38.

forty-five, an ideal age to go on a mission.'[15] J M Mérigoux is correct, Beaurecueil's first journey in 1955 was 'the engagement (*les fiançailles*)' and the second one in 1962, was 'the wedding (*les épousailles*)'.[16]

Beaurecueil was fascinated by Anṣārī's life and oeuvre from the time he discovered him or rather was 'seized' by him. Subsequently, he collected and studied all surviving texts and carried out a passionate historical investigation of the master of Herat. He traced the events of his life, the context in which he lived, the theological conflicts Anṣārī engaged and his spiritual legacy. Carefully, the friar collected and checked as pieces of a puzzle Anṣārī's spiritual and intellectual legacy. This dedication expressed itself in his pursuit of Islamic studies, focusing on mysticism as the religious core of Islam with Anṣārī as a central religious figure. His studies of Islamic mysticism and in particular of Anṣārī led to a sympathetic vision of Islam, with mystical experience being at the core of the tradition.

After 17 years in Cairo, Beaurecueil was ready to move on to a different land and encounter different people. He yearned for direct experience of Persian-speaking Muslims. To be sure, Beaurecueil's departure to Kabul was driven by a myriad of personal and professional reasons. The move gave him complete latitude in his choice of ministry and how to organize his religious life. Away from a regular Dominican friar's life, and ecclesial structure, and financially independent, he found himself in uncharted territory.

In Afghanistan, mystical Islam and the examples of ordinary Muslims embodied the presence of the divine. It was there that Islam and Muslims helped him deepen an 'evangelical' sense of humanity and solidarity with the most vulnerable. The dire poverty of Afghans and their ethnic and religious complexity mesmerized this aristocratic Parisian friar. In *Dār al-Islam*, Muslims showed him another way of being a Christian and a Dominican.

Praxis Mystica in Kabul

In the final weeks of his life, Anṣārī's *Munājāt* was at Beaurecueil's bedside. No doubt, Anṣārī prompted a passion and elicited a dedication seldom

15 Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, p. 44.
16 Mérigoux, 'Un mystique dominicain …', *Sources*, p. 2.

found among western scholars. Even more surprising, Beaurecueil's experience at the University of the Kabul was short-lived. However, this unsuccessful episode opened the door to a pastoral mysticism he had never dreamt of. His decision to settle in Kabul led to a deepening of his mystical intuition and *praxis*. He became less and less concerned with an orientalist's scholarly work. Rather, he was more and more attuned to the *praxis* of a spiritual life, the day-to-day human encounter and the practice of everyday life. This unusual path seemed strange to many Dominican friars and friends. In an article written in honour of Massignon, he explained:

> Dear Louis Massignon, I am no longer an orientalist, just an elementary school teacher. First, I abandoned my research position for a faculty position, and then left my professorship to teach at a grammar school. Now, I am on the verge of becoming a primary school teacher. The scholar that you were might regret at first glance this strange downward mobility … However, the man of God, the prophet and servant would certainly understand this unusual path of mine. My journey is marked with broken steles adamantly pointing to heaven.[17]

It is worth noticing that he did not abandon two decades of intensive research on Anṣārī lightly. At a crossroads in his life and in the middle of an existential crisis, Beaurecueil made a journey to Anṣārī's shrine near Herat for an intimate conversation. Louis Duprée, a close friend who lived in Kabul with Beaurecueil, files this account:

> In the early evening, when the sun bathes Herāt in a golden light, Serge sat before the tomb of Anṣārī and closed his eyes to meditate. As reported later, he asked the questions which plagued him and demanded of Anṣārī: 'O Pīr of Herāt, you brought me to Afghanistan. But what should I do now?' As he meditated, Serge became aware that all sounds of man and nature had died away. Silence! Then he opened his eyes. Sitting before him were two

17 Beaurecueil, 'À propos d'une stèle brisée …', in *L'Herne: Louis Massignon*, Jean François Six (ed.), no. 13, L'Herne, Paris, 1970, p. 419.

> little boys, huddled together, contemplating this strange *khareji* (foreigner) who sat so respectfully in front of the tomb of Anṣārī. One of the boys, it turned out, claimed to be a direct descendants of the Khwāja ʻAbdullāh Anṣārī, Pīr-i-Herāt.[18]

In Beaurecueil's view, these boys were Anṣārī's answer to his questions. Why would a Dominican friar make a pilgrimage to the tomb of a Hanbali Sufi for an intimate and crucial conversation? The mystical affinity between the friar and the Sufi holds the answer. It is this iconoclasm that I pursue in Beaurecueil's life as a friar preacher. His books, *A Christian in Afghanistan* and *My Children of Kabul* summarize his attempt to follow the late Bishop of Oran (Algeria) Pierre Claverie's motto *être l'autre chez l'autre* ('to be other to those made other'). In so doing he achieved the goal of hospitality, which according to Jacques Derrida happens when the guest becomes the host and the host the guest.[19]

Both books, in my view, map out Beaurecueil's *praxis mystica* or pastoral mysticism, his path to holiness or sanctity. These books are portraits of Beaurecueil's life as a friar preacher in a land he cherished and of a people he learned to love. I am interested in his spirituality or mystical theology which is Catholic and Dominican in scope and dialogical in commitment. It seems to me, his entire adventure in the land of Anṣārī can be framed within Christian Duquoc's arresting view of the reign of God:

> The dominion of Christ points to Jesus of Nazareth, who chose in his life to relinquish hegemonic imagination and to assume the risk of a fragile justice and a discrete love. Jesus deemed this withdrawal from power and wealth more beneficial to the hoi poloi. The Resurrected one, through the gift of the Spirit, invites the Church and Christians to walk a similar path, which scorns deceptive optimisms, and opens up to lucid and unfathomable hope. Such hope builds on faith which overcomes

18 Louis Duprée, 'Serge de Beaurecueil', *South Asia Series*, vol. 20, issue 8 (1976), p. 6.
19 Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, Meridian, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1999.

> doubts produced by corrupted and imperial vision of the reign of God.[20]

Duquoc understands the fragility of the reign of God because Christian communities are prone to a constitutive unfaithfulness, and proclivities toward that which negate the possibility of the reign of God. It seems to me, faithfulness to the resurrected one grounded Beaurecueil's deepest motives and intuitions. He experienced with Kabul's street children the fragility of life and the abiding divine providence.

It seems to me the holiness of a saint lies in this downward mobility, a motion toward the signs of the reign of God. What the friar lost in academic endeavour, he gained in pastoral engagement. His attachment to people, particularly children living in dire socio-economic situations in a beautiful and yet devastated country, tested his core identity as a friar and a priest. In the abode of Islam, he travelled unparalleled roads and had to re-imagine what it meant to be a faithful Christian disciple among Muslims. He strove to craft a genuine religious life which was Christian in faith but Afghani in culture. In his own words, he describes the situation with a captivating honesty:

> Often, I thought about my life in Kabul. At eighteen I became a Dominican mostly because of the liturgy of the hours, the conventual life, the habit and of course the tonsure. At sixty, here I am: no habit, no liturgy of the hours and I live thousand miles away from my priory of assignment (Beirut), which I have not seen in years. Here, I am overwhelmed by my mundane work … Nothing like what I first had in mind apart from going away in a non-Christian country. Ironically, I feel right at home. Am I faithful?[21]

This process demanded a slow and careful method of integration and re-evaluation of his vocation. Kabul street children were the greatest gift of his life and the most painful and formative aspect of his mystical journey. The living encounter between Christianity and

20 Christian Duquoc, *L'unique Christ. La symphonie différée*, Cerf, Paris, 2002, p. 255.
21 Beaurecueil, *Je crois en l'étoile du matin*, Cerf, Paris, 2005, pp. 35-36.

Islam took place at the House of Abraham, where he attempted to offer hospitality and to share 'bread and salt' with the descendants of the Pīr of Herat. His adventure uncovered a deep understanding of how mysticism and *praxis* converged in the depths of contemplative consciousness, in the deepest dimension of Islam and Christianity. The convergence in Beaurecueil's case went beyond speculative theology and settled on spiritual life and practice. He observed, 'Sufism brought me to Afghanistan, but Afghanistan forced me out of Sufism in order to engage a more vital endeavour, no longer in books but in the mundane and everyday service to people. In this gloomy environment all steles as soon as erected are mercilessly broken, but still pointing to heaven.'[22]

It is not surprising that no friar has so far followed in his footsteps. Speaking about his abode in Kabul, he notes:

> All in all, I chose Abraham as the patron saint of our humble abode in Shār-é-Naw. Thirty years ago, I joined the Order of St. Dominic, and later I heard Father Chenu's invitation to go to Egypt and landed in Cairo in 1946. How would I have ever imagined that my Promised Land was farther away in the mountains of Central Asia? God led me step by step, and now I see clearly the itinerary. However, the meaning of my adventure escapes me completely. Like Ur and Harrān for Abraham, Paris and Cairo were just steps on the way to my Promised Land.[23]

The interplay of the mystical and the prophetic elements found in the life of Beaurecueil have a well-established lineage in the Dominican Order. One sees in his example that the essential unknowability of God embraces the imperative of a loving ministry. The life and religious praxis of Beaurecueil is congruent with the Dominican tradition and spirituality, which necessarily includes: prayer and study, material and spiritual poverty, the primacy of Truth, and contemplation expressed in active service to others. This latter aspect known as *Contemplata aliis tradere* (to hand on to others what has been contemplated) is at the heart of Beaurecueil's *praxis mystica*. As Woods explains: 'Drawn from the teachings of Thomas Aquinas, the gnomic phrase *[Contemplata aliis tradere]* is meant not to distinguish

