



THE LIVING STONES OF THE HOLY LAND TRUST

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LIVING STONES YEARBOOK 2022

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*History, Theology, Dialogue, Spirituality:
Challenges to Christianity in the Middle East*



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NOTE

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

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

EDITORIAL

In 2022 we celebrate the publication of the tenth issue of *The Living Stones Yearbook*. The Living Stones community and the scholars associated with the Theology Group continue to offer a committed focused but wide-ranging contribution to the modern history, theology, interreligious dialogue, spirituality, and the current situation and challenges of Christianity in the Middle East. *The Living Stones Yearbook* over the last decade has contributed over one hundred papers covering all aspects of Christianity in the Middle East.

The 2022 edition of *The Yearbook* offers a series of fine papers which add to our knowledge and understanding of Christianity in the Middle East from a broad range of scholars offering creative, original, and new insights in theological and political thought, ecumenical dialogue, interreligious exchange, and the modern history of Eastern Christianity.

In this issue of *The Yearbook*, we publish the Michael Prior Memorial Lecture (2021) by Michael Cardinal Fitzgerald on ‘Christians in the Arab World and Interreligious Dialogue’. Living Stones had been honoured to host Cardinal Michael, a member of the Missionaries of Africa, a distinguished pastor, senior diplomat, and scholar in the service of Christian engagement with the world’s religions. Michel Cuyppers, a Little Brother of Jesus (Charles de Foucauld), who lives with a community of Brothers in Upper Egypt, writes on the question of scripture and its interpretation in the Muslim tradition. Robin Gibbons (Chair of Living Stones) offers a reflection on the life and influence of Charles de Foucauld for today. *The Yearbook* publishes the posthumous essay by Ian Latham† on John Paul II’s encounter with Islam and the Muslim World. Duncan Macpherson continues this

theme with an engaged contribution on Vatican II and the question of Muslim-Christian relations. Richard Wheelert†, whose obituary can be found in this issue of *The Yearbook*, writes on Louis Massignon (1883-1962), the influential scholar, mystic, priest, and engaged political figure located between France and the Middle East, Christianity and the Muslim World. Leonard Harrow's essay provides a wide-ranging contribution on the reception of Sufism in scholarship and religious discourse which adds to our understanding of the encounter between the 'West' and Muslim tradition. Antoine Audo, a noted Jesuit theologian, is a biblical scholar and thinker on Christian engagement with Islam. Mar Antoine, Chaldean Bishop of Aleppo, writes with thoughtful verve and critical reflection on Christianity in contemporary Syria. Michael Arteen provides a distinct theological framework from a Middle Eastern Christian and reformed ecclesial perspective on the urgent question of refugees in the MENA region. Alexander Humphries, based upon his recently completed doctoral research, offers an account of the Chaldean Patriarch, Joseph VI Emmanuel II Thomas in the formation of modern Iraq. Kristian Girling writes on the Chaldean Catholic diaspora. This study echoes a growing reality for all the Eastern Christian churches of the Middle East which have been confronted and challenged by large scale migration of Christians from the region journeying mainly to North America, Australia and Europe. Ecumenism is an ever-present challenge and reality for all the Eastern Christian churches in the region and especially their relations with the Western and Eastern Christian churches in global context. Máté Szaplanczay writes on the pivotal ecclesial dialogue between the Assyrian Church of the East, the Chaldean Catholic Church, and the Holy See. Vrej Nersessian, a leading scholar on the Armenian Church and ecclesial and religious culture, in his fifth contribution to *The Yearbook* provides a further study on the modern history of the Armenian Christian tradition. Anthony O'Mahony explores some contemporary contours and currents for considering the present situation of Christianity in the Middle East.

Editors
October 2022

CONTRIBUTORS

Michael Arteen was born and raised in a Christian family in Luxor in Upper Egypt. His first degree was in Physical Therapy (BSc). Whilst in Egypt, Michael initially served in several leadership roles in his own church, and then moved to the US for several years to serve within the Arab communities in the US. In 2014, he returned to the Middle East and worked on the staff at Bethlehem Bible College as Chaplain till 2018. He was ordained as a Pastor by the Local Evangelical Council of Churches in the Holy Land in 2015. He earned an MA in Practical Theology from Moorlands College (2021), including writing his dissertation on the response of the Arab Evangelical Church to the refugee crisis.

Bishop Antoine Audo SJ. Born in Aleppo in 1946 he entered the Jesuits in 1969. Ordained a priest 1979. He commenced his academic formation with a 'licence de lettres arabes', University of Damascus, 1972; doctoral thesis, Paris III, Sorbonne, 1979. He completed his philosophical and theological formation with biblical studies at the Pontifical Biblical Institute (Rome). He was for a time professor in biblical exegesis at Université Saint-Joseph and Université Saint-Esprit (Kaslik). His publications include: *Zakî al-Arsonzî un arabe face à la modernité*, Université Saint-Joseph, Faculté des lettres et des sciences humaines, Collection Hommes et Sociétés du Proche-Orient, Beyrouth, Dar el-Machreq, 1988; 'Approches théologiques du récit de Joseph dans Gn 37-50 et Coran sourate 12', *Proche-Orient Chrétien* (Jerusalem), Vol. 37, 1987; 'Storia e prospettiva dei cristiani in Iraq', *La Civiltà*

Cattolica (Rome), no. 3787, 2008; ‘Les Chrétiens d’Iraq’, *Etudes* (Paris), vol. 408, 2008; ‘The Synod of Bishops: The Catholic Church in the Middle East’, *One in Christ: a catholic ecumenical review*, vol. 44, 20.2, 2010; ‘Eastern Christian Identity: A Catholic Perspective’, in A O’Mahony and J Flannery (eds), *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East*, Melisende, London, 2010; ‘Isaac of Ninevah, John of Dalyatha and Eastern Spirituality’, *One in Christ: a catholic ecumenical review*, vol. 44, 20.2, 2010; ‘The Current situation of Christianity in the Middle East, especially Syria, after the Synod of the Middle East’s Final Declaration (September 2012) and the Papal Visit to Lebanon’, *Living Stones Yearbook 2012*; ‘L’Église Chaldéenne dans l’Église Catholique d’aujourd’hui: identité liturgique et communion universelle’, in Cesare Girauda (ed.), *The Anaphoral Genesis of the Institution Narrative in Light of the Anaphora of Addai and Mari*, Acts of the International Liturgy Congress, Rome 25–26 October 2011 (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, vol. 295, Rome, 2013); ‘Reflections on the Apostolic Exhortation of Benedict XVI and the Papal Visit to Lebanon’, in Dietmar Winkler (ed.), *Towards a Culture of Co-Existence in Pluralistic Societies: The Middle East and India*, Pro Oriente Studies in the Syriac Tradition, no. 4, Piscataway, NJ, Gorgias Press, 2021; ‘The Church in the Middle East. The Future of Christians in the Region’, in Harald Suermann and Michael Altripp (eds), *Orientalisches Christentum. Perspektiven aus der Vergangenheit für die Zukunft*, Leiden, Brill/Schöningh, 2021.

Michel Cuypers is Belgian, born in 1941, a Frère of the Fraternity of the Little Brothers of Jesus (Father Charles de Foucauld). He currently lives in Ḥagāza, a small city near Luxor, Egypt. Michel resided for twelve years in Iran, where he obtained a PhD in Persian literature at the University of Tehran (1982) and then worked at the University Press of Iran. He was the co-founder of *Luqmān*, a journal of Iranology. Michel Cuypers left Iran in 1986 and, after studying Arabic, in 1991 he became a researcher at IDEO (Cairo), (<https://www.ideo-cairo.org/en/michel-cuypers-p-f-j-2/>). Since then, Michel has focused on the rhetoric analysis of the Qur’ān. In 2007, he published *Le Festin. Une lecture de la sourate al-Mā’ida* (Lethielleux, Paris). In 2009, this book was granted the ‘World Prize for the Book of the Year’, awarded by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance of the Republic of Iran

as ‘one of the best new works in the field of Islamic studies’. In 2012, he published *La Composition du Coran* (Gabalda, Pendé), a theoretical book in which he explains the method of Semitic rhetoric applied to the Qur’ān, English translation: *The composition of the Qur’ān, Rhetorical Analysis* (Bloomsbury Academic, London, 2015), Arabic translation: *Fi naẓm al-Qur’ān* (Dār al-Mašriq, Beirut, 2018). In 2014, he published *Une apocalypse coranique. Une lecture des trente-trois dernières sourates du Coran* (Gabalda, Pendé), in which he summarizes and develops his previous articles on the latest chapters of the Qur’ān, English translation: *A Qur’anic Apocalypse. A Reading of the Thirty-Three Last Surabs of the Qur’ān*, (IQSA, Lockwood Press, Columbus, 2018), Arabic translation expected in 2022. His numerous research contributions have been published in *Luqmān*, *MIDÉO*, *Annales islamologiques*, *Islamochristiana*, and *Journal of Quranic Studies*. Also, Michel contributed ‘Is a non-violent interpretation of the Qur’ān possible?’, to A O’Mahony and J Flannery (eds), *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East*, Proceedings of the Synod for the Middle East: Catholic theology and ecclesial perspectives, 9-11 June 2010, Centre for Eastern Christianity, Heythrop College, University of London, 2010.

Michael Louis Fitzgerald OBE (born 17 August 1937), Cardinal of the Catholic Church, senior diplomat, and a leading expert on Christian-Muslim relations. Bishop 1992, Archbishop 2002, He headed the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue from 2002 to 2006; the papal nuncio to Egypt and delegate to the Arab League 2006-2012. At retirement in 2012 he resided at Saint Anne’s, Old City of Jerusalem, with the Missionaries of Africa until early in 2019, when he returned to England to work in a Liverpool parish. Fr Fitzgerald is one of the leading experts on Islam, Christian-Muslim relations and interreligious dialogue. His publications include *Dieu rêve d’unité. Les catholiques et les religions: les leçons du dialogue. Entretiens avec Annie Laurent* (Bayard Presse, Paris, 2005) and (with John Borelli) *Interfaith Dialogue. A Catholic View* (SPCK, London & Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, 2006). He studied for his undergraduate degree (BA) in Arabic at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1965-1968, whereupon he became a lecturer at the IPEA (Institut Pontifical d’Études Arabes), later renamed the Pontifical Institute of Arab and

Islamic Studies (PISAI), <<https://en.pisai.it>>. On 5 October 2019, Pope Francis made him Cardinal-Deacon of Santa Maria in Portico. Fitzgerald was appointed Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in the 2022 New Year Honours for services to interfaith and interchurch partnerships. Fitzgerald has published numerous papers in the PISAI journal *Islamochristiana* [ISCH], 'Fraternity. A Proposal and a Project for Relations between Christians and Muslims', no. 47, 2021; 'From Amman to Assisi', no. 46 (2020); 'Reflections on Human Fraternity', no. 45 (2019); 'The Relevance of Nostra Aetate in Changed Times. Developments in the Last Decade', no. 41 (2015); 'The Arab Spring outside', no. 39 (2013); and 'A Reflection on Jesus in a Shi'ite commentary', in *Catholics and Shi'a in dialogue: Studies in Theology and Spirituality* (Melisende, London, 2004). He also helped create the periodical, *Encounter: Documents for Muslim-Christian Understanding*.

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 Michael's Abbey, Farnborough, 1972-1997. He was Director of Studies for Theology and Religious Studies, Department for Continuing Education, University of Oxford; Faculty Member, Faculty of Theology and Religion, Oxford; Alexander Schmemmann 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* (HarperCollins, London, 2012); editor, *The Weekday Missal: The Order of Mass for Weekdays* (HarperCollins, London, 2012); *The Eastern Christian Churches* (CTS, London, 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*: 'Hagia Sophia, Museum, Mosque, or Church or something else?' (2020); '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).

Kristian Girling studied history (BA and MA) at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and his PhD thesis in Theology was submitted to the Department of Theology, Heythrop College, University of London (2015) which was published as *The Chaldean Catholic Church: Modern History, Ecclesiology and Church-State Relations* (Routledge, London, 2017). He contributed to the first issue of *The Living Stones Yearbook*, 'Engaging "the Martyred Church"—The Chaldean Catholic Church, Assyrian Church of the East and the Holy See in Ecumenical Dialogue 1994-2012 and the Influence of the Second Vatican Council' (2012). Other publications include 'To Live within Islam: The Chaldean Catholic Church in modern Iraq, 1958-2003', *Studies in Church History*, vol. 51, 2015; 'Jesuit contributions to the Iraqi education system in the 1930s and later', *International Studies in Catholic Education*, vol. 8, 2016; 'Patriarch Louis Raphael I Sako and Ecumenical Engagements between the Church of the East and the Chaldean Catholic Church', *One in Christ*, vol. 50, 2016; 'Comparative Contexts in Ukrainian and Melkite Christianity: The Attendance of Patriarch Gregory III Laham at the September 2016 Ukrainian Catholic Synod', *Eastern Theological Journal*, vol. 3, 2017; 'Dominican Contributions to Christian Life in Mesopotamia-Iraq (c. 1750-2017)', *The Downside Review*, vol. 136, 2018; 'Displaced Populations' in Kenneth R Ross, Mariz Tadros, and Todd M Johnson (eds), *Christianity in North Africa and West Asia*, Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity 2, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2018.

Leonard Harrow studied Persian with Arabic at Edinburgh University and Persian literature at London SOAS. Earlier published material includes work on Islamic architecture and the carpet knotting tradition of Iran and Turkey. Articles include 'The Tomb Complex of Abu Sa'id Fadlallah b. Abi'l Khair at Mihna', *Iran* XLIII, 2005; 'Historical Aspects of Catholic-Shi'a Dialogue in Iran' in A O'Mahony, W Peterburs and M A Shomali (eds), *A Catholic-Shi'a Engagement* (London, 2011); 'Notes

on Catholic-Shi'a Relations during the Safavid Period', *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, 63 (1-2); and 'Jerome Xavier and two Persian gospels (mss. Cod. 7964 and cod. 7965) in the Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal at Lisbon', in Nicolas Balutet, Paloma Otaola and Delphine Tempère (eds), *Contrabandista entre mundos fronterizos, Hommage au Professeur Hugues Didier*, Paris, 2010; and 'A reflection: Armenians and other Christians at the end of the Ottoman Empire and 100 years later', *The Living Stones Yearbook 2015*.

Alexander Humphries is a graduate of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, where he completed his MA in Religion and Global Politics and his doctorate on the Chaldean Catholic Church and its contributions to Iraq's national identity (2021). His research interests are focused upon Christianity in the Middle East and Christian-Muslim relations. He has worked lived and worked with the Chaldean community in northern Iraq as a teacher and lecturer at the Catholic University of Erbil since 2021.

Br Ian Latham†, Little Brothers of Jesus (LbJ), studied in France where he became acquainted with the circle of Louis Massignon, including Brother Louis Gardet, and lived for many years in Asia and the Middle East. He made a number of studies on Catholic encounters with Islam, including 'Christian Prayer' in *Catholics and Shi'a in Dialogue: Studies in Theology and Spirituality* (London, 2004); 'Charles de Foucauld (1898-1916): Silent witness for Jesus in the face of Islam', in *Catholics in Interreligious Dialogue: Studies in Monasticism, Theology and Spirituality* (London, 2006). 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), 'Christian encounters with Islam in history and modern times: some Theological reflections' (2015), 'Islamic Belief and Practice' (2020); 'Louis Massignon and Iraq: mysticism and conversion in the Christian Encounter with Islam and the Muslim World' (2021).

Duncan Macpherson is a Permanent Deacon in the Diocese of Westminster and was a visiting Senior Research Fellow at St Mary's University College, Twickenham, where he lectured in Theology from 1967 to 2000. A Doctor of Ministry in Preaching, his publications include *The Pilgrim Preacher: Palestine, Pilgrimage and Preaching* (London, 2004 and 2008), and *The Splendour of the Preachers: New Approaches to Liturgical Preaching* (London, 2011). He is features editor of *The Preacher* and a tutor of the College of Preachers, a member of the US-based academy of Homiletics and the Catholic association of Teachers of Homiletics. He is a founder member of Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust. His contributions to *The Living Stones Yearbook: 'Christian-Muslim Relations: From Conflict to Dialogue A Critical Account of Present and Recent Catholic Teaching on Christian-Muslim Dialogue'* (2017-2018); 'Jesus the Jew and Jesus the Palestinian?' (2017-2018); 'Zionism, Anti-Semitism and the Bible' (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 Armenian Church history. 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*: 'The Armenian Church under The Sceptre of The Tsars, 1828- 1905' (2020); '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).

Anthony O'Mahony has been a Fellow of Blackfriars Hall, University of Oxford, since 2018. He was reader in the Modern History of Eastern Christianity, Heythrop College, University of London, between 1999 and 2018 and Director of the Centre for Eastern Christianity from 2009 until 2018. His main research interests include the modern history of Eastern Christianity, ecumenical dialogue between Eastern and Western Churches, Christian-Muslim-Jewish relations and the religious and political history of Jerusalem. He has published widely in these areas, including contributions and papers in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, *The International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, *The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, *New Blackfriars* and *The Downside Review*.

Fr Máté Szaplóczay is a Catholic priest of the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church and a researcher at the Saint Athanasius Greek Catholic Theological College. He holds a degree in Catholic theology from the same institute and a licentiate in Eastern Canon Law from the Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome. He wrote his MA dissertation on the 'Eucharistic peculiarities in the Assyrian Church of the East'; and his licentiate on 'The discipline of the Eucharistic fast in the Catholic East and West'. He translated a number of official Vatican documents to Hungarian. He has a research interest in the history

of the Eastern Churches; the Christianity in the Middle East; as well as in the reform of the processes regarding the nullity of marriage in the Catholic Church, cf. M.p. 'Mitis Iudex' for the Roman Catholic Church and M.p. 'Mitis et misericors' for the Eastern Churches. He recently published 'Eucharistic Fast in the Catholic East and West—With Special Emphasis on the Current Legislation of the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church', *The Downside Review*, vol. 140(1), 2022; and in *The Living Stones Yearbook*, 'From Hungary to Syria: applied solidarity in the Eastern Catholic Churches' (2021).

Richard Wheelert†. See obituary in this issue of *The Living Stones Yearbook 2022*.

RICHARD WHEELER

Richard Wheeler, who had been a member of the Living Stones Theology Group from its early days, sadly died on 7 October 2021 aged 77. Richard attended the last face-to-face Living Stones Theology Group meeting held on the eve of the Covid pandemic on Wednesday 2 October 2019 in Oxford which focused upon on the life and work of Fr Paolo Dall'Oglio SJ.

Richard Roy Wheeler was ordained into the Church of England. He studied for the ministry at King's College, London, graduating with a BD in 1972. Director of St Matthew's Meeting Place, Brixton (1978-79); Secretary of the British Council of Churches Community Work Resource Unit (1979-82); Team Vicar in the Southampton City Centre Team Ministry (1983-88); Team Rector (1988-98); Hon. Canon of Winchester Cathedral (1994-98); St Albans Diocesan Social Responsibility Adviser (1998-2009); Residentiary Canon of St Albans Cathedral (2001-09).

The obituary published in *The Guardian* states Richard would be remembered as 'an Anglican priest and social reformer who believed the church had a duty to support and represent disadvantaged people. He worked in Brixton in south London in the 1970s, in the midst of tensions between black young people and the police, and became a race adviser to the British Council of Churches.' And 'He was at heart a reformer but also valued the Anglo Catholic traditions of prayer and contemplation. He had great humanity, borne out especially in his own struggles with depression. He was an empathic pastoral priest and a loyal friend.'

Richard studied for an MA in Christianity and Interreligious Relations at Heythrop College, University of London, developing a distinct interest in Christian engagement with Islam and the wide

question of Christian-Muslim relations. Richard, who had a good knowledge of French, developed an interest in the French Catholic religious thinker Louis Massignon (1883–1962). He had a particular awareness of Massignon as a Eastern Catholic Melkite priest and the ecclesial dimension of Christian relations with other religions. Based upon this theological concern he published ‘Louis Massignon and Al-Hallâj: An Introduction to the Life and Thought of a 20th Century Mystic’, *Aram*, Vol. 20, 2008, 221–243. Included in this issue (2022) of the *Living Stones Yearbook* is Richard’s unpublished paper ‘Louis Massignon—A Servant of God’ which he presented at the Centre for Eastern Christianity, Heythrop College, conference in 2017 offering the following abstract for his paper: ‘On 18 July 1934 Louis Massignon met Pope Pius XI in private audience. He presented His Holiness with a schema of prayer for his blessing. Using the schema and the exchanges, as Massignon recorded them, this essay explores the scholar’s theories, and also his religious practice, as they turn around the figures of Abraham, and al-Hallaj, the 10th century Sufi mystic martyred in Baghdad.’

May he rest in peace in the Lord.

Anthony O’Mahony

METROPOLITAN KALLISTOS WARE

*Orthodox Bishop, Theologian, Scholar and Spiritual Father,
A Spiritual Patron of The Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust,
b. 11 September 1934, d. August 2022*

In a 2011 interview given to the magazine *Christianity Today*, Metropolitan Kallistos said this; ‘... to those who show an interest in Orthodoxy, I say, “Come and see. Come to the liturgy.” The first thing is that they should have an experience of Orthodoxy—or for that matter, of Christianity—as a worshipping community. We start from prayer, not from an abstract ideology, not from moral rules, but from a living link with Christ expressed through prayer.’ For many this was part of the gift of Kallistos, an open approach that engaged others with a living faith shared through the life and work of an extraordinary advocate.

The death of Metropolitan Kallistos Ware has been for many like the loss of a dear friend. Seeing the Pembroke College flag flying at half mast in his memory—he was elected a fellow in 1970—reminded me that Kallistos touched so many areas of life in the city and University of Oxford, his influence radiating outwards to so many people and places like the ripples of a pebble falling into the centre of a very big pond. Kallistos was the best-known and most respected and influential Orthodox theologian in this country and in Europe, eminent in the Orthodox and ecumenical world, in academia and beyond. He will long be remembered as one who tirelessly taught and wrote about the spirituality and theology of Orthodoxy, not in a polemical manner but as a treasure to be shared with others. This came directly from his monastic, priestly and theological vocation, rooted in the Byzantine Orthodox tradition, in prayer and in his love of Christ.

Timothy Ware was born in Bath on 11 September 1934. He was educated at Westminster School then at Magdalen College, Oxford, where he studied classics and theology graduating with a double first. He converted to Greek Orthodoxy in 1958, becoming a monk at the Monastery of St John on Patmos in Greece, and receiving the name

Kallistos. Ordained as priest in 1966, he helped found and served in the Greek Orthodox Parish of the Annunciation, Oxford. In the same year he was appointed Spalding Lecturer at the University of Oxford in Eastern Orthodox Studies. A distinguished member of the theology faculty at Oxford he taught until his retirement in 2002. He combined his life as an academic with serving as a parish priest, visiting the sick and celebrating the sacraments. In 1982 he was ordained an auxiliary bishop (Bishop of Diokleia) in the Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. In 2007 he was elevated to the rank of Metropolitan.

He collaborated on the translation of several major Orthodox ascetic and liturgical texts. In collaboration with Mother Mary, he published English translations of liturgical texts in *The Lenten Triodion* and *The Festal Menaion*, and wrote numerous articles for various journals. Together with G E H Palmer and Philip Sherrard, he translated the *Philokalia*, the classic 18th-century Orthodox anthology. Four volumes of five had been completed as of 1995; he was working on the proofs of the fifth and final volume as he was dying.

Thoroughly ecumenical, he served as joint president of the international commissions for Orthodox-Anglican and Orthodox-Roman Catholic dialogue. In 2017 he was awarded the Lambeth Cross for Ecumenism by the Archbishop of Canterbury. But names, dates, lists of works do not make up the whole story. Countless undergraduates and graduates have wonderful memories and stories of ‘Super-K’ to tell. Mgr Paul McPartlan, who worked with him on the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Church, recalls, ‘Bishop Kallistos ... was a wise and holy man of peace, a skilled crafter of the right phrase, a precious voice of reason at difficult moments. He spoke with a natural authority and his gentle words carried great weight.’ As a Greek Catholic I have long valued his friendship, his understanding of Eastern Catholicism, his comprehension of shared origins and traditions, coupled with his openness to new developments, including his commitment to the development of a ‘green’ theology so espoused by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Francis. He maintained a critical openness to the Catholic Church, actively participating in dialogues established between Rome and Constantinople, and since 2014 co-chairing with Archbishop Bernard

Longley an extremely creative Catholic-Orthodox consultation in the UK. And he demonstrated an awareness by no means common among his fellow Orthodox of the tragic history of the Eastern Catholics under Soviet and communist rule. In recognition of his contributions The Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome gave †Kallistos the prestigious Sir Daniel and Countess Bernardine Murphy Donohue Chair in Eastern Christian Theology.

His intellectual, spiritual and pastoral legacy—including his two most famous works, *The Orthodox Church* and *The Orthodox Way*—will continue to inspire others to love and learn about Eastern Christianity. As Rowan Williams recalled of him; ‘Part of †K’s gift was to present the classical themes and emphases of Eastern Christianity not as something exotic or esoteric but as the solid centre of all Christian thought and imagination (a gift he shared, I think, with Olivier Clement). Never a polemical writer, he enabled countless readers as well as myself to see the simplicity, coherence and sanity of the great doctrinal synthesis of the first seven councils, and to find in it a way around or through the more self-tormenting aspects of Western theological debate ... This was manifestly a prayed and felt theology, and Kallistos was always a wonderful witness to it.’

Always the teacher and spiritual guide, his own words on death provide us with consolation and of the ‘sure and certain hope’ he had in the risen Christ’s gift. ‘Death’, Kallistos wrote in 1999, ‘is the means of our return to God. It is an encounter with Christ. It could be transformed into an act of worship, into an experience of healing. It is a friend not an enemy. It is a beginning, not an end. I think of the last words of the Russia thinker Prince Trubetskoy. As he was dying, he said: “The royal doors are open, the great Liturgy is about to begin.”’

May Kallistos now, forgiven and risen in Christ go through those Royal Doors to be evermore in that great Liturgy of Heaven!

Memory eternal!

Robert (Robin) Gibbons

CHRISTIANS IN THE ARAB WORLD AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE*

† *Michael Cardinal Fitzgerald, M.Afr.*

This paper intends to offer a survey of the present situation of Christians in the Arab World, i.e. MENA: Middle East and North Africa. It underlines the differences in the situations from country to country. With regard to the difficulties, it asks what can be done to remedy matters and whether interreligious dialogue can help in these situations, and if so in what way.

On retiring from the service of the Holy See in 2012, I went to live in Jerusalem, at St Anne's, in the community set up in 1878 by Cardinal Lavigerie, the founder of the Society of Missionaries of Africa¹ to which I belong. St Anne's, which many of you will know, is situated just near the Haram al-Sharif, the Temple Mount, in occupied East Jerusalem. Having lived for six years in Jerusalem, I know how important it is to be concerned not only with access to buildings and their maintenance, but also with the construction and welfare of living communities.

Complaints are often voiced about indifference towards the plight of Christians in the Arab World. This does not apply to you for, as members of the Living Stones, you maintain your interest and your concern for Christians in this region. I have given a rather general title to this talk: 'Christians in the Arab World'. In order to cover the whole of the Arab world, to the Middle East I am adding North

* A paper read to the Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust at the Holy Apostles Church, Pimlico, London, on 20 November 2021.

I would like to thank Deacon Duncan Macpherson and all others involved for inviting me to give this Michael Prior Memorial Lecture.

1 Frans Bouwen, M.Afr., 'Le cardinal Lavigerie et l'union entre les Eglises d'Orient et d'Occident', *Proche Orient Chrétien*, 42, 1992, 383-403.

Africa (so I shall be dealing with what is known as the MENA region). I am speaking about Christians, rather than Catholics, though I do not pretend to give a complete coverage of all the different Churches and denominations that exist in the region. I have not included in the title either of the terms 'persecution' or 'suffering'. Covering, or attempting to cover, the situation of Christians in this region will obviously include something about the ways in which Christians are suffering. This will form the first part of this talk. I shall then go on to ask the question: What can interreligious dialogue do in a context where there is suffering and even persecution?

As a preliminary remark, I would like to say that I think it is useful to make a distinction between persecution perpetrated by the state and violence against Christians carried out by individuals or groups. Of course, to those who are undergoing suffering, whether or not it is to be termed 'persecution' is a purely academic question. We should also be aware that when states are considered, there are considerable differences among them. In fact, although we may talk in general about the persecution or the suffering of Christians, no two situations are exactly the same.

Let me point out first of all that the suffering of Christians is not confined to the MENA region. In Pakistan, Christian communities exist and are allowed to function, even if they form only a very small minority of the population. Here particularly it is the Laws against Blasphemy which give rise to problems. Nigeria, particularly in the north of the country, has in recent years been witnessing multiple attacks against churches. These would appear to have been carried out by Boko Haram, an Islamic movement in favour of the strict application of the *shari'ah* and opposed to Western culture which it considers to be destructive of Islam. Apparently, the situation is steadily getting worse. The Federal Government is blamed by some for negligence and weakness in opposing Boko Haram, but it cannot be accused of the persecution of Christians. Then there is the example of China. The Government of the People's Republic of China protests that it is not against the existence of different religions, and indeed Buddhist, Christian and Muslim communities are present within this vast country. So it must be recognized that in China churches do exist, and communities are able to gather for worship.

By way of contrast, in Saudi Arabia the public practice of Christianity is forbidden and no churches are allowed to exist in the country. The official line is that Christians are free to practise their religion in private, but no public gathering for worship is permitted. Although there are millions of Christians present in Saudi Arabia as foreign workers, technicians or traders, any public manifestation of Christianity is prohibited. Yet the situation is changing, and the late Cardinal Tauran,² when he visited Saudi Arabia as President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in April 2018, was able to celebrate Mass in the presence of a congregation³.

Saudi Arabia is, in fact, an exception. In the other countries of the Arabian Peninsula, whether Bahrain, the Emirates, as well as Qatar and Oman, Christians are allowed to gather for worship. In a number of these states, such as Dubai and Abu Dhabi, the rulers have granted land for the construction of churches. I was in Abu Dhabi in October 2016, and it is in fact amazing to see the thousands of people who attend the Catholic church there. The congregations are made up mainly of Indians and Filipinos, but there are also Arabs, Europeans and Americans. The cathedral, built in 1983 to hold about 800, has proved to be too small. A second, larger church has now been built in the same compound, but even when the two churches are being used at the same time there is not enough room for everyone, and many remain in the courtyard, following mass on large screens. Over the weekend, from Friday to Sunday, some fifteen masses are celebrated in English, and about the same number in a variety of other languages. Within the compound the Church is free to act as it wishes, organizing catechism classes, holding meetings for different groups, but Christians are not allowed to propagate their religion in these countries. Nevertheless, there are schools run by women religious which attract many pupils, the majority of whom are Muslims.

In Yemen an appeal was made, back in the early years of the 1970s, for communities of religious women to come and work in the health sector. The Missionaries of Charity and the Missionary Sisters

2 Jean Jacques Pérennès (OP), 'Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran (5 avril 1943-5 juillet 2018)', *MIDÉO*, no. 34, 2019, 347-352. See also, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, *Je crois en l'homme, Les religions font partie de la solution, pas du problème*, Paris, Editions Bayard, 2016.

3 The homily he preached on this occasion has been reproduced in the journal of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Pro Dialogo* 160 (2018/3), pp.77-78.

of Our Lady of Africa responded to this appeal. At first no priests were to be allowed, but Mother Teresa⁴ insisted that her sisters needed the presence of a priest for the Eucharist, otherwise they would not go. A compromise was found: the sisters were allowed the presence of 'a spiritual guide'. Not only the religious women, but other people also were permitted to participate in the Catholic services, in Sana'a, Hudaydah and Ta'izz. In Southern Yemen, in Aden, there was at that time a functioning Catholic Church. Of course, with the civil war raging in Yemen, the situation has changed and, to my knowledge, there are at present no priests resident in the country.

In Morocco, as in other countries of North Africa, churches exist but are confined to foreigners. In Morocco, in particular, any expression of Christian propaganda is severely prohibited, being considered as a form of proselytizing. Yet there is a network of Catholic schools, run by the archdiocese of Rabat. Since the directors, the teachers and the pupils, are all Muslims, the diocese tried to hand over these schools to the government. This was refused; the Christian ethos prevalent in these educational institutions is much appreciated. In Algeria and Tunisia there are some local Christians, the majority of whom are Protestants. Their existence appears to be tolerated. It is remarkable that the government of Algeria accepted and actively co-operated in the celebration of the Beatification of the Martyrs of Algeria, a ceremony which took place in Oran, on 8 December 2018. This would seem to be confirmation that the Catholic Church is seen, as the late Archbishop Teissier⁵ used to say, as the Church *of* Algeria, not just *in* Algeria. At the moment it is difficult for foreign priests and church workers to obtain visas for Algeria and this makes the work of the Church more difficult. Just recently I received a message from the bishop of Laghouat in the Sahara, Bishop John MacWilliam, a British White Father, in which he says: Yesterday our diocese got four authorisations for visa requests (two *fidei donum* priests and two religious sisters). 'They have been waiting for over a year just to access their consulates. *Al-hamdu lillâh*. Now for the other six who are waiting ... Prayers please.' The

4 Mother Theresa (born Anjezë Gonxhe Bojaxhiu, Albanian, 1910–1997), honoured in the Catholic Church as Saint Teresa of Calcutta.

5 Henri Teissier (1929–2020) was a French-Algerian Catholic Bishop of Algiers and Archbishop Emeritus of Algiers. See 'Teissier Henri (In memoriam)', *Islamocristiana*, 46 (2020), 1–4.

government of Algeria has stipulated that worship can only be held in officially recognized buildings. This makes it difficult and even dangerous for any celebrations to take place where there is no church. Tunisia is going through political turmoil at present. I have no recent information about the small number of Christians in the country. With reference to religious liberty, it is worthwhile noting that Morocco and Tunisia both have small, but officially recognised, Jewish communities.

In Libya too, the Christian communities are made up of foreigners. There were many Filipinos, men and women, working in the medical services, as also a good number of Polish Catholics working in different fields. Because of the civil war that has been raging since the fall of Gaddafi, many of these Catholics have been forced to leave. Yet the Church, served by the Franciscans, is still present.

In the countries of North Africa, as in the Gulf, Christians are almost entirely expatriates, but in the other countries of the Middle East there are indigenous Christian communities whose origins pre-date Islam. Egypt is the country with the largest number of Christians, estimated to be about 10 percent of a population of probably almost 100 million. The majority of these Christians belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church. In Egypt one could say that though Christians and Muslims have been living side by side for centuries, ever since the advent of Islam in the 7th century, sectarian violence has been almost endemic. When disputes occur, they often taken on a religious colour.

I happened to be serving as Nuncio in Egypt at the time of what has been called the Arab Spring. In an attempt to describe this 'Arab Spring', I underlined three main grievances which brought people to demonstrate against their governments: oppression by dictatorial regimes; tight control of information; the increasing gap between the rich and the poor. To these grievances corresponded 'the desire for a greater possibility of political involvement, for greater freedom of expression and for a better distribution of wealth'.⁶ These revolutionary movements, initiated mainly by young people, and in Egypt by Muslims and Christians together, were not religiously motivated, nor were they ideological. They aimed at obtaining greater freedom, more justice and true respect for human dignity.

6 Cf. Michael L Fitzgerald, 'The Arab Spring outside in', *Islamochristiana* 39 (2013), 161-173, p. 162.

Since the forced resignation of President Mubarak, the rise to power of Islamists, and then the army intervention to depose President Mohammad Morsi, a Muslim Brother, there have been many attacks against Christians, with the destruction of churches, shops and dwellings. The world was appalled by the public slaughter of Coptic workers on the shore in Libya, and 2017 saw the Palm Sunday bomb attacks on two Coptic churches with considerable loss of life. This violence, carried out by Islamist groups, is condemned by religious leaders, both Christian and Muslim⁷ and also by the government. Here is a case where it would be wrong, in my opinion, to speak about persecution. President al-Sisi has shown great respect for Christians, and yet Christians complain that the forces of order do not give them sufficient protection. They also complain of discrimination. Freedom of worship exists, and the churches of the various Christian communities are well frequented, but it could be said that there is no freedom of religion in the sense that it is very difficult, if not well-nigh impossible, for an Egyptian Muslim to embrace the Christian faith and to be officially recognised as a Christian.

There are also legal dispositions which go against Christians. For instance, if a married Christian man converts to Islam, his children will automatically be considered to be Muslims. A case occurred while I was in Egypt. Two young boys, twins aged about twelve, whose father had become a Muslim and had abandoned his Christian wife, had to sit the exam on religious knowledge. They were presented with a paper on Islam. Each of them refused to answer the questions, writing on the paper *Anā masīhī*, 'I am a Christian.' They were made to sit the exam again, and the same thing happened. With the support of their mother, they held out, and eventually were allowed to proceed to the next class without taking the exam.

The current conflict in Syria, a conflict which has been going on for so many years now, has brought immense suffering to Christians as to other citizens of this country. Already in November 2014, Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, in a joint

7 See for instance the strong condemnation of terrorism and all religiously inspired violence in the *Document on Human Fraternity*, jointly signed by Pope Francis and Dr Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, the Grand Imam of al-Azhar, on 4 February 2019, ¶¶ 21 and 28 (the numbers of paragraphs according to the Arabic and Italian versions published in *Islamochristiana* 45 [2019]).

statement, said: 'Many of our brothers and sisters are being persecuted and have been forced violently from their homes. It even seems that the value of human life has been lost, that the human person no longer matters and may be sacrificed to other interests. And, tragically, all this is met by the indifference of many. As Saint Paul reminds us, 'If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together' (1 Cor 12:26).⁸ A group of Jesuits involved in the Middle East wrote, in June, 2016: 'according to OCHA [United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs], 13.5 million Syrians (out of an estimated population of 22 million in 2010) need humanitarian aid, 4.8 million have already left the country to seek refuge in neighbouring countries or in Europe, and 6.6 million are displaced within their own country because of violence.'⁹ The majority of these suffering people are Muslims, but there are many Christians among them. According to an article by John Pontifex of Aid to the Church in Need, published already in 2018, since the beginning of the civil war in Syria, the Christian population had decreased, from 1,400,000 to 450,000.¹⁰ If Christian churches and other properties have been targeted, it is often because they have been taken over by armed forces and used as bases from which to engage in combat. It is also true that the strongly Islamic character of many of the forces of opposition has led them to acts of violence against Christians.

In Iraq also, where the Catholic Chaldean Church is the largest Christian body, attacks have been carried out on Christians by different groups, particularly of course by the so-called Islamic State or DAESH. The Christians were driven out of their traditional and ancient homelands in the north of the country. Many have sought refuge in the area run by Kurds. Though it would be difficult to blame the Government of Iraq for these attacks, Christians do feel that they are not sufficiently protected. Following the defeat of DAESH, in Mosul for example, Christians have been able, and

8 Cf. *Pro Dialogo*, 146–147 (2014/2–3), p. 79.

9 Text of a group of Jesuits involved in the Middle East, written at the request of the Superior General of the Society of Jesus (June 2016); the original French version of this text has been published in *Bulletin Oeuvre d'Orient*, no. 786 (janvier, février, mars 2017), 20–26; English translation, no. 2 (subsequently referred to as 'Jesuit text').

10 Cf. John Pontifex, 'The Road from Damascus' in *The Tablet* (31 March 2018), pp. 12–13.

are being encouraged, to return to their homes. Appreciations of the situation differ: a report published in July 2018, by the French branch of Aid to the Church in Need noted that the Christians in Iraq, who had numbered 1.5 million in 2003, had been reduced to 500,000 and predicted that they would disappear completely. There is an immense work of reconstruction to be undertaken. On the other hand, an article published by another aid agency, Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA), stated:

Even though damaged homes have been undergoing reconstruction with the support of the church and international organizations, many people remain too discouraged to return until better conditions prevail—such as some guarantee of services, job opportunities and, most importantly, safety. With very little representation in political and administrative institutions, many Christians here say they do not feel they have a place in the country.

The author concluded: ‘(T)here is a pervasive feeling among many in the city that those who left will never come back’. Yet the same article noted:

The sight of hundreds of people of all ages and walks of life neatly dressed and flocking into the church—vibrant amid the scorched walls, broken statues and ruined icons—show a returning population determined to revive their town [Qaraqosh, currently the largest Christian enclave in Iraq].’

A Christian who wished to remain in Iraq declared: ‘Every stone is best in its natural place’.¹¹

I think that we are all aware of the desperate situation in Lebanon, especially since the explosion in the port of Beirut in August 2020. The stagnation caused by the lack of government and economic disaster affects the whole of the population, Christians and Muslims, or to whatever community people belong.

11 Cf. Raed RAFEI, ‘Two years after ISIS, Iraqi Christians fight for their homeland’ in *One*, vol. 45, no. 3 (September 2019), 7-13.

In all these countries, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria, young adults are to the fore in demanding change. As Msgr Gollnisch, the director of L'Oeuvre d'Orient¹² observed, the youth are angry and discouraged, and they hesitate between despair and hope. He speaks of a growing consciousness in this new generation of young adults that their countries have to move ahead.¹³

In the Holy Land (Israel, Jordan and Palestine) the proportion of Christians is as follows: Israel, about 250,000 (2.5 percent); Jordan, between 220,000 and 225,000 (3 percent); Palestine, 50,000 (1.2 percent). These communities form a mosaic of Churches, the most important being the Greek Orthodox, the Latin Rite Catholics (Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem) and the Greek Catholic or Melkite Church. A distinguishing feature of the local Christian communities in Jordan and Palestine is that their members are Arabs and are thus fully integrated into society (the situation in Israel is of course different). Archbishop Maroun Lahham, former Auxiliary of the Latin Patriarch in Amman, in a talk delivered in Paphos in March 2017, explained that the Christians in Jordan and Palestine know very well that they constitute minorities in their countries. They do not really like to use this term, preferring to speak of being few in number, but their historical experience has forged the mentality of a minority which he describes as an exaggerated sense of their own identity, a tendency to seek protection from outside, a fear of engaging in the public square, and an over-emphasis on perceived discrimination. On the other side, the Muslim majority tends to dominate and does not always pay sufficient attention to the rights of the minority. In Palestine, particularly in the occupied territories, the Christians suffer from the limitations on freedom of movement imposed by the occupying power.¹⁴

Catholic priests understand the frustration which continued Israeli occupation arouses, but they exhort the members of their communities not to resort to violence, insisting that violence has no part in the Christian way of life, and instead promoting non-violent means of protest.

12 Hervé Legrand, Giuseppe Maria Croce (eds), *L'Œuvre d'Orient. Solidarités anciennes et nouveaux défis*, Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2010.

13 Interview for the French news agency *Aleteia* In January 2020.

14 Maroun Lahham, 'La Liberté de Religion en Jordanie', paper presented at a conference organized by MISSIO in Paphos, March 2017.

There is much talk in the Western world about Islamophobia. The Holy See has been advocating greater attention to the phenomenon of Christianophobia. Mgr (now Cardinal) Silvano Tommasi, who at the time was Observer of the Holy See at the UN in Geneva, stated in 2011 that a survey had shown that out of 100 people killed because of religious hatred, 75 were Christian. This figure refers to what is happening around the world, and not only in the MENA region. It is perhaps good to remember this, so that all the blame is not laid on Muslims. In Pakistan, as I said above, Christian communities exist and are allowed to function, even if they form only a small minority of the population. In neighbouring India both Christians and Muslims have suffered at the hands of radical Hindus. In Sri Lanka it has happened that Christian churches have been attacked by Buddhists, in retaliation for the verbal attacks on Buddhism by some Christian preachers. In Brazil and other countries of Latin America, individual Christians are frequently murdered because of their activities on behalf of the poor and oppressed. Other examples could be given, but these are perhaps sufficient to illustrate the complexity of the situations. The question to which we must turn now is to what can be done to remedy matters and whether interreligious dialogue can help in these situations, and if so in what way.

It could be said that the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East had prepared Catholics for this moment. The Apostolic Exhortation that followed this Synod stated that ‘Catholics of the Middle East, the majority of whom are native citizens of their countries, have the duty and right to participate fully in national life, working to build up their country. They should enjoy full citizenship and not be treated as second-class citizens or believers’ (25).¹⁵

It should be noted that participation in national life is both a right and a duty. The tendency of minorities is to stay out of the fray in order to protect themselves, but this detachment often plays against them. Recognizing the fact that Catholics had tended generally to keep away from politics, the bishops in Egypt, at the time of the Arab Spring, promoted special lectures and conferences, mainly for young people.

15 Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, <http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20120914_ecclesia-in-medio-oriente.html> [accessed 28/02/22]; the number between parentheses refers to the paragraph.

The aim was to create greater political awareness, and this included an explanation of constitutional matters so that there could be a true understanding of the importance of the referendum to be held on the proposed new Constitution. It was interesting to see that the focus of the bishops was not on the rights of Christians alone, but on the rights and duties of citizens in general. Unfortunately, the victory in the parliamentary elections of the Islamist tendency, represented by both the Muslim Brothers and the Salafists, and the subsequent election of a Muslim Brother as president, acted as a damper on the enthusiasm of Christians.

The group of Jesuits from the Middle East, referred to above, made the following comment:

After the hopes that the ‘Arab Spring’ of 2011 raised, Christians, and a good number of the inhabitants of the area now live in deep uncertainty. The situation has become relatively stable in Egypt today [this was written before the more recent violence], but it remains volatile and uncertain in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Libya where military operations have become increasingly international. It is not possible to forget the situation in the Holy Land where the lack of a political settlement creates permanent tensions between Palestinians and Israelis, leading to outbursts of violence from which both peoples suffer.¹⁶

These Jesuits call for free speech and for the development of democracy. They state: ‘Education for citizenship requires genuine familiarity with human rights and reflection about the concept of “laicity” (understood as citizenship that recognizes and respects cultural and religious plurality). Under these conditions, religion will have its appropriate place in the public arena and will be able to make positive contributions to living together.’¹⁷ They insist on the true nature of Christian identity, which cannot simply be defined in opposition, i.e. not Muslim, not Jewish, nor reduced to the observance of liturgical traditions, or considered as a ‘plus value’ in plans being

¹⁶ Jesuit text, § 8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, § 12; ‘laicity’ is an attempt to render into English the French ‘laïcité’ which means the secular character of a state taken positively.

made for migration. This Christian identity is to be based on a true spiritual experience, encouraged and fostered by dedicated pastors. The authors of this document even speak of ‘spiritual resistance’, by which they mean ‘the sense of belonging to Christ in order to find again the meaning of a presence that is sometimes undermined by violence and intolerance, or threatened by individualistic and consumerist trends.’ They go on to say that ‘such spiritual roots will bring renewed impetus to make God’s care, proximity and mercy known in different social realities, especially in education, in healthcare and in development.’¹⁸ To live this Christian identity is not an easy task; in fact, it could be considered a call to heroism.

Many people from the Middle East, including Christians, are seeking to flee from areas of conflict. This is understandable, and the Catholic Church encourages communities and countries to welcome these refugees and help them to integrate into new surroundings. On the other hand, the Church’s wish is to bring an end to the conflicts and to create the necessary conditions for individuals and families to remain in their own countries. With regard to Syria the Holy See has always insisted on two things: the need for continuing humanitarian aid to all those suffering from the war, and the search for an inclusive and Syrian-led solution to the political conflict. I quote here the words of Mgr Gallagher, the Secretary for Relations with States: ‘Of deep concern remains the vulnerable situation of Christians and religious minorities in the Middle East, who suffer disproportionately the effects of war and social upheaval in the region, to such an extent that their very presence and existence are gravely threatened. As His Holiness Pope Francis has repeatedly recalled, their continued presence can enable them to fulfil their historic and essential role of contributing to the social cohesion of those societies, which will be of vital importance for the future of the entire region.’¹⁹

THE ROLE OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Let me now examine what interreligious dialogue can do in the situations that we have been considering. First it is useful to remind

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, § 20.

¹⁹ Cf. Vatican Press Office. Bulletin, 5 April 2017.

ourselves of the definition of dialogue as given by the document *Dialogue and Proclamation*:²⁰

In the context of religious plurality, dialogue means ‘all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment’ (*Dialogue and Mission* 3), in obedience to truth and respect for freedom. It includes both the witness and exploration of respective religious convictions (DP 9).

One of the aims of interreligious dialogue, indeed one could consider it the first aim, is to allow people of different religions to live together in peace and harmony. This is particularly the aim of the *dialogue of life* ‘where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations’ (DP 42). This is very relevant to our present concern, for where people of different religions live together, not just side by side, but as a single human community where there reigns an atmosphere of respect and trust, it is easier for them to resist outside influences which would arouse sectarian tension and violence. It must not be assumed that such a dialogue of life develops automatically. It has to be worked at; it requires constant effort to increase mutual understanding, to overcome prejudices, to build up trust. A Christian-Muslim dialogue group on the West Coast of the USA, stated in a report of one of their meetings which took place after the events of 11 September 2001: ‘Our Muslim friends felt an extra measure of pain because these terrible acts, which clearly violated their faith, were strongly associated with Islam.’ The partners in dialogue agreed ‘that accurate introductory information is a first step for overcoming false ideas and negative views of one another and for breaking down barriers to understanding.’ They noted the fatigue of responding to ‘false

20 Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation. Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*, 1991; see Francesco Gioia (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue. The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church from the Second Vatican Council to John Paul II (1963–2005)*, Pauline Books & Media, Boston, 2006, 1156–1189. The document is cited as DP followed by the paragraph number.

accusations and random placements of blame’, the frustration when encountering bias, yet they also acknowledged their need to confront their own prejudices.²¹

It is also true that projects which unite the different religious communities can be very helpful in creating harmony. This leads us to consider the *dialogue of action*, where people of different religions work together to promote justice, reconciliation and peace. An excellent example is provided by *Adyān*, a foundation created in Lebanon in 2006 by a Maronite priest, Fr Fadi Daou and a Muslim professor, Nayla Tabbara. This non-profit and non-governmental organization ‘promotes the values of diversity, solidarity and human dignity.’²² It contributed to having the 25 March, the Feast of the Annunciation, declared as a national public holiday in Lebanon, and on that day its associates arrange joint prayer services between Christians and Muslims.

In a more official way, the World Conference on Religions for Peace, now called simply Religions for Peace, has been engaged in setting up interreligious councils at national and regional levels. This initiative has been particularly important in places where conflict has taken on an interreligious colour, such as in Bosnia. In some cases, members of such interreligious councils, especially in Africa, have undertaken visits to different countries in order to encourage reconciliation.

There can be interreligious co-operation in opposing legislation which is deemed to be unjust. Mention has been made of the blasphemy laws in Pakistan which often give rise to abuse. Muslims in that country have backed Christians in the call for modification of these laws. Such joint action has been made possible by the fellowship that has developed through the Pakistan Association for Inter-Religious Dialogue.

Joint action is not possible unless there is an agreement on the aim of the action and the means to achieve this aim. This supposes prior discussion, and so we see the need for *the dialogue of discourse*. Over the years, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has been engaged in meetings that have examined or touched upon

21 ‘The West Coast Dialogue between American Catholics and Muslims, Friends and not Adversaries: a Catholic-Muslim Spiritual Journey’, *Islamochristiana* 30 (2004), pp. 178-9.

22 Cf. the Adyan year book for 2019-2020, p. 1.

different aspects of human rights. For instance, there have been bilateral dialogues with Muslims on the rights of children, and on the use of the earth's resources, on migrants and refugees, on the place of religion in society.²³ The Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims made a study on religious liberty, examining the principles of religious liberty according to both Christianity and Islam, and then adding case studies. The papers were discussed with a select group of Muslims before being finalized.²⁴ A multilateral seminar was held on religious sources for peace according to the Holy Books of different religious traditions.²⁵ Such exchanges may not be entirely satisfactory and may appear like mere drops in an ocean of conflict, but they contribute nevertheless to creating greater understanding and a will to co-operate to maintain peace.

Discussion and action should be accompanied by prayer. This was the conviction that led Saint John Paul II to invite Christians and the followers of other religions to Assisi in October 1986 in order to pray for peace. It was why he invited Jews, Christians and Muslims to a special weekend of prayer for peace in Europe, especially in the Balkans, and again invited representatives of religions to gather in Assisi as a response to the events of September 2001. At this latter gathering various commitments were undertaken. Similarly, after his visit to the Holy Land, Pope Francis invited the late Shimon Peres, then President of Israel, and Mahmoud Abbas, the President of the Palestinian Authority, to come to the Vatican to pray for peace. This prayer, at which Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople was also present, took place on 8 June 2014. Pope Francis requested that 'a minute for peace' be observed every year on this date. All these activities, as also the joint prayer of Lebanese Christians and Muslims on 25 March, referred to above, could be considered as belonging to the *dialogue of religious experience*. They are a way of recognizing that in order for peace to be established and maintained, there is need of the assistance of a Higher Power or, as we Christians would say, of God's grace.

23 Reports on these meetings have been published in *Pro Dialogo*, the journal of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

24 *Religious Liberty: A Theme for Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, Vatican City, 2006.

25 *Spiritual Resources of the Religions for Peace: Exploring the sacred texts in the promotion of peace*, Vatican City, 2003.

Prayer should lead to action. Here the final paragraph of the Declaration *Nostra Aetate* is relevant. It contains the following statement:

We cannot truly pray to God, the Father of all, if we treat any people in other than brotherly fashion, for all men are created in God's image. Man's relation to God the Father and man's relation to his fellowmen are so dependent on each other that the Scripture says: 'He who does not love, does not know God' (1 Jn 4:8). There is no basis, therefore, for any discrimination between individual and individual, or between people and people, arising either from human dignity or the rights which flow from it (NA 5).

Sometimes, however, the suffering is so great that the words of our prayers seem inadequate and, like Job, we are reduced to silence. Yet even this shared silence can be a powerful incentive to continue to work together to overcome all manifestations of violence.

CONCLUSION

What conclusion can be drawn from these reflections? One would be that the limitations of interreligious dialogue must be respected. Of itself it cannot eliminate the persecution of Christians or of any other religious minority. Peace can only come about through negotiations, and this means first establishing a climate of confidence. Interreligious dialogue can, however, by contributing to greater understanding and mutual appreciation, help to prevent such persecution from taking place. It is perhaps to be considered more as preventive medicine than a cure.

I would like to add one further reflection. We naturally hear much about persecution and violence, because these hit the headlines. The absence of conflict is not considered to be newsworthy. The media have to be encouraged to report the Good News of instances where people of different religions are living together in peace and harmony. Such examples would be a positive way of combating discrimination and persecution.

Allow me to conclude with the following invocation based on the life of St Francis of Assisi:

*Almost blind, Francis sang of the beauty of God's creation.
In the very heart of war, he recognized God's presence in the heart
of the 'enemy'.
Recognizing himself to be a sinner among sinners, he wept at the
thought of God's mercy.
Through his intercession, may we, despite our blindness, be humble
yet grateful peacemakers, and so be worthy children of our God.*

A NEW APPROACH TO QUR'ANIC EXEGESIS

Michel Cuypers

Muslim intellectuals today, aware of the unprecedented crisis which Islam is undergoing as it faces up to modernity, are increasingly calling for a new exegesis of the Qur'an, one which would be able to respond to the intellectual and ethical demands of modern humanity. For them, the classical exegesis, though splendid in its day, has long ago used up all its resources and is reduced to constant repetition. In a certain way, contemporary Islamist trends share the same feelings, since their founders, such as Maududi in Pakistan (d. 1979) and Sayyid Qutb in Egypt (d. 1966), felt the need to develop a new, ideological kind of exegesis, projecting onto the Qur'an their own socio-political categories; these were clearly very far from those of society of the 7th century which saw the birth of the Qur'an. Caught between traditional exegesis, weighed down by centuries of repetitive commentaries, and the ideological exegesis which leads to the excesses we are aware of, the intellectuals to whom I have referred wish to return to the text itself, read and analysed with the tools of modern exegesis, which biblical exegetes had been able to employ very skilfully for the study of the Bible. These include those of historical criticism, which has long been the only tool of biblical exegesis, and which Western orientalisks have equally applied to the Qur'an since the 19th century, without this being able to take its place in the circles of traditional Muslim scholars. Other methods, called 'synchronic', have been introduced more recently in the biblical sphere. In this talk I shall seek to show how one of these, named 'rhetorical analysis' or 'Semitic rhetoric', can in every respect be applied to the Qur'an and bring about completely new ways for the interpretation of the Book. It is also more easily acceptable for traditional milieux, for reasons which we shall see.

1 THE SITUATION

Non-Muslim readers on first encountering the Qur'an are most often surprised, not to say disconcerted, by the apparent disorder of the text and its fragmentary nature. Accustomed to reading books whose theme is developed in a consistent and linear way, they find themselves faced with a succession of chapters (or *suras*) of very unequal length, and with no obvious link. And within the suras, sometimes very varied subjects (narratives, legislation, exhortation, polemic ...) follow one another and intersect, without making it possible to follow a clear logical line. Thence the question arises: is the Qur'an composed of fragments, originally independent and brought together later, somewhat at random, when the final collection of the Book was made, after Muhammad's death? Or are these fragments, despite appearances, arranged into a genuine composition, to form a logical and coherent whole?

The question arose very early, in the Muslim world itself. In the 3rd and 4th centuries of the Hijra a series of works appeared concerning *naẓm al-Qur'an*, 'the composition of the Qur'an'. Unfortunately these works are lost, but their content can be deduced from later works on the 'inimitability of the Qur'an', *i'jāz al-Qur'an*, like the *Bayān i'jāz al-Qur'an* ('Meaning of the Qur'an's inimitability') by al-Khaṭṭābī (d. 388/998). One section of this book tries precisely to reply to opponents who denounced the lack of coherence in the qur'anic text. In his replies, al-Khaṭṭābī shows how certain verses match up, throughout the Qur'an, thus proving the unity of the Book. These kinds of works point out several characteristics of composition such as parallelisms and repetitions. Their replies, however, remain very partial and do not rest on any general theory of the composition of the Book. The same applies to the later works on 'qur'anic sciences', *ulūm al-Qur'an* (of Zarkashī and Suyūṭī, 14th and 15th centuries), which also pick out several characteristics of composition; in particular they show that such a verse is linked to the preceding one, and the same for the suras. They thus highlight a certain interconnection of verses and suras, but without succeeding in finding a genuine organic structure of the different parts of a sura or of suras between each other. And the varied elements of composition which they bring out (parallelism, repetition, antithesis, etc.) remain isolated, without managing to constitute a system.

The fragmentary nature of the text is certainly the principal reason why there developed, from the earliest days and up till now, an ‘atomistic’ exegesis—according to the expression of the Pakistani scholar Mustansir Mir—commenting on the text verse by verse, without taking into account the literary context of the verses in question. The commentators sought rather to explain the verses by what has been called technically the ‘occasions (or circumstances, or causes) of the revelation’, *asbāb al-nuzūl*. This consisted of relating a verse to an event in the life of the Prophet or of the infant Muslim community, an event which would have been the reason for which a particular verse was revealed. Explanation by the historical context replaces that by the literary context. This method of commenting on the text undoubtedly responded to the concern to link the Qur’an directly to the life of the Prophet.

This way of commenting on a verse taken in isolation can however be very risky, and should today be submitted to criticism. I should like to give a particularly significant example of this kind.

Sura 2, The Cow, verse 106 says: ‘None of Our revelations (verses) do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar’ (Yusuf ‘Ali’s translation). This verse has been interpreted by the whole exegetical tradition as meaning that certain verses of the Qur’an were later abrogated by other, better ones. The classical commentaries tell us that this verse was revealed following a revelation which the Prophet received at night and promptly forgot the next Day.¹ Others explain it by a different anecdote: the pagans complained that Muhammad gave now one command, now another which contradicted the first, proof that this did not come to him from God but was his own invention; then God sent down the verse in question.²

The interpretation of this verse, according to which one Qur’anic verse can be repealed by another Qur’anic verse, served as scriptural justification for the method of interpretation called *abrogation* (*nāsikh wa mansūkh*, literally ‘abrogating and abrogated’). This method, much favoured by the jurisconsults (*fuqahā’*) to overcome the contradictions between certain legal verses, made it permissible to consider the softer, more tolerant and open verses to be abrogated by the harder, more

1 For example, in Suyūfī, *Lubāb al-nuqūl fī asbāb al-nuzūl*, n.d., p. 32.

2 Al-Wāḥidī al-Nisābūrī, *Asbāb al-nuzūl*, Cairo, 1991, p. 25.

rigorous and closed verses. Thus, according to some, 'the verse of the sword' (9: 29) would abrogate more than 130 verses: 'Fight those who believe not in God nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by God and His Apostle, nor acknowledge the Religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the *jizya* (poll tax) with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.' Islamist extremists of today make use of this type of exegesis to justify their positions.

Now if we consider the whole wider context of 2: 106, we find simply a polemic against the Jews, who complain that the Prophet is bringing a new Scripture and modifying the verses of the Torah, in his preaching. Read in its literary context, the verse thus signifies the cancelling out of the verses of the Torah by those, better ones, of the new revelation, a theme which is found in many places in the Qur'an.

At the same time, the 'occasions of revelation' quoted by the commentators no longer have any connection with the real significance of the verse. These anecdotes are clearly fictitious.

Several 20th-century commentators have vehemently denounced the erroneous interpretation of this verse (Muhammad 'Ali, Muhammad Asad, Yusuf 'Ali and even Maududi, nevertheless one of the fathers of modern Islamism) but in vain. This doctrine continues to be current, as a quasi-dogmatic certainty. In the 1960s, Ahmad Hasan, a Muslim researcher, voiced his astonishment: '... it looks strange that some of the most eminent authorities of *tafsīr* [Islamic exegesis] have missed the central point of this verse.'³

This example allows us to see the urgent need to go beyond the classical method of interpretation, verse by verse and by the 'occasions of revelation', through another method, which will take account of the literary context of the verses.

Starting from the 19th century, as mentioned, the 'orientalist' Western scholars began a serious study of the Qur'an, using the historical-critical method. One of the first of these, the German Theodor Nöldeke (1836-1930), while admitting as a fact that the text was much fragmented, tried to reconstruct the history of the origin of the Qur'an, comparing and classifying chronologically the different fragments, in his famous *History of the Qur'an, Geschichte des Qur'an*. Far

3 Ahmad Hasan, 'Theory of naskh', *Islamic Studies* IV, 1965, p. 189.

from trying to find a coherence in the text as a whole, he deconstructed it into disparate fragments, from possibly different periods.

Simultaneously with these researches in Islamic studies, Christian scholars studying the Bible found themselves faced with a similar problem: certain texts of the Bible also effectively appear as a collection of more or less independent fragments. This is true for the 'prophetic books', but also for a good part of the books of the Pentateuch (the Torah), for the Psalms, and even for the Gospels. Beside those holding to the historical-critical method, who deconstructed the texts to understand their origin, in a diachronic perspective, other scholars, taking up a synchronic viewpoint, set themselves the question of the coherence and composition of the biblical texts as they appear in their final version.

The first discovery, which was to be the starting point of a systematic theory which took two and a half centuries to develop, was made by an English biblical scholar, the Revd Robert Lowth (1711-1787), an Oxford professor, then Bishop of Oxford and later of London, who in 1753 published his *Readings on the sacred poetry of the Hebrews (De sacra poesi Hebraeorum)*. In this book he shows that the psalms and other poetic texts of the Bible are composed of *parallel* elements, which maintain between them a relationship of *synonymy* (A // B), of *antithesis* (A ↔ B), or *complementarity* (A + B). This theory has become completely classical in biblical studies.

At the same time, a German scholar, Johann-Albrecht Bengel (d. 1752), noticed the great frequency in the Bible of the feature of *chiasmus* (AB/B'A') or inverse parallelism. He pointed out also the *concentric composition*, when between the two sides of the symmetry of an inverse parallelism a central element is inserted (AB/x/B'A').

Subsequently it was perceived that these features of composition existed throughout the Bible, at the scale of verses, but also on a much vaster scale, between groups of verses, and thus at several levels, even to the entire book. It was again two Englishmen who were foremost in continuing the work of the pioneers just mentioned: John Jebb (1775-1833), who in 1820 published a book entitled *Sacred Literature*, and Thomas Boys (1792-1880) who in 1824 published *Tactica Sacra. An attempt to develop, and to exhibit to the eye by tabular arrangements, a general rule of composition prevailing in the Holy Scriptures*. These principles of composition are now well systematised in a theory which was at first known as

'biblical rhetoric' and more recently as 'Semitic rhetoric' when it was perceived that it applied equally to ancient non-biblical Semitic texts.

In the 1980s a team of four researchers in Beirut, two Muslims and two Christians, analysed in accordance with these principles a series of biblical texts and some *hadiths* (traditions of the Prophet).⁴ They showed that these texts are all constructed on these same principles of symmetries. By doing so, they rediscovered the ancient 'Semitic rhetoric', very different from the Greek rhetoric of which we are all heirs, in both the West and the Arab world. The term 'rhetoric' here must be taken in the sense of 'the art of composition of speech' or 'the arrangement of the parts of speech', which corresponds to only one of the parts of classical rhetoric, the *dispositio*. Just as the composition of the word or sentence follows rules of grammar, speech as a whole also follows rules of composition. There is thus a kind of 'grammar of speech' or 'rhetoric of composition'. And while for the composing of speech Greek rhetoric proceeds in a linear and continuous manner, from an introduction, followed by a development, to end with a conclusion (introduction, narrative, discussion, summing up), Semitic rhetoric for its part proceeds by way of semantic correspondences, in a complex game of symmetries.

The principal theoretician of this Semitic rhetoric is Fr Roland Meynet, Jesuit, professor at the Gregorian University in Roma, who has set out his systematisation in two books: *L'Analyse rhétorique* (1989, translated into English as *Rhetorical analysis. An introduction to Biblical Rhetoric*, 1998), and *Traité de rhétorique biblique* (2007, translated into English as *Treatise of Biblical Rhetoric*, 2012).⁵

Over the past twenty-seven years, I have published in various articles in French the analysis of the composition of some forty suras, following this system, and three books.⁶ It turns out that this 'rhetorical

4 Roland Meynet, Louis Pouzet, Nayla Farouki and Ahyaf Sinno, *Rhetoric and hermeneutic method. Analyses of texts of the Bible and of the Muslim tradition*, Saint-Joseph University, Dar el-Machreq, Beyrouth, 1993 (in Arabic); French edition, *Rhétorique sémitique. Textes de la Bible et de la Tradition musulmane*, Cerf, Paris, 1998.

5 Roland Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis. An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 1998; *Treatise on Biblical Rhetoric*, Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2012 (trans. from *Traité de rhétorique biblique*, Lethielleux, Rhétorique sémitique 4, Paris, 2007).

6 Michel Cuypers, *Le Festin. Une lecture de la sourate al-Mâ'ida*, Lethielleux, Paris, Rhétorique sémitique, 2007; trans. in English *The Banquet: A Reading of the Fifth Sura of the Qur'an*, Convivium Press, Miami, 2009; trans. in Arabic *Fī nazm sūrat al-*

analysis' can be applied perfectly, in accordance with all its principles, to the qur'anic text. This research is therefore totally interdisciplinary, since it applies to the Qur'an a method developed entirely within the framework of biblical studies.

This method of analysis allows simultaneously for showing the formal and semantic coherence of the text, and interpreting this according to its composition, that is to say, in accordance with its literary context. Thence its whole interest for exegesis.

This system will be explained here through some texts which, though short, are sufficient to indicate most of the principles of this Semitic rhetoric, which seems well fitted to be applied to the whole of the qur'anic text.