22 Beaurecueil, 'À propos d'une stèle brisée', *L'Herne: Louis Massignon*, p. 419.
23 Beaurecueil *Un Chrétien en Afghanistan*, Cerf, Paris, 1985, and reprinted 2001, p. 16.

the mystical, contemplative dimension of Dominican spirituality from its active expression, but to unite them. Nor are they related as a means to an end: they form one goal.'[24]

Beaurecueil's scholarship was a meditation on master—teacher relations, and on the hidden and abiding presence of God amid incommensurable differences. His life journey points to the transformative role of Islam and Muslims upon Christian discipleship. In the abode of Islam, this Christian life given to the study of the mystical dimensions of Islam experienced a conversion of his orthopraxy and worldview. He learned to allow the religious other to speak as other without assimilating him or her to the category of sameness. The context of otherness in Kabul ushered in a different way of living, an authentic Christian discipleship. The children at the House of Abraham opened an unexpected window, a ministry of mutual hospitality to the Muslim other. Beaurecueil writes:

> Amazement! Indeed, the morning Star has never ceased to light my way, even during the darkest hours of my life. Often, it illumines my path through the radiant face of children, the icons of Jesus which reveals His presence. I encounter God in unexpected corners, but He disguises himself in order to surprise and leave me bewildered before His radiant beauty.[25]

On the one hand, Beaurecueil's life is a faith journey lived from the location of weakness, otherness and a constant effort to understand his faith in the light of Islamic faith. On the other, his life was the locus of Christian-Muslim theological conundrums. He lived every aspect

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24 Richard Woods, *Mysticism and Prophecy: The Dominican Tradition*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1998, p. 25. The classical reference is 'For even as it is better to enlighten than merely to shine, so it is better to give to others what has been contemplated than merely to contemplate.' Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q. 188. For more on Dominican spirituality, see Anselm Townsend, *Dominican Spirituality*, Bruce Publishing, Co., Milwaukee, 1934; Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ways of the Spiritual Life*, TAN-BOOKS, Rockford IL, 1977; Benedict Ashley, *The Dominicans*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville MN, 1990; *Thomas Aquinas: The Gifts of the Spirit: Selected Spiritual Writings*, (ed.) Benedict Ashley, trans. Matthew Rzeczkowski, New City Press, Hyde Park, New York, 1996. Oliver Davies, *Meister Eckhart: Mystical Theologian*, SPCK, London 1991.

25 Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, pp. 131-32.

of the challenges, differences and incompatibilities of the two faith traditions. Above all, Islam and Muslims serve as the crucible of his scholarship and the ground upon which his Christian discipleship drew nourishment and bore fruits. In the abode of Islam, he discovered the sacred meaning of hospitality given and received, a 'holy hospitality'!

Beaurecueil's studies were themselves the outcome of an approach in which a scholarly interest was intimately linked to his personality, which in turn seemed to be the fruit of a unique life experience. All of this led to far-reaching intellectual and spiritual explorations, and a project of life quite different from that of many friars at the time. Even among modern scholars of Anṣārī, the case of Beaurecueil was exceptional and so was his perception of the master of Herat. He felt a special vocation to Anṣārī and the street children of Kabul. Besides his scholarly self-discipline, he subjected himself to a rigorous religious and mystical discipline.

In conclusion, the mystical encounter of Beaurecueil and Anṣārī bore the characteristics of what T S Eliot calls 'a raid on the inarticulate' and Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī refers to as 'divine flashes'.[26] Nonetheless, his devotion to Anṣārī's spiritual treatises unsettled many Christian scholars of Islam and his pilgrimages to Anṣārī's shrine for intimate conversation baffled many observers. Despite these valid criticisms levelled against Beaurecueil's commitment to Anṣārī, there is something unfathomable about this encounter. Besides his premier scholarly endeavours, the friar was an unmistakable example of Christian hospitality nourished by Islamic tradition.

26 T S Eliot, *The Four Quartets*, Mariner Books, London, 1968, p. 16; Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī, *Divine Flashes*, trans. William C Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson, Paulist Press, New York, 1982.

THE ARMENIAN CHURCH UNDER THE SCEPTRE OF THE TSARS, 1828-1905

Vrej Nerses Nersessian

The Armenian population of Transcaucasia numbered a significant population; however, for a long time it had become a bone of contention among the Russians, Persians and Ottoman Turks and this was most visibly felt in the elections of the Armenian Catholicoses of All Armenians. The Russian, Persian and Ottoman empires had substantial Armenian communities and with strong commercial and economic influence, were eager to portray themselves as the 'protector of the Armenian people'. Muslim leaders regarded the Catholicos of All Armenians as both the spiritual and political head of the nation and in their decrees referred to him as the 'caliph' of the Armenian people.

In fact, both Persia and Russia had wanted to obtain the economic co-operation of Armenians for over two centuries.[1] Since, the end of the seventeenth century, the Russians also began to consider an alliance with the Armenians crucial for their future expansion and to achieve their goal, the Armenian Church found itself playing an intermediary role. The southward advance of the Russian empire into the Caucasus

1 Khatchikian Lewon, «Հայերը հին Մոսկուայում եւ Մոսկուա տանող ճանապարհների վրայ» ('Armenians in old Moscow and on the roads leading to Moscow'), *BM*, 13 (1980), pp. 7-107 reprinted in *Collected Works,* Vol. II, Erevan, 1999, pp. 150-240; Zh Ananian, «Հայ վաճառականութիւնը Ռուսաստանում (ԺԷ-րդ.դ վերջ -ԺԹ-րդդ.սկիզբ)» ('Armenian merchants in Russia, end of the seventeenth century-beginning of the nineteenth century') in V B Barkhudarian and Zawen Ekawian (eds), Էջեր հայ գաղթավայրերի պատմութեան *(Collected studies on the Armenian diaspora)*, Erevan, 1996, pp. 181-208; Kostikyan, K'ristine, ' « Հայոց եկեղեցու իրավական եվ սոցիալ-տնտեսական դրության հարցերն ըստ Մատենադարանի ԺԷ-ԺԸ դարերի Պարսկերեն վավերագրերի» ('The legal norms and conditions of the Armenian Church under the rule of Iran as reflected in the 17-18th century Persian decrees and deeds of purchase found in the Matenadaran's collections'), Ejmiadsin 3 (2018), pp.68-86

at the expense of the Ottoman and Persian empires was the first major order change in the region since the seventeenth century.

Thus, long before the annexation of Eastern Armenia, in areas mainly under nominal Persian control, Russia through its sporadic contacts with Armenians established clearly two principal sources of Armenian identification—commerce and Christianity.[2] The Russo-Persian wars of 1801-13 and 1826-28 were concluded by the treaties of Gulistan in 1813 and Turkmenchai in 1828.[3] The first treaty saw Persia forfeit its rights in Eastern Georgia, while the later treaty resulted in the Russian conquest of the *khanates* of Erevan and Nakhijevan, which in addition to these territories, secured for Russia economic and political concessions in Persia.[4] In the Russo-Persian wars of 1804-10 and of 1826-27, the Armenians lent military and political support to the Russians in anticipation not only of liberation from the rule of Persians, but also of achieving a base for an autonomous Armenian development. In 1826, for instance, Archbishop (later Catholicos,1843-1857) Nerses Ashtarakets'i, in a famous 'Appeal to the Armenian Nation', reminded the Armenians that the Russians were coming not in their own self-interest but for the peace, security, and well-being of the Armenians. He therefore asked the Armenians, in the name of their glorious forefathers, for the sake of God and Christianity, not to spare either their goods or their lives for the success of the Russians. The archbishop himself led a detachment of Armenian volunteers against Erevan. Avan-Yuzbashi, the Kharabagh *melik*, affirmed boldly: 'We will fight until that time when we will enter the service of the tsar, and all will perish to the last one but we will not leave Christianity; we will fight for our faith.'[5]

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2 When Kiev adopted Christianity at the end of the tenth century, Prince Vladimir married Anna the sister of Basil II of the Macedonian dynasty, which was of Armenian origin. See A Kazhdan, 'Macedonian Dynasty' in *ODB*, Oxford, 1991, Vol. 2, p. 1262.

3 John F Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus*, London, 1908, Chapter XI, pp. 164-94; Sir Percy Sykes, *A History of Persia*, 3rd ed., London, 1930, pp. 311-22.

4 For a detailed account of the military operations of 1826-27 based on archival sources, see D Muradian and V Martirosyan « Արեվելյան Հայաստանը Ռուսաստանին միանալու տարեգրությունից» ('Chronological account of the annexation of Eastern Armenia by Russia'), *Teghekagir*, no. 12 (1957), pp.18-30.

5 Cited in Suny Ronald G, 'Images of Armenians in the Russian Empire' in *The Armenian image in History and literature*,R G Hovhannisian (ed.), California, 1981, p. 110, Ezeants' Karapet,«Ս.Էջմիածնի Մայր Աթոռի եւ Ռուսաց կառավարութեան յարաբերութիւնների ծագումը» ('The origins of the

Following the death of Ghukas I Karnets'i (1780-1799) there were four candidates patronised variously by Russians and Persians. The rivalry among the different candidates was fuelled by Ottoman, Russian and Persian ambitions, and in the history of the Armenian Church, the period from 1801-1808 is referred to as the 'Davit-Danilian, era of vulgar disputes' [«ԴԱՒԻԹ- ԴԱՆԻԷԼԵԱՆ ԳՌԵՀԻԿ ՎԷՃԵՐԸ»].[6]

The conflict was finally resolved in 1807, when the Persians recalled Catholicos Davit' V Eneget'ts'i (1801-1807) from exile and forced Daniel I Surmarets'i (1807-1808) to resign. In 1808 Daniel I attempted to reoccupy the throne but failed, because the Russians had decided that his return did not comply with their interests and inspirations of the Armenians.[7] After the death of Daniel in 1808, the Persians re-called Ep'rem I Joragheghts'i (1809-1830) as Catholicos of All Armenians.[8] Although, Ep'rem had been the primate of the Armenian diocese of Russia, he had remained neutral and in the view some even anti-Russian. His candidacy was supported by Tsar Alexander I (1801-1825) and the Persian heir-apparent Abbas Mirza (d.1833) .The period from 1814 to 1824 was a low point in Armeno-Persian relations, which forced Ep'rem to leave Ejmiadsin and take up residence in the Monastery of Haghpat. His rival, Hovhannes Karbets'i (1831-1842), bribed the *khan* of Erevan to declare himself catholicos but failed. Despite being a Muslim, the Persians honoured the principles of the Armenian Church and refused to interfere in the internal affairs of the Church saying 'as long as the elected catholicos of the nation is alive no other person can take his place.'