2 THE EXAMPLE OF SURA 101, 'THE CALAMITY'.

Table 1

1 The calamity
2 What is the calamity?
3 and what will let you know what is the calamity?
4 On the day when the people shall be like moths scattered,
5 and the mountains shall be like carded wool.
6-7 Then as for him whose balance is heavy, he shall be in a pleasant life,
8-9 but as for him whose balance is light, his mother shall be the abyss.
10 And what will let you know what it is?
11 A burning fire.

On the first table, the text has been rewritten, its members superimposed in the style of poetry. This is the zero level of rhetoric: that of *members*

Mā'ida, Dar el-Machreq, Beyrouth, 2014; *The Composition of the Qur'an*, Bloomsbury, London, 2015, trans. from French *La Composition du Coran, Naẓm al-Qur'ān*, Gabalda-Peeters, Paris-Leuven, 2012; Arabic trans., *Fī Naẓm al-Qur'ān*, Dar al-Machreq, Beyrouth, 2016; *A Qur'anic Apocalypse. A Reading of the thirty-three Last Surabs of the Qur'an*, Lockwood Press, London, 2018 (trans. from French, *Une Apocalypse coranique. Lecture des trente-trois dernières sourates du Coran*, Peeters, Paris-Leuven, 2014). An Arabic translation is being published.

or elements which will serve for the rhetorical composition, which will appear on the next level, when these elements will be combined.⁷

At a second level (Table 2) it is noticed that certain members are regrouped in parallel pairs:

Table 2

1	The calamity	
2		WHAT IS THE CALAMITY?
3 and	what will let you know	WHAT IS THE CALAMITY?
4	On the day when the people	SHALL BE LIKE <i>moths</i> scattered,
5 and	the mountains	SHALL BE LIKE <i>wool</i> carded.
6-7	Then	AS FOR HIM WHOSE BALANCE IS HEAVY, <i>he shall be in a pleasant life,</i>
8-9	but	AS FOR HIM WHOSE BALANCE IS LIGHT, <i>his mother shall be the abyss.</i>
10	And what will let you know	what it is?
11	A burning fire.	

The members, 1, 10, 11, remain isolated, the others form parallel pairs of *members*, or *bi-member segments*:

Verses 1 and 11 contain only one or two terms (not a sentence).

Verses 2 and 3 take up a similar question, slightly modified.

Verses 4 and 5 are constructed grammatically in the same manner, and have a complementary meaning: on the Day of Judgement, the people are scattered because the mountains explode.

Verses 6-7 and 8-9 are equally of the same grammatical construction but of opposite meaning.

The whole is thus composed of 6 *segments*: 3 of a single member, and 3 of two members. Now it is a rule of Semitic rhetoric that the

⁷ Rhetorical analysis distinguishes the following textual levels, in increasing order of magnitude: member, segment, piece, part, passage, sequence, section, book. This simple terminology, borrowed from current vocabulary, was popularized by Roland Meynet, in his *Treatise*. For this and other technical aspects of our exposition, see *The Composition of the Qur'an*, previous note.

higher level of segments, to be conventionally called the *piece*, cannot contain more than 3 segments. Indeed it is seen (Table 3) that these 6 segments can regroup themselves in 2 pieces of 3 segments, as hereunder:

Table 3

A 1 The calamity		
B 2	<i>WHAT IS</i>	the calamity?
3	<i>AND WHAT WILL LET YOU KNOW</i>	<i>WHAT IS</i> the calamity?
C 4	On <i>the day</i> when the people	shall be like moths scattered,
5	and the mountains	shall be like wool carded.

A' 6-7	Then as for him whose balance is heavy,	he shall be in a pleasant life,
8-9	but as for him whose balance is light,	his mother shall be the abyss .
B' 10	<i>AND WHAT WILL LET YOU KNOW</i>	<i>WHAT it IS?</i>
C' 11	<i>A burning fire.</i>	

At first glance, the two pieces seem to be composed in a parallel style (ABC/A'B'C'): one synonymic term is put in the first segments ('the calamity' / 'the abyss', at the end of verse 9), followed by a question in the second segments ('what will let you know ...') and its reply in the third segments ('the day' / 'a burning fire').

But more numerous signs of composition show that the two pieces are above all set out in inverted symmetry (ABC/C'B'A') (see Table 4):

–At the two ends (AA') isolated terms appear: 'the calamity' (evoking a cosmic upheaval) / 'a burning fire' (evoking hell). The correspondence of these two *extreme terms* is emphasised by their assonance: *qĀrI'A / ḥĀmIyA*.

–In median position BB' appear questions, partly identical.

–In central position, CC', appear two segments, each one of strictly parallel structure. Moreover, the two segments form between them a complementary parallelism: the first

(C) describes the cataclysm of the Last Day, the second (C') the Judgement.

From the point of view of rhetoric, the sura is thus constituted of a single *part*, evoking the Day of Judgement in *two complementary pieces*, set out in a mirror composition or *chiasmus*, the first describing the cosmic upheaval of this day, the second the Judgement and its retribution.

Table 4

[A]	– 1 THE CALAMITY (<i>q.Ārl'ā</i>)
[B]	= 2 What is the calamity?
	= 3 AND WHAT WILL LET YOU KNOW WHAT IS the calamity?
[C]	+ 4 On the day when the people shall be like moths scattered,
	+ 5 and the mountains shall be like wool carded.

[C']	+ 6-7 Then as for him whose balance is heavy, he shall be in a pleasant life,
	+ 8-9 but as for him whose balance is light, his mother shall be the abyss.
[B']	= 10 AND WHAT WILL LET YOU KNOW WHAT IT IS?
[A']	– 11 A BURNING FIRE (<i>h.Āmlyā</i>)!

3 ANALYSIS OF SURA 96

The following example, on a slightly longer and more complex sura, will show how various approaches—lexicological, historical-critical and rhetorical—can converge for a contextual exegesis of the Qur'an. The various exegetical approaches should not be considered as rivals, far less as contradictory, but rather as complementary. They can also sometimes correct one another.

Sura 96, The Clotted Blood, is one of the most famous suras, as it begins with the verses in which the whole tradition has seen the Prophet's commissioning: 'Read (or proclaim) in the name of your Lord

who created, created man from clotted blood ...'. Such would have been the first words addressed by the angel Gabriel to Muhammad, during one of his times of spiritual solitude in the cave of Hira', near Mecca.

The strange thing is that this sura is composed of two fragments which are stylistically, semantically and, according to tradition, historically completely different: the first five verses are very rhythmical, perfectly regular, dealing (apparently) with the Prophet's being sent on mission by God, Creator and Revealer. The following verses, in a freer style, are an invective against a rich arrogant man who is trying to prevent the 'servant' of God from praying. Tradition links this fragment with threats of the pagans of Mecca against Muhammad, who prayed near the Ka'ba, an incident which would have taken place at least three years after the first revelation. The great commentator Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī (d. 1209) had already noticed the anachronism: he concluded that the first five verses were revealed first; the rest, revealed later, were attached in due course to the first verses, by order of the Prophet.⁸

Even granted that these two fragments, so different in style, could have had an independent origin, their combination in the same sura should have a meaning. What is the semantic, logical, and rhetorical unity of this sura?

A first track, **lexicological**, is given us by a certain number of scholars, concerning the exact meaning of the first word: *iqra'*. Generally translated by 'read', sometimes 'recite', this imperative has by some been related to the vocation of Deutero-Isaiah (Is. 40: 6 'A voice says "Cry!"'), thus confirming the meaning of being sent on a mission. Now in research among the hadiths, the contemporary scholar Uri Rubin has noticed that the most ancient narratives of the Prophet's calling make no reference to the first verse of this sura, which casts doubt on the link between the two.⁹ The formula *iqra' bi-sm* seems to be a calque of the Hebrew expression: *qera be-shem* 'call on the name'.¹⁰ The verse thus

8 Rāzī, *Al-Tafsīr al-keabīr*, Beirut, 1983, xxxii, p. 18.

9 U Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder. The Life of Muhammad as viewed by early Muslims*, The Darwin Press, Princeton, 1995, pp. 103-8, 230.

10 In this interpretation, the particle *bi-* is explained as being a *bā' zā'ida*, a 'superfluous *bā'*'. Cf. Abū 'Ubayda, *Majāz al-Qur'an*, ed. M-F Sazkin, Cairo, 1988, ii, p. 304; Ibn Qutayba, *Ta'wīl mushkīl al-Qur'an*, ed. A Şaḡar, Cairo, 1954, p. 193; U Rubin, *'Iqra' bi-smi rabbika ...!* Some notes on the reinterpretation of the *surat al-'Alaq* (vs. 1-5), *Israel Oriental Studies*, xiii, 1933, p. 213-30, summarised in Cl. Gilliot, 'Bulletin

would not mean 'Read in the name of your Lord', but 'Call upon (invoke, praise) the name of your Lord', signifying an invitation to prayer, and in no way a call to mission.¹¹ The formula appears again, for example, in Psalm 116: 13, 'I will call on the name of the Lord'. One would then have, in the first five verses at least, a short invitational psalm, analogous to those which can be found in the Psalter, for example Psalm 95 (94).

A second track consequently opens up by way of **intertextuality**: it is remarkable that straight after this opening imperative, the sura evokes creation in general, and that of mankind in particular. The same sequence is found in the invitational Psalm 95: a call to praise, in the imperative ('O come, let us sing to the Lord', v.1) / God the creator ('the sea is his, for he made it: for his hands formed the dry land', v. 5) / creator of mankind ('let us kneel before the Lord, our maker', v. 6). In the two texts, this whole is then followed by a very similar formula of justification: 'For thy Lord is the most generous' (sura 96: 3) / 'For he is our God' (Ps. 95: 7).

d'islamologie et d'études arabes', *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 78, 1994, p. 461. U Rubin's notion is taken up in J Chabbi, *Le seigneur des tribus. L'islam de Mahomet*, ed. Noësis, Paris, 1997, p. 214, and in A-L de Prémare, *Les fondations de l'islam. Entre écriture et histoire*, Seuil, Paris, 2002, pp. 311-12.

11 This interpretation was already held in the 19th century by Gustav Weil and Hartwig Hirschfeld (see Günter Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, Motilal Babarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 2003, p. 32) and Hubert Grimme (*Das Leben Mohammeds*, Münster 1892, I, p. 18: 'Preise den Namen deines Herren'). Th. Nöldeke in *Geschichte des Korans*, I, p. 81, quotes the Arab philologist Abu 'Ubayda (d. 203/818) for whom the verb *qara'a* in 96: 1 'has the same meaning as the verb *dhakara*: invoke, praise, glorify' (Lüling, *id.*, p. 31). Ch. Luxenberg relates the verb to a Syriac formula of introduction to prayer (Chrisoph Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran, Das Arabische Buch*, Berlin, 2000, p. 279). Lüling and Luxenberg see as the origin of sura 96 (by the medium of various adaptations) a Christian hymn.

Sura 96, 1-5)

1 **Call upon the name of your Lord**

who *created*

2 **created man** from clotted blood.

3 Call on, *for your Lord is the most generous,*

4 who taught by the pen,

5 Taught man what he did not know.

Psalm 95 (94), 1-7

1 O come, let us sing to the **Lord ;**
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation;
2 let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! 3 For the Lord is a great God, and a great king above all gods.
4 In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.
5 *The sea is his, for he made it; for his hands formed the dry land.*
6 O come, let us worship and bow down,
let us kneel before **the Lord, our Maker!**
7 *for he is our God,*
and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.

The third track is that of **rhetorical analysis**. Understood as just suggested, the first five verses are no longer so very different from those following: the whole sura concerns the prayer. The two *parts* (upper level of the *sentence*) 1-4 / 6-19 are linked together by a series of ‘signs or marks of composition’:

–‘man’ at the end of the first part (5) and at the beginning of the second (6) play the role of a hinge or *median term* linking the two parts;

—‘your Lord’ (1, 3/8) is placed as (almost) *initial term*, indicating the beginning of the two parts;

—‘he knows not/did he not know’ (same verb *ya’lam*), verses 5 and 14, at the end of the first part (5) and at the exact centre of the second, represents an application of one of the ‘laws’ of Semitic rhetoric, that of ‘displacement of the extremities towards the centre’, ‘fourth law of Nils W Lund’ (a biblical scholar who published around the 1940s). This construction binds together the two parts into one whole, according to a typical process of Semitic rhetoric. Verse 14 then appears as an explanation of the enigmatic verse 5 ‘taught man what he did not know’. What is it that man did not know? Verse 14 replies: that God is the supreme judge who sees everything, and will not leave unpunished the rebellion of the rich man. It is remarkable, moreover, that this central member should be in the form of a question: it is one of the characteristics or laws of Semitic rhetoric that very often in the centre of a system a question appears; this could also be a wisdom utterance, a quotation, or a parable, something which compels reflection concerning a decision.

A rhetorical subtlety confirms the coherence of the sura as a whole: the terms at either end defining the sura (beginning of v. 1, end of v. 19) are two verbs in the imperative singular. The correspondence of the two verbs is underlined by an assonance: *IQRĀ’ BI / IQĻARIB*. This correspondence seems all the less a matter of chance in that the term *iqtarib* is the only one that does not rhyme with another verse. If it was chosen, without rhyme, this can only be for its suitability for inclusion with the first word of the sura. This assonanced inclusion invites us to put these two imperatives, at either end of the sura, equally in a semantic relationship. Verse 19b is clearly an invitation to prayer and adoration: ‘bow down and draw near’, which responds to the meaning of v. 1, if this is translated by: ‘Call upon (praise) the name of thy Lord’. The whole sura is thus unified around the theme of prayer, evoked not only in vv. 1, 3 and 19, but again in vv. 9-10: ‘Have you considered him who restrains a servant when he prays?’

1 **CALL UPON** (*IQRĀ' BI*) the name of YOUR LORD
who created,
2 created man from clotted blood.

3 Call upon, for thy Lord is the most generous,
4 who taught by the pen,
5 Taught **man** what *HE DID NOT KNOW* (*YA'LAM*).

6 Nay, but verily **man** acts presumptuously
7 because he sees that he has become rich.
8 Verily, to YOUR LORD is the return.

9-10 Have you considered him who restrains a servant when he prays?
11-12 Have you considered if he be following the guidance, or urging
in piety?
13 Have you considered if he has counted false, and turned away?

14 *DOES HE NOT KNOW* (*YA'LAM*) that God sees?

15 Nay, but surely if he do not desist, We shall seize (him) by the
forelock,
16 a lying sinful forelock.

17 So let him call his council,
18 We will call the Archangels.

19 Nay, heed him not,
but bow down (in adoration) and **DRAW NEAR** (*IQTARIB*).

The structure of the sura thus made clear allows us to return again to **intertextuality**. Psalm 95, too, is clearly composed in two movements: an invitation to praise 1-7 (as quoted above), followed by a threat of punishment against the disobedient rebels (8-11).

8 Harden not your hearts, as at Meribah,
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,
9 when your fathers tested me,

and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.
10 For forty years I loathed that generation and said:
'They are a people who err in heart,
and they do not regard my ways.'
11 Therefore I swore in my anger
that they should not enter my rest.

The same holds for the two parts of sura 96, even if the nature of the rebellion is different (general rebellion of the people against God, in the psalm; rebellion of a wealthy enemy against the 'servant' of God, in the sura).

We notice again the insistence of the two texts on the ignorance of the rebel: 'they do not regard my ways' (Ps 95: 10) / 'Does he not know that God sees?' (sura 96: 14), and in particular the similarity of the final verse of the sura: 'bow down and draw near' (sura 96: 19) with the two verses of the psalm: 'O come, let us worship and *bow down*' (Ps 95: 6) and 'let us come into (*approach*) his presence with thanksgiving' (Ps 95: 2). The *Ecumenical Translation of the Bible* points out that 'to approach, to draw near' forms part of the vocabulary of worship.¹² It is the same in the Qur'an.¹³

These comparisons of the Qur'anic text with the Bible should not be taken to indicate the Qur'an had copied or plagiarised the Bible, or had come under its influence, as an incautious Christian polemic has often done. Intertextuality should rather be understood as a *rereading*, by the Qur'an, of the Bible (and other para-biblical writings) so as then to reappropriate the Bible in reorientating it according to its own theology. The Bible itself is constantly undertaking this 'rereading': as Psalm 95, for example, in its last part, rereads the events of the books of Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, or as the New Testament continually rereads and reinterprets the Old Testament. Its rereadings of the Bible take nothing away from the Qur'an's originality, but they situate it in the very wide context of the biblical tradition.

12 As a note to Jer. 30: 21, referring to Lev. 9: 5-9 ('All the congregation drew near and stood before the Lord') and Num. 8: 19 ('That there be no plague among the children of Israel, when the children of Israel come nigh unto the sanctuary').

13 A contemporary commentary glosses the word *iqtarīb*: 'Approach thy Lord in obedience to him' (*Al-Tafsīr al-wasīf*, al-Azhar, Cairo, 1973-1993, p. 1972).

In conclusion of our analysis of sura 96, it can be admitted, I think, that the accumulation of the results of the lexicological and historical-critical enquiry on the one hand, of intertextuality and rhetorical analysis on the other, leave no doubt as to sura 96's character of invitatory psalm. It is moreover remarkable that the person addressed is nowhere personally specified, unless by the term 'servant' or 'slave' (*'abd*): tradition supposes that the sura is addressed to Muhammad, but it can just as well be addressed to every believer who is offended by the insolence of unbelieving enemies, as is so often the case in the biblical psalms.

This analysis therefore demands a rethinking of the traditional interpretation of this sura, and particularly of its first verse, without any need to modify the canonical text of the Qur'an in any way.¹⁴ It shows the fictitious nature of relating this verse to the call of Muhammad. The meaning of the sura thereby finds itself completely changed, but without the Islamic faith being in the slightest way affected.

4 THE LINK BETWEEN SURAS

The example of these two suras shows how the verses can be combined through the interplay of symmetry, within a sura, to give it coherence. But does a coherence of the same kind exist, *between the suras*? According to the contemporary Pakistani commentator, Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī (d. 1997), the suras would regroup by thematic pairs¹⁵ (by similarity, antithesis or complementarity).¹⁶ My rhetorical analysis of the final twenty-five suras of the Qur'an has shown the exactitude of this theory. In addition, certain suras are regrouped by four or six, forming, for example, a *sequence* of four or six *passages*. Interpretation should evidently take account of this enlarged context, the meaning of a sura extending onto its neighbour or neighbours with which it forms a rhetorical composition.

14 Contrary to what G Lülting and Ch. Luxenberg suggest, see note 11 above.

15 We know the same is the case for a certain number of the Psalms.

16 For a detailed study of Iṣlāḥī's commentary, see M Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an. A Study of Iṣlāḥī's Concept of Naẓm in Taddabur-i Qur'an*, American Trust Publications, Indianapolis, 1986.

5 CONCLUSION

Rhetorical analysis, as we see, opposes the traditional way of commenting on the Qur'an verse by verse. It most often makes it ineffective to make use of occasions of revelation: the literary context is better at indicating the significance of the text than are these 'occasions'. It seems that rhetorical analysis, joined to intertextual exegesis, responds perfectly to Muslim intellectuals' demand of 'return to the text', which I noted at the start. It interprets the text making use only of material found in the words of the text itself and in its composition.

If traditional Muslim scholars appear generally suspicious regarding the work of Western scholars on the Qur'an, this is partly because these latter have too often treated it in a positivist way, as an object among others, without respecting its sacred nature, not hesitating to deconstruct the text, indeed moving verses in order to give them what seems to them a more logical sequence. Rhetorical analysis according to the principles of Semitic rhetoric ought to avoid this objection since it respects the canonical text, as it is, and it responds perfectly to the questions which Islamic tradition itself raised from the beginning about the coherence of the qur'anic text. I would add, finally, that to examine the composition of the text, step by step, to discover how the Qur'an rereads and reinterprets the earlier texts, makes it seem as if one were living within the text, with a demand for a kind of contemplative 'empathy' with the text, which never loses sight of the sacred nature of the Book for Muslims.

CHARLES DE FOUCAULD: A SAINT IN THE DARK

Robert Gibbons Obl OSB

INTRODUCTION: STUMBLING IN THE DARK.

*I was in the dark. I no longer saw either God or men: There was only me.*¹

With the recent canonisation of Charles de Foucauld on 15 May 2021, one can expect greater interest in this most enigmatic of Catholic saints, but there are several issues which muddy the waters so to speak. We need to separate the vanities of hagiography, which serves the purposes of formal canonisation so that de Foucauld can be venerated in an ecclesial manner, giving him a liturgical and spiritual status within the context of the Church and the more complex issues of colonial French history and in that way try to disentangle the more difficult aspects of his life.² This is not being ‘woke’, rather it is something about the necessity for honesty and transparency in the historical story of Church as well as State. This has become all the more imperative when we listen to the words of Pope Francis on his recent visit of penitence to Canada:

I express my deep shame and sorrow, and, together with the bishops of this country, I renew my request for forgiveness for the wrong done by so many Christians to

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- 1 Biography of Charles de Foucauld by The Spiritual Family of Charles de Foucauld. Part 2. A young man in a world without God (1874 to 1876), <<https://www.charlesdefoucauld.org/en/biographie.php#ami>> [accessed 26/07/22].
 - 2 Minlib Dallh, ‘Exploration in Mysticism and Religious Encounter: The Case of Charles de Foucauld (1858–1916)’, *The Downside Review*, vol. 138, issue 4, 133–142. Article first published online 1 December 2020; issue published 1 October 2020 (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage>), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0012580620973487>. See also Hugues Didier, ‘Louis Massignon and Charles de Foucauld’, *Living Stones Yearbook* 2021, 279–99, <<https://www.livingstonesonline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/LSYBws2021.pdf>> [accessed 26/07/22].

the indigenous peoples. It is tragic when some believers, as happened in that period of history, conform themselves to the conventions of the world rather than to the Gospel.³

Francis has no problem in acknowledging the shame and disgrace that this has brought on the Catholic Church but in consistently telling remarks he has also pointed out that the Church needs to be answerable to other authorities such as the United Nations!

In such a spirit it is a humbling pilgrimage we sometimes have to make with some of our ‘saints’, who for one reason or another have had some aspects of their life or ministry slightly airbrushed out; rather like the case of Junipero Serra, whose ideologies were not always totally consistent with the Gospel ethic. This is necessary not to destroy them, nor even demote them, rather it is a condition of our own journey to note the unfinished and stumbling nature of life and situate these persons in the context of time and place, but also acknowledge that their witness matters today for better or for worse within a greater vision, which to misquote St Paul we can only partially see: ‘For now we see in a mirror, darkly, but then face to face’. (I Cor 13: 12)

HOW DOES CHARLES DE FOUCAULD FIT INTO THIS KIND OF ECCLESIAL REVISIONISM?

I am not a social historian, but a theologian who has a strong interest in monasticism (being formed by the Rule of St Benedict as a monk), but rather like Shakespeare’s Hamlet, having seen the ghost of his father, is like him concerned to find out the truth.

Hamlet’s oft misquoted phrase is, with the change of wording to an earlier format, very prescient for my task:

HORATIO:

O day and night, but this is wondrous strange.

HAMLET:

And therefore as a stranger give it welcome.

3 Pope Francis. Address in Quebec, Canada, 27 July 2022.

*There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in our philosophy.*

There certainly are more things in our philosophy, for somewhere in the muddled and tangled web of the darkness of the past, there is something in this call to dig deep for truth that I feel helps us put de Foucauld into another space of engagement. One that allows us to view him from yet another angle, and yet, try as I might, there will always be something of the hidden enigma, the ‘dark’ of my title, that surrounds Charles de Foucauld. In a communiqué of 22 May 2022, the *Vatican News* stated,

De Foucauld is considered to be one of the pioneers of interreligious dialogue. He witnessed to his faith above all through his quiet example, without words, of trying to live it through deep prayer and friendship and service to the people he came to know. His life and faith witness could easily make him a model for ‘human fraternity’ that Pope Francis has so often mentioned in his writings and talks.⁴

Yet despite this popular acclaim and the number of people and communities inspired by him, Charles de Foucauld remains a very complex character! Some have wondered just why he has been canonised, because underlying part of his life is that undoubted aspect of influence and bias, French religious missionary activity completely bound up with military and political colonial actions, which in de Foucauld’s case is mixed up with some of the very real prejudices of an aristocratic upbringing at that time. There are those who feel his canonisation sends out the wrong messages and have made their concerns known. ‘The canonization of Charles de Foucauld would be a denial of history,’ wrote Professor Ladji Ouattara in an article appearing in the 2 July 2020 edition of *Le Monde*. De Foucauld’s work would be ‘inseparable from the colonial conquest of the Sahara ...’ ‘The work of the “hermit of hoggar” is inseparable from France’s colonial conquest of the Sahara,’ claimed Ouattara, who teaches history at universities

4 <<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2022-05/de-foucauld-example-total-surrender-god-universal-fraternity.html>> [accessed 26/07/22].

in France and Niger. The article quoted works from a number of historians such as Jean-Marie Muller, who in 2002 denounced ‘the deep nationalist and colonialist convictions of this Saharan hermit who defended a total war against Germany during the Great War.’ In a succinct summary Ouattara maintains that ‘Foucauld’s canonization requisitions African, American and international news at the same time. While the consequences of the soldier monk’s political thought still affect the stability of Tuareg societies, his canonization is seen by some Tuareg intellectuals as a “denial of history” and an “expression of the trivialization of colonial memory” by Pope Francis.’⁵

DE FOUCAULD’S WAY

Where we can get things wrong is to place the character in the wrong box. Firstly we must understand that Charles de Foucauld was not a theologian, nor a spiritual writer, he wasn’t even a founder of a religious order in his lifetime and he lived a marginalised eremitical life, but as Mícheál Liston put it so well, he had one overarching quality: ‘He was a man in love with Jesus of Nazareth, who wanted to be conformed to Jesus, and whose love of Jesus sent him to all men to become the universal brother.’⁶

He was born in Strasbourg in 1858 to a wealthy family. Orphaned at the age of eight he then grew up under the care of his grandfather and was indulged by him becoming extremely self-willed in the process. After school in Paris he entered the Military Academy of St Cyr in 1876. By this time his grandfather had died, he had gained a wealthy inheritance and had completely lost the practice of his Catholic faith. He was lazy, dissipated, boastful, scandalous in his behaviour and was self-indulgent to an extreme, famous for ordering catered *foie gras* and

5 My translation of ‘la canonisation de Foucauld réquisitionne à la fois l’actualité africaine, américaine et internationale. Alors que les conséquences de la pensée politique du moine soldat affectent encore la stabilité des sociétés touareg, sa canonisation est perçue par certains intellectuels touareg comme un «*déni d’histoire*» et une «*expression de la banalisation de la mémoire coloniale*» par le pape François.’ Read more at <<https://international.la-croix.com/news/religion/historians-troubled-by-upcoming-canonization-of-charles-de-foucauld/12733>>.

6 Mícheál Liston, ‘De Foucauld’s Way’, *The Furrow* 28, no. 7 (1977), 417–25, p. 418, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/27660393>> [accessed 26/07/22].

the finest wines when he was in cavalry school, which earned him the sobriquet 'le porc' from his fellow students. It was said by a cousin that 'chubby' Charles was the terror of the dessert table at family parties.

But as so often happens, our weakness can become something else if challenged and channelled into a particular direction. Charles, extremely intelligent, but so lazy he got poor grades, was posted to the Sahara where he fell in love with northern Africa when fighting a rebellion in the French colony of Algeria, and so the stubborn self will began to shift into something more constructive, deeper and contemplative.

Having learnt Arabic, he explored Morocco disguised as a Jewish rabbi, and wrote and published a report that won him prizes and made him well known among geographers in France. It was there that his immediate contact with Judaism and Islam marked him for life. We can detect this in a letter of Charles to Henri de Castries, an officer friend whose own Catholic faith had been 'shaken':

Your faith has only been shaken, mine was completely dead for years: for twelve years I lived without any faith: nothing seemed to me to be sufficiently proven; the equal faith with which people follow such different religions seemed to me the condemnation of them all; less than any, the religion of my childhood seemed to me admissible, with its 1=3, that I couldn't bring myself to consider; Islam pleased me a lot, with its simplicity, simplicity of dogma, simplicity of hierarchy, simplicity of morality, but I saw clearly that it was without divine foundation and that the truth was not there; the philosophers are all in disagreement: I remained twelve years without denying anything, without believing anything, in despair of the truth, not even believing in God, as no proof seemed to me evident enough.⁷

⁷ Charles de Foucauld, *Lettres à Henry de Castries*, introduction by Jacques de Dampierre, Grasset, Paris, 1938, p. 94. This correspondence is a key source for Foucauld's connections with Islam; <<https://www.jesuscarritas.info/jcd/en/charles-de-foucauld-silent-witness-jesus-face-islam?page=0%2C1>> [accessed 26/07/22]. See also Ian Latham, 'Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916): Silent witness for Jesus "in the face of Islam"', in *Catholics in Interreligious Dialogue: Studies in Monasticism, Theology and Spirituality*, O'Mahony and Bowe (eds), Gracewing, Leominster, 2006, 47-70. Brother

This was a fertile period of interior spiritual growth through his life as soldier. In her Ph.D thesis ‘The Life and Thought of Charles de Foucauld’, Ariana Patey points out that in this period de Foucauld made a deeper connection with his religious tradition, one that would bear great fruit: ‘In the army Foucauld slowly began to annihilate the selfishness and vanity of his former self. Much like a monk, he began to strip away the extraneous aspects of life that prevent self-knowledge and love of God. Foucauld also made the comparison of his military life with a monastery. Of his soldiers who were with him in the South Oranis, he wrote half the men in my platoon would have made excellent monks.’⁸

For de Foucauld this would, as Patey suggests, bear fruit in the eremitical dimension of his vocation, but it also brought with it another aspect of the monastic calling, that restless search for God which I would consider is bound up, not so much in the Western Benedictine structures of monasticism, but the deeper Eastern sources, where more latitude was given (after finding a spiritual father or mother and being tested—which de Foucauld certainly found in different figures!) to various different forms of monastic life.

Ian Latham, Little brothers of Jesus (LbJ), studied in France where he became acquainted with the circle of Louis Massignon, including Brother Louis Gardet, and lived for many years in Asia and the Middle East. He made a number of studies on Catholic encounters with Islam, including ‘Christian Prayer’ in *Catholics and Shi’a in Dialogue: Studies in Theology and Spirituality*, London, 2004. Brother Ian was living in a community of followers of Charles de Foucauld, London, before he died in January 2007. His contributions to *Living Stones Yearbook*: ‘Louis Massignon and Iraq: mysticism and conversion in the Christian Encounter with Islam and the Muslim World’ (2021); ‘Islamic Belief and Practice’ (2020); ‘Mary in the Qur’an and Islamic Tradition’ (2017–18); ‘Christian encounters with Islam in history and modern times: some theological reflections’ (2015).

- 8 See Ariana Joyce 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’ (unpublished Ph.D, Heythrop College, University of London, 2012), p. 41. See also Ariana Patey, ‘The Legacy of Charles de Foucauld’, *Living Stones Yearbook* 2014, 187–199, <<https://www.livingstonesonline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/LSYBws2014.pdf>> [accessed 26/07/22].

WE ARE BORN FOR GREATER THINGS: *AD MAIORA NATI SUMUS.*

This restlessness meant de Foucauld was never fully satisfied with any of the sacrifices he made for his love of Christ. Like a number of ex-soldiers he embraced a disciplined life and in January 1890 he entered monastic life in the Trappist monastery of Notre Dame des Neiges in the Ardèche. In January 1890, he received the religious name of 'Marie-Albéric' when clothed in the habit as a novice, but seeking greater asceticism and after getting permission from his abbot, he was sent to the Syrian abbey of La Trappe at Akbès in Syria.

This restlessness continued in Syria, desiring to take as his model the hidden life of Jesus in Nazareth, with permission Charles left the community and found work at the Poor Clare convent in Nazareth, becoming the gardener for the nuns and spending hours in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Even that did not satisfy this restless soul, returning to France, he studied for the priesthood, was ordained and then decided to return to Africa as a chaplain in the French army.

Yet again this inner desire to live as in the poverty of Christ woke in him the vocation to be a hermit in the manner of the monastic desert fathers and mothers. He sought to create a life of prayer and fraternity in a hermitage in Beni-Abbes, which he hoped would give witness to the local Muslim community and allow him to evangelize silently, preaching by his presence and love. He even dreamt of founding a religious order, 'The Little Brothers of the Sacred Heart'. But Beni-Abbes was not sufficient, and when a friend suggested the more remote and poorer site of Tamanrasset in Algeria, where he could begin to know the Tuareg tribesmen, he left to build a his hermitage there, began to study the Tuareg language producing a translation of the Gospels in Tuareg, compiling a bilingual dictionary and a grammar book, and then writing a collection of indigenous poetry that would later be published.

His gift for communication and language as well as his charism of inspiring people helped the local Muslim community have great respect for his vocation, calling him their 'marabout' ('holy man'). Charles believed that his continual prayer would be the groundwork for his evangelization in the desert. Unfortunately at the outbreak of the First World War, some of the Arab tribes declared a 'jihad' against the French colonialists, so for his safety the military moved Charles from his hermitage to a small fort, where he lived alone but

was able to give shelter to the other villagers in the case of an attack. He was killed there by a Tuareg raiding party sent to kidnap him on 1 December 1916.

In this sense he can be seen as a failure, nobody joined his proposed religious community, nor did he convert anyone around him to Christianity. In his lifetime none of his religious writings was published, it would seem that none of his projects bore fruit!

THE SEARCH FOR GOD

But this is to read the story by a particular lens. De Foucauld was also somebody who straddled in a very curious way the interstices of faith, doubt and a sense that God cannot be confined to one particular religious format. Those who prefer their Catholic saints to be clearly defined in the doctrinal righteousness of that Church may cavil, but for my purpose I see him fitting into another perhaps less understood and known, but well defined spiritual path, one more connected with Eastern than Western Christianity—although within the overarching tradition of monasticism examples of this eremitical idiosyncrasy are also present, so that one might posit a point of view that the real root and hint of that calling he lived is actually found in his monastic vocation and traits of restless searching for the Holy One.

In her thesis Patey makes an important point about his failure to create any form of religious community or ‘monastic’ life around him, quite rightly pointing out the complexity of this witness and certain difficulties those who claim him as influence in their own religious manner of life may find. Foucauld’s canonisation brings into focus some questions about his vocation. He worked to establish three monastic congregations and dedicated the last years of his life to the establishment of a confraternity for clergy, religious, and lay people all unsuccessfully. As she points out, ‘his death, without an established congregation or association to codify his legacy, created a vacuum in which different legacies were able to flourish. There are nineteen different organizations under the banner of the Spiritual Family of Charles de Foucauld Association: ten religious congregations and nine associations of spiritual life. Charles de Foucauld’s beatification has

prompted discussion concerning the manifestation of his spirituality within the vocational traditions of the Church, therefore calling into question the legitimacy of a plurality of legacies.⁹

This quite rightly places his vocation in a place that we might find difficult to analyse. He was no theologian, so we need to examine just how this call to love Islam influenced and fed his Catholic identity. That is perhaps why I would suggest that one way through this is to examine the monastic basis of his life as crucial and important, for it allows us one significant and very rich hermeneutic with which to create a dialogue between his personal life, experience, and later ecclesial ministry and witness as hermit-monk and mission-priest. Yet it also situates it within a deep, ancient and rich tradition of the Christian Church. I believe de Foucauld's life is one that was far more attuned to the monastic tradition of Eastern Christianity than we might at first suspect.

Thomas Merton, himself a Trappist who rediscovered much of the monastic connection with the wider east, but also the hidden eremitical tradition within Benedictine/Cistercian life itself, said that 'Christian solitude', is 'essentially an expression of the mystery of the Church, even when in some sense it implies a certain freedom from institutional structures.' But this 'freedom is never a freedom from the Church but always a freedom in the Church and a contribution to the Church's own charismatic heritage.'¹⁰ What Merton is also hinting at are the other, wider, dimensions of monasticism, that of a prophet, wanderer, seeker and perhaps holy fool.

Ariana Patey rightly points to the importance of de Foucauld's eremitical tradition, in his time rather neglected in Western Christianity, and certainly at first very much against that coenobitic life of the Cistercian Benedictine followers. For though Benedict in his Rule accepts that the call to be a hermit is indeed valid, he puts this as something that flows out of what he discerns as the better kind of monastic setting, the coenobium. Indeed it is thanks to his restrictions that Western monasticism did not always examine in greater detail the richer and wilder vocations found in the east. His division of monks into four distinct kinds, no doubt useful in his own context, firstly reversed the order of monastic evolution,

⁹ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁰ Merton, Thomas, *Contemplation in a World of Action*, Doubleday, Garden City, NY, 1971, p. 251.

First, there are the cenobites, that is to say, those who belong to a monastery, where they serve under a rule and an abbot.

Second, there are the anchorites or hermits, who have come through the test of living in a monastery for a long time, and have passed beyond the first fervour of monastic life.¹¹

Then having placed the eremitical life under the coenobitic Benedict cavils against the evils of two kinds of other monastics,

Third, there are the sarabaites, the most detestable kind of monks, who with no experience to guide them, no rule to try them as gold is tried in a furnace (Prov 27: 21), have a character as soft as lead. Still loyal to the world by their actions, they clearly lie to God by their tonsure. Two or three together, or even alone, without a shepherd, they pen themselves up in their own sheepfolds, not the Lord's. Their law is what they like to do, whatever strikes their fancy. Anything they believe in and choose, they call holy; anything they dislike, they consider forbidden.¹²

As a young monk I remember this section well because of one conference given by Abbot Dyfrig Rushton to our community at Farnborough, then a dependency on Prinknash. For some reason though he followed Benedict's teaching, there must have been some question in his voice, because from that moment I started to wonder what the obverse side of these other forms of monastics might have been! Due to the wisdom of another monk of Prinknash, Dom Sylvester Houedard, I was then introduced to the concept of holy fools and wondered whether here in the sarabaites we see a form of holy fool.¹³ Benedict criticised a fourth monastic group.

11 *Rule of St Benedict*, Chapter 1, 'The Kind of Monks'. Translation, *The Rule of St Benedict in English*, Timothy Fry OSB (ed.), Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1981/2018, p. 18.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

13 I cannot quite place the actual date but it would have been on one of his regular visits in 1974, as I was still a junior monk at that time. The division of the Rule and when this Chapter was to be read would help matters.

Fourth and finally, there are the monks called gyrovagues, who spend their entire lives drifting from region to region, staying as guests for three or four days in different monasteries.¹⁴ Yet in the Eastern tradition this wandering is noted amongst many saints, and St Francis took it up in a more regularised format as part of his own vision for his mendicant friar, part of a wider mendicancy that can also be seen as a taking on of the Christ who had nowhere to lay down his head. To my mind here is a richer monastic resource than we have used so far in interpreting de Foucauld's life!

A CHILD OF A MONASTIC CULTURE, BUT A PROPHET OUTSIDE OF THAT.

Charles de Foucauld is certainly a child of the 19th-century French Catholic Church of his early upbringing, his later devotional life centred on the Blessed Sacrament (the reserved host in the tabernacle) and also the Sacred Heart of Jesus is very much part of that, as is his desire to live in the poverty of Christ in the hidden life of Nazareth. All this weaves a tapestry that colours the hagiography of his life and needs careful exegesis, but woven into the narrative of his earthly life is that of this vocation as a prophet and seeker that never really left him throughout his life. A calling which is very much part of the central spirituality of the monk in both Eastern and Western Christianity, that of the search, that core of the word monk, *monos*, to go out alone into the depths and find the Living God and by life and example to witness to this presence. For Charles as for all Christians it is centred in Christ.

That de Foucauld ended his life in Africa is no incidental detail in the narrative, the call of the lands of ancient Christianity runs deep in the monastic tradition. There where he met his death and where tribes moulded by Islam lived, in a hidden sense the ancient lands of early Christianity also remain part of our ecclesial DNA. The exploration of the monastic life he embraced is certainly a useful tool to enable us to discover in de Foucauld one of the existential vocations of Christianity, the prophetic vocation, not only one of interreligious dialogue between Christianity and Islam, but the deeper search

14 *RSB*, p. 18.

which the spiritual tradition of the monks and mystics know in the practice and experience of uniting the heart of a person with the One Divine Being. In this sense, the aristocrat-soldier turned monk has a defined trajectory, but not that of a well defined path. That he should have chosen the Trappists is not accidental either, something in the austerity and utter simplicity of that Cistercian reform seemed to call him, as it has other soldiers, to join that order. There is something in the institutional austerity of a life lived in common, and at that time defined in almost military precision by Rule, Constitution and Observances down to the smallest detail that called to those military men seeking purpose in life. This was seen not only in the monasteries of Europe but in that massive and exponential increase in Trappist life in the United States of the mid-twentieth century, after the Second World War, spurred on and buoyed up by the writings and insights of another Cistercian hermit monk, Thomas Merton, whose own restless search has deep links with de Foucauld!

In one sense to try and understand what is at the heart of Charles de Foucauld's spiritual journey and how it took him as a real prophet and pioneer into ecumenical dialogue, is also to penetrate the layers of monastic vocation which I would suggest was in a real sense foundational to his manner and way of life. The Trappist-Cistercian life itself was a strict reform based on the vision of Armand de Rance in the 17th century. Originally Cistercian monasticism was the reform of Benedictine life in the 11th/12th century, led at first by the Cluniac Robert of Molesmes and his companions Alberic and Stephen Harding. Further impetus was given by Bernard of Clairvaux. At that point it was a return to the primitive simplicity of the Rule of Saint Benedict. The monasteries of the Order of Cîteaux were as some of their poetic names suggest based in locales far away from the haunts of people, often in untamed areas, but always near water, essential to life in any monastic community, but they were a medieval reform and as a reform formed themselves in a highly disciplined manner by their structure of filiations, the General Chapter at Cîteaux, their Constitutions and the *Carta-Caritatis*.¹⁵

They proved to be a very homogeneous unit of monasteries, their success in creating vast empires of wealth was based on the manual

15 A useful book is Emilia Jamrozak, *The Cistercian Order in Medieval Europe 1090-1500*, Routledge, London, 2013.

work of agrarian activity, helped by a division of community into *conversi*, brothers, and choir monks, many of whom were priests. The Trappists, now referred to as Cistercians of the Strict Observance (OCSO) had at their heart an austerity that went beyond the ideals of the Rule, in fact so severe were some of the practices that they had to be modified by order of Church authority. Yet this disciplined and strict approach, coenobitic in an extreme sense, nevertheless picked up the deeper echoes of monasticism in general. The *'fuga mundi'* of the desert anchorites and monks of the 3rd and 4th century were based on a renunciation of the world and desire for a distinctive form of ascetical life, a yearning for 'white martyrdom' as a witness to Christ, but also of an innate rejection of what we can call 'Institutional Christianity'.

Whilst the monastic vocation remained rooted in the traditions of its origins, its development in both Eastern and Western Christianity took different though similar paths, although that essential monastic search for the Holy One remains foundational to both. In the 19th and early 20th century the Trappists, though familiar with the desert ideals, were not yet ready to return to the eremitical component of the Benedictine way of life, so unlike Merton who fought hard to make this choice part of monastic life, de Foucauld had to leave the institutional format of Cistercian life, but in another sense take up an older Eastern ideal of hermit-starets, or as I might suggest with a component of the lesser known tradition of a Holy Fool!

In the long history of Christian monasticism, certain elements of its life and witness, particularly in Eastern Christianity, retained a more prophetic identity. For no matter how much the institutional Church tried to control monasteries and monks, new avenues of exploration and dialogue always emerged. We know for instance that Islam itself valued some forms of Christian monasticism even if there was an uneasy relationship with its Dhimmi status.¹⁶ Steve Cochrane points out that a corpus of 10th-century Islamic writing shows that Christian monasteries could be places where 'Muslims could go to relax, be amused and receive hospitality, including at times even wine. Mutual conversations and prayer could result in an environment that

16 See Steve Cochrane, 'Historical Overview of Inter-Faith Relations in the Islamic Countries: The Presence of Christian Monks and Monasteries as Signposts of Faith', *Transformation* 27, no. 4 (2010), 275-80, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4305281>> [accessed 26/07/22].

seemed to be non-threatening to either faith. The monasteries appeared to be places where Muslims would be welcomed not as strangers but as neighbours, in a mutuality of the common journey of faith.¹⁷ This strange ecumenical ambivalence, a touch of holy foolishness, of monastic communities as places of encounter and hospitality between different groups continues today. In that sense it is a useful tool to examine de Foucauld's ministry and outreach as well as his inspiration.

In a particular way his evident early loss of faith and the lure of Islam is also an illustration of de Foucauld's own interest in that monotheistic faith. For hidden deep in this is a spiritual route well traversed in the desert monastic way, that of search for the Holy One, that *metanoia*, conversion of life, a process which places his total journey fundamentally rooted in the context of the word *monos*, restless search shifting perceptions, and honesty of interior dialogue with God. His early life led him to something he would later discover in the Cistercian monastic ideal, the simplicity of God; this one can surmise, was also one of the apparent attractions for him of Islam as a faith in which the Divine One is perceived in simplicity rather than doctrinally or by definably theologically complex imagery. Later of course he will discover this single focus in the person of Jesus.

He actually refers to this loss of faith as a '*bouleversement*', as he wrote to Henri de Castries, for this period as an army officer in Algeria led him to an almost mystical (but dare one say a wider monastic) vision. As he wrote, 'Islam produced in me a profound "over- turning" ("a profound *bouleversement*")—the sight of this faith, of these souls living in the continual presence of God, made me catch a glimpse of something greater and more true, more real, than earthly occupations: *ad majora nati sumus*.¹⁸ Doesn't this, as others have already pointed out, fit into the well trodden path of religious experience and development, and have echoes with other conversions, such as Paul, Anthony, Mary of Egypt, Augustine, Benedict, Bernard of Clairvaux, Margery Kempe, Ignatius of Loyola and Thomas Merton, to name but a few? Whilst this is not the only manner of conversion to a different form of life, de Foucauld fits in well to those who seem to need a 'divine encounter' of the Pauline 'Damascus Gate' sort!

¹⁷ Cochrane, p. 276.

¹⁸ Trans. 'We are born for greater things.' Correspondence, Ch. de F./ H. de Castries, op. cit., p. 86.

Inevitably he discerned a route and it led at first to the Abbey of Notre Dame des Neiges: 'The Gospel showed me that the first commandment is to love God with all one's heart and that we should enfold everything in love; everyone knows that the first effect of love is imitation. It seemed to me that nothing presented this life better than the Trappists.'¹⁹ But it did not stop there!

The concept of the saint as 'holy fool' is not too well known in the Western tradition of spirituality but it was an early concept in monasticism. A research article in the *Journal of Religion and Science* of April 2012, on Holy Fools, gives a clear indication that it was a well established concept in the East by the seventh century CE: 'A century later (seventh century), the second biographer of Symeon, Leontius of Neapolis, attempted to provide a theological background to the word and define holy folly. He also used the novel verb "salizo" to define feigning madness. He was also the first to use the term "fool for Christ", adopting the biblical language, as it seems to derive from Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (3. 18): For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God (Bishop Ware 1989).'²⁰

The authors rightly point out that holy folly is a special gift, and also rare for there are few typical 'Fool Saints', however anybody interested in hagiography might well note that the lives of many saints are also full of what we could determine as acts of lunacy. 'Besides, seeking to attract the attention of people, the peculiar behaviour of the Old Testament prophets showed signs of "eccentricity": Isaiah walked naked and shoeless, Jeremiah wore a yoke designed for animals, Ezekiel baked his bread in ox manure, and Hosea married an adulteress. The spirit of retreat of the first hermits and the homeless wandering of others embodied the ideals of simplicity and poverty.'²¹

One of their observations places the holy fool in a religious context and allows that it 'could be seen as an extreme protest

19 Biography of Charles de Foucauld, Part 6. A Trappist Monk (1890 to 1897), <<https://www.charlesdefoucauld.org/en/biographie.php#moine>> [accessed 26/07/22]. See Patey, pp. 5 and 6.

20 E Poulakou-Rebelakou, A Liarmakopoulos, C Tsiamis, D Ploumpidis. 'Holy Fools: A Religious Phenomenon of Extreme Behaviour', *The Journal of Religion and Health*, April 2012, 53 (1), DOI 10.1007/s10943-012-9600-2, p. 4, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/224824473_Holy_Fools_A_Religious_Phenomenon_of_Extreme_Behaviour/link/00b4953b3d3338a692000000/download> [accessed 26/07/22].

21 Ibid., p. 4.

against social injustices and deviation from the rules of morality, but by no means a spirit of insurgency, as holy fools strictly observed the basic tenets of faith.²² To support this observation it has been noted that in times of social and religious unrest, the number of holy fools declined significantly. Whilst Charles de Foucauld is not as extreme as some, there is a driven quality to his spiritual life which touches on the borders of holy folly, part of this lies in his later focus on Jesus' life in Nazareth and his desire to emulate something utterly unknown and hidden from us in Scripture, conjectural almost, but the 'Nazareth' motif is perhaps a symptom of holy folly. Gisbert Greshake makes an interesting point about the foolishness of his manner of life; 'Nazareth here appears as a total contrast to his previous life. This life is "hidden" insofar as it means total humility. "Be careful to hide everything that could raise you up in the eyes of others," he remarks. "Seek out the work that is most humiliating ... If you look like a fool to other people, so much the better."²³ With this the contemplative element of his life comes to the fore, in particular his desire to observe the admonition to unceasing prayer, so deeply rooted not only in Christian but in monastic tradition. For him this uninterrupted contemplation leads to a resolution, quite in tune, one might add, with the hesychasts on Mount Athos. 'For Brother Charles, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph lived in Nazareth in unity with God, "in order to lead in common, in a small, lonely house, a life of adoration, of continuous prayer, ... of uninterrupted contemplation, a life of silence.'" For this reason, he resolves 'to leave the house as seldom as possible, solely for things that are absolutely necessary, ... to deal with the outer world as little as possible.'²⁴ This did not cut him off, as the tradition of the holy fool also shows, there are those who have to put up with these individuals, but in the case of a hermit, that desire for connection, asking for the blessing of the holy one or simply being open to the stranger meant also hospitality and welcome in solitude as a brother for all.

22 Ibid., p. 8.

23 Gisbert Greshake, 'The Spiritual Charism of Nazareth', *Communio* 31 (Spring 2004), p. 18, <<https://www.communio-icr.com/files/GreshakeFormatforpdf.pdf>> [accessed 26/07/22].

24 Ibid., p. 20.

As Greshake points out part of the model for his own establishment were the so-called ‘Zaouias’ [zāwiyas], the Islamic centres of hospitality, offering travellers accommodation and shelter, no matter who they might be, but it is also a command in Chapter 53, The Reception of Guests in the Rule of Saint Benedict, as well, ‘All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: I was a stranger and you welcomed me (Matt 25: 35).’²⁵ This would also underline the primary importance of seeing everybody who came to visit, especially the poor and the stranger, as the person of Christ. In de Foucauld’s ‘Nazareth’, hospitality, a wide variety of relationships, and a ‘missionary’ presence became key characteristics, but as I have also noted by following Benedict’s admonition, the link of constant, uninterrupted prayer is also found in that commandment of loving ones neighbour and discovering the presence of Christ.

“Nazareth” is thus for Foucauld an extremely flexible spiritual keyword. The concept that ties together the various expressions of Nazareth is “présence,” presence, a word that Foucauld uses frequently: Humble and lowly presence before God and humble and poor presence among men, just as Jesus himself lived it in Nazareth’.²⁶ Here in this concept of Nazareth, I think we begin to find the spiritual foundations and building blocks of a vocation that is deeply monastic, eremitical but also part of that wider tradition of ‘holy folly’!

CONCLUSION

Perhaps these words from the martyred Cistercian Prior of Tibhirine may help us further grapple with that existential call ‘to seek’ that wider world of the monastic pilgrim, of the holy fool and the hermit. For me the vagueness of the terminology Dom Christian de Chergé uses and the imprecision of theological image suggests to me much more the reality of that personal encounter with the Other, both numinous and incarnational, found not only in the indwelling presence of the Spirit, but in the Christ of each meeting. De Foucauld’s martyrdom, like the monks of Tibhirine, is a martyrdom not so much of blood but of friendship, a friendship that is forged in the guts of one’s being.

²⁵ *RSB*, p. 83.

²⁶ Greshake, p. 24.

It is also a friendship that gains momentum in death, it also leaves the death of these monastics open, a martyrdom wider than a simple confession of faith, but the supreme folly of laying one's life down in trust! This Testament of de Chergé has deep echoes of Charles de Foucauld and sets both of them in a long tradition of those on the edges of religious worlds, where in the end words cease to matter and encounter is all.

For me, Algeria and Islam are something different; they are a body and a soul. I have proclaimed this often enough, I believe, in the sure knowledge of what I have received in Algeria, in the respect of believing Muslims—finding there so often that true strand of the Gospel I learned at my mother's knee, my very first Church.

My death, clearly, will appear to justify those who hastily judged me naive or idealistic: 'Let him tell us now what he thinks of it!' But these people must realize that my most avid curiosity will then be satisfied. This is what I shall be able to do, if God wills—immerse my gaze in that of the Father, to contemplate with him his children of Islam just as he sees them, all shining with the glory of Christ, the fruit of his Passion, filled with the Gift of the Spirit, whose secret joy will always be to establish communion and to refashion the likeness, delighting in the differences.²⁷

Profound, deeply contemplative, but linked to the activity of the restless search for that vision of the Holy One, to be discerned in curious places and different people, in solitude and in encounter, just as in the life of de Foucauld.

Perhaps we can leave the judgement of what de Foucauld is to the on-going explorations into his life and legacy, but I would suggest that his monastic ethos, the enrichment of his life by the deeper, darker, currents of that tradition help us get at least one significant handle on his interior thought. In that sense he is

²⁷ Fr Christian de Chergé OCSO, 'Last Testament; A Letter from the Monks of the Tibhirine, August 1996', <<https://www.moines-tibhirine.org/en/documents/le-testament/51-testament-of-dom-christian-de-cherge>> [accessed 26/07/22].

definitely part of the eremitical tradition of a wider monasticism, more akin perhaps to the desert monks and nuns, or the flexible Coptic monastic tradition. The idea of the holy fool is not difficult to grasp either, for the conundrum, the topsy-turvy word turned upside down, that these characters live is found in most religious traditions. They hold up by their lives a mirror in which we see ourselves stripped bare, most of us find that uncomfortable, but monastics have little choice, that is the essence of the search. Armand Veilleux, Cistercian monk and abbot of Scourmont, is clear on the marginality of this calling.

Religious are marginal by choice, but that marginality is in the service of prophecy not of escapism. From the edges of the system there is a view of what the system does to those who are excluded. If contemplation fosters immediacy to God, marginality fosters immediacy to the oppressed. The monk wants to be where the cry of the poor meets the ear of God. To feel the pathos of God is not a warm and comfortable religious experience; it is an experience of the howling wilderness.²⁸

That is certainly part of what we discover with Charles de Foucauld and it helps tease out that apparent dichotomy of monk and missionary, which in the end is not two forms of life but different ways of encountering within a way of life. Veilleux calls them, 'equally important and complementary: the contemplative, prayerful encounter in the silence of the cell (Mt. 5), and the encounter of Christ is the suffering and needy brother (Mt. 25).' His own experience allows him to critique the 'temptations' inherent in any spiritual tradition and religiously directed manner of life.

'In a Church where two temptations are as prevalent one as the other, that is, the temptation to seek a sweet presence of God without sharing his pathos and his preoccupation for the poor, and the temptation of losing oneself in a type of social activism deprived of any contemplative dimension, an aspect of the mission of the monk is to witness to

²⁸ Armand de Veilleux OCSO, Lecture: 'The Role of Monasticism of Today in the ReEvangelization of a Secularized World', Kolympari, Crete, Greece, 14 May 1989.

the equal importance of the two.²⁹ Did de Foucauld exalt one above another, does his unique experience and example draw us into that search for Christ? What manner of martyrdom is his death? Obviously he does connect us with Christ as many can witness, but can we ever understand the human being and his motivations? If Charles has part of his calling as a holy fool, the real answer is, only so far!

AFTERWORD

Speaking to the June 2022 Synod of the Greek-Catholic Melkite Bishops gathered in Rome, Pope Francis reminded them of the importance of Syria and Christians in the Middle East stressing the need for great concern over their survival, he reminded the bishops that the Melkite Church has played a great part in the witness of these faithful. Invoking Saints Peter and Paul he reminded us all of the need for the prayers of the saints,

‘We need their intercession,’ said the Pope, ‘so that even in our time ... the Christian community may have the courage to bear witness to the name of Christ, author and perfecter of our faith.’³⁰ In an earlier February meeting with representatives from Iraqi churches, Pope Francis reminded everybody of the witness of the saints connected with the Middle East. What he says connects us deeply with the newly canonised Charles de Foucauld, for now his ministry, witness and monastic example are part of this intercession; ‘may the blood of these many martyrs of our time, belonging to different traditions but united in the same sacrifice, be a seed of unity among Christians and a sign of a new springtime of faith.’³¹ May the intercession of Saint Charles de Foucauld be another seed of this new springtime for the Christians of the Middle East!

29 Ibid.

30 <<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2022-06/pope-francis-discourse-greek-melkite-synod.html>> [accessed 03/08/22].

31 <<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2022-02/pope-francis-receives-representatives-on-iraqi-churches.html>> [accessed 03/08/22].

POPE JOHN PAUL II AND RELATIONS WITH ISLAM

Ian Latham†

THE ROLE OF LOUIS MASSIGNON (1883–1962) IN THE EMERGING THOUGHT OF THE MODERN PAPACY¹

Massignon, an Arabic scholar and agnostic, was ‘seized by Christ’ when in prison, and in danger of death, in Baghdad. Aged 25, he was collecting material for a study of the life of the Sufi ‘saint and martyr’, al-Hallaj (‘Mystic and Martyr of Islam’),² put to death in Baghdad in 309/922. Massignon experienced the presence of God ‘in Islam’, through the hospitality and life-risking intervention of his Muslim hosts and the felt intercession, among others, of al-Hallaj.³ This profound experience, together with his Quranic studies, led him to claim that Islam was an ‘Abrahamic faith’, a faith therefore related to the Jewish and Christian faith (with, by implication, a supernatural foundation, though incomplete because lacking in the Christian gifts of hope and charity).⁴ Further, Massignon was a friend of Mgr Montini,

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- 1 Christian S Krokus, ‘Louis Massignon’s influence on the teaching of Vatican II on Muslims and Islam’, in: *Islam and Christian-Muslim relations*, vol. 23 (2012), no. 3, 329–345; ‘Louis Massignon, Vatican II and Beyond’, *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, vol. 55. No. 3–4, 2014, 433–450; *The Theology of Louis Massignon: Islam, Christ, and the Church*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, DC, 2017; ‘Catholic Saints and Scholars: Nostra Aetate and Islam’, in Kail Ellis OSA (ed.), *Nostra Aetate, Non-Christian Religions, and Interfaith Relations*, Palgrave/Macmillan, London, 2020, 115–137.
 - 2 Louis Massignon, *La passion d’Al-Hosayn ibn Mansour al-Hallaj, martyr de l’Islam*, 2 vols., Paris, 1922; second edition 4 vols., 1975, English Translation, *The Passion of al-Hallaj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 4 vols, 1982.
 - 3 Ian Latham, ‘Louis Massignon and Iraq: mysticism and conversion in the Christian Encounter with Islam and the Muslim World’, *Living Stones Yearbook 2021*, 250–278.
 - 4 Sidney Griffith, ‘Sharing the Faith of Abraham: The “Credo” of Louis Massignon’, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, vol. 8, 1997, 193–210.

who later became Pope Paul VI and who insisted on the insertion of an explicit mention of Islam in the Vatican II Council text *Nostra Aetate*. It is precisely this text to which Pope John Paul constantly refers as the basis of his reflections.⁵

**THE BACKGROUND:
VATICAN II (1962–5)⁶**

For the first time in Christian history, the Catholic Church issued an authoritative, and positive, statement on the value and role of Islam. This statement comes first in the key document *Lumen Gentium* (on the Church):

But the plan of salvation also [referring to the Jewish people] includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place among whom are the Muslims: these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one [nobiscum adorant Deum unicum], merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day. (LG, 16: trans. Flannery).

A text with less authority, but a lot more detail, is *Nostra Aetate* (on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions):

The Church also regards highly the Muslims who worship the one-and-only God [unicum Deum], living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, [who has] spoken to men, to whose hidden decrees

5 Isabel Olizar, 'The Question of Religious Freedom—Relations between the Catholic Church and the Islamic world: a study in theology and interreligious diplomacy', School of Advanced Studies, University of London, PhD (2019); 'From the Margins to the Center: Exploring *Nostra Aetate* in the lives of Charles de Foucauld, Louis Massignon and Pierre Claverie', in *Nostra Aetate, Non-Christian Religions, and Interfaith Relations*, 139–161; 'John Paul II, Dialogue with Muslims and the Question of Religious Freedom', *The Downside Review*, vol. 139 (4), 2021, 195–208; 'Universal and local Perspectives on Religious Freedom in the Muslim World: John Paul II and Pierre Claverie', *Living Stones Yearbook 2021*, 300–316.

6 Kail Ellis OSA (ed.), *Nostra Aetate, Non-Christian Religions, and Interfaith Relations*.

they whole-heartedly strive to submit themselves, just as Abraham, to whom Muslims willingly refer, submitted himself to God.

Jesus, whom as God they do not recognise, as a prophet however they venerate, and his virgin mother Mary they honour and they sometimes devotedly invoke.

The Day of Judgement moreover they await, when God will resurrect and reward all human beings.

For this reason, they highly esteem a moral life, and they worship God especially through prayer, alms-giving and fasting.

Although over the centuries, between Christians and Muslims many hostilities and disagreements have arisen, this Sacred Synod encourages everyone to forget the past and to work sincerely at mutual understanding and let them defend and promote together [communiter] social justice, moral values and peace and liberty for all persons and peoples. *[This is a self-made word-for-word translation by the author].*

This, given the long past of mutual *mis-understanding* and mutual *non-cooperation*, is a truly astonishing assessment!

Notice the key word '*with us*' [nobiscum]: we can paraphrase, '*together*'. '*Together*' we adore the 'unique' (one-and-only) God. Notice also the common claim to Abraham's *faith* (leaving open the question of the validity of this claim), and the common claim (without qualification) to be one in Abraham's *submission* to God. This seems to imply the 'supernatural' quality of Muslim faith.

Notice also the accent on a shared pursuit of a '*moral life*' (without entering into the details), and on a shared '*religious life*' in the important dimensions of prayer, fasting and alms-giving.

Finally, we can notice the double *intention* for the future: to work at '*mutual understanding*' and to work for '*justice and peace*' (to summarise) for the benefit of all. What marvellous hopes, now made possible by God's 'gift' to the Council, and, of course, with our co-operation!

POPE JOHN PAUL'S SPEECHES TO MUSLIMS

The Pope John Paul II made many speeches to Muslims, both when visiting Muslim countries, and to Muslim-Christian symposia in Rome.

Here are the key phrases from the beginning and end of a joint symposium on 'Holiness' in Christianity and Islam (Rome, 9 May 1985):⁷

As I have often said in other meetings with Muslims, *your God and our God is one and the same*, and we are *brothers and sisters in the faith of Abraham*.

The countless numbers of good people around the world—Christians, Muslims and others—who quietly lead lives of *authentic obedience*, praise and thanksgiving to God, and of *selfless service* of their neighbour, offer humanity a genuine alternative, 'God's way', to a world which otherwise would be destroyed in self-seeking, hatred and struggle [emphasis added].

We both, Muslims and Christians, are worshipping the '*same God*', and the obedience of us both is said to be '*authentic*'.

In the same year, the pope made a famous speech to the 'Young Muslims of Casablanca' [19 August 1985] in Morocco.⁸ He develops the theme of our 'common' faith in the one God and our 'common' human values.

It is of God himself that, above all, I wish to speak with you, because it is in Him that *we believe*, you Muslims and we Catholics. I wish also to speak with you about *human values*, which have their basis in God

Today we should witness to the spiritual values of which the world has need. The first is our faith in God ... We should witness to our humble search for His will ... Therefore, we must also respect, love and help every human being, as a creature of God

7 <https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1985/may/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19850509_partecipanti-simposio.html> [accessed 27/02/22].

8 <https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1985/august/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19850819_giovani-stadio-casablanca.html> [accessed 27/02/22].

I believe that we, Christians and Muslims, must recognise with joy the religious values we have *in common*, and give God thanks for them ... Loyalty demands also that we should recognise and respect our differences ... , the most fundamental of which, obviously, is the view that we hold on the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth

These are important *differences*, which we can accept with humility and respect, in mutual tolerance. This is a mystery about which, I am certain, God will enlighten us one day

Today, I believe, God invites us to change old practices. We must *respect* each other, and *stimulate* each other in good works on the path to God.

Dear young people, I wish that you may be able to help build a world where God will have first place, and so to aid and save mankind

Notice the repeated 'We'. In most cases, it is a 'we' who hold a 'common' faith and 'common' values; in one case, it is a 'we' who must humbly differ; in all cases, it is a 'we' who should work together for the good of each person and for the whole human community. To the Islamic leaders of Senegal, in 1992,⁹ the pope said:

Our Creator and our final judge desires that we live together [and build together a harmonious society]. Our God is a God of peace ... He is a God of dialogue ... We Christians and Muslims must be *people of dialogue*.

This commitment means, first of all, 'a dialogue of life': a positive acceptance, interaction and co-operation, witnessing to our God-given ideals

A dialogue also addressing the economic problems of our people, searching together for solutions: to poverty ..., for justice ..., for peace

And a dialogue on the moral and religious level ... Many have lost the sense of a God who cares about them, a God of love, who is merciful and compassionate. We for

⁹ <https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/travels/1992/travels/documents/trav_senegal.html> [accessed 27/02/22].

whom God is a reality, the deepest reality in our lives, must never tire of bearing witness to *God's presence at the centre of human life*.

True, we must 'loyally recognise and respect our differences', as I said at Casablanca ... But I warmly accept the beautiful letter of Dr Hamid Algabid of the Organisation of Islamic Conference, promising that the 'member nations will work with the Holy See to foster peace and strengthen dialogue between Christians and Muslims.' We will encourage Christians everywhere to work together with Muslims for these goals.

I repeat today the Council's appeal for a deeper mutual understanding. Let our collaboration for humanity, in the name of God, be a blessing and benefit for all people.

**THE POPE' S TALKS
WITH FELLOW BISHOPS**

To the North African bishops, on 23 November 1981, the pope spoke of the need to strengthen the small Catholic communities in their countries:

Christians should bear *Christian witness* among those who receive them ... This witness may be enriched by Muslim culture and piety, but this should not obscure the primary responsibility of the Christian to witness to their faith in Christ and in Christian values The Church should have a special care for Catholic women married to Muslim men, for their presence in Muslim families allows them to witness directly to their faith.¹⁰

In the same month, he told the bishops of Mali that:

It is good to enter into dialogue with the Muslims in your countries, but dialogue would lack an important

¹⁰ <https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/fr/speeches/1981/november/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19811123_vescovi-nordafrika.html> [accessed 25/2/22].

dimension if it did not foresee the possibility of one freely asking for baptism.¹¹

Is this using dialogue simply as a *means to conversion*? This is the claim of an alert Muslim commentator, Mahmoud Ayoub. He claims:

The approach of Pope John Paul II to Muslims centers on two essential concepts, interfaith dialogue and Christian witness, ... which appear to be seen as two closely interrelated terms. Thus the purpose of dialogue is to facilitate Christian witness. But the aim of both is ultimately the conversion of Muslims to Christianity.¹²

We can ask a double question. Is this the pope's view and intention? And is all interfaith dialogue simply a 'means' of 'converting' the other? Or, to put it another way, can dialogue be 'gratuitous'? My own view is that the two cannot be totally separated, but that they are clearly distinct both in method and intention. I dialogue with my dialogue-partner to 'listen' to another believing person expressing their 'faith', and, when asked, expressing my 'faith'. It is the effort to 'know the other as other', objectively (accepting the message of the other as it is) but with profound intellectual sympathy (seeing that message as good). My human and Christian motivation will be to respect the other, through love of the other, precisely as *other*. This requires study and patience in a context of mutual confidence. It is a typically *human* activity.