The Persians also declined to accept Ep'rem's resignation insisting that 'a catholicos elected by the nation has no right to resign by his will.'[9]

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contacts between the Holy Mother See of Ejmiadsin and Russia'), Tiflis, 1904.

6 Georg-Mesrop, Պատմութիւն Հայ եկեղեցւոյ ('History of the Armenian Church'), Constantinople, 1914, Vol. II, pp. 460-62.

7 Ormanian, Maghak'ia, Ազգապատում ('National History'), Beirut 1960, Vols. II and III; Ut'ujyan Aghawni, «Դավիթ Ե Էնեգեթցի [1801-1807] » ('Davit'Vth Eneget'ts'i, [1801-1807]'), *HEH*, Ejmiadsin, 2008, Bk. I, pp. 72-74.

8 Vrej Nersessian, 'Two Armenian manuscripts in the library of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland', *JRAS*, Series 3, 27, 3 (2017), pp. 359-76.

9 A Eretseants, Ամենայն Հայոց Կաթողիկոսութիւնը եւ Կովկասի Հայք, Մասն Բ. Կաթողիկոսութիւն Տ.Յովհաննէս *VIII* Կարբեցւոյ եւ « Պօլօժէնիէ» *(1831-1842թ.)* ('The Catholicate of Yovhannes VIII Karbets'i and "Polozheniye" (1831-1842'), Tiflis, 1895, p. 259; Msereants' Mser Magistros, « Պատմութիւն Կաթողիկոսաց Էջմիածնի ի Սիմէօնէ մինչ ցՅովհաննէս Ը ամք տեառն 1763-1831» (A history of the catholicoi from Simeon to Hovhannes VI from the

In 1828 the Treaty of Turkmenchai included the cession to Russia of the provinces of Erevan and Nakhijevan.[10] The euphoria in the wake of the Russian annexation of Eastern Armenia was such that Armenian Church leaders, intellectuals and writers, chief among them the novelist Khatchatur Abovian (1809-?48), in triumphal language glorified the event which the historian Leo described as an 'inexpensive victory which brought a Russian Erevan in exchange for a Persian Erevan.'[11]

Armenians had much reason to rejoice in the occupation, for it changed the demography of Eastern Armenia. At the conclusion of the Russo-Turkish war, thousands of Armenian refugees from Turkey and Persia settled in newly acquired Russian land and whole areas formerly occupied by Muslims were given over to Armenians. Almost 20,000 Armenians from Bayazit and Kars regions settled in Erevan and Nakhijevan and an extra 25,000 Armenians were repatriated from northern Persia. For the first time in centuries, the number of Armenians was on a par with that of Muslims in Eastern Armenia.[12]

The Russians saw themselves as both liberators and conquerors—liberators of a Christian people no longer able to defend themselves, and conquerors who had brought glory to the empire by defeating the Muslim powers.

Polozheniye

The Armenian Church had parted company from the Church of the first six centuries in 506 at the Council of Dvin, when the Church was still a unified community, when the terms 'Catholic' and 'Eastern

year of the Lord 1753 to 1831), Moscow,1876.

10 H F B Lynch, *Armenian Travels and Studies*, London, 1901,Vol. I, pp. 232-33;Vartan Gregorian, 'The impact of Russia in Armenia', in Wayne S Vucinich (ed.), *Russia and Asia .Essays on the influence of Russia on Asian peoples*, Stanford, 1972, pp. 178-80.

11 Leo [pseud. Arakel Babakhanyan], Հայոց Պատմություն ('Armenian history'), Erevan, 1984,Vol. IV, p. 431;Vrej Nersessian,'Abovyan Khatchatour' in R B Pynsent and S I Kanikova (eds), *The Everyman Companion to East European Literature*, London, 1993, pp. 7-8. On14 April 1848 Abovyan left home, supposedly on a brief errand, and was never seen or heard of again. He was assassinated by the Tsarist secret service . He expressed his joy in this memorable phrase « օրհնուի էն սհաթը,որ Ռուսը ոտը դրեց հայ հողին» ('Blessed be that hour when the Russians placed their feet on Armenian soil').

12 Arkun Aram, 'Into the modern age, 1800-1913' in Edmund Herzig and Marina Kurkchiyan (eds), *The Armenians*, London, 2005, p. 66.

Orthodox' had not been coined for the needs of Catholic and Orthodox apologetics. These terms were employed after the schism in 1054 in the furtherance of their power and authority, which were no longer tied to theology or ecclesiastical authority but calculated power politics. The Armenian Church in its title prefers to use the term *Endhanrakan* (Ընդհանրական) meaning 'general', or 'universal' and in place of 'Orthodox' the term *Oughapar* (Ուղղաբառ) meaning 'true' or 'right', implying like the other ancient Churches of Apostolic origin, faithfulness to the doctrines of the undivided Church.[13] Autonomy and autocephaly are two different forms and structures of ecclesiastical conceptions which in fact are clearly visible in the tradition of the Eastern Orthodox Churches. The Armenian Church is one of the family of the five Oriental Orthodox Churches which have among themselves brotherly or sisterly relations and eucharistic communion, but they do not recognise any kind of juridical or jurisdictional or hierarchical inter-dependence. Their only common tradition is their non-Chalcedonian stance, which is based on the first three ecumenical Councils of Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381) and Ephesus (431).[14]

Pegging down orthodoxy to the authority of the canons of the Ecumenical Councils hand in hand with canons of its local councils, the Armenian Church governed itself until the nineteenth century, when political and social changes in eastern and western sections of the Armenian Church, under Russian and Ottoman rule respectively, produced momentous changes in the juridical organisation or institutional form of the Church.[15]

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13 Fr Krikor Maksoudian, *Frequently asked questions about the Armenian Church*, New York, 2004, pp. 14-15.

14 Vrej Nersessian, 'The Armenian Tradition', in Augustin Casiday (ed.), *The Orthodox Christian World*, London, 2012, pp. 41-57; 'Armenian Christianity' in Ken Parry (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Eastern* Christianity, Oxford, 2007, pp. 23-46; and 'Armenian Christianity' in Leslie Holden (ed.), *Jesus in History, Thought, and Culture: An Encyclopedia*, Oxford, 2003, pp. 63-66.

15 Ghltchian Arsen, Կանօնագիրք Հայոց ('Canons of the Armenian Church' {contains} a. National Councils, b. Caucasian-Albanian Church (Աղուանից) (until 605 the Georgian Church came under the jurisdiction of the Armenian Church), c. Apostolic, d. Three Ecumenical Councils), Tiflis, 1914; Abel Mkhitareants, Պատմութիւն ժողովոց հանդերձ կանոնագրութեամբք ('History of the church councils accompanied by their canons'), Vagharshapat, 1874; Vazgen Hakobyan, Կանոնագիրք Հայոց ('Code Book of the Armenian Church'), Erevan, Vols I-II, 1964 and 1971; Vrej Nersessian, 'Տիեզերական ժողովների հեղինակությունն ու անսխալականությունը' ('The Ecumenical councils

To consolidate power over Armenia, Russia granted Erevan and Nakhijevan autonomous status *(Armeianskai Oblast)*, which lasted from 1828 to 1840. As the Russian government pursued broader political objectives, it espoused the 'centralist' theory, which advocated instituting a set of rules and regulations which would bring the Armenian Church under the control of a central administration. In February 1830 General Ivan Paskevich formed a secret committee made up of a Russified Armenian, Major Vasili Bebutov, commander over the Armenian district, Serovbe *vard*, Araratian *Karnets'i* (from Karin), Hakob Shahan Jrpetian (*pseud*. Chahan de Cirbied [French language instructor at the Nersisian College in Tiflis]) and the aristocrat Prince Otchkin who were commissioned to devise a 'Regulation' for the Armenian Church. Serovbe *vard* was a convert from Catholicism, Chahan de Cirbied and Prince Otchkin (the latter of Polish descent) were Catholics. Thus initial steps to institute Regulations for the administration of the Church remained fruitless. The Russian dramatist and diplomat Alexandr Gribaiodov complained to Paskevich about the bureaucratic and insensitive manner in which Russian governance was imposed.[16]

> We have taken the power from the beks and khans and in exchange we have given the people the confusion of alien laws. Our urban and city[officials]made no effort to adapt to local customs … . They judge by drawing things out and signing directives and decisions which the inhabitants obey, not by conviction, but as if by force.

Under the leadership of V Rosen, the head of the Oriental Faculty in St Petersburg, who succeeded I Paskevich on 11 March 1836, a

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their authority and infallibility'), *Ejmiadsin* 9-10 (1991), pp. 55-68.