Christian witness is something different. We are on the level of the *Holy Spirit's* action in me and in the other. I am presenting my human experience of God's work in me—for my good, and humbly proposing this to my friend for his/her good. It is a 'call' to change and to receive God's gift of new life ['Repent and believe'], in short a call to 'living faith'. The intellect is at work, but only the will *moved by the Holy Spirit* can persuade the speaker to 'witness' and the hearer to 'believe'.

11 <https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/fr/speeches/1981/november/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19811126_vescovi-mali.html> [accessed 25/2/22].

12 Mahmoud Ayoub, 'Pope John Paul II on Islam', in D Efrogmson and J C Raines (eds), *Open Catholicism: the Tradition at its Best*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 1997, 190-205 and also in *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue*, Byron L Sherwin, Harold Kasimow, Cardinal Edward I Cassidy (eds), Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1999, 169-184.

Of course as a Christian, when in dialogue, I witness by the *manner* in which I dialogue (if Christ is ‘living’ in me). But my intention is simply to *know* the other, and to *be known*. It is essentially *gratuitous*. Experience of our brothers and sisters in Islamic countries shows, I think, that this is possible: difficult certainly, but possible and fruitful.

THE POPE’S PUBLIC AND PERSONAL
PRONOUNCEMENTS ON ISLAM

In his encyclical letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), the pope, on the basis of the New Testament and Vatican II, declares that ‘Christ is the one Saviour of all, the only one able to reveal God and lead to God’ (RD 5), that the Church is the ‘universal sacrament of salvation’ (and so we must admit ‘the necessity of the Church for salvation’, while also admitting ‘the real possibility of salvation in Christ for all’ (RD 9), and that the Church (and all her members) have the duty to ‘proclaim Christ as the Saviour of all’ (RD 11).¹³

Does this contradict the pope’s discourses to Muslim audiences where, claims Mahmoud Ayub, ‘he places the three faiths (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) on an equal footing’ (177)? Mahmoud considers that today ‘after the development ... of the scientific study of religion and ... advance of global communication, meaningful dialogue is only possible *on the basis of religious and cultural pluralism*’ (181). He means that we must accept that God’s revelation is varied (‘God speaks to every people ... in their own cultural and spiritual situation’), so that there is no one God-given religion.

This is an attractive idea! It would solve all our problems! But is it true? The Christian answer seems plain: God ‘had’ spoken through prophets in ‘many and various ways’, but ‘now’ has spoken ‘in a Son’, whom He has made ‘heir of all’ (Heb 1:1). We can admit new ‘prophets’, Christian or non-Christian, I think, but they will always be relative to the Son, the *one* [implicitly] Son for all. The pope emphasises that this insistence on the unique role of Christ is not only as God’s full self-revelation, but also as the ‘one Model’ of human fulfilment

13 <https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html> [accessed 27/2/22].

(hence the ‘right’ of every human person to hear about Jesus and to be united to him).

But, again, does this ‘proclamation’ contradict ‘dialogue’? The pope answers that *both* are necessary, but while being ‘connected’ (as elements of the overall ‘mission’), they retain their ‘distinctiveness’ (RD 55). For dialogue is ‘a method of mutual knowledge and enrichment’, while proclamation is ‘an announcement of God’s love in the life of Jesus and an invitation to enter into a personal relationship with God in Christ’ (RD 44, summary).

In *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (1994),¹⁴ a personal text, the pope, after quoting *Nostra Aetate* on the need for appreciating Islam, points out its *limits* in his opinion.

Three related points are made. Reading the Old and New Testaments, and then the Qur’an, one ‘clearly sees the *process by which it completely reduces the Divine Revelation.*’ For ‘all the richness of God’s self-revelation ... has definitely been set aside.’

Then, while the Qur’an gives God ‘some of the most beautiful names in the human language, ... He is ultimately a God outside the world, a God who is *only Majesty*, never *Emmanuel* (God-with-us).’ Finally. ‘*Islam is not a religion of redemption.* There is no room for the Cross and the Resurrection.’ So, to sum up, both the theology and anthropology of Islam ‘are very distant from Christianity’ (92–93).

It must be admitted, in my opinion, that the phraseology of the pope is not ideal! It lacks both tact (for example, the use of ‘Allah’ for God) and precision (for example, the Qur’an insists on God’s nearness to us: He is ‘nearer than the jugular vein’, Qur’an 50:16, cf. 34:50, 37:96). But what of the substance?

It is, to my mind, difficult to deny, from the Christian point of view, that the Qur’anic message omits the ‘self-revelation’ of God that we are given in the Jewish and Christian scriptures. For us, God reveals God’s self *through God’s* words and God’s acts for and in God’s people. The key notion is that of ‘covenant’: God allies Himself with His people, so that He is *present* with them, and even ‘suffers’

14 Pope John Paul II, published in 1994 as *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, originally in Italian by Arnoldo Mondadori Editore and in English by Alfred A Knopf, Inc. It is distributed by Random House, Inc., New York City. The book had sold several million copies and was published in forty languages and gained a very wide readership and international audience.

with them. And this, of course, is supremely so in the ‘redemptive incarnation’: Jesus is God-with-us in person.

We can add: Islam has no ‘history of salvation’, for, while God is supremely merciful (He is *al-Rahman al-Rahim*, the Merciful one, the Compassionate), He does not ‘save’, for human beings can *of themselves* repent. And there is no development in God’s message, which is always basically the same.

IS POPE JOHN PAUL’S APPROACH TO ISLAM CONSISTENT?

If we think, with Mahmoud Ayoub, that ‘the ultimate goal of true dialogue is a fellowship of faith,’ meaning an acknowledgement that our [monotheistic] faiths are substantially the same, then, clearly, the pope’s position lacks logic, and might even be seen as being ‘adjusted’ to please different audiences!

But ‘dialogue’ can well have other meanings. For the pope, dialogue is a sharing of what is different. This supposes something ‘common’, our common humanity and, in the present case, our common monotheistic faith, but also implies something ‘diverse’. Without this common base there can be no dialogue; without the diversity, there would be no need of dialogue!

The affirmation, therefore, that has in common, as ‘brothers and sisters’, faith in the One God, does not prevent us from having differences about the character of this One God and our relations with that One God. Nor does it prevent us from wishing to ‘offer’ to the other ‘our faith’: would we not be insincere if we did not wish to do this? It would no longer be an inter-faith dialogue, but rather an exchange between students of different faiths!

While not denying the [obvious] differences, the pope’s approach, taken as a whole, emphasises what is common in belief and attitude as a base for common action in the world. So in Pakistan (1981), addressing religious and government leaders,¹⁵ the pope said:

I pray this mutual understanding and respect between
Christians and Muslims, and indeed between all religions,

15 <https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/travels/1981/travels/documents/trav_far-east.html> [accessed 25/2/22].

will *continue and grow deeper*. And that we will find still better ways of cooperation and collaboration for the good of all.

**CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM INTERACTION
IN OUR CHANGING WORLD**

We in the so-called ‘West’ can be preoccupied with ‘Islamic fundamentalism’, just as ‘Muslims’ can see only ‘Western neo-colonialism’. The pope is not a victim of this simplistic view:

Christians should realise that reformist, traditionalist, mystical, militant, quietist, and still other tendencies are found among Muslims. It is not necessary [for us] to determine which of these represents ‘true Islam’. (Rome, December 1989)

The pope’s remarks on the needs of Muslim immigrants in the ‘West’ are of particular interest:

Your motive in leaving your country, whether work or study, gives your departure undoubted dignity. But your condition as immigrants causes serious social, cultural and religious problems both for you and for the country which has received you.

Ibrahim M Abu-Rabi states in his comment on ‘John Paul II and Islam’, ‘He is tireless in his encouragement, not just of Christians, but of Muslims to adhere to their spiritual and cultural values, especially in a Westernised context.’ The same author adds: ‘To the Pope’s mind, Muslims, especially those who live in Europe, can serve as a *religious model* for the Christians to emulate.’¹⁶

¹⁶ Ibrahim M Abu-Rabi, ‘John Paul II and Islam’, in *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue*, 185-204, p. 192.

A 'FINAL WORD'

'Dialogue' has become a human value recognised and advocated by the Catholic Church. Is it also an Islamic value? Yes, according to Abu-Rabi. The Qur'an states:

Invite [all] to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and gracious (16:125).

The context is that of *da'wab*, the call to believe, and so the 'mission', which is 'an integral part of Islam'. In a similar way, the pope refers to dialogue as 'a part of the Church's evangelising mission ..., one of its expressions' (RD 55). And there is a similar expression of the need for dialogue in this context.

And we find a number of Muslim scholars who are well practised in the art of interfaith dialogue on the intellectual level. We find, too, many 'ordinary' Muslim believers who share the basic 'dialogue of life' with their fellow Christians. The 'news' tends to highlight the obstacles, but there is a real hope for a new age of genuine and popular interfaith dialogue and cooperation.

POSTSCRIPTUM

While Pope John Paul gives us an 'official' invitation to Christian-Islamic dialogue, we may, perhaps, consider Massignon as a spiritual 'patron' of this enterprise. He wished to 'offer his life', in union with Jesus the son of Mary, as a 'guest' in Islam and as a *service* to his 'hosts', as an act of (co)-redemption for their salvation. For he saw their faith in God, the one-and-only God, as authentic, but as lacking in that God-given hope and charity (*agape*) that only Christ's sacrifice on the Cross can bring. As a 'guest' in Islam—and so as an accepted 'co-member' of the Muslim *umma* (community)—he, and those who wished to join him, would 'reply in their place'. He called this act the *Badaliyya*, the Arabic word for 'substitution'. For he saw the heart of Jesus' life, and so the heart of the Christian imitation of Jesus, as his total self-giving on

the Cross for others: others who were ‘separated’ from God, and whose place he freely took. This conception of the redemption as a ‘substitutory sacrifice’ can well be criticised, but the fundamental idea of the *Badaliyya* rests. It is carried on by, among others, the Little Sisters of Jesus, who ‘offer their lives with Jesus for their brothers and sisters of Islam.’¹⁷

A FURTHER REFLECTION: THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS: POPE JOHN-PAUL II¹⁸

Speaking on a visit to Tunisia in April 1996, John-Paul spoke before the President and 200 representatives of the cultural political and religious worlds (the original is in French).¹⁹

After praising Tunisia for its past history, both Christian and Muslim (St Augustine and Ibn Khaldoun are cited), and its present political stability and tolerance, the pope refers to the theme of ‘mutual understanding and collaboration’. Beginning on the economic and political level, he moves on to the cultural and especially the religious level (quoting the ‘programme-project’ of Vatican II in favour of seeking to understand each other and work together in the field of social justice and peace: *Nostra Aetate* 3).

17 The Little Sisters of Jesus are a Catholic community of religious sisters inspired by the life and writings of Charles de Foucauld, founded by Little Sister Magdeleine of Jesus (Madeleine Hutin) on 8 September 1939, in Touggourt, French Algeria. On Charles de Foucauld see the studies by Hugues Didier, ‘Louis Massignon and Charles de Foucauld’, *Living Stones Yearbook 2021*, 279–299; and Minlib Dallh, ‘Exploration in Mysticism and Religious Encounter: The Case of Charles De Foucauld (1858–1916)’, *The Downside Review*, vol. 138, no. 4 (2020), 133–42.

18 The continuities and discontinuities between the Ecclesial engagement with Islam and the Muslim World in papacy of John Paul II and Benedict XVI can be studied in Rocco Viviano, ‘The Theological-Ecclesiological Thought of Benedict XVI (2005–2013) on the Christian Engagement with the Religions in the context of the Modern Papacy’, Heythrop College, University of London, PhD (2013); ‘Benedict XVI, Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations’, *The Downside Review*, vol. 135, 2017, 1, 55–75; ‘The Ecclesial and Theological Origins of *Nostra Aetate* and Its Significance for Present and Future Interfaith Engagement’, in *Nostra Aetate, Non-Christian Religions, and Interfaith Relations*, 35–64.

19 <https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1996/april/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19960414_world-culture.html> [accessed 25/2/22].

The key section (7) is on ‘dialogue between Muslims and Christians’ (Muslims being mentioned first).

Allow me to reflect a moment with you on the *conditions required for a fruitful dialogue*. First of all, it’s indispensable that this dialogue be animated by a real desire to know the other. It’s not just a matter of human curiosity. Openness to the other is rather a way of replying to God who allows our differences and who wishes that we come to know each other more deeply. And for this, it’s essential that we situate ourselves in relation to each other in truth.

The partners in dialogue will be confident and at ease in so far as they are truly rooted in their respective religions. This firm ‘rooted-ness’ will allow the free acceptance of differences, and will avoid the opposite errors of syncretism and indifference. It will also allow each side to profit from the critical regard of the other on the way of formulating and living ones faith.

Faith will be the basis of this form of dialogue which is collaboration in the service of human beings (of which I have spoken). For from the fact that we believe in God as Creator, we recognise the dignity of each human person created by Him. In God we have our origin and in Him our common destiny. Between these two poles, we are on the journey of history, where we should journey as brothers [*cheminer fraternellement*] in a spirit of mutual aid, so as to reach the transcendent end that God has established for us.

I would like to recall what I said on my visit to Senegal [1992]: ‘Let us make a sincere effort together to reach a deeper mutual understanding. May our collaboration in favour of humanity, undertaken in the name of our faith in God, be a benediction and a benefit for all the people’ (Dakar, 22 February 1992).

There is no need, I feel, to comment! This remarkable text speaks for itself. We can just note the ‘acceptance of our differences ... which

God permits,' and the 'journeying as brothers' on the way to the same 'transcendent end' ... And, of course, we can't fail to see the constant use of 'we'; yes, we can, and must, travel together ...

I add a brief quote from a text of the pope celebrating the 100th anniversary of the ordination of Charles de Foucauld²⁰ (9 June 1901), and which refers to a speech in the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus.

Brother Charles [through his shared life with the Touaregs and linguistic studies of their Islamic culture] summons those inspired by his charism to enter into dialogue with the cultures of today's peoples and to follow the way of meeting with other religious traditions, especially with Islam. In this way, the different religious communities will be truly 'communities engaged in respectful dialogue, and never again communities in conflict' (Damascus, 6 May 2001).²¹

20 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', PhD (2012); 'The legacy of Charles de Foucauld', *Living Stones Yearbook* 2014, 187-199; 'Sanctity and Mission of Charles de Foucauld', *Studies in Church History*, 47 (2011), 365-375.

21 <https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2001/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20010630_de-foucauld.html> [accessed 25/2/22].

THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL AND THE FUTURE OF CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM DIALOGUE¹

Duncan Macpherson

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

*Pope Innocent III proclaiming the Fifth Crusade, 'Quia Maior',
October 1213.*²

The church has a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God who is one, living and subsistent, merciful, and almighty, Lord of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to men.

*The Declaration on the Relationship to Non-Christian Religions
(Nostra Aetate) October 1965.*³

After a centuries-old history of conflict and hatred, the Second Vatican Council marked a decisive new approach by the Roman Catholic Church towards Islam. The two quotations at the beginning of this article illustrate graphically just how radical a change this was. The

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- 1 This paper is partly based on my 'The Second Vatican Council and the Future of Christian-Muslim Dialogue' in Alan Jones (ed.), *University Lectures in Islamic Studies*, vol. 2, London 1998.
 - 2 L and J Riley Smith, *The Crusades. Documents of the Middle Ages*, Edward Arnold, London, 1981.
 - 3 A Flannery, *Documents of Vatican II*, Dwyer, Dublin, 1991, p. 739.

context of this changed approach was a new spirit of dialogue and respect towards those outside the community of Roman Catholic Christianity.⁴ The recognition of positive religious toleration, as set out in the Declaration on Religious Liberty, provided the inspiration for this new attitude. The texts of the Council which speak of Islam point towards a new and positive relationship between Christians and Muslims in general and between Roman Catholic Christians and Muslims in particular.

This study will examine these texts, drawing attention both to the possibilities and the limits of theological dialogue. It will offer an account of the criticisms of the treatment of Islam in the Council documents. However such criticisms should not be allowed to eclipse the historical importance of the Council for Christian-Muslim relations. Indeed, in view of the importance of these texts it is surprising that the decision to include discussion on Muslims (along with that on Hindus and Buddhists), was something of an afterthought. Their inclusion arose from a fiercely debated statement on the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Jews.

A fairly detailed account of the impact of Middle Eastern politics on the Council will provide a clear example of the way in which cultural and political issues can impede the growth of better relations between Muslims and Christians. The processes by which the Council produced its statements on Islam provide an illustration in microcosm of the need to address more fully the cultural and political correlatives of religious dialogue. They also highlight the fact that inter-faith relationships are never simply a dialogue between the two faiths concerned. Thus the lessons from the Council debates will lead on to a discussion of the importance of developing shared dialogues. Such dialogues should not only be developed with other faith traditions but also, and most crucially, with secular ideologies and values.

4 In the words of Cardinal Michael Fitzgerald: 'It is not a pleasant duty to recall past opinions of Christians regarding Islam, but if there is to be some appreciation of how long the journey has been and how steep the climb to the crest of the Vatican II statements ... Islam was seen as something diabolical since it prevented God's saving work from being accomplished. It must be admitted that this was an opinion quite common in missionary circles up to the Second Vatican Council.' 'Catholic Theological Perspectives on Islam, and Christian-Muslim Relations since Vatican II until Today', *THEOLOGICA (Acta Universitatis Carolinae)*, vol. 8, No. 1 (2018), 11-31, p. 12.

**A NEW APPROACH IN CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS IN THE
DOCUMENTS OF VATICAN TWO**

The final texts of the Council identify what the followers of the two religions share in respect of belief. They also suggest areas for future dialogue and for practical co-operation. They recognise the importance of theological disagreements between the two faiths, though perhaps they do not take them seriously enough. Certainly there is no attempt to gauge fully the limits of what can be expected from the new dialogue. Obstacles to dialogue are also frankly recognized in the memories of past political and cultural conflicts. Unfortunately, however, the Council fathers failed to take account of the extent to which such obstacles are continually reinforced by on-going political and cultural conflicts. The Council debates themselves serve as an object lesson to the importance of such obstacles.

CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM DIALOGUE IN THE DOCUMENTS OF VATICAN II

In *The Decree on Ecumenism* and elsewhere the Council proposed a new approach towards non-Roman Catholic Christians. *The Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate)* went on to provide a positive appreciation of non-Christian world religions. The Jews came first in terms of emphasis and space although last in the order of religions discussed. Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and other, unspecified, religious traditions are treated in reverse order. As with its approach towards other belief systems and ideologies, the Council attempts to provide a principled methodology for dialogue and co-operation. The two passages concerned with Islam are section three of *The Declaration on Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate)*⁵ and section

5 The full text reads: 'The church has a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, Lord of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to men. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own. Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus as a prophet, his virgin mother they also honour, and even at times devoutly invoke. Further they await the day of Judgement and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this reason they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms-deeds and fasting. Over the centuries many quarrels and dissensions have arisen between

sixteen of *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Lumen Gentium)*.⁶ In setting out the new approach, *Nostra Aetate* seeks first to manifest goodwill and respect towards believers in Islam ('The Church has a high regard for the Muslims'). Next, it sets out the beliefs, values, and traditions which the Church considers as common ground for the proposed dialogue. In the case of Islam, this centres on a shared belief in the one God who is Creator, Revealer and Judge. ('They worship God who is one, living and subsistent, merciful, and almighty, Lord of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to men. Together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day') *Lumen Gentium* also refers to the shared belief in the Day of Judgment ('they await the day of judgment and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead'). Other shared values include ethical and religious practices ('they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms-deeds and fasting'). *Nostra Aetate* also refers to the key Islamic concept of submission to the will of God ('They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God').

The common Abrahamic root of the two faiths is emphasised⁷ as well as elements of shared tradition in respect of Jesus and Mary. It is only in the context of emphasising what is shared that *Nostra Aetate* frankly admits crucially significant doctrinal differences over the divinity of Christ. 'Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus as a prophet, his virgin mother they also honour, and even at times devoutly invoke.' An appeal is then made for a new beginning in relations between the two faiths in the future. 'The sacred

Christians and Muslims. The sacred Council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges a sincere effort to be made to achieve mutual understanding and; for the benefit of all men, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.'

6 'The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the creator, in the first place among whom are the Moslems; these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God mankind's judge on the last day' (*Lumen gentium*: 16), Flannery, p. 367.

7 'Though there are profound differences in the way Jews, Christians and Muslims see Abraham, there is nevertheless a common recognition of Abraham as a model of faith and submission. As long as there is a readiness to respect the different interpretations, the figure of Abraham provides common ground for the followers of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which can be called with some justification "Abrahamic religions", though this term does not describe them adequately or completely.' Cardinal Michael Fitzgerald, 'Catholic Theological Perspectives on Islam and Christian-Muslim relations since Vatican II until today', p. 25.

Council now pleads with all to forget the past and urges a sincere effort to be made to achieve mutual understanding and, for the benefit of all men, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.’

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

THEOLOGICAL LIMITS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM DIALOGUE

The treatment of Islam in the Council documents has been criticised both for exaggerating and for minimising the convergence between Christianity and Islam. More could have been said about shared belief in the mission of Jesus as ‘the Word of God’, *kalimat Allah* (Qur’an IV, 171) and ‘the Spirit of God’, *ruh Allah* (Qur’an IV, 169). However, in the view of the notable Arab Dominican commentator, Georges Anawati, ‘it would not have been right ... to make use of phrases which are indeed to be found in the Koran but could lead to misunderstanding if they are not explained in the Moslem sense.’⁸ On the other hand several crucial issues of disagreement are left out of account. The Christian doctrine of Original Sin is not accepted by Muslims and the concept of redemption has no place. ‘The Koran is aware of human disobedience against God ... but ... does not speak about human sinfulness or the need for redemption. Human beings do not fall into sin and become imprisoned in guilt from which they need to be saved. Apart from

8 Georges Anawati, *Excursus on Islam*, vol. III, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Burns and Oates, London and New York, 1967, p. 152.

theocentrism where a redeemer has no place, human beings also do not need a redeemer.⁹

Other areas of disagreement not referred to in the documents include polygamy and divorce by unilateral repudiation of the wife by her husband (*talaq*). However, these disagreements in the area of family life probably explain the omission of a proposed text extolling the virtues of Islamic family values. This text read: ‘They (Muslims) strive also, in obedience to God, to lead a moral life as individuals in the family and in society.’¹⁰ More fundamentally still there is no acknowledgment that both Christianity and Islam consider themselves as the ultimate truth. ‘Both religions consider themselves absolutes and both religions are exclusive to the extent that they understand the Word of God become Book (Koran) and the Word of God become flesh (Jesus Christ) as definitive and universally valid.’¹¹

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

The question of the prophethood of Muhammad constitutes another major obstacle not adverted to in the Council documents. ‘One can say that the Declaration summarizes with a minimum of words Muslim theodicy but not what is essential to the Muslim faith of which the belief in the mission of Muhammad is one of the most important elements.’¹² Indeed Muhammad is not mentioned in

9 Karl Wolfgang Troeger, ‘Christian-Muslim Dialogue’, *Theology Digest* 44: 2, Summer 1997, 117-124. Originally published in German as ‘Der christlich-muslimische Dialog. Theologische Aspekte einer kirchlichen Aufgabe’, *Berliner Theologische Zeitschrift* 13 (1996), 214-28.

10 Georges Anawati, p. 153.

11 Troeger, p. 122.

12 ‘The silence of the Council concerning the second part of the Muslim profession of faith (shahada) doubtless represents the most sensitive point for the Muslims.

either of the relevant Council documents. Faced with the claims of Islam to a fuller, more accurate knowledge of Divine Revelation than Christianity, earlier generations of Christians had frequently denounced Muhammad as a false prophet. In some cases slanderous attacks had been made on his personal character and moral life. As in the opening quotation from Pope Innocent III, he has even been identified with the Anti-Christ prophesied in the Book of Revelation.¹³ More recently Christian writers have tried to build bridges to Islam by accepting Muhammad's prophethood in some limited sense, characterising him as a prophet to the pagan Arabs but denying him the status of a universal prophet fulfilling and, where necessary, correcting Christian beliefs.¹⁴

However during a General Audience on 9 September 1998. Pope John Paul II spoke positively of the founders of the major religions and, as Michael Fitzgerald suggests, although no founder was mentioned by name, 'if, as seems likely, Muhammad would be included by the pope in the category, this would probably constitute the most positive statement about him so far in the official teaching of the Catholic Church.'¹⁵

The Council chose to deal with it by—silence.' Anwati, p. 398.

- 13 See Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West* (revised edition), One World, Oxford, 1993, 100-129. Norman Daniel (1919-1992) historian of the encounter between the Latin Western Christian World and the Muslim World and former member of the British Council in Egypt. He converted to Catholicism and worked closely with the Dominicans in Cairo at IDEO [<https://www.ideo-cairo.org/fr>] especially being close to work of Georges Anawati OP (1905-1994). Jean-Jacques Pérennès OP, *Georges Anawati (1905-1994). Un chrétien égyptien devant le mystère de l'Islam*, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2008.
- 14 For example, Louis Massignon, the French Catholic orientalist, author of *Al Hallaj, martyr mystique de l'Islam*, Paris, 1922. See also the following studies by Christin Krokus, 'Catholic Saints and Scholars: Nostra Aetate and Islam', in K C Ellis (ed.), *Nostra Aetate, Non-Christian Religions, and Interfaith Relations*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2021, 115-139; 'Louis Massignon's influence on the teaching of Vatican II on Muslims and Islam, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, vol. 23, 2012, no. 3, 329-345; *The Theology of Louis Massignon: Islam, Christ, and the Church*, Catholic University of America Press, Washington, DC, 2017.
- 15 The text of the Pope's address reads as follows: 'goodness, and in the last analysis for God, is inspired by the Holy Spirit. The various religions arose precisely from this primordial openness to God. At their origins we often find founders who, with the help of God's Spirit, achieved a deeper religious experience. Handed on to others, this experience took form in the doctrines, rites and precepts of the various religions', https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/1998/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_09091998.html [accessed 07/07/22]

Ultimately some issues of faith are not resolvable. Christians believe that the content of public revelation is complete with the coming of Christ and that nothing can be added to it after the death of the last of the twelve apostles. Muslims believe that Muhammad is the last of the prophets completing and correcting the understanding of the other 'peoples of the book'. Thus, it is no use for Christians to claim that Muslims have an incorrect perception of Christian beliefs about the Holy Trinity since this perception derives directly from the words of the prophet Muhammad himself. The only refuge here is to hypothesise that there were in fact Christians in Arabia in the time of the Prophet who held a heretical belief in three gods (of which one was the Virgin Mary!).¹⁶ If this were the case, then the Qur'an could be interpreted not as an attack on Christian doctrine but upon a deviant version of it.

THE COUNCIL AND THE POLITICS OF THE MIDDLE EAST

The controversies which surrounded the Council's deliberations provide very clear evidence that the obstacles to better relations between Christians and Muslims are not wholly theological. It was the thorny

16 Bishop Riah Abu Al Assal, 'Christian Continuity in the Holy Land', *Living Stones Magazine* (January 1998), p. 9: 'In an era when a multitude of heresies flourished throughout Christendom, one particular theology spreading through Arabia proclaimed a divine triad rather than a Trinity. The Deity according to this teaching was God the Father, God the Son and God the Mother. Mohammed relates to this in the Qur'an: "God shall say, O Jesu son of Mary, hast thou said unto mankind, take me and my mother as two gods besides God?" (Surah 5:116). Therefore when Muhammad appeared teaching the oneness of God, many Christians embraced Islam ... perhaps, not knowing they were joining a new religion.' A similar line of thought, more surely historically based, is expressed by an Arab Orthodox Christian, Robert Hadad, who reminds us that 'not only were the non-Chalcedonians the greater transmitters to Islam but it may even be argued that Monophysite and Nestorian Christology, the former de-emphasising Christ's human nature and the latter particularly by diminishing his divine nature, have something of a logical conclusion in Qur'anic Christology.' In the first case Jesus tends to be 'simply God' and in the latter 'simply man'. Hadad goes on, 'It may be telling that the preferred Nestorian description "Jesus, Son of Mary" rather than "Son of God" is also the favoured Qur'anic designation for Jesus the Prophet. Islam was no mere bystander in the Christological controversies.' 'Eastern Orthodoxy and Islam', N M Vaporis (ed.), *Orthodox Christians and Muslims*, Massachusetts Holy Cross Press, Boston, 1986, p. 25.

political issue of Israel and the Palestinians which compelled the Council to broaden its discussion on the Church's relations with the Jews to include consideration of relations with Islam and other major world religions. The explanation for the inclusion of a section on Judaism in a document on Christian unity derived from the special relationship between the Christian Church and the people of the Old Covenant. The inspiration for such a move was based on an awareness of the contribution made by Christian teaching and preaching to anti-Semitism in Europe over the centuries. Such an awareness had been rendered the more acute by the Nazi extermination of Jews in the 1940s. At this stage there were no firm plans to extend the discussion to Islam or to any other world religions. Indeed, the decision to broaden the scope of the discussion arose as a direct response to the uproar provoked by the Council's encounter with the political realities of the Middle East.

The proposed chapter IV of the schema rejected the idea that the Jews shared a communal guilt for the crucifixion of Christ. The charge of 'deicide' was to be specifically rejected, and priests and catechists were warned of the dangers of inciting hatred against the Jews in their preaching and teaching of the Gospel narrative of the Passion of Christ. At a distance in time of only thirteen years after the flight and expulsion of some quarter of a million Palestinians from their homes in 1948, the Arab world universally misread the theological and pastoral intentions of the document. One commentator summarised the Arab response as follows: 'If the Council did in fact proclaim the brotherhood of Christians and Jews, such a proclamation might well help the two to live together in peace in the countries of the West, but above all it would redound to the advantage of the State of Israel.'¹⁷

Representatives of Arab Catholic communities in the Middle East were particularly vocal over this question and expressed anxiety over the possibility of a consequent backlash against Christian minorities in Arab countries. Arab suspicions about an undisclosed Zionist agenda were further inflamed by the decision of the World Jewish Congress to appoint an official from the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs as its representative in Rome. Unsurprisingly, this was widely viewed

17 John M Oesterreicher, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Volume III, Herbert Vorgrimler (ed.), Burns and Oates/Herder and Herder, London, 1968, p. 19.

as an attempt to gain semi-official Israeli influence at the Council.¹⁸ In November 1963 a revised version of chapter IV was brought to the floor of the Council and was met with the united and determined opposition of Catholic bishops from Arab countries.¹⁹

In a decisive speech, Cardinal Bea pleaded for the retention of the statement on the Jews in the schema and tried to distance the political questions from the theological: 'We are here treating a merely religious question, there is no question that the Council will get entangled in those difficult questions regarding the relations to the Arab states and the State of Israel, or regarding so-called Zionism.'²⁰ Pope Paul VI's pilgrimage to the Holy Land in January 1964 attempted to give practical expression to just such a pastorally motivated and politically even-handed approach.

By October 1964 the chapter on the Jews had been debated again and been given approval by most of the participants in the debates.²¹ One Arab Catholic leader attributed the progress of the debate to a combination of Jewish propaganda skills and a powerful American lobby motivated by commercial links with Jewish owned business.²²

As more opposition mounted against the declaration, the decision was finally made to follow up the suggestions to enlarge the declaration

18 In June of 1963 American Jesuit Father Gustav Weigel told *The New York Times* that the document on the Jews would not be discussed at the Council because of the opposition of Arab governments. The furore which this indiscretion provoked probably contributed to an increased pressure for the matter to proceed (Oesterreicher, *Commentary* ..., p. 19).

19 The three Arab Catholic Patriarchs were Stefanos I of the Catholic Coptic Church, the Greek Catholic Maximos IV and Cardinal Tappouni of the Syrian Catholics. These three were supported by the Armenian Catholic Peter VI and by the Latin Patriarch Alberto Gori who expressed approval for the Council giving consideration to non-Christian religions but suggested that if one religion was to be included in fairness all the others would have to be as well. Bishop Jelmini of Lugarno also spoke up in favour of including discussion of Islam in the document (Xavier Rynne, *The Fourth Session*, Faber & Faber, London, 1966, p. 21). See also Kail C Ellis, 'The Holy See, Islam, and the Role of the Eastern Catholic Patriarchs in Developing Nostra Aetate', in K C Ellis (ed.), *Nostra Aetate, Non-Christian Religions, and Interfaith Relations*, 187-209.

20 Xavier Rynne, p. 22.

21 A communiqué from the Arab Supreme Committee for Palestine referred to 'imperialist Zionist maneuvers to lead the Church to take up a position in the Palestine conflict favourable to International Jewry' (Oesterreicher, p. 83).