16 A S Griboedov, 'Proekt uchrezhdeniia Rossiiskoi Zakavkazskoi kompanii' ('Project devised by the Russians for the Caucasus'), *Sochineniia*, (ed.) V. Orlov, Moscow, 1953, pp.614-638; V.Parsamyan, « Ցարիզմի գաղութային քաղաքականությունը Հայաստանում ('The colonial policy of tsarism in Armenia') Erevan,1940 and his «Ա.Ս.Գրիբաեդովը եվ Հայ Ռուսական հարաբերությունները» ('A S Gribaiodov and Russian-Armenian political relations'), Erevan,1947. In the year in which the Treaty of Turkmenchai was signed, a special mission to save two Armenian women from the hands of the 'infidels' caused a riot, a mob stormed the Legation, and A.Gribaiodov and his staff were murdered. See Sir Sykes Percy, *A History of Persia*, London,1930 (3rd ed.), vol. II, pp. 321-322.

revised and improved Regulations was presented to Tsar Nicholas I for ratification, which came into force on 1 January 1837. The decree was entitled 'The Ordinances for the Administration of the Affaires of the Gregorian Church in Russia', commonly called the *Polozheniye*, which in Armenian translates «Բարձրագոյն կարգադրութիւն Յաղագս Կառավարութեան գործոց Լուսաւորչական Հայոց եկեղեցւոյ ի Ռուսաստան».[17] It was modelled, by and large, on the administrative structure of the Russian Church, part of the Russian Civil Code as vol. XI, part I, ch. 3. It contains 141 clauses divided into 10 sections.

After the occupation of Transcaucasia, the tsarist government put an end to the Catholicate of Caucasian Albania *[Աղուանք]* and the jurisdictions of that Catholicate were divided between the dioceses of Georgia and Kharabagh. The Catholicates of Aght'amar[18] and Cilicia were restricted to their narrow limits and, like the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, were brought under the jurisdiction of the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople. After the ratification by the sultan of the Armenian National Constitution in 1863, the two Catholicates and the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, came within the direct control of the 'National Assembly' [«զգային Ժողով»] of Constantinople. The Armenian communities in Iran and southeast Asia, formed two dioceses, that of Atrpatakan and the united diocese of Persia and India. According to Article 56 of the *Polozheniye* the communities in Russia were divided into six dioceses.[19] In the election of the Catholicos the *Polozheniye* permitted two delegates from each diocese, the representatives from the Russian dioceses were constantly twelve, four from the Persian and Indian diocese and two from the Ottoman empire. Included were the members of the synod—usually eight bishops and seven archbishops, or *vardapets*, from the brotherhood of Holy Ejmiadsin. The overall representations from the Russian territories was limited to twenty-seven delegates.[20]

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17 Armenian text of the *Polozheniye* translated from the Russian by M K'artashian is inserted as an Appendix in Eretseants, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 551-89. According to Eretseants the errors and mistranslations in the Ejmiadsin edition of 1836 were corrected in the monthly *Maseats Aghawni* (1858) and by the Russian Embassy in Constantinople in 1866.

18 Vardanyan Vrezh, «Աղթամարի Կաթողիկոսության պատմություն» ('History of the Catholicate of Aght'amar'), Holy Ejmiadsin, 2017.

19 (1) New Nakhijevan, (2) Astrakhan, (3) Province of Erevan, (4) Georgia, (5) Kharabagh and (6) Shirvan in Azerbaijan.

20 Krikor Maksoudian, *Chosen of God. The election of the Catholicos of All Armenians from the fourth century to the present*, New York, 1995, p. 108.

In order to spare the Church from the repeat of the 'Davit-Danielian disputes' (1801-1808) and protect the elections of catholicoses from the manipulations of Persian and Turkish overlords, on 10 July 1806, Catholicos Daniel, in an Encyclical to the Brotherhood of Ejmiadsin, suggested the need to establish a synod based on the canons of the Armenian Church to oversee and regulate the conduct of the elections and assist the catholicos. The Russians at first objected to the proposal of a synodal structure, arguing that Russia cannot intervene legally in the affairs of Ejmiadsin as the Araratian Diocese was outside its territorial jurisdiction, but the situation had changed when Russia occupied Eastern Armenia.[21] On 25 May 1808, the synod was confirmed with a constitution comprising of twenty-two clauses. The synodal structure remained in use until the introduction of the *Polozheniye* in 1836.[22] There was a precedence in the Church for a synodal structure. The historian P'awstos Buzand, commenting on the reign of Catholicos Nerses I Part'ew (353-373), observes: 'At the time of the chief-bishop Nerses there were twelve bishops in the house of the patriarch under his authority; they were his co-bishops, collaborators, and joint-planners. They were entrusted with the supervision of the poor and were entirely loyal to him during his time.'[23] The introduction of the *Polozheniye* did not raise any serious objections among the communities in Russia, except those in the diaspora who were critical of the high-handed manner in which the Constitution was drawn up, ratified by the Tsar and imposed on the Church. Armenian communities in Ottoman Turkey, Persia, and India saw the 'Regulation' as an attempt to erode the autonomy and autocephaly of the Armenian Church by decreeing that its relationship with the diaspora be conducted through the Russian Foreign Ministry. On 27 January 1840 the Armenian community in Calcutta on behalf of all the Armenian communities in Eastern Asia, through the intermediary of the British Embassy in St Petersburg, sent two letters of protest—the first on behalf of Catholicos Yovhannes VIII Karbets'i (1809-1830) and the second in the name of the Synod in Ejmiadsin.[24] The Armenians in Ottoman Turkey convened a National

21 M Ormanian, *Azgapatum*, Vol. III, Part 1, pp. 3409.

22 M Ormanian, *Azgapatum*, Vol. II, Bk. 3, pp. 3342-47; Georg-Mesrop, *Patmutiwn*, *ibid*., pp. 562-64.

23 P'awstos Biwzand, *The Epic Histories attributed to P'awstos Biwzand*, transl. and commentary by N G Garsoian, Harvard University Press, 1989, Bk.V, p. 235.

24 For a full text of the letters suggesting alternatives in the *Polozheniye* to the clauses

Religious Council on the 4 December 1865 under the leadership of the former Patriarch Poghos II Grigorian of Constantinople and decided to bring to the attention of the authorities in St Petersburg the recommendations of the Armenian communities of Turkey, India and Persia and seek changes to the *Polozheniye* for the reason that it had been formulated 'without the participation and consultation with representatives of the Armenian Church but conceived by a group of individuals ignorant of the canons and traditions of the Armenian Church.' The requests were communicated in a letter to the newly elected Catholicos Georg IV of Constantinople (1866-1882), formerly Patriarch of Constantinople (1858-1860), for implementation.[25]

The ten sections of the *Polozheniye* and their titles are as follows. The numbers in brackets indicate the number of clauses each section contains.

> Concerning the general regulations and authorisations by which the Armenian Gregorian Church should conduct itself [1-9]
> Statutes for the conduct of the Patriarch [10-32]
> Statutes for the conduct of the Armenian Synod in Ejmiadsin [33-54]
> Statutes for the conduct of the Diocesan primates of the Armenian Gregorian Church [55-71]
> Statutes for the Spiritual Institutions and court of corrections [72-82]
> Statutes for the Monasteries [83-101]
> Statutes for married clergy [102-111]
> Statutes for the religious schools under the control of the Armenian Gregorian Church [112-116].
> Statutes concerning the governance of property belonging to the Gregorian Armenian Church [117-126]
> Statutes concerning the incomes of the clergy and the support of their widows and orphans (127-141].[26]

11, 12, 13, 32, 33, 37, 71, 89 and 91, see A Eretseants, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 478-504.

25 Izmirlian Mat'eos, Հայրապետութիւն Հայաստանեայց Առաքելական Սուրբ եկեղեցւոյ եւ Սիս ու Աղթամար ('The Catholicate of the Armenian Apostolic and Holy Church and of Sis and Aghtamar'), Ejmiadsin, 2008, p. 214-219, Yusik *vrd.* Movsisian, Հայաստանեայց Առաքելական Սուրբ Եկեղեցւոյ Պատմութիւն ('History of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church'), Ejmiadsin, 2008.

26 For the Armenian text, see A Eretseants, *op. cit.*, Appendix, pp. 549-89; Valter Diloyan,

In 1995 on the eve of the election of a new Catholicos to succeed Vazgen I Palchian (1955-1994), to provide the modern elector with an understanding of historical developments in the proceedings of electing a catholicos, it was deemed desirable to include in *Chosen of God* an English and modern Armenian translation of Articles 10-19 of the *Polozheniye* concerning the election of a catholicos.[27] The editors of the Regulation attempted to pull together the traditional concepts and practices and put them into a constitutional framework.

For the first time the novel and unwelcome appellation in the name of the Armenian Church was used by the Russians—the term 'Enlightener' /ռւսաւոր-չական/, which in the Russian text translates as *Gregorian*. By the use of this pejorative epithet the Russians sought to attach a denominational attribute to the name of the Church and chose a sectarian adjective for the purpose in place of 'Armenian Orthodox', as in 'Greek Orthodox', 'Latin Catholic', or 'Russian Proslav'. While Catholic Mkhitarists adopted this epithet for the name of the Armenian Church in their attempt to reject the 'Apostolic' foundation of the Armenian Church, the Russians selected this epithet to distinguish it from those Armenians who were Catholic or Protestant. The tailored introduction of the formulation 'Affairs of the Gregorian Church in Russia' seemed to the Armenians to be in accord with ancient tradition, but in reality its aim was to reduce the power of the Church far more than the Persians or Ottoman Turks ever attempted. From the use of the territorial designation 'Russia' in the title one surmises that those who conceived the constitution had no intention of suggesting that it was meant for the entire Armenian Church. But there are in the statutes legally binding provisions which directly or indirectly apply to the whole Church, in particular those regarding the method of selecting the Catholicos of All Armenians. H F B Lynch, describes the *Polozheniye* in these terms:

> The decrees of the synod are headed 'By order of the Emperor of Russia'; and they are submitted to a Russian

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«Պոլոժենիա» ('Polozhenia') in *KHH*, pp. 864-65; Tiran *Abp*. Nersoyan, 'Laity in the administration of the Armenian Church' in Revd Vrej N Nersessian (ed.), *Armenian Church Historical Studies: Matters of Doctrine and Administration*, New York, 2001, pp. 248-49; H F B Lynch, *op. cit*., 233-35.

27 Krikor Maksoudian, *vard., Chosen of God*, pp. 103-108, Appendix 1, pp. 164-66 (Classical Armenian text), Appendix 2, pp. 167-69 (Modern Armenian translation).

> procurator, resident at Edgmiatsin, who examines their validity … The synod has jurisdiction subject to the approval of the Minister of Interior … In this manner the Katholikos is put into leading strings, of which the ends are held by officials on the banks of the river Neva duly instructed by a professed and resident spy … He [the Catholicos] may not leave the cloister for more than four months except with the sanction of the Tsar.

Lynch concludes his assessment with this overall definition: 'In the true Russian fashion, what is given with one hand is taken away with the other.'[28] The *Polozheniye* did recognise the Armenian Church as a separate entity, outside the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church, which was very different compared to the fate of their neighbours, the Georgians, whose Church was made part of the Russian Orthodox Church after the annexation. The last Georgian Catholicos-Patriarch Antoni II, was stripped of his rank in 1811 and sent into enforced retirement at St Petersburg.[29]

The members of the committee appointed to compile the Constitution were unfamiliar with the history of the Armenian Church and for their information were dependent on Greek and Latin sources for information, which throughout the centuries had been hostile to the independence of the Armenian Church. Their knowledge of the doctrines of the Armenian Church and its laws, traditions, and practices were 'based on unreliable, incorrect and deficient Latin and Greek documents who had for centuries adopted a hostile position towards the Armenian Church.[30] There is ample evidence in twelfth-century

28 H F B Lynch, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 233-235; For the 'centralist' notion of government, see L H Rhinelander, 'Russia's Imperial Policy: The Administration of the Caucasus in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century', *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 2-3 (1975), pp. 218-35.

29 Baron A von Haxthausen, *Transcaucasia*, London, 1854, p. 303; D M Lang, 'A century of Russian impact on Georgia', *Russia and Asia*, in W Vucinich (ed.), *Russia and Asia*, Stanford, 1967, p. 211.

30 «Սակայն պետութեան այս բարեմիտ և օգտակար ցանկութիւնն իրագործելու համար բաւական չէին արտաքին և ներքին գործոց նախարարութեանց դիւանատներում առձեռն և շտապ ժողոված վերոյբերեալ թերի և սխալ տեղեկութիւնները, որ մեծ մասամբ քաղուած էին անհարազատ աղբիւներիցից և Հայոց եկեղեցւոյ դէմ թշնամական դիրք բռնած լատին և յոյն հեղինակներից: *Պատմական սխալներից զերծ մնալու համար կարևոր է ուսումնասիրել Հայոց*

polemical sources of the vitriolic theological attacks on the dogma of the Armenian Church and on the Armenians themselves.[31] Speros Vryonis who analyses the 'scurrilous' poem of the ninth-century Greek nun Kasia, found in the twelfth-century treatise entitled 'Expository Discourse against Armenians', and in the 'Panoplia Dogmatike' of Euthymius Zigabenus, ideas which 'contain a violently hostile perception of the Armenian, based not on religious differences, but on ethnic differences, which in today's terms would be defined as racism.'[32] The Church, as Christ's body, is not supposed to make distinction based on ethnicity, 'for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3:28). From the time of the official break between the imperial and the Armenian Churches in 506 neither side could be anything but fundamentally hostile to those whom each reciprocally viewed as heretics. According to the historian Sebeos to achieve union between the two churches, Emperor Maurice invited Catholicos Movses II Eghivardets'i (574-604) to a council; safe beyond the imperial frontier, he scornfully rejected Maurice's summons for union with the contemptuous jibe 'I will not cross the Azat river [which is the Persian border]. Neither will I eat the oven-baked bread [of the Greeks], nor will I drink [their] hot water.'[33]

եկեղեցւոյ հոգին և կազմակերպութիւնը բուն հայկական հարազատ աղբիւրներից »('To avoid regurgitating the ancient polemics against the Armenian Church, it is important to study the spirit of the Armenian Church and its institutions on the bases of Armenian authentic sources'); see A Eretseants, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 330.

31 H-G Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich*, Munich, 1959, pp. 532-533.

32 Vryonis Speros Jr., 'Byzantine images of the Armenians', in R G Hovannisian (ed.), *The Armenian image in history and literature*, Malibu, 1981, p. 69; *The decline of medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the process of Islamization, eleventh to fifteenth century* Berkeley, 1971, pp. 238; Nina G Garsoian, 'The Problem of Armenian Integration into the Byzantine Empire' in Hélène Ahrweiler and Angeliki E Laiou (eds), *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire*, Dumbarton Oaks, 1998, pp. 66-69; Tia M Kolbaba, 'Byzantine perceptions of Latin Religious "Errors": Themes and changes from 850 to 1350', in Angeliki E Laiou and Roy Parviz Mottahedeh (eds), *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, Washington DC, 2001, pp. 117-143.

33 « Անցանել ընդ գետն Ազատ, ուտել ի պատարագի զեփեալն ի փռան, եւ ըմպել զջերմ բաժակն» quoted by Ormanian *abp.* Maghak'ia, *Azgapatum*, Vol. I, Book I, p. 583. The references are to the Greeks' use of leavened bread for the Eucharist (*azymes*, 'without yeast, leaven') and to the admixture of hot water ('zeon') in the chalice. Neither practice is acceptable to the Armenians. See Zak'aria *vrd.* Baghoumyan, « Անապակ բաժակի խնդիրը Հայոց եկեղեցում» ('The problem of not mixing water in the Eucharistic cup in the Armenian rite'), Holy Ejmiadsin,

The authors of the Constitution had sourced slavishly repeated the familiar deafening recriminations and stereotyping of Armenians found in Greek and Latin sources and in particular Mkhit'arist authors and Catholic authors like Picart, Berault-Bercastle, Ricaut, Monier Dardel and others.[34]

In 1839 an official book was published in St Petersburg in Russian entitled *Dopolneni k dokazatel'stvu o drevnosti trexperstnago sloxheniya,* «Լրացուցիչ տեղեկութիւններ յապացուցութիւն երեք մատով խաչակնքելու հնութեան մասին» ('Additional information on the ancient habit of making the sign of the cross with three fingers'). The purpose of the book was to prove to Russian dissidents that they were in error for crossing with two fingers, inferring that the practice originated in eighth-century Armenia, among heretics for their adherence to Arianism. The Armenians of Moscow and St Petersburg, incensed by the repugnant misrepresentation of their faith, wrote to Catholicos Hovhannes VIII Karbets'i to protest to the Tsar in defence of the Armenian Church. Catholicos Hovhannes, during whose reign the *Polozheniye* was introduced to refute the anti-Armenian perceptions of their dogma and prejudices copied from Latin and Greek sources, wrote an appeal in Russian to Tsar Nicholas, defending the Armenian Church's Christology, doctrines, practices and traditions, signed 31 July 1841 in Ejmiadsin.[35]

In the introduction to his appeal the Catholicos thanks the Tsar for freeing the Armenian Church from the bondage of Islamic rule and introducing the *Polozheniye* for the regulation of the Armenian Church. He then raises the need to question and evaluate each specific Greek and Latin source in order to determine its veracity. He expresses his astonishment that in the age of enlightenment pejorative language to demonise one's opponents with images that prevailed in Byzantine society had re-surfaced in the Russian Church, displaying the same

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2013, pp. 182; Robert F Taft, 'Zeon, lit. "hot", the custom of adding hot water to the chalice at Eucharist', *ODB*, vol. 3, p. 2223-24, John Meyendorff, '*Azymes*' in *ODB,* vol .I, p. 241.

34 *Dictionnaire des Hérésies* (1817), Histoire de l'Eglise (1809), Cérémonies religieuse, Conversions-Lexicon, Les Langues et religions, *Etat de l'Eglise arménienne*; *Relation de l'Arménie*, V Grumel, 'Les invectives contre les Arméniens du 'catholicos *Isaac*', *REB* 14 (1956), pp. 532-33 etc; see A Eretseants, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 302-311.

35 Full text in Russian and Armenian translation in Eretseants, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 526-541, entitled «Յովհաննէս Կաթողիկոսի աղերսագիրը առ Նիկողայոս կայսրն Հայոց դաւանութեան մասին».

degree of ignorance, witnessed in the fore-mentioned publication.[36] He defends the Armenian practice of making the sign of the cross with two fingers but rejects the accusation that it is an expression of Arianism. The Catholicos confirms that the Armenian Church recognizes the doctrinal and canonical validity of the first three Ecumenical Councils of the Christian Church, namely of Nicaea (325), of Constantinople (381) and of Ephesus (431). He confirms that it is true that the Armenian Church rejects the teachings of the Council of Chalcedon (451) but controversially adds 'but because it accepts the 5th, 6th and 7th councils in so doing they naturally accept the Council of Chalcedon … for they confess two natures in Christ unmixed.'[37] Catholicos Hovhannes Karbetsi's in his communication with the Tsar implies that since the Armenian Church had not officially condemned the decisions of the 5th, 6th and 7th Ecumenical Councils, it follows that it was in full agreement on matters of dogma with the Byzantine Orthodox, 'is unacceptable' and in the judgment of Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan '[the Catholicos] had no conciliar mandate for his position.'[38] Back in 1836 the Catholicos had requested with the creation of a theological academy in Ejmiadsin to also establish a 'censorial committee' to review and validate all publications within the territories of the Russian empire with the aim

36 Eretseants, *ibid*. In his appeal the catholicos reminds the tsar his predecessors Tsar Peter the Great who in 1719 instructed Russian clergy to allow Armenians to conduct services in their churches, Empress Anna in 1734 permitted Armenians to have their own churches, Catherine the Great in 1763 and 1770 allowed Armenians to found churches in Moscow and St Petersburg, while in 1839 in an official publication the Armenians are accused of being Arian heretics or confusing the terms 'Aramean' with 'Arian'. See M Ormanian, *Azgapatum*, Vol. III, Part I, p. 3752.