22 Patriarch Maximos, the Melkite Patriarch of Antioch (Xavier Rynne, p. 164).

to embrace all the major world religions. The theme of shared elements of religious truth in the major world religions was emphasised in several of the speeches from the early months of Pope Paul VI's new pontificate in 1963. His first encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* (August 1964) centred on the theme of dialogue between the Catholic Church and other traditions and belief systems. The encyclical envisaged a series of concentric circles. The inner circles consist first of Roman Catholic and then of other Christian traditions. The next circle is that of non-Christian monotheism:

We refer first briefly to the children of the Hebrew people, worthy of our affection and respect, faithful to the religion of what we call that of the Old Covenant. Then to the adorers of God according to the conception of monotheism, the Moslem religion is especially deserving of our admiration for all that is true and good in their worship of God. And also to the followers of the great Afro-Asiatic religions.²³

The new, broader perspective on the question largely failed to assuage Arab anxieties. On 20 November 1964 the voting took place on the revised document which was largely carried. Arab reaction followed speedily. A Syrian radio broadcast referred to 'a facelift which would fool nobody.'²⁴ It went on to observe that the Church had regarded the Jews as responsible for the death of Christ for twenty centuries. Why then did they wish to change their minds when Arabs were engaged in a bitter struggle with Jewish aggressors who had invaded Palestine and expelled a million Arabs from their homes to languish in refugee camps? If the Church had not had the courage to speak out during the Nazi persecution of the Jews why did it choose to speak out at a time when Jews were persecuting Arabs? Jordanian leaders and Arab orthodox Christians expressed equally strong views.²⁵

23 Printed in English as *The Church in the Modern World*, CTS, 1965, London.

24 *Herder Correspondence*, March 1965, p. 80.

25 Jordanian Members of Parliament, as well as Muslim and Christian leaders took the opportunity to engage in anti-Catholic polemic, and the Catholic Church leaders in Damascus were at pains to point out that the Council had not yet spoken the last word on the matter (Oesterreicher, *Commentary ...*, p. 104).

Some Muslim voices counselled a more nuanced approach. One article in the Beirut newspaper *L'Orient* argued that Arabs should have welcomed the awakening of the Christian conscience to the truth in other religions. 'It is a pity that the fear of Zionist exploitation prevents them from examining its contents ... Islam is presented as a sister religion. The Christian is exhorted to end all disrespect not only to Jews but to all non-Christians.' In this respect the author considers that Christianity is moving closer to the greater inclusiveness of the Qur'an. These thoughts were echoed by another writer in the same issue of the same journal: 'now men will be able to live as brothers, and it will be left to God to ask them to justify their faith on the Day of Judgement.'²⁶

Such positive responses from the Middle East were, however, the exception. The general view was that the wrongs done to the Jews were being acknowledged but that the injustices still being suffered by the Palestinians were being ignored and, by implication, being condoned. The inclusion of a sympathetic statement on Islam did little to mollify this sense of injustice.²⁷

Whether or not this view was fair, the final promulgation of the document at the end of the Council gave some encouragement to commentators sympathetic to Zionism. It also gave some basis to the worst fears of the Arabs especially to the suspicion that the next step would be the recognition of Israel by the Holy See.²⁸ In passing, it

²⁶ *The New York Times*, 26 November 1964.

²⁷ As the theologian René Laurentin observed, there was now a serious danger to Catholics in Arab countries and the Israelis were themselves giving credibility to the more hostile Arab interpretation of the Council's intentions by suggesting that the denial of Jewish responsibility for the death of Christ had a hidden Zionist agenda. Laurentin considered that these Israeli interventions had the opposite effect from what had been intended (R Laurentin and J Neusner, 'The Declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions', *Vatican II Documents*, 1966, p. 303).

²⁸ One Dominican writer expressed the hope that the new dialogue would eventually lead to the recognition of the State of Israel by the Church. Oesterreicher himself argues that the immoderate attack on the document by the Arab states had 'deprived them of the sympathies which they had enjoyed before, and thus the hearts of Christians turn to the forward-looking (*sic*) State of Israel.' Certainly at this point his own sympathies, hidden behind a judiciously balanced academic commentary on the history of the Council debates, suddenly become very clear. The increasing desire 'for the recognition of Israel does not amount to a breach of promise but springs from the realisation that it is the duty also of the Christians to confirm the sovereignty, freedom, even the mere existence of the country that

should be noted that Vatican recognition of the State of Israel had to wait for more than thirty years (30 December 1993), until there was, apparently at least, some serious prospect of peace between Israel and the Palestinians, and the Palestinians themselves had accorded Israel such recognition.

CULTURAL AND POLITICAL IMPEDIMENTS TO BETTER CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

It is paradoxical that it was 'the problem of Israel' which eventually directed the attention of the Second Vatican Council towards Islam. Nevertheless the Israel-Palestine conflict remains a complicating factor in attempts to establish better Christian-Muslim relations. As such it does not stand alone. Political conflicts with Muslim states in the Middle East, later civil conflicts in Bosnia and the Sudan and the struggle to contain Islamist terrorism all constitute serious political impediments to greater understanding between Christians and Muslims. Since 2001 the situation has worsened considerably. Following the attack on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York, a chain of events unfolded that led to the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, and the emergence of violent Islamist groups. These groups, including Isis and Al Qaeda, became active in armed civil conflicts in Iraq and Syria, West Africa and elsewhere, all involving the radicalisation of numbers of Muslims and the violent persecution of indigenous Christian and other minority communities.

Faced with massive and often indiscriminate Western military force and a widespread explosion of anti-Muslim sentiment, Muslims sometimes find it difficult to differentiate between Christianity and Western political and military interests. On the Christian side there is a corresponding inability to distinguish between Islam and the political interest groups of either autocratic feudal sheikdoms or of fanatical Islamist organisations. At the cultural level Muslims may perceive consumerist materialism and sexual licence as Christian values. Christians, too, may identify opposition to the rights of the

has given its Jewish citizens a home and has strengthened a healthy self esteem of Jews everywhere.' Oesterreicher, *Commentary* ..., p. 133.

individual and hostility to democratic institutions as characteristic of the faith of Islam.²⁹

Underlying all these contemporary conflicts and misunderstandings there are the unhappy memories of historical confrontation and wars between representatives of the two religions. Such memories probably lie heavier upon the thinking of the Muslims than of Western Christians. In the words of one commentator, '[While] on the Western side ecumenical and intellectual progress has made it possible to regard past events with equanimity of spirit, the same does not apply to the Moslem countries. These are still engaged in a struggle against Western pressure, which they all too often equate with "Christian" pressure. The wounds of the past are still far from healed and some leading Moslems ... find it difficult ... not to recall the "aggressions" of the West at the time of the Crusades as well as at those of "colonialism" and "imperialism".' George W Bush did little to dispel such memories, when, a few days after the attack on the Twin Towers in 2001, he described the planned US military response as a 'crusade', and 'a war on terrorism'.

The sensitivity of Muslims with regards to the past was further evident in the angry reactions to the speech of Benedict XVI in Regensburg in September 2006. In this address the pope quoted the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II's negative description of Islam in 1453 which read: 'Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.' The Muslim sense of outrage continued despite the pope's disclaimer that the quotation did not reflect his own views but only those of Manuel II.³⁰

29 Such obstacles are summarised in the 1991 Vatican document *Dialogue and Proclamation* which speaks of 'intolerance ... aggravated by association with political, economic, racial and ethnic factors' as well as 'lack of reciprocity in dialogue which can lead to frustration'. *Pontificium COUNSILIUM pro Dialogo*, Vatican City, <https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html> [accessed 12/07/22].

30 'In the Muslim world, this quotation has unfortunately been taken as an expression of my personal position, thus arousing understandable indignation. I hope that the reader of my text can see immediately that this sentence does not express my personal view of the Qur'an, for which I have the respect due to the holy book of a great religion. In quoting the text of the Emperor Manuel II, I intended solely to draw out the essential relationship between faith and reason. On this point I am in agreement with Manuel II, but without endorsing his polemic.' Benedict XVI,

The close linkage between ancient and more recent conflicts in the Muslim psyche is evident in Muslim writers, even among those who are otherwise irenic. 'Ever since the Crusades, the relation between Europe and the Muslim world was distorted by the colonialist agenda of the European countries, and after World War I almost all Islamic countries were in the grip of European colonialism. A long struggle ensued that secured political independence, but colonialism merely took another form, neo-colonialism headed by the United States of America, which does not depend on occupation armies but on economic leverage.'³¹

As we have noted other concrete confrontations still abound, but they are more readily recognised. In the 1996 Vatican Greetings to Muslims for Ramadan, Cardinal Arinze referred to the conflict in Bosnia which he claimed to have been 'falsely interpreted by some as an example of Christian Muslim confrontation, and to the southern Sudan where inter-faith tensions were ongoing contributory factors to the conflict between the Sudanese government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army from 1955 to 1972 and again from 1983 to 2005.'³²

RELIGIOUS THIRD PARTIES TO INTER-FAITH RELATIONSHIPS

We have seen that the inclusion of Islam on the agenda of the Council debate arose directly from discussions on the Jews and the perceived impact on Middle Eastern politics of any change in the relationship between Catholic Christianity and Judaism. The now, somewhat faded, hopes for a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were greeted by the Vatican as 'an encouragement towards Muslim-Christian co-operation, and indeed to trilateral dialogue and co-operation.'³³ Recent initiatives to set up three-way discussion between Muslims, Jews and Christians represent a recognition that any change in relations between two religions may affect relationships with a third. Thus supportive moves by Christians towards religious Jews must take account of

'Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections', Regensburg Lecture, footnote 3.

31 *Islam and the Others*, World Assembly of Muslim Youth, pp. 12-13, Riyadh, <<https://wamy.org/>> [accessed 12/11/97].

32 *Cath News*, <http://www.tasc.ac.uk/cc/cn/960216a.htm> [link broken]

33 Francis Arinze, 'The Way Ahead for Muslims and Christians', *Pro Dialogo*, Bulletin 92, 1996/2, 26-32.

the fact that most, although not all, religious Jews are supporters of the State of Israel and that moves to promote friendship between Christians and Muslims might in turn be misinterpreted as an attempt to isolate the Jews. The establishment of The Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies by Crown Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan in 1996 represented one of the most important of several new initiatives 'to link the three Abrahamic religions in a network of inter-faith dialogue.'³⁴ In the United Kingdom the Inter-faith Network includes Islam and Christianity together with all the other major faith communities. In addition, a 'Three Faiths Forum' was set up in London in 1997 to extend the already established framework of Jewish-Christian dialogue to a trilateral conversation which includes Islam.³⁵

It is not only the three Abrahamic faiths which need to be aware of the multilateral character of inter-faith relationships. Similar sensitivities may arise in the opening up of dialogue with Hinduism in relation to the important issues of human rights for the substantial minority Muslim population of India. A leading Roman Catholic partner in dialogue between Christians and Muslims in India has drawn attention to the need for a multilateral approach to dialogue which included Hindus as well as Christians and Muslims and which emphasises common concern for religious rights.³⁶ Meanwhile in Britain it is reported that some Hindus have been surprised and even irritated by the 'special' relationship between Islam and the Roman Catholic Church.³⁷ Political and social conflicts between Buddhists and Hindu Tamils in Sri Lanka or between Buddhists and Muslims in Bangladesh may also raise problems for bilateral Christian-Muslim initiatives.

The issue of the importance of multilateral interfaith dialogue takes us beyond issues purely relating to Christianity or Islam. For example

34 Statement of Purpose of The Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies, Amman, Jordan, 1995.

35 Ruth Gledhill, 'Forum to bridge gap between the three main faiths', *The Times*, 25 January 1997.

36 Terence Farias SJ, 'Christian-Muslim Dialogue in India', *Pro Dialogo*, Bulletin 71 1989, pp. 180-184.

37 In his 1985 visit to Kenya Pope John Paul II took the opportunity to meet with Hindus and Muslims together and to stress the close link between the dialogue of religious experience and the dialogue of action: 'The close bonds linking our respective religions—our worship of God and the spiritual values we hold in esteem—motivate us to become fraternal allies in service to the human family.' *Pro Dialogo*, vol. 60, 1985, 221-257, p. 236.

without this awareness the whole enterprise of interfaith can be seen as the exclusive domain of pan-religious pluralists who regard all religions as of precisely equal value. Such an approach automatically excludes most Christians and all Muslims. Without the multilateral awareness too, it is difficult to see how any bilateral partners in dialogue can be serious about co-operating to promote peace and justice impartially or to work together for the common benefit of *all* members of the human community.

SHARED DIALOGUES WITH SECULAR IDEOLOGIES AND VALUES

The need to be conscious of the importance of dialogue with third parties is not confined to religious systems. In their different ways all religions have to wrestle with the challenge of secular modernity and what is loosely referred to as “post-modernity”. To survive and to retain its integrity a religion needs both to adhere to the truths it proclaims and at the same time to adapt where adaptation is needed and possible. Commenting on the encounter between Islam and liberal culture in Britain over the Rushdie affair, Shabbir Akhtar observed that while ‘Muslims will have to learn the limits of legitimate political demands in Western societies ... nonetheless if we are right to expect religions to evolve in doctrine and ethics, why should liberalism remain immutable?’³⁸ The balance between immobility and surrender is never an easy one and this is an issue that dominates the internal discourses of all the great world religions in one form or another.

A more cordial and better informed relationship between Christianity and Islam will help to dispel the Muslim perception that Christianity and the secular values of ‘the West’ are one and the same. Indeed it is already becoming clear that traditionalist Christian positions make common cause with Islam against secularist wisdom on a range of issues. As Cardinal Arinze observed in relation to the UN Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994, ‘it was noticeable that the Catholic position and the Muslim position in defence of the family were rather nearer to each other, especially in the rejection of abortion, homosexuality, and promiscuity.’³⁹

38 ‘Muslims and their schools’, *The Tablet*, 14 February 1998.

39 ‘The Way Ahead for Muslims and Christians’, *Pro Dialogo*, 92 1996/2, p. 27.

However, it is important to stress that this co-operation cannot operate at a purely negative level either by excluding other religions from the dialogue or by making common cause against secular forces of darkness. The dialogue with modern values is also an internal one both for Christianity and for Islam. Christians and Muslims are also human beings living in the modern world. To the extent that their faith prevents them from accepting the wisdom of the age it also commits them to an engagement in dialogue with modern liberal ideologies. This presupposes the same respect and toleration for the other party in dialogue with the secular world as it does when the dialogue is with another religious faith.

Better relations will also help Western Christians to discriminate between Muslim values that derive from the Qur'an and the teaching of the Prophet Muhammad and those which are contingent upon particular cultural variables and stages of economic and social development. Uncluttered by such confusions it should be possible for Christians and Muslims to engage with common issues of concern. Where secularism is hostile or indifferent to religion they can make joint efforts to promote religious freedom and the recognition of ethical values which are underwritten not only by moral philosophy but also by religious beliefs common to both religions. Christianity and Islam share so much in the area of belief. This sharing provides the basis for a programme of practical co-operation. In the words of Cardinal Arinze, 'On the permanent agenda for Christian-Muslim collaboration is the promotion of human values. Justice, honesty in private and public life, harmony between peoples, development in its many forms, justice and peace, these are not values that just happen. They are conquests to be achieved.'⁴⁰

CONCLUSION

The conquests of which Cardinal Arinze wrote offered a realisable way forward both for Roman Catholic-Muslim relations and for wider Christian-Muslim relations. Despite the difficult cultural and political

40 Ibid.

problems which have clouded relations between the two faiths in the years since the Second Vatican Council formal theological dialogue and institutional links have been developed beyond what would have been thought possible in the past. The contrast between the medieval view which identified the Prophet Muhammad as the beast prophesied in the Apocalypse and the Vatican Council's professions of esteem for Muslims and their faith is nothing less than staggering. However, no matter how many theological misunderstandings or inherited prejudices may be resolved serious disagreements of principle will persist irrespective of the good-will which may obtain.⁴¹ The Principle of Contradiction makes it impossible to be both a Christian and a Muslim. Nevertheless this does not preclude developing a new friendship based upon principles of mutual respect, an emphasis on shared beliefs and moral precepts, and a permanent agenda of collaboration to promote humanitarian values, peace and justice. Such a principled agenda needs to be protected by the lessons which should have been learned from the debates of the Second Vatican Council. An example of such a lesson derives from the Arab-Israeli conflict which provides just one, particularly intractable, example of a political impediment to improved relations between Islam and Christianity. Another lesson from the same debates is that a change in relations between any two religions may affect relations with a third. Proceeding from such a realisation it is also evident that all religions are involved in confrontation and dialogue with the values of secular modernity and post-modernity. Thus Vatican II charted a new course of co-operation between Christians and Muslims. As such, it did not only represent a new departure for relations between the religious faiths but also for relations between religious faith and post-religious secularism.⁴²

41 In the words of one Greek Orthodox commentator, 'It is quite natural for Christians and Muslims to differ fundamentally ... since they belong to different religions and their definitions and evaluations vary.' Metropolitan Constantine, 'The Importance of Christian-Muslim Dialogue', in N M Vapori (ed.), *Orthodox Christians and Muslims*.

42 The development of engagement with Other Religions since Vatican II has become a central element of the modern Papacy. See the following contributions which reflect upon the Modern Papacy and the wider concept of interreligious dialogue: Martin Ganeri, 'The Catholic magisterium and world religions: a study in the modern history of theology', *The Downside Review*, 2017, 135 (2), 111-123; Anthony O'Mahony, 'Catholic Theological Perspectives on Islam at The Second Vatican Council', *New Blackfriars*, vol. 88, No. 1016, 2007, 385-398; Isabel Olizar, 'John

Paul II, Dialogue with Muslims and the Question of Religious Freedom’, *The Downside Review*, 2021, 139 (4): 195–208; Rocco Viviano, ‘Benedict XVI, Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations’, *The Downside Review*, 2017, 135 (1), 55–75; Rocco Viviano, ‘The Ecclesial and Theological Origins of Nostra Aetate and Its Significance for Present and Future Interfaith Engagement’, in K C Ellis (ed.), *Nostra Aetate, Non-Christian Religions, and Interfaith Relations*, 35–64; Scott Thomas, ‘St Francis and Islam: A Critical Appraisal for Contemporary Muslim–Christian Relations, Middle East Politics and International Relations’, *The Downside Review*, 2018, 136 (1), 3–28; S M Thomas, ‘A Trajectory Toward the Periphery: Francis of Assisi, Louis Massignon, Pope Francis, and Muslim–Christian Relations’, *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2018, 16–36; S M Thomas, ‘The Way of St Francis? Catholic Approaches to Christian–Muslim Relations and Interreligious Dialogue’, *The Downside Review*, 2008, 126 (444), 157–168. For the encounter with religions from a personal engagement: Isabel Olizar, ‘From the Margins to the Center: Exploring Nostra Aetate in the Lives of Charles de Foucauld, Louis Massignon, and Pierre Claverie’, in K C Ellis (ed.), *Nostra Aetate, Non-Christian Religions, and Interfaith Relations*, 139–161; Minlib Dallh, ‘Exploration in Mysticism and Religious Encounter: The Case of Charles de Foucauld (1858–1916)’, *The Downside Review*, 2020, 138 (4), 133–142; Agnes Wilkins, ‘Spirituality, Dialogue, Conversion: The Itinerary of Fr Jean-Mohammed Abd-el-Jalil’, *The Downside Review*, 2020, 138 (4), 122–132; Agnes Wilkins, ‘Mary Kahil and the Encounter Between Christianity and Islam’, *The Downside Review*, 2017, 135 (3), 131–143; Agnes Wilkins, ‘Monasticism and Martyrdom in Algeria’, *The Downside Review*, 2008, 126 (444), 193–218; Anthony O’Mahony, ‘The influence of the life and thought of Louis Massignon on the Catholic Church’s relations with Islam’, *The Downside Review*, 2008, 126 (444), 169–192.

LOUIS MASSIGNON—A SERVANT OF GOD

Richard Wheeler†

On 18 July 1934, Professor Louis Massignon met Pope Pius XI in a private audience at the Vatican. As was his custom, Massignon made a note of the conversation that same evening. The text he left has been published as an Annexe to the 1997 edition of *Les Trois Prières d'Abraham*,¹ compiled by his son. Daniel Massignon notes that his father had asked the Pope 'to bless his abrahamic prayers and his social engagement'. The schema of prayer presented to the Pope offers an inviting set of points to access Louis Massignon's life and work of prayer, advocacy, and scholarship.

The note opens with a characteristic dateline: 'Wednesday 18 July 1934 (St Camille) 11.15am—11.45am.'²

The Holy Father in his study: 77 years old, rested (the previous audience had been cancelled), his face a little drawn; bright-eyed behind his glasses; bids me to sit.)

1 Louis Massignon, *Les Trois Prières d'Abraham*, Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 1997. In this essay I quote from the 1997 edition prepared by Daniel Massignon. Original publication : *Prière sur Sodome* published in 1930, Éditions Chirat, 32 pp., only 111 copies. Second updated and corrected edition, Paris, 1949, 24 pp., 200 copies. *L'Hégire d'Ismaël*, published at Tours, 1935, 73 pp., 300 copies. *La troisième Prière, le Sacrifice d'isaac* was never published. In *Les Trois Prières d'Abraham*, 'Prière sur Sodome, version de 1949', 31-58; 'L'Hégire d'Ismaël, version de 1935', 59-122; 'le Sacrifice d'isaac, ébauche [draft] de 1949', 123-128; *Les Trois Prières d'Abraham*, 1962, 129-146, which had been published in three separate editions: *Dieu Vivant*, vol. XIII, 1949, 25-37; *Opéra Minora* [Louis Massignon], t. III, Paris-Beirut, 1964, 812-816, *Parole donnée*, Paris, Éditions Juilliard, 1963, 257-272. For a detailed overview see the review by Rolcave Pierre, 'Louis Massignon, Les trois prières d'abraham', *Horizons Maghrébins—Le droit à la mémoire*, N° 35-36, 1998, 312-314.

Translations from French into English are made by the author throughout.

2 Louis Massignon, 'Audience de S.S. Le Pape Pie XI Le 18 Juillet 1934', *Les Trois Prières d'Abraham*, 191-193, p. 191.

1. He spoke for about 5 minutes—How is your Revue doing? (*Études Islamiques*)—I am interested in the Muslims—met a Muslim maharajah from India: ‘Who is closest to the truth?’—Seek out the truth?—I know of your career (probably the note from Mgr Mulla handed in to the private secretary the previous evening)—You make me think of your godson, Jean Abdeljalil.³ ... He tests me: Your way is very particular, ‘muslim catholic’. (I say nothing, I offer him the prepared schema: he takes it, reads through word for word, and discusses it in perfect French).

2. Abraham?—I would like the office said for this saint at the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem to be extended to the whole Latin Church.—The saints of the Old Testament cannot wholly be recommended to Christians: e.g. David advising his son to swear falsely before God.—But Saint Abraham, according to your predecessor Benedict XV was ‘*vraiment évangélique*’—Yes. Abraham is a different case, but there are also objections in his life.

ABRAHAM

This brief exchange with his Holiness signals the primacy of ‘Abraham’ in Massignon’s *imaginaire* but the sainthood of the patriarch would be a secondary recognition of his importance. Daniel Massignon notes that this conversation takes place about a year before ‘L’Hégire d’Ismaël’, the central essay of *The Three Prayers*, is published. There, Massignon expounds the crucial connection of Muhammad and the faith of Abraham. ‘Before God, he calls Abraham to witness and lays claim for the Arabs alone all his heritage, spiritual and temporal. Ten years on he will die, having brought together ... the tribes of his race in the religious unity of Islam.’ Muhammed expands ‘a new community of believers in God, unique to Abraham ... extending to all those who did not receive the Book of God, convincing them to participate in reclaiming the patriarchal blessing, holding to his vocation which

3 Agnes Wilkins, OSB, ‘Spirituality, Dialogue, Conversion: The Itinerary of Fr Jean-Mohammed Abd-el-Jalil’, *The Downside Review*, vol. 138 (4), 2020, 122–132.

spreads throughout the whole world.’ He continues, [the patriarch figures] in the daily prayer of Muslims: “Bless Muhammad and his people as you have blessed Abraham and his people. Abraham [is] the founder of Muslims (Q 22:77)” Muhammad did not lay claim to the sanctity of Moses nor the divinity of Jesus, and seems to be confident before all else in the intercession of his great ancestor, Abraham, to obtain from God the salvation of his people ... “for them, Abraham had revealed the truth (and the 40 *abdal*⁴ ‘through whom God protects the inhabitants of the earth’), have in their hearts the same faith of Abraham”: hadith of Ibn Mas‘ud, according to Tabarani.”⁵

Les Trois Prières d’Abraham has appeared in several recensions. These essays are fruit of a lifetime of reflection, study and prayer around the encounter and conversation between God and Abraham, particularly the episodes at Mamre, the visit of the strangers, followed by the prayer for Sodom; at Beersheba, the dismissal of Hagar and Ishmael, the first-born; at Moriah where Abraham responds to the call to offer Isaac as sacrifice. Massignon reads the texts of Genesis and the relevant *suras* of the Qur’an. In what can be described as a torrent of erudition, there emerges a vision of salvation history, the encounter of God with his human creation through his chosen interlocutors, his prophets, his messengers, drawn from these foundational exchanges which fix Abraham as the ‘father of all the faithful’.

As Mary Louise Gude observes: ‘Abraham was the first and pivotal figure in the long line which Massignon singled out after Hallaj, and the patriarch came to exemplify for him not only the earliest link between Christianity and Islam but also the notions of mystical substitution, hospitality, and compassion.’ Gude offers a useful summary of Massignon’s reading: ‘The three monotheistic religious traditions trace their beginnings to the story of God’s revelation to Abraham in the Bible and the Qur’an. Muhammad taught that just as the Jewish people traced their lineage through Isaac to Abraham, now the Arabs could claim divine favour through Ismael, Abraham’s son by Hagar, the slave-girl. Before sending the mother and the child off to the desert at his wife Sarah’s request, Abraham had blessed the child. For Muslims, the revelation to Muhammad and subsequent rise of Islam fulfilled a more ancient divine promise than the one made

4 An important group of God’s saints. [Eds]

5 Massignon, *Les Trois Prières d’Abraham*, pp. 65–68.

to Isaac because, although Judaism was blessed through Isaac, Ismael, as Abraham's first-born, was blessed first. Since Abraham was central to divine revelation in all three faiths, he constituted a bridge between them. Moreover, since the patriarch is portrayed as having a direct experience of God, Massignon felt a kinship with him because of his own mystical experience of conversion. Finally, the Genesis account of Abraham's relation with God illustrated Massignon's concept of hospitality, and intercession on behalf of others In Massignon's interpretation Islam signified—six hundred years [after Christ]—the 'mysterious resurgence of the patriarchal cult prior to the Mosaic Decalogue and the Beatitudes' or again, 'a mysterious response of grace to the prayer of Abraham for Ismael and the Arabs'. Within this context the Qur'an is related to the Bible in a way analogous to the relationship between Ismael and Isaac. Abraham blessed both his sons. The existence of the Qur'an testifies that his blessing of Ismael was realized through Muhammad just as Christ fulfils the blessing of Isaac.⁶

The most intriguing aspect of the *Trois Prières* corpus is the discovery of the answers to Abraham's prayers. There is no doubt in Massignon that the answer to the 'prayer' for Hagar and Ismael is Islam itself; and while it is true that 'Christ fulfils the prayer over Isaac', the manner of God's answer is a particular focus of Massignon's attention. The closing section of the 1962 version of 'Three Prayers' has a very poignant coda:

In the final analysis, Abraham prayed that the social contract, the foundation of the city, shall be pure; that contending parties shall aim for a fraternal peace; that the clergy shall be holy; and these three Prayers, at Mamre, Beersheba, and Moriah are but one, and the third is the seal upon the others. A daughter of Abraham has come. The evil City refused hospitality to angel strangers, She has welcomed the Holy Spirit, Love, of whom one does not ask 'why' or 'how'. The tribe of Ismael has chosen to make war in the name of a transcendence whose peace passes all understanding, She has received the salvation of that Peace. Israel is still not resigned to hold deep in its heart the extraordinary burden of the catastrophes

6 Marie Louise Gude, *The Crucible of Compassion*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1996, pp. 117-18.

which are remembered in the trials and privations which fill out her life story (*liturgie*). She has, from the first, accepted to be under suspicion of secret betrothal, to be slandered by her neighbours, registered as an adulteress in the family rolls of her birthplace, and doubted (or unknown) for nearly two thousand years by her people, whom she loves eternally, because she has disclosed, in order to save them, the secret vow of an immaculate heart, that which for Abraham, is even more than his offering of Isaac. For she has thus offered for Israel the very root of God's justification through her sole perfect creation, in a spiritual sacrifice unimagined by the angels.

She is also the true Holy Land, being the virgin 'clay' predestined, redeemed in the most sublime way, where all the elect, including their Head, are conceived. It is indeed She who draws ... all pilgrims seeking justice to the high places of Palestine—Jew, Christian, Muslim whether they know it or not, even the latter. Just like Abraham, those who have left homelands and become wanderers find in the Holy Land their place of election, and it is the last place on earth where one can send 'displaced' persons into exile, without committing injustice.⁷

'A daughter of Abraham has come' is the key to this reading of Mary, mother of Jesus; a reading drawn from Massignon's very particular engagement with all three bodies of tradition—Jewish, Christian and Muslim. All of the traditions are read through the call and response of Abraham, the first and archetypal 'servant of God'.

Louis Massignon is credited with coining the idea of 'Abrahamic faiths'. In the discussion about Christian-Muslim relations his citing of Muhammad's claiming of the inheritance of Abraham becomes the cornerstone. He is also cited as a primary influence on the changing attitudes of the Catholic Church towards Islam. The Vatican II document *Nostra Aetate*, 1965, with its emphasis on what is viewed in common between the two traditions, calls for co-operation particularly in the field of social justice and in moral debate. The latter is very much

7 Massignon, *Les Trois Prières d'Abraham*, p. 145.

in line with Massignon's own thinking and practice, but *Nostra Aetate* does not give the place to Abraham that he would. Nevertheless, in subsequent discourse and conversation the common ancestry features prominently. Thomas Michel SJ has analysed the addresses and speeches of Pope John Paul II when speaking to Muslims or about Islam. Michel offers this summary:

An important element in the faith of Christians and Muslims which unites them with their Jewish brothers, is their spiritual attachment to Abraham. For both, he is the model of faith, submission to His will, and confidence in His goodness. He is the archetype of migrant believers, who bring their faith and worship to distant lands.⁸

This recognition would surely delight the teacher and friend of Muslims, and the follower of Abraham. The 'archetype of migrant believers' is a particularly Massignonian trope.

A common 'spiritual attachment' would not be sufficient for Louis Massignon. There are two distinctive features of the Abraham narrative which dominate Massignon's understanding. The first is that there is direct communication between God and Abraham. It may not be 'face to face' as with Moses at Sinai, but throughout the stories of Abraham and Sarah, Hagar, Ismael, and Isaac there are moments of open conversation, dialogue, and of course negotiation. The call to all faithful people is initiated by God, and everything turns on the response. Abraham's response to the arrival of the three strangers while he is camped by the oaks of Mamre is formative for both Massignon's *mystique* and his *politique*. 'The hospitality of Abraham', wherein he is both host and guest, is not only about the reciprocity of God's relations with his chosen servant, but is also to characterize humanity's dealings with each other. In Massignon hospitality becomes a touchstone spiritual discipline, one that he profoundly believed he had learned from his contacts with Muslim friends at the time of his spiritual crisis and conversion during an expedition to Mesopotamia in 1908. It is, however, a discipline sustained by his attachment to the story and the example of Abraham. His attachment comes close to

8 Thomas Michel SJ, 'Pope John Paul II's Teaching about Islam', *Seminarium*, 'Ioannes Paulus II et Islamismus', Nova Series, vol. XXVI, 1986, no. 1, 73-82.

self-identification with the father of all the faithful: when he joins the Franciscan Third Order in 1931 he takes the name ‘Ibrahim’, in the Arabic form, and later when, in 1950, he is ordained to the Melkite priesthood, he asks to be known as ‘Fr Abraham’. In correspondence, especially in his letters to Mary Kahil, he frequently refers to himself as ‘Ibrahim’; but this is not to claim for himself the status of patriarch, but is simply taking the name of the most complete *serviteur de Dieu*, the obedient servant who hears and responds to God the Most High.

BAGHDAD

The second heading in the schema of prayer presented to Pope Pius, also has its connection to Abraham. It is from the region now known as Baghdad that Abraham left to begin his foundational journeys. In 1908 the city was the base for Massignon’s archaeological expedition, the community of friends deepening his encounter with Arab culture and Islamic faith. Most of all, Baghdad is the city of al-Hallaj, the site of his preaching and of his martyrdom; a place of pilgrimage for Massignon for all of his life. Among the most distinctive works of Massignon’s scholarship are his historical and geographical studies of 10th-century Baghdad, in the time of her glory. As Ian Latham notes in his illuminating essay,⁹ ‘these studies were not just scholarly works on a long-past civilisation.’ They were intended also to indicate

9 The author is much indebted to the study by Ian Latham, ‘The Conversion of Louis Massignon in Mesopotamia in 1908’, *Aram: Society for Syro-Mesopotamian Studies*, vol. 20 (2008), 245–267. Br Ian Latham, Little brothers of Jesus (LbJ), lived his vocation in awareness of the significance of the Catholic engagement with Islam and the Muslim world. He studied in France where he became acquainted with the circle of Louis Massignon, including Brother Louis Gardet, and lived for many years in Asia and the Middle East. He made a number of studies on Catholic encounters with Islam, including ‘Christian Prayer’ in *Catholics and Shi’a in Dialogue: Studies in Theology and Spirituality* (2004); ‘Charles de Foucauld (1898–1916): Silent witness for Jesus in the face of Islam’, in *Catholics in Interreligious Dialogue: Studies in Monasticism, Theology and Spirituality* (2006). His contributions to the *Living Stones Yearbook*: ‘Mary in the Qur’an and Islamic Tradition’ (2017–18), ‘Christian encounters with Islam in history and modern times: some Theological reflections’ (2015), ‘Islamic Belief and Practice’ (2020), ‘Louis Massignon and Iraq: Mysticism and Conversion in the Christian Encounter with Islam and the Muslim World’ (2021). Brother Ian was living in a community of followers of Charles de Foucauld, London, before he died in January 2007.

the ‘super-historical physiognomies’ of cities and communities that would inspire, and so give hope, to those living in the present. In this context, Massignon holds in mind two of the ancient names of Baghdad: ‘The God-given’ and ‘City of Peace’. In his prayer ‘Baghdad’ would stand for his intercession for the sustained holiness of Muslim culture and the fidelity to the calling of Islam. In the conversation, Pope Pius asks, ‘How long have you been a Muslim?’, the note says the reply was short: ‘I have been simply a sympathizer, having fallen into disbelief; I have not declared *shibada*.’ However Massignon was clearly upset by this challenge and later on he protests: ‘What did you mean to say, most Holy Father, in calling me “muslim”? To cause me distress’—‘On the contrary, I wanted to say that your name is linked to Islam, in the way that, as Manzoni has it, the name of St Charles Borromeo is linked to the plague of Milan, and his very name prompts love and respect for his charity.’¹⁰ Daniel Massignon adds a revealing footnote: ‘Here an incident occurred, that my father did not include in his record. He knelt before the Holy Father, who was surprised and said to him: “What are you doing? Please stand up, Mr. Massignon”—I will not stand up again, until you have answered my question, “What did you mean by saying ...?”’¹¹ Even allowing for the smooth, sharp wit of Pius, it must have been no small thing to have been linked with Borromeo, one of the heroes of the 19th-century Church. In a curious way it connects to Massignon’s view of the significance of holy people and places and the struggle to uphold hope and charity in times of deep distress. This servant of God was a perpetual pilgrim. He made thirteen visits to Jerusalem to walk and pray the Way of the Cross. He made the Abraham itinerary several times.