37 «Ընդ սմին Հայաստանեաց եկեղեցին, ընդունելով, 5, 6, 7-րորդ ժողովները, որոնք, որպէս յայտնի է, ընդունեցին եւ հաստատեցին Քաղքեդոնական ժողովի վճիռները, դորանով իսկ բնականապէս ընդունած է և յիշեալ ժողովը»; see Eretseants, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 538; the reality is that the Armenian Church has not recognised any of the Councils held after the first three Ecumenical Councils.

38 «Կաթողիկոսի եւ սինոդին *ներելի չէր* այնպիսի գիր մը տալ, որով Հայերուն կը վերագրուի Քաղկեդոնը եւ անոր յաջորդած երեք ժողովները ընդունած ըլլալ» ('It is unacceptable that the Catholicos and the synod in their communication to the Tsar had implied that the Armenians had accepted the Council of Chalcedon and the three Ecumenical Councils that followed'); see Ormanian, *Azgapatum* III, Part 2, p. 3753, Tiran Arb. Nersoyan, 'Summary topics of Armenian church history' in *Armenian Church Historical Studies*, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

of restricting the 'propagandist' activities emanating from Armenian Catholics in Venice, Vienna and Tiflis.[39]

In this Constitution of East Armenians, the role of the laity is reduced to the minimum. It is in striking contrast to the National Constitution of West Armenians, which was adopted in the Ottoman empire in 1863.[40] The Constitution restricted the activities of the Armenian Church in political matters and required that the Catholicosate at Ejmiadsin conduct its relations with the outside world through the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. With respect to the election of the catholicos, the government required that Armenians submit the names of two candidates to the tsar for his ultimate vote. In return, it granted certain privileges to the Church, including *inter*

39 Eretseants, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 412-13. J Gill, *Byzantium and the Papacy,* New Brunswick, 1979, pp. 197-98, quotes the monk Barlaam (*ca.* 1290-1348), to the pope's demand that reunion of the churches precede military aid from the West, Barlaam gave the following reply: 'It is not so much difference in dogma that alienates the hearts of the Greeks from you, as the hatred that has entered their souls against the Latins because of the many great evils that at different times the Greeks have suffered at the hands of Latins and are still suffering every day.' Armenian polemical literature against the Greeks and Latins has not yet been fully investigated. However, Catholicos Nerses IV Klayets'i, called *Shnorhali* (1166-73), in his 'General Epistle' [«Թուղթ Ընդհանրական»] addressed to the emperor of Constantinople this plea: 'The cause of our running away from you is that you have been pulling down our churches, destroying our altars, smashing the signs of the Christ (reference to Armenian *khatchk'ars*/stone crosses), harassing our clergy, spreading rumours in a way that even our enemies of Christ would not do, even though we live in the midst of them. Such conduct will not only fail to unify the divided but it will divide those who are united. For human nature loves contrariness. And men are drawn to the execution of commands not so much by violence as by humility of love.' See Vrej Nersessian, 'The legacy of Ecumenism in the Armenian Orthodox Church', *One in Christ*, Vol. 49, no. 1 (2015), p. 47.

40 Full text in H F B Lynch, *Armenia, Travel and Studies*, Vol. II, pp. 445-67; Ազգային Սահմանդրու թիւն Հայոց ('National Armenian Constitution'), Beirut, 1931; Arshak Alpoyachian, Հայ եկեղեցու Սահմանադրութեան հարցը ('The question of the Armenian National Constitution'), Cairo, 1945, p. 82, note. In 1945 on the occasion of the consecration of Catholicos Gevorg VI, one of the topics in the agenda of the Armenian National Council was the deliberations on formulating a new Constitution to replace the old National Constitution. The author was unable to participate in the meetings and here in printed form he presents his conceptions together with a report he had presented to Catholicos GeorgV Sureneants in 1926, when the latter suspended the use of the *Polozheniye*. Until to-day the Armenian church does not have a 'National Constitution'; see Hagop Nersoyan, *Remarks on a proposed Constitution for the Armenian Church*, Jerusalem, 2001, p. 39; «Ազգային Սահմանադրութիւն Հայոց» [*Մատենաշար «Ջահակիր) թիւ 11*] (Armenian National Constitution-Text only), Beirut, 1931, p. 40.

alia freedom of worship, tax exemption, and local autonomy under the primacy of Ejmiadsin. Another element of involvement by civil authorities in the actual administration of the Church was the office of *procurator*,[41] who was appointed by the tsar and who had the task of supervising the administrative, judicial, and business transactions of the synod and reporting it to the government in St Petersburg. This was an entirely novel form of control by the state over the management of the Church. The government also controlled the diocesan bishops who were appointed by the tsar. The Russians greatly appreciated the role of the Church in Armenian community life and sought to utilize its influence to promote and protect Russian interests in the region.[42]

The Russian government also proposed to eliminate the tradition of seeking edicts from the Ottoman sultan and the Persian shah; instead they demanded that the new catholicos merely announced his election in an encyclical. Requests from the Ottoman and Persian governments to enable the Armenians living in their realms to look to Ejmiadsin for their spiritual needs, for Holy Chrism, were to be sought through the offices of the Russian embassies in Constantinople and Tehran.[43] The *Polozheniye* although criticised in certain quarters as a document imposed on the Armenians by the Russian government, synthesised what was known about the administration of the Armenian Church from literature and tradition.

One of the important innovations introduced into the Armenian liturgy was the mention of the name of the tsar and the imperial family

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41 Eretseants, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 564, Melik'-Tangian , Nerses a*bp.*. «Հաց Եկեղեցական իրաւունքը » (Armenian book of Canon Laws), Tehran, 2004 [reprint of the 1906 ed.), pp. 606-07; M Ormanian, *Azgapatum*, Vol. III, Part I, pp. 3691-93.

42 V Diloyan V and V H Rshtuni, «Արեվելյան Հայաստանը Ռուսաստանի կազմում: Ցարիզմի գաղութային քաղաքականությունը »('Eastern Armenia in the Russian system. The colonial policy of Tsarism') in Ts. P. Aghayan *et al.*, *Հայ ժողովրդի Պատմություն* ('History of the Armenian people'), Vols I-III, Erevan, 1967-84, Vol. V, pp. 211-214; David M Lang, 'Religion and Nationalism. A case study: The Caucasus', paper delivered at the International Conference on Trends in Changing Society: Religious and intellectual Ferment in the USSR, September 11-14, 1967, Geneva, 1967, pp. 13-14 [unpublished paper].

43 Since the war of 1828 Ejmiadsin had stopped the sending of *nuncio ['nvirak']* to Constantinople. With Ejmiadsin under Russian control, the relationship between the catholicosate and the patriarchate was affected more by the traditional antagonism between the two empires and by the opposition of the Western Armenians to the Polozheniye promulgated in 1836 to regulate the affairs of the Armenian Church in Russia.

in the Litany of the Synaxis. In 1833, Prince Bludov writes to Baron Rozen seeking information as to whether the Armenian Church like the Greek and Russian Churches included blessings [*Ek'tenia*) for the imperial household and if so in what order.

The fifth-century historian of Armenia is of the view that in the case of Armenia 'the king of Armenia and the catholicos are of the same rank' («թագաւորն Հայոց աշխարհի և կաթողիկոսն *ընդ մի համար են*»): In the litanies of the Armenian liturgy and in the prayers of intercession in breviaries only the name of the catholicos is recalled. In the thousands of Armenian manuscripts and in inscriptions on Armenian churches the name of the catholicos is followed by that of the reigning monarch as a standard practice, in particular those manuscripts and churches that were copied or built during the reign of the Bagratuni kings and of kings of the Cilician Armenian kingdom.[44] The inscription on the Cathedral Church of Ani inscribed in 1010 mentions Catholicos Sargis I Sevantsi (992-1019) followed by the name of the king Gagik, while the inscription on the Church of All Saviours dated 1036 the name of Catholicos Petros I *Getadardz* (1019-1065) is recorded with the name of King Smbat Son of Gagik 'King of Kings *(shahnshah)*. Nerses Lambronatsi in his 'Canon for blessing vestments for use in church' in the lections recited after the reading of the Gospels has the intercession 'for our pious kings and our God-loving king and all the royal household and all the soldiers, let us beseech the Lord'(«Վասն բարեպաշտ և աստուածապահ թագուորին մերոյ,և ամենայն պալատանն և ամենայն զինուորաց նոցա,զՏէր աղաչեսցուք») after that of the Patriarch. The Litany of Special Intercession 'Thanksgiving and glory'[«Գոհութիւն և փառաբանութիւն»], after recalling the name of the reigning Catholicos, ends with the prayer or litany 'Let us pray for the forces and victories of Christian kings and pious princes'. A manuscript of the Liturgy dated 1284 includes in the 'Litany of Special Intercession' the names 'Our king Lewon and Het'um (now deceased) and their ancestors the Rubenides'.[45]

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44 A K Sanjian, *Colophons of Armenian manuscripts, 1301-1480. A source for Middle Eastern History*, HUP, Harvard, 1979; Vrej Nersessian, *Treasures from the Ark. 1700 years of Armenian Christian Art*, The British Library, 2001.