Daniel Massignon places an epigraph for his Foreword to the 1997 edition of the *Trois Prières*: ‘Hebron, I love to go there: it is the tomb of Abraham, the father of the faithful, Jews, Christians and Muslims, and he is also the first hero of hospitality, the right of asylum. I think that the problems at the beginning of humanity are also those of the end, especially the sacred character of the right of asylum and that of respect of the stranger (*l'étranger*).’ This was written in 1952 from the paper on ‘The West facing the East—Primacy of a

¹⁰ Massignon, *Les Trois Prières d'Abraham*, p. 192.

¹¹ Massignon, *Les Trois Prières d'Abraham*, p. 192, n. 2.

Cultural Solution’,¹² at a time when Massignon was deeply involved in campaigning for and supporting Palestinian refugees. Holy sites are not just way stations for the spiritual tourist, for Massignon they are places of refuge and reflection. For him encounter with the holy is to strengthen the pilgrim for active pursuit of healing and justice in a divided world.

OBLATION

As he tries to explain to the Holy Father, Massignon has a particular commitment in prayer: ‘Oblation—I explained: like in the daily office, *majorem hac dilectionem nemo habet ut animam suam ponat quis pro amicis suis*—Blessed.’¹³ Whether the Pope knew of the depth and range of his commitment to self-offering cannot be known, but in the next item on the schema he does effectively bless the work of the *Badaliya* begun in the same year, 1934.

Ian Latham offers insightful commentary¹⁴ on Massignon’s calling to ‘oblation’:

Before his conversion (though this was close and maybe germinating), he noted: ‘Woe to the one who has not flamed with the flame of enthusiasm since the clear dawn of youth ... as if one should gain the salvation of all lives, as if the ascension of justice and the destiny of the world depended on the efforts of one alone and should spring forth from one’s hands.’¹⁵

...

Massignon is quoting a page of his personal notebook, dated 30 October 1907, when he was preparing for his

12 Louis Massignon, ‘L’Occident devant l’Orient: Primitivité d’une solution culturelle (1952)’, *Politique Étrangère*, no. 4 (2006), 1033–1044. See also Fabio Petito, ‘In Defence of Dialogue of Civilizations: With a Brief Illustration of the Diverging Agreement between Edward Said and Louis Massignon’, *Millennium*, May 2011, vol. 39, no. 3, 759–79.

13 Massignon, *Les Trois Prières d’Abraham*, p. 192. [John 15.13: ‘Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.’]

14 Latham, ‘The Conversion of Louis Massignon in Mesopotamia in 1908’, pp. 261–262.

15 *Ibid.*

trip to Baghdad. So typical of Massignon—enthusiastic, extravagant, poetic, these lines foreshadow his great and maybe, dominant concept of ‘substitution’. This initial call ... became more explicit in hospital in Baghdad, recovering from the crisis of 3–4 May: ‘I must offer myself in the name of all to pay their debt together with mine.’ It was completed by a complimentary idea: ‘Then an intuition, on the mental horizon, of an effort of coordinated traction, drawing the whole world to God—a perception of the forward journey of the Church, lifting up all the good wills, together, towards God.’¹⁶

For Massignon, always, and increasingly, felt the urge to join the common effort of all humanity towards its final goal, and to give his life unreservedly for that end. The concept of ‘substitution’ summarised for him this intention, and will lead later to the founding of the *Badaliya* (Arabic for ‘substitution’). His specific desire was to express his human solidarity with his Muslim friends through the union of his life as ‘one’ with theirs, but with his own distinctive contribution as a Christian, through participation in the one redemptive sacrifice of Christ offered for all.¹⁷

Brother Ian himself prefers the idea of ‘solidarity’ to Massignon’s concept of ‘substitution’, but is aware of how Massignon came to his own expression: ‘He discovered Islam as a living faith through Hallaj and through his friends the Alusi, and this led him to the fullness of faith in Christ and the Catholic Church The originality of Massignon was to continue to penetrate Islam “from within” and as a “guest and friend”, and to see the Christian mystery through Islam, in particular through Hallaj. Did not Hallaj see himself as the “substitute” for his people, as the “intercessor” for Baghdad? And was not Hallaj a model of “compassion” and of “witness”?’¹⁸

‘Solidarity’ as suggested by Ian Latham tends away from the ‘mystique’ of Massignon’s approach, and fails to recognise an important

16 Ibid.

17 Latham, ‘The Conversion of Louis Massignon in Mesopotamia in 1908’, pp. 261–2.

18 Latham, ‘The Conversion of Louis Massignon in Mesopotamia in 1908’, p. 262.

source of his understanding and his practice. His concept does not originate with al-Hallaj. In her biography *Crucible of Compassion*, Mary Louise Gude, records an event at Christmas 1911: Louis Massignon made a solitary pilgrimage to the Alpine shrine of La Salette, where in 1846 the Virgin Mary had appeared to Melanie, a young shepherdess. The arduous winter ascent was undertaken in memory of J-K Huysmans, and on 24 December, Massignon made a vow to follow a life of prayer and substitution on the model advocated by the writer. Gude sees this vow as confirmation of the commitment made at the close of the spiritual crisis endured in May and June 1908: 'in Beirut, in the Church of St Joseph, on 28 June he decided to make the way of the Cross He glimpsed that through the crucible of his past he was called as a believer, "to complete with simple and clear faith the way of the cross for those who were unable to go right to the end by their own strength." This is the moment of vocation, pole vaulting the intensity of his crisis, he turns to a profound spiritual exercise which is inflected throughout his life by his preoccupation with substitution mystique.'¹⁹

The pilgrimage to La Salette in 'memory of Huysmans' was in part a recognition of the debt Massignon believed he owed to Huysmans. He had heard that the writer had prayed for him as he lay dying of a terrible cancer, in 1906; and Massignon lists Huysmans as among those who interceded for him during the most intense episodes of the crisis that brought him to 'fullness of faith'. Joris-Karl Huysmans figured among a circle of prominent men of letters in France who very publicly returned to the Catholic Church, and he was a friend of Massignon's father. During a visit to the author's home in 1900, when Louis is seventeen, 'among the topics touched upon was Huysman's biography of St Lydwine of Schiedam ... where he explores the belief that one could atone for the sins of others by offering up one's sufferings on their behalf.'²⁰ The theme became part of Massignon's own study. For his Licence de Lettres, in 1902, he wrote his dissertation on the 'Vocabulary of Love in *L'Astrée*', a 17th-century novel by Honoré d'Urfé. It included study of Meister Eckhart, Ruysbroek and St John of the Cross. It was as early as this that Massignon formed the view that 'where God is the beloved, the will is first propelled toward divine union not by impulse,

19 Gude, *The Crucible of Compassion*, p. 50.

20 Gude, *The Crucible of Compassion*, p. 57.

but by divine initiative.²¹ This is quite an insight from a nineteen-year old student, and is evidence of an opening to spiritual exploration in one who is becoming detached from his Catholic faith. It is clear that Huysman's remains an influence and an interlocutor during this period, and as Gude notes: 'It is [in the biography of Lydwine] that the "substitution mystique" that Massignon inherited from Huysmans can be summarized: "God calls certain persons to become substitutes for those whose evil lives wreak havoc in the world. Jesus was the first in the long line of *chosen substitutes* who accept suffering in atonement for human sin. Lydwine, who died in 1443 belongs to this *lineage of substitutes*, who continued Christ's *work of expiation*.'"²² Massignon undoubtedly amplifies his version of 'substitution' from his Islamic studies, particularly from the Sufi traditions relating to the *Abdal*, but Huysman's presentation of a Catholic version remains the bedrock. It is from here that Massignon takes the emphasis on 'sufferings', and this dimension of oblation is ever-present in his mind-set and in his writing and speaking.

There is another powerful influence on Massignon's spiritual and intellectual formation. The young scholar had been put in touch with Charles de Foucauld²³ by a mutual friend, Henri de Castries. De Castries had sent Foucauld, Massignon's research on Leo Africanus and his Geography of Morocco; he saw that they had much in common in their interest in the Muslim world and in the spiritual life. The 'brother in the desert' responded with a gracious letter of appreciation which arrived in early 1908. It included a remarkable

21 Gude, *The Crucible of Compassion*, p. 58.

22 Gude, *The Crucible of Compassion*, p. 59.

23 On the encounter between Massignon and De Foucauld, see Louis Massignon, 'An Entire Life with a Brother Who Set Out on the Desert: Charles de Foucauld', in *Testimonies and Reflections: Essays of Louis Massignon*, Herbert Mason (ed.), University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1989, 21-31; Hugues Didier, 'Louis Massignon et Charles de Foucauld', in *Louis Massignon et ses contemporains*, Jacques Keryell (ed.), Karthala, Paris, 2004, 93-110; Hugues Didier, 'Louis Massignon and Charles de Foucauld', *Aram*, vol. 20, 2008, 337-353; 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', PhD thesis, Heythrop College, University of London, 2012. Ian Latham, 'Charles de Foucauld (1898-1916): Silent witness for Jesus in the face of Islam', in *Catholics in Interreligious Dialogue: Studies in Monasticism, Theology and Spirituality*, A O'Mahony and Peter Bowe OSB (eds), Gracewing, Leominster, 2006, 47-70.

prayer and blessing: 'I offer to God my poor and unworthy prayers, asking him to bless you, to bless your works and your whole life.' Massignon recalled this prayer when he returned to Paris late in 1908 after the 'Visitation of the Stranger', in which Foucauld had appeared as one of the petitioners alongside, Huysmans, Hallaj and others. The two met at the Massignon family home in Paris in February 1909. A profound friendship and mentorship was formed; the conversation and correspondence brought up the prospect of joining de Foucauld at Tamanrasset. There Massignon could continue his sociological and linguistic research, and in a life of prayer, perhaps ordained privately to the priesthood, work out his religious vocation. The exploration of vocation was not concluded until Massignon's decision in 1913 to marry his cousin, Marcelle Dansaert-Testelin. The marriage was blessed by Père Daniel Fontaine, who had been Huysman's last confessor, on 27 February 1914 in Brussels. De Foucauld had confirmed him in this step, blessing the couple warmly: '... in marriage you will find la vie plus pure et la plus unie a Dieu ... to be the begetter of a family of blessed souls who will worship God—that is greatness, that is an admirable calling.' (Letters dated 13 and 30 September 1913) There was to be no shared life in the desert but de Foucauld had firmly established a model of sacrificial offering of Christian prayer for Muslims, lived within a Muslim milieu.

ANOTHER SOUL (MK)

MK is Mary Kahil.²⁴ Massignon explains to the Pope: 'as I have a Muslim godson, she has a Muslim goddaughter. She offers her life, as St Francis wished to do there (at Damietta).'

Louis Massignon and Mary Kahil met in Cairo; Louis was teaching at the University of Cairo, he had kept contact with his former lover Luis de Cuadra resident there and they frequented the cosmopolitan society of the city.

²⁴ Agnes Wilkins OSB, 'Mary Kahil and the Encounter Between Christianity and Islam', *The Downside Review*, 135 (3), 2017, 131-143.

On 11 December 1912, the Countess Hohenwaert, the Spanish wife of the Austrian consul, introduced Massignon to a wealthy young Egyptian woman of twenty-five, descended from a Catholic family which had come to Egypt in 1775. The daughter of a Syrian father and a German mother, she reflected in her background the polyglot nature of Cairo's upper-class society at the beginning of the century. Fluent in Arabic and educated in European schools, Mary Kahil was an accomplished young woman, at home both with the Egyptian court and the European diplomatic corps ... the two met frequently at the Countess's receptions and she knew Luis de Cuadra, 'a charming person, not good looking but so nice.' Massignon confided to Mary that he had offered himself to God in substitution for his friend, in order to bring about his return to the Catholic faith. Then Luis fell ill with typhus in February 1913 ... Massignon had asked Mary and she had agreed to join him and offer her life too in substitution for Cuadra's conversion; by her own account she was impelled less by the thought of ... conversion than by hopes for his recovery, 'at bottom it was rather that he might be cured' ... motivations differed, but their shared offering had taught them to pray together, and more than twenty years later that lesson would bear surprising fruit.²⁵

But at this time Massignon stopped seeing Mary 'for fear that she was becoming emotionally attached to him.' He was still in troubled uncertainty about his own personal path in life, but it is very significant that this is a first example of prayer of substitution on the Huysmans model.

Mary Kahil and Louis Massignon do not meet again for nearly twenty one years, and it is a very different person with whom she renews a friendship, and a spiritual companionship, which lasts for the rest of their lives. Kahil is generally under-represented in studies of Louis Massignon's life and work, and this may be because their very

²⁵ Gude, *The Crucible of Compassion*, pp. 78-9.

intimate exchanges in a voluminous correspondence (from 1934 until Louis' death in 1962) reveal the persistent internal strife in Massignon's reflection and self-examination. It is however granted to her that she was the prime mover in bringing Massignon to ordination in the Greek Catholic Melkite priesthood, in Cairo in the church of Sainte Marie de la Paix, on 28 January 1950.

Their reunion in 1934 brought about a major turning point in Massignon's service of God through prayer. As Gude puts it:

Massignon and Kahil wished to ritualize their shared sense of commitment to Islam They did so in a place that epitomized how places and events converged for Massignon in an intricate pattern of symbol. On February 9th, 1934, they returned to the abandoned Franciscan church at Damietta made famous by the crusaders and by Francis of Assisi, who had offered to be tested by fire to prove the truth of Christianity to the Sultan. For Massignon that episode was linked to the encounter with the Christians of Najran, the *mubabala*²⁶ witnessed by Salman Pak (a Persian Christian who became a companion of the Prophet). In turn Salman was linked both to the long line of Muslim witnesses, the *isnad* who testify to the truth of an event and preserve its memory across generations, and the *Abdal* or substitutes, whose act of self-donation is salvific because their holy lives make reparation for others. At Damietta [they] vowed together to offer their lives for Muslims, 'not so they would be converted, but so that the will of God might be accomplished in them and through them'. This offering was termed *badaliya*, after the Arabic signifying 'to be in place of' or a substitute. It gave expression to Massignon's convictions about mystical substitution encountered first in Huysmans and echoed in the Muslim notion of the *Abdal*.²⁷

26 The event when God commanded Muhammad to call on the Christians of Najran to invoke God's curse upon those who are liars to determine who are truthful. [Eds]

27 Gude, *The Crucible of Compassion*, pp. 134-5.

All the elements of the ‘intricate pattern of symbol’ had been yielded by Massignon’s research into Islamic mysticism and his deepening engagement with the religious questions which it had provoked—the character and status of Islam, the entwining of the ‘Abrahamic’ traditions, the search for connections and for sources to prompt companionship and co-operation in place of enmity and conflict. The discovery of St Francis’s encounter with Sultan Malik had an outcome in his own life. In 1931 he was admitted to the Franciscan Third Order which provided him with a rule of life, a structure for his daily prayer and a means to focus his meditation, and wrestling with his personal vocation to prayer for ‘my brother muslims’. The vow and commitment made with Mary Kahil at Damietta eventually lead to the *Badaliya*, a ‘sodality of prayer’ whose members offered themselves in substitution for the salvation of the Muslim community. ‘Salvation did not necessarily mean exterior conversion,’ Massignon wrote in compiling the statutes for *Badaliya* in 1943, ‘It is already a great deal to obtain that a larger number belong to the soul of the Church, and live and die in a state of grace.’ It is profoundly moving that Massignon presents Mary Kahil, ‘another soul’ with whom and for whom he prays, to the Holy Father. On the very same evening of the interview, he writes to Mary that the Pope had approved their action, ‘he blessed by name our offering of Damietta.’

HALLAJ ... 10TH CENTURY

The final headline in the schema suggests that Massignon wants the Pope to confirm that Hallaj does indeed belong to the ‘soul of the Church’, and perhaps ought be added to the roll of Christian martyrs: ‘Hallaj ... 10th century: this is 3 centuries later [than the rise of Islam], there are other issues than at the beginning—a mystic, primarily ascetic; and not only his primacy in charity: I needed to add: ‘conformed to Christ even to the baptism of blood, joining him de jure to the Church’—Distractedly—it is blessed.’

The study of al-Hallaj first breaks surface in April 1907. Louis wrote to his father from Cairo: ‘I’m beginning to work fairly steadily ... on a critical study of the martyrdom of a 10th-century Baghdad mystic, about whom innumerable stupidities have been recounted.

In reality, he was such a noble character, and the account of his martyrdom has an intensity of colour and tragic movement that fires me with enthusiasm.²⁸ The colour and tragedy of the dramatic life and death of Husayn ibn-Mansur al-Hallaj (858–922 CE), had struck more than intellectual curiosity. A journal entry for 24 March 1907 notes a declaration of Hallaj: ‘Two prostrations: that’s enough for the prayer of desire—but the ablution that validates them must be made in blood,’ and records Massignon’s instinctive empathy with the mystic martyr of Baghdad. These early references to the al-Hallaj studies signal two central themes. The binding of prayer and suffering is found everywhere in Massignon’s thought, and his immersion in the world of al-Hallaj and his predecessors produced an expanded understanding of ‘substitution’. He was drawn to the mystic martyrs, ‘and their capacity to extract from the wells of their inner lives the means to “heal the pain of men’s hearts”, to dress the wounds of a community torn by the vices of unworthy members.’ Massignon adds, ‘The enduring power (of mysticism) is the superhuman desire for sacrifice for the sake of one’s brothers: in the martyr’s transcendent ecstasy sung by Hallaj: “Forgive them, and do not forgive me ... since You are consuming my humanity in your divinity, by what your divinity owes to my humanity, I ask you to be merciful to these, who have worked to bring about my death.”’ The second thema heralded in his letter to his father is that the scholar becomes Hallaj’s champion. A millennium after the martyr’s death, the French orientalist enters the list against all-comers: his contemporary critics and their successors in Islam, Muslim scholarship, and Christian scepticism, even unto the Pope in Rome.

The colour and drama of Hallaj’s life and death are fully described in the principal thesis ‘Passion of al-Hallaj’, presented at the Sorbonne in 1922. ‘Passion’ was accompanied by a complementary thesis—‘Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane’. Massignon himself, in a biographical essay, ‘Toute une vie’,²⁹ explains: ‘It was through Semitic philology that I was led to examine true mystical texts closely. Going from Hebrew to Arabic in order to study the Qur’an, I was surprised to see with what increasing clarity, the Semitic

28 Daniel Massignon, ‘Voyage en Mésopotamie et conversion de Louis Massignon en 1908’, *Islamochristiana*, 14 (1988), 127–199.

29 Louis Massignon, ‘Toute une vie avec un frère parti en désert’, *Parole donnée*, Paris, 1962, p. 71.

languages, Arabic above all, tended to distinguish religious revelation from poetic inspiration, prayer from poetry, mysticism from literature, through their mode of presentation.’

Using this sophisticated linguistic apparatus Massignon mines the ancient texts, many of which he has himself retrieved. The *Passion* and the *Essai* present a highly original history and critique of Sufi mysticism of the early Muslim centuries. Although al-Hallaj is the centre and focus of the study, Massignon also gives due notice to the developing tradition, from the ‘archetypal proto-Sufi’, al-Hasan al-Basri (642–728) onwards. He pays particular attention to al-Junayd who was one of Hallaj’s teachers. ‘Junayd was the first to embrace the problem of mystical union and to explain it correctly; he found the exact threshold of the operation of transcendence, the night of the will whose anguish Bistami had foreseen and whose trial Hallaj would undergo. [Junayd’s] *Dawa’ al-arnah* shows that some through the grace of loving preference of divine providence are invested with the very secret of revelation itself and are allowed an experimental taste of the prophetic vocation’s successive stages. In this short work, Junayd constructed the first dynamic synthesis of the Qu’ran conceived as a manual of ascension towards God which is precisely the theme of the *Wa-l-najm idha hawa*³⁰ of Hallaj.’ It is vital to Massignon’s championing of Sufi mysticism that the tradition is seen to be drawn out of the Qur’an. He is also intent upon describing ‘what is actually going on’ when the mystic embarks on his ascetic meditation. ‘The correct solution of the central problem, mystical union, is finally presented by Hallaj through a complex method defining it as an “intermittent identification” of subject and object. The identification is renewed only by a continual, affective exchanging of roles between the two, a vital alternation (like oscillation, pulsation, sensation, consciousness) that is imposed in superhuman, transcendent fashion on the heart of a given human subject, without ever achieving a permanence or a stable regularity during the subject’s mortal life.’³¹

30 Qur’an 53.1. [Eds]

31 Quotations from Louis Massignon, *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane*, Geuthner, 1922; Vrin, 1954; Vrin, Paris, 1968, trans. Benjamin Clark, *Essay on the origins of the technical language of Islamic mysticism*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1997.

Benjamin Clark in his Introduction to his translation of *Essai* notes the all important discovery in this research of the Sufi notion of *Abdal*, ‘the “apotropaic saints” are defenders from harm, protectors ready to be substituted for others and suffer in their place The doctrine of mystical substitution is at the heart of Massignon’s work. His discussion of Islam always returns to the voluntaristic mystics who put the possibility of providential benefit for the community and direct experience of God’s love before their own safety and personality.’³² Additions to the *Essai* extend the frame of reference to take in Massignon’s contact with Mahatma Gandhi with a discussion of Hinduism and Islamic mysticism.

[T]he social reform of the *satyagraha* (‘civil vindication of the truth through self-sacrifice’) now preached by a pure Hindu ascetic, Mohanlal Karamchand Gandhi, shows how close some kinds of Hinduism have come to a Muslim religious and mystical ideal: social action ... is directed towards ... our communal salvation; actions are founded on the dogma of the personal soul’s immortality, and the soul is devoted to a sort of spiritual ‘holy war’ through the fast and the practice of the sacrificial virtues accessible to illiterates.³³

‘Illiterates’ here refers to Gandhi’s ability to embrace the excluded—the untouchables—and to mobilise his social movement across all caste and communal barriers. Massignon was particularly supportive of the Mahatma’s commitment to the Muslim community. Al-Hallaj and Gandhi are prime examples of that spiritual heroism which insists that spiritual gifts are not to be locked away in an esoteric circle or held by a privileged elite. Louis Massignon’s study of Islamic mysticism generated a distinctive *politique*, which in his case had a particular address to his *frères musulmanes*.³⁴

32 Massignon, *Essay on the origins of the technical language of Islamic mysticism*, p. xxx. (Introduction by Benjamin Clark, xxi-xxxi.)

33 Massignon, *Essay on the origins of the technical language of Islamic mysticism*, p. 62.

34 On Massignon’s relations with Gandhi, see Christian Krokus, ‘Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism in Louis Massignon’s Appropriation of Gandhi as Modern Saint’, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, vol. 47, no. 4 (2012), 525-540. Krokus offers a wide ranging theological exploration of Louis Massignon’s life and thought in *The Theology*

Whether Pope Pius knew what he was blessing, distractedly, is open to question. The audience draws to a close with rapid exchanges about prayer for Muslims, prayer for homosexuals (refused by Pius), promptings for the beatification of Charles de Foucauld, a blessing for Louis' sick eldest son, and a blessing on Massignon for the way he has chosen. The very last word sees Massignon engaging the Holy Father about the struggles of North African workers in France.

The picture of the professor passionately engaging the Pope sticks in the mind; and there are so many images, in such a diversity of scenes. The solitary elderly gentleman walking from Baghdad airport to Hallaj's tomb; the French military attaché in Allenby's convoy at the entry to Jerusalem—he is seated next to Col. T E Lawrence in the fourth car. The scholar in deep conversation with Judah Magnes or Martin Buber, then returns to teach his Friday evening class in Paris for his North African neighbours. One day he is in discussion with King Faisal in Iraq, on another he is seated on the steps of the Paris mosque reading the Qur'an with the North African fruit sellers. The pilgrim travels to pray at a desecrated Muslim shrine with followers of Gandhi; on a balmy summer day he and his family join Muslim and Catholic friends at the Chapel of the Seven Sleepers in Brittany. The weary petitioner makes the way of the cross, alone, praying for the peace of Jerusalem, the frail protestor links arms with Jean-Paul Sartre and François Mauriac marching to demand justice and mercy from the French government.

Massignon's attachment to prayer of substitution puzzled his companions and his critics alike. But there is one story and image that perhaps illustrates his meaning: Massignon was not present for the massive demonstration of 17 October 1961. 20,000 peaceful demonstrators came by Metro to the centre of Paris. A ferocious attack by the police on the assembly resulted in 100 deaths, 11,000 arrests, and subsequently over a thousand deportations. Massignon learned that one of his night-school students was among those who had been killed. He travelled to the morgue, paying 20,000 francs to reclaim the body. He arranged and paid for a funeral, and accompanied the

of Louis Massignon: Islam, Christ, and the Church, Catholic University of America, 2017; 'Catholic Saints and Scholars: Nostra Aetate and Islam', in K C Ellis (ed.), *Nostra Aetate, Non-Christian Religions, and Interfaith Relations*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2021, 115-138.

family to the ceremonies in the Muslim cemetery. This is a simple act of solidarity and compassion, and it also signals a prophetic defiance of the depredations inflicted on his Muslim fellow citizens by the authorities. It stands too as a witness to the Franciscan notion that prayer is not just words.

For all his wisdom about mysticism, and his disciplined practice of prayer, Louis Massignon was not a mystic. His witness *can* be seen to be prophetic; his prayer and his teaching was consistently a call, especially to the sons and daughters of Abraham, to live out the gospel of love, in a careless world so much in need of it. Fr Abraham, the ‘muslim catholic’, responded again and again to the call he had received; in season and out of season this complex and frequently conflicted man pursued the simple service of God.

The ‘last words’ of Louis Massignon occur in the new preface for a revision of the *Passion of Al-Hallaj* (eventually published in 1975), written on the very day that he died, and the coda to *Les Trois Prières* (part of which is quoted above) also written in 1962 has a valedictory tone. But for today there is a resonant call to his companions in prayer.

In his last letter to the *Badaliya*, 1 June 1962, he wrote: ‘Let us not grow weary of repeating that we must pray *together* as Christians, Jews and Muslims for the coming of that Peace, so much desired and which has delayed so long.’³⁵

35 See my reflection, Richard Wheeler, ‘Louis Massignon and Al-Hallaj—an introduction to the life and thought of a twentieth century Mystic’, *Aram*, vol. 20, 2008, 221–243.

THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY:
A REFLECTION ON
THE MUSLIM MYSTICAL TRADITION
AND THE MODERN WEST'S RESPONSE

Leonard Harrow

The handiest of the marks by which I classify a state of mind as mystical is negative. The subject of it immediately says that it defies expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words. It follows from this that its quality must be directly experienced; it cannot be imparted or transferred to others.

(William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*)

This paper aims to present a discussion of Sufism in the light of its popular perception in the modern Western Christian world, and to review what sort of understanding that might be, whence it stems and how complete or otherwise that perspective might be. For this purpose we consider in particular the contributions of three important modern commentators—Louis Massignon, Henry Corbin and Seyyed Hossein Nasr. We also consider whether the modern presentation of Sufism has become part of a wider general discourse that is not always friendly towards the West. Christians need, we would suggest, a better grasp of the character of Sufism and its doctrinal truths in order to respond appropriately.

FRAMING THE QUESTION

Anyone with any familiarity of Muslim culture will know Sufism—mysticism in Muslim tradition—plays a vast part in popular, intellectual and literary tradition. This paper seeks to begin to understand how

it is received and understood particularly in the West in recent years and also among some contemporary Muslim thinkers.¹

The plan is to present some general thoughts and a perhaps presumptuous outline of the main elements in the mystical tradition in Islam as it appears to a Western audience. What we are trying to grope towards is an understanding of how the Western world's perception of this significant aspect of Muslim culture has been formed and is viewed, how modern Western interest in this dimension of the culture usually contrasts it to *salafi/jihādi* violence and other aspects of Islam that charitable Western commentators find it difficult to accommodate.

We need some consideration of the modern commentators who often are responsible for so much of our understanding of Sufism. In viewing famous Sufi personalities and their work mainly from the past, we find ourselves looking through the lens of modern scholars whose views themselves have now become part of the discourse.

No attempt is made here to evaluate the validity of Sufi ideas, to fathom any deep understanding of a boundless range of concepts, whenever and wherever they might be presented. Many modern thinkers will not regard mysticism as a valid subject of investigation for it cannot be evaluated or qualified. Much of its thinking is seen as tautology, metaphysics and thus unverifiable and logically of little value. Modern psychology will also have developed a range of views on the topic. Nor are we looking to understand the mind of God in adding such a dimension to the human experience. Not least, Sufism requires a guide and is closed to outsiders, although this has not deterred a huge body of commentary seeking to examine it.

A modern dimension, however, is exemplified by an article in the *New Yorker*,² indicating a fashionable aspect of Sufism among certain circles in America where Sufism is detached from Islam. 'Sufism' has become almost separated from its roots in the Muslim world. You do

1 This paper in part was originally based on Living Stones Theology Group meetings in the autumn of 2016 at Heythrop College and online 28 April 2022. I am deeply grateful for the help and comments of Anthony O'Mahony and Duncan Macpherson in preparing this paper.

The emphasis is on the Iranian world, whilst space and ignorance means we are unable to give appropriate attention to the rich Sufi traditions of North and sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

2 Rozina Ali, 'The Erasure of Islam from the Poetry of Rumi', *New Yorker*, 5 January 2017.

not have to be Muslim to be a Sufi, as the *New Yorker* article suggests. However, it would seem that Sufism has achieved a level of popularity in the West, at least among a section of its glitterati. Modern Western interest at a superficial level is too often a sort of intellectual 'tourism'.³ Is Rūmī really America's best-selling poet?⁴

Is it the undoubted literary merit of the poetry of many Sufi writers, and those who imitate their style, vocabulary and ideas, especially in the Persian language tradition, that attracts many in the West? A knowledge of the original language is, of course, an advantage. For the poetic medium so much of the beauty and euphony of the original is lost in any translation. Many translations of Persian poetry which seem to come from a mystical tradition say more about the translator than the original works. Admiration for, and appreciation of, a rich literary heritage, do not demand an intimate knowledge of or participation in any 'mystical' ideology or adherence to any particular religious tradition. Perhaps the very idea of the exotic, part of the mystery of the East, is sufficient attraction itself, demanding little understanding of the potential complexities of the ideas expressed and the historical context.

SOME GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Crudely we might describe Sufism as a system for its followers to approach the Divine, to become more God-like through its particular practices, demanding deep and powerful journeys into the world of a creative imagination. Nevertheless, any mystical experience is very much a personal one and thus no attempt to describe the indescribable can be successful. Every adept will have his (or her) personal experience and every group (as in the modern *ṭarīqa*) will have its own doctrine, its own system, to lead its followers towards its goals. Such knowledge needs the guidance of a shaiḫ/*pīr*. However, can there really be a

3 As noted by an eminent teacher of theology, when a student told him being a Sufi meant he could effectively come and go as it suited him (Revd Dr Duncan Macpherson, personal communication, 10 March 2020).

4 See Jane Ciabattari, art. 'Why is Rumi the best-selling poet in the US?', 21 October 2014, <<https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20140414-americas-best-selling-poet?ocid=ww.social.link.email>> [accessed 02/07/21].

meaningful discussion if much remains inaccessible to the uninitiated and to those on the outside?

Many of the ideas and the very aspirations of Sufism have their parallels in other religions. The common elements of this spirituality, however, seem to be absorbed at various times and places into a sort of theosophical amalgam which often has become quite fashionable. There has been a number of popular movements in the West in the last hundred years or so based on such ideas. Some of these movements have achieved notoriety rather than respect. Sufism seems often to be perceived in a Western situation as a miscegenation often with, or aspects, of *sophia perennis* ('perennial wisdom'), theosophy, traditionalism, mystical universalism and various shades of beliefs.

In Europe the growing Muslim communities in recent years have often meant that Sufi groups have been 'imported' with their traditions and often expanded within small groups of converts. Muslims, many with a Sufi tradition within their cultural experience, have an emphasis that is quite different from the rather somnolent and perhaps exclusive groups heretofore mainly based in academia and literary circles. The growing body of modern studies reflects this. Recent times have also seen an increase in relevant studies, especially among the social sciences and notably in the USA. Eminent Sufis in the West and their supporters also form an eloquent and persuasive group, making full use of techniques developing out of the digital revolution.