45 « … թագաւորաց քրիստոնէից և *բարեպաշտ թագաւորին մերոյ* », « թագաւորացն մերոց *Լեւոնի և Հեթմոյ հանգուցելոց և նախնեաց նոցին Ռոբենեանց*», Hatsuni Vardan, Պատարագամատոյց ըստ Հայաստանեայց

During his Primacy of the Armenian Diocese of Moscow, Yovsep' Arb. Arghut'eants, in gratitude towards Catherine the Great and following the custom in other Christian denominations, requested permission from Catholicos Simeon I Erevants'i (1763-1780) to introduce into the Armenian Liturgy a litany for the Russian imperial household which came into use only in 1827, and the innovation has mistakenly been attributed to Catholicos Simeon I Erevants'i.

On 18 February 1856 an imperial rescript called *Hatti humayun* opened the way for a democratic government of the communal life in Constantinople, granting a say to the ordinary people. This led to the compilation of statutes in 1860 called in Armenian «Ազգային Սահմանադրութիւն» (National Constitution) but the Turkish original had the title *Eremeni patrikligi nizamati*) standing for 'The Regulation of the Armenian Patriarchate' which came into effect in 1863.[46] The Constitution reduces the Armenian Church to something like a department of religious affairs within the larger body of what may be described as the National Administration.[47] The 1863 Armenian Constitution was made possible by the anti-clericalism then sweeping Europe and making waves in the Ottoman empire of Sultan Abdul Aziz. In contrast to the *Polozheniye* the Ottoman Constitution limited the power of the patriarch and of lay representatives, organised the life of the community on a democratic basis, stimulated learning among the people and generated a renaissance of literature among the Armenians of Turkey. It is important to note that at no time was a Catholicos of All Armenians ever elected according to the 'National Constitution', which ceased to function with the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923.

Seven catholicoi serving between 1843 and 1912—Nerses V Ashtarakats'i (1843-57), Matt'eos V K-Polsets'i (1858-65), Georg IV K-Polsets'i' (1866-85), Makar I T'eghutts'i (1885-1891), Mkrtitch I

Եկեղեցւոյ ('The Liturgy according to the Armenian church'), Venice, 1936, pp. 108-109. The periods of independent monarchy in Armenia is confined to the Arshakuni dynasty (AD 12 [180]-428), the Bagratuni dynasty (*ca*. 884-1064) and the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia (*ca*. 1080-1375).

46 Armenian text in Կոստանդնուպոլսոյ Հայերը եւ իրենց պատրիարքները ('Armenians of Constantinople and their patriarchs'), Istanbul, 2011, pp. 237-264; English translation in H F B Lynch, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 449-67 (Appendix I).

47 Kevork B. Bardakjian, 'The Rise of the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople', in Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (eds), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, New York, 1982, Vol. I, pp. 89-100.

Vanets'i (1892-1907), Matt'eos II K-Polsets'i Izmirlian (1908-1910), and Georg V Tp'ghisets'i (1911-1929)—were elected according to the directions of the *Polozheniye*. The *Polozheniye* ceased to function after the Russian Revolution and the consequent Sovietization of Armenia in 1920.

The Russification efforts, begun in earnest in 1885 first in the Baltic region and in Poland, reached Armenia in 1886. Tsarist policy regarding Armenia changed in line with a general turn towards conservatism and Russification. All Armenian parish schools were closed and replaced with Russian schools. The Caucasian authorities hoped to eradicate Armenian 'patriotism' and 'populism'. The unilateral abrogation of the *Polozheniye* of 1836 and the callous treatment of the educational system run by the Church dealt a fatal blow to the prevalent good Russian Armenian relations and pushed the Church into opposition to tsarist authority. The process of democratisation of the structure of the Church and secularisation of education had transformed it not only into a bastion of orthodoxy but also one of nationalism.[48] Resistance was organised in the form of secret schools, proclaiming their opposition to the Russian autocracy with the call 'the Armenian school is the *narthex* of the Armenian church'[«հայ դպրոցը հայ եկեղեցու նախագավիթն է »].[49] Back in the 1860s during the Catholicate of Matt'eos I Tchuhachian (1858-1865) some opposing the *Polozheniye* had even considered relocating the Holy See to the Monastery of Horomos in Shirak, which was situated in Ottoman territory.[50] Things came to a head on 12/25 June 1903, when Prince Grigorii Golitsyn, the Governor General of the Caucasus, advised Tsar Nicholas II (1894-1917) to confiscate Armenian Church property and to take away control over its network of schools. The ruling *(ukaz)* was designed to deal a final blow to the dominant socioeconomic position of Armenia. The rural and cultivable properties were to be administered directly by the Minister of Agriculture and_Property, income earning urban buildings were placed under the control of the Home Secretary, and the maintenance of the schools were handed over to the Minister of Public Education. He felt that crippling the power of

48 Gregorian Vartan, 'The impact of Russia on the Armenians and Armenia', *op. cit.*, p. 190.

49 Leo [*pseud.* Arakel Babakhanyan], Հայոց Պատմություն ('Armenian History'), *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 491.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 493.

the Church would deliver a serious blow to the Armenian nationalism, particularly to its major political parties, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation *(Dashnak)*, Constitutional Democrat *(Ramkavar)* and the Revolutionary Liberal [*Henchakian*, Armenian for 'bell']. The Russians did not anticipate much resistance from the octogenarian Catholicos Mkrtich IVanets'i (1892-1907)[51] or the Armenian leadership scattered in Transcaucasia and divided into political factions. The Armenian reaction was, however, immediate, unanimous, and extremely strong. At the end of October, the Catholicos of Cilicia, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, the Church leaders in Egypt, Bulgaria, America, England, Persia, India and each Turkish diocese sent petitions and declarations 'to St Petersburg to revoke the rulings in the name of the honour and prestige of Russia'.[52] Patriarch Ormanian in a speech to the National Religious Council in Constantinople (10 August 1903) wrote: 'The history of Christianity bears witness that only three nations in the world—the Armenians, the Greeks and the Latins—received Christianity directly from the Apostles of Christ, while all the others were baptised into the Christian faith by the Greeks and the Latins. The Armenian Church is autonomous like the Greeks and the Latins … Russia as a baptised and subject Church has no authority to pass "laws" against the autonomy of the Armenian Church.'[53]

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51 M G Nersisyan, « Խրիմյան Հայրիկի դիմումը Նիկոլայ Երկրորդին (1907 Թ.) եվ արխիվային այլ նյութեր Հայկական Հարցի ու հայ կամավորական շարժման մասին (1912- 1915 ԹԹ.) ('The appeal of Catholicos Khrimyan Hayrik to Tsar Nicholas II (September 16th 1907) and other archival material on the "Armenian Question" and the Armenian voluntary movements (1912-1915)', *PBH*, 1-2 (1993), pp.165-180.s

52 K Mandakuni, «Դէպի կռիւ: VI. Բողոքի ձայներ գաղութներից: Ձայներ Ամերիկայից, Բուլգարիայից, Եգիպտոսից, Հնդկաստանից, Պարսկստանից եւ Եւրոպայից» ('Towards Struggle. VI. Voices of protest in the diaspora. America, Egypt, Persia-India, Europe, Turkish Armenians, Bulgaria,'), *Hayrenik* monthly, 4 (February 1934), pp. 118-135. 'Tsarism that had for a long time forgotten the "leaderless" Armenian people, even in this instance remained loyal to its policies. The Armenian Church in the eyes of Tsar Nicholas II, V K von Plehve, Prince Grigory Golitzine, K P Pobiedonostsev meant not the Armenian people, who still remained faithful to their religious institution but their high ranking clergy, who were no longer a powerful force, lacking the support of the people, and for the intellectual class the church was a distant relic' (p. 120).

53 Ormanian, Maghak'ia, «Մաղաքիա Արք. Օրմանեան Կոստանդնուպոլսի Պատրիարք *(1896-1908)* ('Maghak'ia *abp*. Ormanian, Patriarch of Constantinople [1896-1908]'), *VHEP*, Bk. 15, Erevan, 2007, Nr. 72, pp. 372-73.

For 67 years after the formal recognition of the Armenian Church and its prerogatives by means of the *Polozheniye*, the decision of the 13 June 1903 violated all those provisions. All the reasons given for the new act had been anticipated by the rules instituted through the *Polozheniye*.

> Article XXXV—The supreme administration of all possessions of the Armenian Gregorian Churches, was placed in the power of the Armenian synod
> Article XXXIV—The members of the synod were elected by the Emperor
> Article XLV—The workings of the synod were controlled by an Imperial Procurator elected by the Russian government.
> Article XXXXIX—The same Procurator had to verify all accounts of the synod, in accordance with the provision of the article XXXXIX
> Article CXXI—The administration of each parish was in the hands of ephories composed of laymen and elected publicly by the congregation.
> Article LXXXII—Their accounts were collated in the diocesan consistories.
> Article LXIX—The accounts of the consistories were for their part placed in to the hands of the synod of Ejmiadsin.
> Article XXXIV—The members of the synod were elected by the government.
> Article XLV—The activities of the Synod were supervised by the Imperial Procurator.

Archbishop Maghak'ia Ormanian, former Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople in his posthumously published *Thoughts and Memoires*,[54] recalls the petitions in the French language he posted to the tsar for which he received replies from General Friedrich Minister of the imperial household. In addition to the official communications he also

54 Ormanian *abp* Maghak'ia, Խոհք եւ Խոսք: Իր կեանքին վերջին շրջանին մէջ Յետմահու հրատարակութիւն ('Thoughts and memories'), Jerusalem, 1929, pp. 229-233, [Hakob] Siruni, «Օրմանյան և իր ժամանակը» ('Ormanian and his times'), *Ejmiadsin* 9 (1961), pp. 29-33.

employed the format of unofficial publications. In order to illuminate the problem from an historical perspective, to prove the injustices of the new laws and the contradictions to the *Polozheniye*, he prepared in French a pamphlet. To avoid censorship he sent it to Berlin, where the Armenian Council in the Persian Embassy, Yovhannes Masehian *Khan* with his financial means and under Prof. P'ilippos Vardanian's guidance, anonymously printed and distributed it to the European and American embassies, teaching institutions and the press, exposing the anti-Christian unlawful, hostile actions of a state pretending to be 'Protector of the values of the Christian faith'.[55] In these very rare and unique legal documents, the author sets out the historical background to the methods of administration in the Armenian Church, points out that Holy Ejmiadsin does not represent exclusively the ecclesiastical authority of the Armenians in Russia. Ejmiadsin is the location where the seat of the Catholicos of All Armenians is founded. The seat of Ejmiadsin represents for the Armenians the papacy of their Church, of an apostolic and autonomous Church, different from others by its hierarchy, its dogma, its discipline and ritual. For all these reasons, the Catholicos of Ejmiadsin must be considered in his double capacity of universal leader of the entire Armenian Church and as the particular and immediate head of the Russian Armenians. This double role is explicitly recognised in the law of 1836, and the universal character of the Catholicos is indicated in the method of his election (Article XV) in his title (Article XX) and in his relations (Article XXVII). The organic law of 1836 had carefully respected this point, and had consciously recognised this same principle, even concerning the property right, in admitting that all the possessions of the Armenian churches were the property of the entire Armenian Church (Article CXVII). The name of the Catholicate was never derived from a locality. On the strength of his title 'Catholicos of All Armenians' («Ընդհանրական Հայրապետութիւն»,« Եպիսկոպոսապէտ», «Քահանյապետ») he had the authority to establish the See wherever the political centre of the nation happened to be. Thus founded in Vagharshapet in 301-302

55 [Ormanian *abp*. Maghakia], *Les biens de l'Eglise Arméniennes en Russie. Memorandum*, Druck von Max Schmersow vorm. Zahn & Baendel, Kirchhain N-L, 1904, pp. 25. See 'An Armenian version of this *Memorandum* addressed to Zinoviev the Russian Ambassador in Constantinople (9th 1903)' in *VHEP*, Book XV, Nr. 175, pp. 377-84. For an exhaustive account by a contemporary and participant to the events, see M Ormanian *abp*. Maghak'ia, *Azgapatum*, Vol. III, Bk. 3, pp. 5155-5183.

it was transferred to Dvin in 481, to Aghtamar in 927, Argina in 947, Ani in 992, and to Cilicia 1065 and finally returned to Vagharshapet in 1441.[56] The Catholicos, the Episcopate and the Armenian people are currently seriously preoccupied by this vital question, and everywhere the nation was discussing and seeking the best way of safeguarding the prerogatives of the supreme seat and the autonomy of the Armenian Church. The question of abandoning the actual residence in order to save the Church was seriously considered in some quarters. According to Ormanian in a moment of total despair Catholicos Mkrtitch I Vanets'i *Khrimean* had begun to contemplate that maybe the Russian anti-Armenian movement could abolish totally the See of Holy Ejmiadsin. It must be stated that the situation of Armenians during this period was no more enviable than that of the Turkish Armenians.[57] The uncompromising policies of 'Russification' *(obrusenie)* deeply concerned the Armenian Orthodox Church for it could find itself leaderless if the election of a new catholicos was obstructed. Ormanian in his communication with the catholicos suggests that it would be wise in such circumstances to revert to the practice of consecrating coadjutor catholicos, employed from the time of Kirakos I Virapets'i (1441-43) to Movses I Tat'evats'i (1629-1632). This was not a canonically accepted practice to have a coadjutor catholicos at the same time as the elected catholicos. But at times when it was difficult to canonically elect a catholicos after the death of the incumbent, it was beneficial to have a coadjutor in place before the death of the incumbent, so that the seat did not remain vacant. The most convenient way out would be to appoint the Catholicos of Cilicia as coadjutor so that if the election of the Catholicos in Ejmiadsin were threatened the Armenian Church would have its leader outside the borders of Russia.[58]

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56 Vrej Nersessian, *One People, One Nation, One Church*, New York, 2008, p. 53. 'Catholicate *in* Ejmiadsin and not *of* Ejmiadsin, Eznik *abp.* Petrosyan', «Հայ եկեղեցու պատմություն Ա մաս» ('History of the Armenian Church') (Part I), Erevan, 2016, p. 251.

57 The Armenian daily and weekly newspapers criticised the tsarist regime Russian policy towards the Caucasus and drew parallels between the 'Red Sultan' [Sultan Hamid] and the 'Red Tsar' [Nicholas II].

58 Ormanian, *abp.* Maghak'ia, Խոհք եւ խօսք, *op. cit.*, p. 233. Following the murder of Catholicos Khoren Muradbekian in April 1938, Archbishop Gevorg Chorekchian was appointed *locum tenens* and remained in that post until 16 June 1945 because the Soviets objected to the summoning of the National Ecclesiastical Council to conduct the election. See Vrej Nersessian, 'Church-State relations in the Soviet

Russia by its misconceived policies squandered the Russophile affections of its Armenian subjects and united the Armenian population of the Caucasus and the diaspora against it. The Armenian reaction was immediate, unanimous, and extreme. The Russian measures were met by a series of terrorist activities. The wave of strikes and turmoil throughout the Russian empire intensified following defeat in the 1904-05 Russo-Japanese War, and turned into the first Russian Revolution. To deal with the open rebellion in the Caucasus, in July 1904, Tsar Nicholas replaced Gregorii Golittsyn, who was said to have boasted 'in a short time there will be no Armenians left in the Caucasus, save a few specimens for the museum,'[59] with the more Armenophile Count Illarion I Vorontsov-Dashkov (1905-1916) as viceroy of the Caucasus to establish law and order. One of his earliest and most popular measures was the restoration of the Armenian properties to the Armenian Church on 1 August 1905.[60] On 17 October Tsar Nicolas issued a manifesto promising all the people of the empire civil rights and the establishment of a representative legislature, the Duma.

Ancient authentic churches are not governed by constitution, because a constitution is, by definition, a secular instrument and framed accordingly. They are governed by canon law. It uses a constantly updated code of canon law. In the modern period for reasons beyond its control the Armenian Church adopted two constitutions devised for it by foreign governments. The first, called the *Polozheniye*, was constituted by the tsar which reduced the Armenian Church to a Christian denomination tolerated by the Russian empire. That regulation gave the tsar the power to handpick their catholicos. The National Constitution for the Armenians of the Ottoman empire was based on the principle that a religious community, as a people and an ethnic minority, is in itself a judicial entity and has the inherent right to administer its own

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Republic of Armenia during the Catholicate of Gevorg VI Ch'orekch'ian (1945-54) and his successor Vazgen I Palchian (1955-94)', *Living Stones Yearbook 2016,* London, 2016, pp. 226-265; Felix Corley, 'The Armenian Apostolic Church', in Lucian N Leustean (ed.), *Eastern Christianity and the Cold War, 1945-91*, Abingdon, 2010, pp. 189-203.

59 Vilari Luigi, *Fire and Sword in the Caucasus*, London, 1906, p. 157.

60 Ananun David, «Ռուսահայերի հասարակական զարգացումը:1870-1900» ('The social development of Russian Armenians:1870-1900'), *Ejmiadsin* 2 (1922), p. 25; George A Bournoutian, 'The Armenian Church and Political formation of Eastern Armenia', *Armenian Review*, 36, 3 (1983), pp. 7-17; Christopher J Walker, *Armenia. The survival of a Nation*, London, 1980, pp. 71-74.

internal affairs in accordance with its own customs and usages and its rules of internal organisation. The Ottoman constitution reduces the Armenian Church to something like a department of religious affairs. Both of the constitutions made the Church a tool of political parties with dire consequences.

Abbreviations

BM—*Banber Matenadarani*
HEH—*Hay Ekeghets'akan Hanragitaran*
JRAS—*Journal of Royal Asiatic Society*
KHH—*K'ristonya Hayastani Hanragitaran*
ODB—*The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*
PBH—*Patma Banasirakan Handes*
REA—*Revue des Etudes Arméniennes*
REB—*Revue des Etudes Byzantines*
VHEP—*Vaveragrer Hay Ekeghets'u Patmutean*

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—Promote contacts between Christians (and others) in Britain and in the Holy Land, e.g. through pilgrimages promoting encounter, reflection and witness;

—Develop higher academic studies among Palestinians, particularly in contextual Palestinian Christian theology, Holy Land studies, contextual pilgrimage and tourism in the Holy Land;

—Provide scholarships and bursaries for undergraduate or postgraduate students who have been accepted by accredited universities anywhere in the world for a course in one of the above areas of study; and

—Finance research fellowships or lectureships in an appropriate area of study at a partner institution of higher education in the Middle East.

If you have already decided you would like to include a gift to Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust in your will, thank you. If you want to leave a gift, the most important information you need is:

Our registered charity number: 1081204

Our registered address: 22 Ebenezer Close, Witham, CM8 2HZ

If you have any questions about gifts in wills and the work of Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust, please contact by email: colinwsouth@aol.com, or call: 07894436624, or use our contact form at our website www.livingstonesonline.org.uk.

On our website you can also find frequently asked questions about will-writing and legacy giving which you can download and take to your professional adviser.