Is there a temptation in modern Western society merely to equate a deep personal piety with being a mystic?⁵ In popular English 'mystical' has almost come to be equated with 'mysterious', and can be heard used as such in common parlance. Within the root of the word 'mystical' lies the Greek root *μω*, meaning 'to conceal', inferring to being an initiate, i.e. privy to some secret knowledge. It is not helpful that in English usage 'mystic' and 'mysterious' have this classical origin deriving from the idea of something closed off, of privileged knowledge.

It is not without significance that the titles of many works in Sufi literature contain terms suggesting something 'concealed', even 'secret', for those who would seek it. Thus, among others, we find *Kashf al-*

5 I suspect that some topics around Sufism are familiar at fashionable dinner parties; we might note that Melvyn Bragg presented a programme, 'In Our Time. Rumi's Poetry', on BBC Radio 4, 11 February 2016.

Mahjūb, Asrār al-Tauḥīd, Asrār-nāmāb—‘The Unveiling of the Concealed’, ‘The Secrets of [Divine] Oneness’, ‘The Book of Secrets’

THE RECEIVED WISDOM AND SUNNI AND SHI‘AH CONTEXTS

Whilst Sufism is elusive in definition, it nevertheless regularly found and finds itself in conflict with Islam’s religious authorities.

Whilst few would contest that there is a mystery at the heart of traditional Christian liturgy, for Islam the case is not so straightforward. For it is stated that there is no mystery in the revealed text of the Qur’an, rather the Qur’an is *mubīn*, ‘clear’.⁶ Very soon, however, in the history of Islam there were those who began to seek through the sacred text deeper meanings as a way to understanding how to get closer to God.⁷ The easy presentation of Sufism as a readily accepted part of Islamic tradition is not always justified.⁸

The common narrative outlining the history of Sufism has a beginning in an ascetic, apocalyptic atmosphere, intoxicated with the fear and then love of God. Muslims in the 7th and 8th centuries AD were so fearful of God and the Last Judgement that they wished they had never been born, wept uncontrollably, and otherwise carried on as we seldom hear of in later centuries. The piety noted is intensely ascetical. The development of Sunni theology in the 9th century made it necessary to stress the prospect of salvation for all Muslims, and of a Sunni piety that eschewed extreme practices as unsuitable for everyone.⁹ Furthermore, the current common wisdom about the history

6 As in Qur’an 12.1, 15.1, 27.1, 28.1-2.

7 The usual term for Sufism is *taṣawwuf*, sometimes *ṣūfīyya*. The commonest etymology has the origin of the word in *ṣūf*, ‘wool’, referring to the simple woollen cloak of adepts.

8 Important modern authorities spend little time establishing and rigorously presenting the historical basis for their work. A quite different emphasis is found, for example, in Bruce Lawrence, ‘Sufism and neo-Sufism’, in R Hefner (ed.), *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 6, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 355ff, and, for a general review of the conflict with *salafī* thinking and that of some modern Muslim reformers, Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis: The Defence, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World*, Routledge & CRC Press, New York, 2013.

9 Christopher Melchert, ‘Exaggerated fear in the early Islamic Renunciant Tradition’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, Vol. 21, No. 3 (July 2011), 283-300.

of Sufism, that it developed out of the earlier renunciant tradition, seems confirmed by local schools and practices.¹⁰

Sufism begins to acquire among many adherents a more regular structure and doctrine from the 10th century AD with formal *ṭarīqas* ('paths' or 'ways', but often rendered as 'orders') and *kḥānaqāhs* ('convents'), around the teaching of a founding shaikh, the elaboration of belief systems and the construction of chains of authority. Doctrines are developed, formalised, and subsequently there are many elaborations.

Thus, the usual historical trajectory of Sufism is in three stages, each with a particular emphasis and much overlapping: an early period of asceticism, followed by intoxicants/ecstatics (with a 'sober' dimension)¹¹ and then, with the likely influence of Neoplatonist material becoming available, elaborate theories were developed notably culminating in the more formal doctrine of *wahdat al-wujūd* (often rendered as 'the unity of being/existence'), much influenced by Ibn 'Arabi.¹²

Competing arguments as to likely influences in the development of Sufism in Islam were a part of the development of oriental studies in the West. Sufism either owed much to Christian ascetic tradition, or to the Hindu/Persian tradition, or was an indigenous creation. With a certain amount of political correctness, the indigenous argument is popular today and owes much to the prestige of Louis Massignon as its major proponent (see below).¹³

10 Christopher Melchert, 'Khargūshī, *Tabdhāb al-asrār*', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 73, No. 1 (2010), 29–44.

11 For later developments, see for example, Soraya Khodamoradi, '*Ṭarīqah Muḥammadiyyah* as *Ṭarīqah Jāmi'ah*: Khawājah Mīr Dard's Experience Beyond *Jamāl* and *Jalāl*', *Islamic Studies* 51:4 (2012), 367–402; and for discussion of *sukr* ('intoxicated') and *ṣaḥw* ('sober'), see Jawid A Mojaddedi, 'Getting Drunk with Abu Yazid or Staying Sober with Junayd: The Creation of Popular Typology of Sufism', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 66 (2003), 1–13.

12 A summary of the main elements is found in David P Brewster, 'The Study of Sufism. Towards a Methodology', *Religion*, 6.1 (1976), 31–46, especially in his quotations from a paper by Robert Caspar ('La Mystique musulmane: Recherches et tendances', *IBLA: Revue de l'Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes*, Tunis No. 99, 1962, 271–89).

13 Miguel Asín Palacios SJ, in the introduction to his *Islam cristianizado. Estudio del sufismo a través de las obras de Abenárabi de Murcia*, Madrid, 1931, already argues for Sufism deriving from Christian monasticism.

By the end of the first millennium AD, a number of ‘manuals’ appear summarizing the doctrines of Sufism.¹⁴ As Sufi groups develop their own ‘paths’ they are concerned to develop their own *silsilas*, the chains of authority, for their *tariqas*, usually aiming to reach back to Muhammad, or ‘Alī or Ḥusain. Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (the sixth Shi‘ah Imām) is also a favourite for inclusion in any chain of authority. This apparent link with Shi‘ism probably reflects mainly an aspiration to authority through the holy family and ultimately to Muhammad, rather than any inclination towards Shi‘ism.

Popular Sufis, however, served as a brake, almost a mouthpiece for the weak and powerless, who were able to remonstrate before mighty despots etc. The patronage of political and military leaders was not uncommon. There are many anecdotes of Sufis speaking forthrightly, even rudely, to the great and powerful, rebuking them with their admonitions. The voice of the Sufi often stood for that of the unrepresented and voiceless in society, a role which might also be seen to fall to that of the ‘*ulamā*’ but who were perhaps too frequently themselves part of the establishment. The gap between those who hold power and those at the bottom of society rarely had other means of communication.

From the 12th century AD, within the turbulent politics of the time, Sufism assumed a growing role in the intellectual culture of the Islamic world. Often, but not always, circumstances led to the founder’s ideas being codified and available to later generations. Within the Persian context in particular, there is an apparent ease and spontaneity with which Sufi adepts are able to distil their thoughts and experiences in matchless poetry. And there is a lot of it, both poetry and prose.

The reaction of Sunni authorities to Sufi practices varied according to local circumstances but was often harsh whenever it seemed to deviate from orthodox ideas. Thus there was a cruel and violent end for many eminent masters/authorities, not least al-Ḥallāj and Suhrawardī.

14 See also Atif Khalil, ‘Abu Talib al-Makkī, The Nourishment of Hearts (*Qūt al-Qulūb*) in the Context of Early Sufism’, *The Muslim World*, 102/2, 2012, 335–56. For other early commentaries see Abū Naṣr ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Alī al-Sarrāj al-Tūsī, *Kitāb al-luma’ fi’l-taṣawwuf*, R A Nicholson (ed.), London, 1914, who died in 378/988 and Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhi, *The Doctrine of the Ṣūfīs (Kitāb al-ta’arruf li-madhbhab abl al-taṣawwuf)*, trans. A J Arberry, Cambridge, 1935, who died c. 380/990. The earliest manual in Persian is Alī Hujwiri, *Kashf Al Mahjūb. The Oldest Persian Treatise On Sufism*, R A Nicholson (ed.), London, new ed., 1936; Hujwiri is said to have died in 464/1072.

Opposition from conservative religious authorities arises mainly from where Sufis are clearly behaving in an unorthodox and often offensive way.¹⁵ The position of Sufism among the orthodox (itself a term of flexibility) varies with place and within time. We might recall the criticisms of Ibn Khaldūn (732/1332–808/1406);¹⁶ whilst Ibn Taimiyya (d. 728/1328) is often cited as a writer who is hostile to Sufism. However, Homerin, for example, comments he was not anti-Sufi as such.¹⁷ It is the dancing, singing and use of intoxicants that offend the orthodox, rather as modern music in the West is supposedly hostage to sex, drugs and rock and roll.¹⁸ The Egyptian historian Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442), himself a student of Ibn Khaldūn says in his *Khiṭāṭ* that Sufism had ‘degenerated to a worthless organization of ignorant adulterers, dupes and idiotic drunkards who loved songs, dancing and a lazy life under religious pretence.’¹⁹

By the beginning of the 12th century AD, and especially because of the importance of al-Ghazālī’s writings, philosophy in a speculative form was severely restricted because it clashed with traditional Islamic juridical views. With the triumph of the jurists it is almost as if the intellectual energy of a vast part of the Muslim world could only express itself in Sufism. The period also saw enormous political changes and this was a turbulent political background that was to get much worse. Whilst al-Ghazālī’s teaching argued the limitations of philosophy, it did accommodate Sufism.

15 For a review of how Sufis were perceived, see Lloyd Ridgeon, *Sufi Castigator: Ahmad Kasravi and the Iranian Mystical Tradition*, Routledge & CRC Press, <<https://www.routledge.com/Sufi-Castigator-Ahmad-Kasravi-and-the-Iranian-Mystical-Tradition/Ridgeon/p/book/9780415665131>> [accessed 07/06/21]. Much of this work focuses on the views of Ahmad Kasravi and his attacks on Sufism, notably in his *Šūfiyārī*, Tehran, 1322 sh. [1943].

16 For example, with customarily alacrity, Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimab*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 3 vols, London, 1958, vol. 3, section 16, 76–102. He often refers to the views of ‘recent Sufis’. See also, James Winston Morris, ‘An Arab Machiavelli? Rhetoric, Philosophy and Politics in Ibn Khaldun’s Critique of Sufism’, *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 8 (2009), 242–291.

17 Th E Homerin, ‘Ibn Taymiyah (d.1328), *Al-Sūfiyah wa al-fuqara*’ from his *Majmu’ fatawā*’, translation by Th E Homerin, ‘Ibn Taymiyya’s ‘Al-Sūfiyah wa al-fuqara’, *Arabica*, T. 32, Fasc. 2 (July 1985), 219–244.

18 See Morgan Clarke, ‘Cough Sweets and Angels: The Ordinary Ethics of the Extraordinary in Sufi Practice in Lebanon’, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (2014), 407–425, for accounts of some modern practices.

19 Cited in Sami Hamarneh, ‘Pharmacy in Medieval Islam and the History of Drug Addiction’, *Medical History*, vol. 16 (1972), 226–237, p. 233.

He argued that Sufism originated from the Qur'an and thus was compatible with mainstream Islamic thought, and did not in any way contradict Islamic law.²⁰

Learned jurists found obscure language and the interpretations by people who had no training in Islam led to doubts being cast over the validity of Sufism as a part of Islam. However, many Sufis did not submit to the control of the jurists. This was seen by the system, of course, as a threat to its authority. Such hostility was not just limited to Sunni jurists.

Within the Shi'ah intellectual world fluctuations in the views of Sufism are complex.²¹ However, it seems reasonable to argue that *'irfān* (gnosis in the sense of an immanent form of knowledge or transcendent insight) is part of traditional thinking. Shi'ah principles and gnosis are part of the teaching *apud* Mulla Sadra (d. 1640) which is received doctrine today.²² Yet Shi'ah thinking and Sufism are still open today to problems, especially around the *ṭarīqah* and its conflicting elements of primacy and loyalty.

There is a long narrative of the conflict, even competition, between Sufism and the Shi'a *ḥanẓa* (i.e. its religious establishments) etc.²³ The

20 In *Deliverance from Error*, he writes very openly of his own experiences and the evolution of his thinking. See al-Ghazālī, *Deliverance from Error* ('al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl'), trans. R J McCarthy, Boston, 1980, paras 80 to 85.

21 There is also a very old literary genre poking fun at Sufis which was also pursued during the Safavid period in Iran. See Sajjad Rizvi, 'Sayyid Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'iri and His Anthologies: Anti-Sufism, Shi'ism and Jokes in the Safavid World', *Die Welt des Islams*, 50.2 (2010), 224–42, <<https://doi.org/10.1163/157006010X514497>> [accessed 02/07/21].

22 Sajjad H Rizvi, 'Hikma muta'aliya in Qajar Iran: Locating the Life and Work of Mulla Hadi Sabzawari (d. 1289/1873)', *Iranian Studies* (2011), 44: 4, 473–496. See also Ahmad Ahmadi, 'Irfan and Tasawwuf (Sufism)', *Al-Tanbid*, vol. 1, no. 4 (1984), 63–76. For the 'classical' view of the great Shi'ah thinker and thereby much of the whole, subsequent Shi'ah tradition, see Said Rajaie Khorasaani, 'Mulla Sadra's Philosophy and Its Epistemological Implications', 1976, Thesis, Durham University, pp. 53–77. See also Alberto Tiburcio, *Muslim-Christian Polemics in Safavid Iran*, EUP, Edinburgh, <<https://edinburghuniversitypress.com/book-muslim-christian-polemics-in-safavid-iran.html>> [accessed 14/06/21]. and Michel Massouei, *The Origins of the Ṣafawids. Sī'ism, Ṣūfism and the Ġulāt* (Franz Steiner Verlag, Wiesbaden, 1972). However, the situation was not completely stable after Ṣadrā. Both popular Sufi preachers and 'highbrow' Sufis came under relentless pressure from Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (d. 1110/1699). Majlisī, a great authority on the *ḥadīths* of the Imams, was hostile to Sufism, which he believed did not follow closely enough the *sharī'ah*.

23 See especially Lewisohn on the modern situation: Leonard Lewisohn, 'An introduction to the history of modern Persian Sufism, Part I: The Ni'matullahi order: persecution, revival and schism', *BSOAS*, University of London, Vol. 61, No. 3 (1998), 437–464, and L Lewisohn, 'An introduction to the history of modern

traditional uneasy relationship between religious scholars and Sufism is also an important and much discussed aspect of the modern Shi'ite state of Iran. This is clear when discussion turns to the whole concept of *vilāyat-i faqih* ('government of the jurist') which is the intellectual basis for the Iranian Revolution of Khomeini.²⁴

The position of Ayatollah Khomeini in this respect has also been discussed at length. The model of Mulla Sadra, which influenced Khomeini, harks back to earlier Sufi teachings.²⁵ Khomeini occasionally mentioned the names of Sufis who stood outside any clear, strict Shi'ī tradition.²⁶ In its mature form the whole aura of secrecy, titles implying a secret knowledge only available to its initiates and the requirement for a guide has strong parallels with Shi'ism's spiritual guides (*marja'-i taqhd*).²⁷ Yet Sufism seeks to function outside the strictures of the formal teaching of the major divisions of Islam. For the Shi'ah in particular the ideas around the 'immaculate' nature of the Twelve Imāms and prominent family members provides a spiritual heritage, almost an immediate mystical dimension, that does not need the ideas that become familiar in many Sufi doctrines.

In general, where Sufis behaved appropriately, in many regions, criticism faded. Later, where Wahhabism, or *salafi*, views prevailed, Sufism was simply condemned in principle.²⁸

Persian Sufism, Part II: A socio-cultural profile of Sufism, from the Dhahabi revival to the present day', *BSOAS*, University of London, Vol. 62, No. 1 (1999), 36–59. Within Iran there are many local religious institutions, such as the Zūrkhāna, Futuwwa and Muḥarram/'Ashūra traditions, that have an important social function within Shi'a Iran and are often found associated with Sufi groups; see 'Zur-kāna' and 'Javānmardi', arts., *EIR*, online [accessed 09/04/20]; Lloyd Ridgeon, *Javanmardi: A Sufi Code of Honour*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2011, pp. 2, 7, 11 and 14. See also Leonard Lewisohn, 'Theoretical Extremes of the Study of Mystic Man in Modern Iran: Review Article', *Iranian Studies*, 42. 2 (2009), 285–310, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00210860902765067>> [accessed 02/07/21].

24 Abbas Amanat, 'From ijthad to wilayat-i faqih: The Evolving of the Shi'ite Legal Authority to Political Power', *Logos* 2. 3, Summer 2003, no pagination.

25 For example, Alexander Knysh, "'Irfan" Revisited: Khomeini and the Legacy of Islamic Mystical Philosophy', *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (Autumn 1992), 631–653, p. 635.

26 Khomeini frequently referred to his knowledge of Islamic esoteric philosophy. *Ibid.*, p. 651.

27 For a discussion of the development of Shi'a thought and Sufism in the Qajar period, see Sajjad Rizvi, 'Hikma muta'aliya in Qajar Iran: Locating the Life and Work of Mulla Hadi Sabzawari (d. 1289/1873)', *Iranian Studies* 44: 4 (2011), 473–96.

28 Hamid Algar, 'Impostors, Antinomians and Pseudo-Sufis: Cataloguing the

OF THOSE WHO WOULD SERVE
FOR OTHERS TO FOLLOW

In general, in the last hundred years, the narrative of Sufism for a Western audience has become dominated by scholarship of the likes of Louis Massignon (1883–1962), Henry Corbin (1903–78) in both of whom we might characterise the ‘francophone’ approach, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr (b. 1933), with an emphasis on the interpretation of theoretical texts. These three scholars are the focus of our attention here. The anglophone orientalist aspect, exemplified by E G Browne, R A Nicholson and A J Arberry was traditionally one dominated by a literary filter.

Massignon’s magisterial works on al-Ḥallāj (c. 858–922) in particular have been considered of inestimable importance for understanding the path of Sufism and the intellectual ferment of the period which formed the basis for his own religious writings. Likewise, Henry Corbin and Seyyed Hossein Nasr have made a colossal contribution to the study of Sufism through their work on Ibn ‘Arabī and Suhrawardī and the relationship of the mystical tradition in Iran and traditional Twelver Shi‘ism. However, has their dominance dampened alternative views? Has it obscured in Western eyes what most Muslims would recognise as their ‘mystical’ tradition?

We do, however, need to be aware that some Sufi groups are more prominent than others and enjoy a pre-eminence not least because they have some very articulate and persuasive spokesmen. The ‘secretive’, ‘clubby’ nature of many groups means they operate quietly, developing influence to help and promote each other and their ideas. As we have noted there is the constant theme of the Sufi shaikh as guardian of a secret knowledge, the gatekeeper to the Divine, which is denied to the majority by choice or circumstance.

The work of Louis Massignon (1883–1962) on al-Ḥallāj is intimidating by its erudition. However, it is presented in several parts over a period of time, and it is not an easy work for the student to use.²⁹ It is so dominant in the field that it is now perhaps one of

Misceants’, *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Volume 29, Issue 1, January 2018, 25–47.

²⁹ Thus *La Passion de Husayn Ibn Mansūr Hallāj: martyr mystique de l’Islam, exécuté à Bagdad le 26 mars 922: étude d’histoire religieuse* (*The passion of al-Ḥallāj: mystic and martyr of Islam*), 25 editions published between 1922 and 2010 in French and English, and *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane* (*Essay on the origins of the*

those works most cited and least read. Massignon's own career was most unusual and his personality and influence have been subject to criticism. We might note especially the views of Robert Irwin. In his riposte to Edward Said's *Orientalism, For Lust of Knowing*, Irwin has a section called 'The Holy Madman—Massignon' with some interesting, unambiguous, and perhaps jaundiced views of Massignon's personality as well as his scholarship. In 1919 Massignon was appointed to a post at Collège de France. It was here that he produced *La Passion* etc. in 1925: '... a weird book by a weird man about another weird man' but he cast his net widely to make up for some deficiencies in original contemporary material. Al-Ḥallāj, 'a heterodox and marginal figure', was seen by Massignon as a figure of the crucifixion, offering his life for others in an 'act of mystical substitution'. This doctrine Massignon came to develop into the idea of *badalīyya*, 'substitution'. He worked to establish the Qur'anic basis for Sufism. He disliked the Shi'ah as, he believed, they were responsible for al-Ḥallāj's death.³⁰ He was a promoter of the idea of the Abrahamic faiths and his views as a religious thinker are thought to have influenced greatly Catholic thinking about Islam at Vatican II and in *Nostra aetate*.³¹ History must decide whether that was a good thing. 'His history of Islam was permeated by esoteric and Christological themes that only he and his disciples found in that history.'³²

technical language of Islamic mysticism), 73 editions published between 1922 and 2003 in 5 languages.

- 30 Al-Ṭabarī mentioned the death of al-Ḥallāj in his *Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk* ('History of the Prophets and Kings'), Arabic text, Tertia series, vol. 4, ed. M J de Goeje, Leiden, 1890, text p. 2289, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, Eng. vol. 38, ed. F Rosenthal, Albany, 1985, p. 199. The events are mentioned for the year 301/913-14, occupying some dozen or so lines in the English translation. See also L Massignon, *La Passion ...*, vol. 1, Paris, 1922, p. 17. Al-Ṭabarī calls al-Ḥallāj a *musha'widh*, 'prestidigitator, conjurer'.
- 31 See, for example, Christian S Krokus, 'Catholic Saints and Scholars: *Nostra Aetate* and Islam', in K C Ellis (ed.), *Nostra Aetate, Non-Christian Religions, and Interfaith Relations*, London, 2020, 115-137, Christian S Krokus, 'Louis Massignon's influence on the teaching of Vatican II on Muslims and Islam, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 23:3 (2012), 329-345, Christian S Krokus, 'Louis Massignon: Vatican II and Beyond', *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, Vol. 55 (2014), Nos. 3-4, 433-450, and Anthony O'Mahony, 'Louis Massignon: A Catholic encounter with Islam and the Middle East', in Katherine Davies and Toby Garfitt (eds), *God's Mirror. Renewal and Engagement in French Catholic Intellectual Culture in the Mid-Twentieth Century*, New York, 2015, 231-251.
- 32 Robert Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing*, London, 2007, pp. 220-29, 'The Holy Madman—

Irwin is of course responding to Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Said's own view on Massignon and his influence are more measured. His influence on the West's understanding or otherwise of Sufism is not Said's primary concern. He acknowledges Massignon is 'willing to cross disciplinary and traditional boundaries in order to penetrate to the human heart of any text', his great scholarship and the study of the figure of al-Hallaj, in whose mysticism was embodied 'a road to divine grace'. Said is aware that Massignon appreciated his material needed 'complex reading'. He is also sympathetic to Massignon's disenchantment with the colonialist venture. He sees Massignon as an outsider and often a man with unorthodox views of Islam.³³ Said does not quite view him as the 'Holy Madman' of Irwin.

Henry Corbin (1903–78) had been renowned for his studies on Heidegger, at whose feet he sat in the 1930s in the *Hitlerzeit* and whose work he translated into French. Stranded in Istanbul during the war he began his studies into Islam and its mystical traditions. In later years he became a revered scholar and visitor at the Imperial Academy of Philosophy in Tehran, where Seyyed Hossein Nasr was the director and with whom he interacted extensively.³⁴ His major works concern Suhrawardī (1154–1191 AD), Ibn 'Arabī (1165–1240 AD), and, in *En Islam iranien*, the development of philosophy particularly in the Safavid period in Shi'ah Iran.

In trying to understand what a Western audience is likely to be presented with and understand, with regard to the Sufi tradition, the complexity of Corbin's writing is often an obstacle. Corbin's work assumes a level of familiarity with philosophy and an esoteric terminology which will not be part of most people's reading. To understand him almost demands being on the inside.

The stress put on the importance of Suhrawardī and his 'school' by Corbin and his followers has, in the view of some scholars, been symptomatic of serious repercussions and has resulted in some long-term effects in the whole intellectual atmosphere of Islamic studies. Is

Massignon'. Irwin is also unambiguously critical of Seyyed Hossein Nasr. *Ibid.*, p. 316. He has nothing to say, however, about Corbin who is also outside Said's remit.

33 Edward Said, *Orientalism*, London, 1985, see especially pp. 267–68 and 275.

34 See Mona Abaza, 'A Note on Henry Corbin and Seyyed Hossein Nasr: Affinities and Differences', *The Muslim World* 90, Spring 2000, 91–107.

the work of Suhrawardī as presented primarily an aspect of Sufism or is it theosophy in the guise of philosophy?

With Suhrawardī comes Corbin's path onto the thinking of Ibn 'Arabī and many Neoplatonic ideas³⁵ and associated exotic concepts, including Hermeticism (Hermes Trismegistus/Thoth), magic and astrology. The change in emphasis reflects also a turning point in modern studies and among supporters/adherents, as well as significant shifts in what Sufism meant: thus asceticism/repentance/annihilation/intoxicants, is followed by *waḥdat al-wujūd*, a disputed tendency towards pantheism (often deriving from Greek thought transmitted in the 9th century)³⁶ and the influence of Egypt and Sabians. This is later elaborated with structured doctrines owing much via Suhrawardī to Ibn 'Arabī and his commentators and disciples and subsequent developments, and for Corbin and colleagues an enduring connection with the Shi'ah, which is seen to have developed later. Although less indebted to the esoteric than Nasr but greatly interested in gnosis, alchemy and the visionary, Corbin's ideas do throw up many problems. He relegates philosophy to a non-rational interpretation, where Islam's philosophers are reduced to the worth of mystical insights and where irrefutable symbols go beyond any method of critical thinking.³⁷ The fusion of theosophy and mysticism championed by Corbin, and also Seyyed Hossein Nasr, meets unambiguous criticism, for example, by Mohamad-Rézâ Fashahi.³⁸

35 Neoplatonism's mystical perspectives in Plotinus' system are attractive to Sufism. Various Arabic scholars and philosophers, including Avicenna (Ibn Sina), Ibn 'Arabī, al-Kindī, al-Fārābī, and al-Himsī, are held to have adapted Neoplatonism to conform to the monotheistic constraints of Islam. However, see also Jaafar Sheikh Idris, 'Is Man the Vicegerent of God?', *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 1.1 (1990), 99–110, <<https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/1.1.99>> [accessed 02/07/21], for an orthodox view which does point out that many Muslims reject the ideas of Ibn 'Arabī.

36 See Richard Walzer, *Greek into Arabic. Essays on Islamic Philosophy*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass., 1962, pp. 2–10. Also see Ian Richard Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists: An Introduction to the Thought of the Brethren of Purity (Iḳwān al-Ṣafā')*, Islamic Surveys 19, Edinburgh, 1991, and Ian Richard Netton, *Islam, Christianity and the Mystic Journey*, Edinburgh, 2011, and *Islam, Christianity and Tradition. A Comparative Exploration*, Edinburgh, 2006.

37 See Ahmad Bostani, 'Henry Corbin's Oriental Philosophy and Iranian Nativist Ideologies', *Religions*, 12.11 (2021), 997, <<https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12110997>> [accessed 02/07/21], pp. 4, 5, and Mona Abaza, 'A Note on Henry Corbin and Seyyed Hossein Nasr: Affinities and Differences', *The Muslim World*, vol. 90, Spring 2000, 91–107.

38 Mohamad-Rézâ Fashahi, *Aristote de Bagdad, De la raison grecque à la révélation coranique*,

Along with Massignon, Corbin now forms a part of a French intellectual industry with organisations dedicated to his work and ideas. However, for all his work and studies advocating Sufism and Shi'ism as he understood it, after so many years, Corbin was not and never was a Muslim. This is noted by Nasr.³⁹ Indeed, within French intellectual circles Corbin is almost seem as a Protestant 'saint' and spoken of in almost hagiographical terms.⁴⁰ Paul Nwiya, in an obituary on Corbin comments: 'Et c'est pourquoi, tandis qu'au début de sa carrière et de son enseignement, H Corbin parlait DE la théosophie ésotériste, peu à peu il en vint à parler EN ésotériste théosophe pour qui tous les «Fidèles d'amour» de toutes les contrées spirituelles constituent une seule famille. Rassembler une telle famille, faire en sorte que ses membres, en Orient et en Occident, se reconnaissent frères dans le même idéal et le même besoin d'un «monde imaginal» supra-sensible—au-delà des «institutions» et des «églises» pour lesquelles il se montrait, à notre sens, trop injuste et manquait de ce «comprendre» qu'il reprochait à Massignon de ne pas avoir eu à l'égard du chi'isme—telle était sa préoccupation majeure, et son impatience était grande de voir son «utopie» réalisée.'⁴¹

Paris, 1995, pp. 33, and 62, 69, 70, 79–80 (note 1), the last mentioned alluding to some scruffy scholarship on the part of Corbin and Nasr.

39 See Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, *In search of the sacred : a conversation with Seyyed Hossein Nasr on his life and thought / Seyyed Hossein Nasr with Ramin Jabanbegloo*, Santa Barbara, 2010, p. 98. Nasr never saw Corbin in any way praying or behaving as a Muslim at prayer.

40 See Jean Brun, 'Un missionnaire protestant: Henry Corbin', *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses*, 59e année n° 2, 1979, 187–200. Also, Hermann Landolt, 'Henry Corbin, 1903–1978: Between Philosophy and Orientalism', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 119, 3 (1999), 484–90.

41 Paul Nwiya, 'Henry Corbin (1903–1978)', *École pratique des hautes études, Section des sciences religieuses. Annuaire*, vol. 87, 1978–1979, 1978, pp. 46–47. Is Corbin's interest in freemasonry (rather complicated and unhappy? And an interest he shared with René Guénon) and Crusader orders a distraction or merely indicative of his lifelong interest in any thinking that involves symbolism? See also Maria E Subtelny, 'History and Religion: The Fallacy of Metaphysical Questions' (a review article of Steven M Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion by Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos*), *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (March 2003), 91–101. See also J A Clergue, 'En Quête de Henry Corbin Franc-Maçon chevaleresque (Deuxième partie)', *L'Initiation* 2/2009, 245–73. For further examples of Corbin's eclecticism, see Hadi Fakhoury, 'Henry Corbin and Russian Religious Thought. Part I: Early Encounters', *Dionysius*, Vol. XXXII, December 2014, 173–218, and 'Henry Corbin and Russian Religious Thought. Part II: Themes and Variations', *Dionysius*, Vol. XXXIII, December 2015, 223–75. '... Corbin affirmed an ecumenical vision embracing gnostics of all times and places, bypassing the official boundaries of established confessions' (Part I, p. 202).

There is no basis to the claim that Corbin was anything but a Protestant; indeed, we know the details he specified for his own funeral service at the Église de l'Oratoire in Paris.⁴²

It is Seyyed Hossein Nasr (b. 1933) who almost sets the agenda for the modern Western response to Sufism. Nasr, alongside whom Corbin frequently worked, remains a renowned writer on Sufism and the intellectual and traditional scientific history of Islam. A Sufi shaiikh, former chancellor of Aryamehr University in Tehran, director of the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, effectively in exile after the revolution in Iran, Nasr has been a professor at universities in America. He was close to the shah, the empress and the court, especially in the shah's final days before exile.⁴³ His deep piety and Sufism (which also is reflected in his views on traditionalism and pluralism) seem to be only a little behind his love of country.

Nasr is responsible for over one hundred books. Many of the books, especially where similar themes are seemingly clustered together in terms of date of publication, as in 1997 or 1987–89, might be reworkings for revised editions etc. Even if such a figure is a close approximation this still suggest a considerable output by any standard. We might note, however, that Nasr, apart from his seminal work on cosmological doctrines (the core of his PhD thesis, published in Persian in 1963 and in English in 1964), and *Science and Civilization in Islam*, in Persian translation in 1971 but in English three years earlier in 1968 (Harvard University Press), saw his main publications only appear in Persian from the mid-1990s onwards. This was often some years after a first publication in English. Also works by Nasr in Persian following publication in English are third party translations, notably by Insh'allāh Raḥmatī, who is the translator of six of the books by Nasr available in Persian. He rarely translates his own work into his mother tongue.⁴⁴

42 Ibid., p. 198, n. 33.

43 See Amir Aşlān Afshār with 'Alī Mīr Fiṭrūs, *Khāṭirat-i Duktar Amīr Aşlān Afshār*, Montreal, 2012, pp. 461, 479–81.

44 The bibliographical references for Seyyed Hossein Nasr taken from WorldCat (<www.worldcat.org, November 2021> [accessed 30/11/21]), which though not perfect in its detail or complete, is likely to be indicative of the quantity of Dr Nasr's work, total 443 book references. The period covered is 1960 to 2018. However, many of these are duplicate entries reflecting different editions of the same work and also translations and joint-author publications. When these are removed the

It seems Nasr's primary audience is in the West—if his publications list is any sort of guide. He writes mainly in English. He himself chooses to live outside the Islamic world and he has now spent most of his life in the land of the 'Great Satan'.

He is described as a 'philosopher' but will this really bear scrutiny? His thinking will always lead to his 'preordained' conclusions, i.e., everything of any substance will only be relevant in a Sufi/Shi'a configuration. His arguments will take him only where he wants to go. Is Nasr better described as a 'religious thinker' rather than as a philosopher?

His views are far from being widely accepted among Muslims and thinkers in general and often more hostile responses to his work are found in Iran.⁴⁵ His Sufism for some is somewhat exclusive and owes much to the teachings of Ibn 'Arabi. Nasr remains one of the great modern proponents and exponents of *wahdat al-wujūd* in the West and in the thinking of other Sufis and commentators, albeit compounded by the complexity of their relationship with Shi'ism⁴⁶ and the context of the Iranian tradition where they worked.⁴⁷

total of 'original' books published by Nasr is 113.

45 See, for example, Mohammed Ghomi Oveli, 'Bar-rasī va naqd-i didgāh-hā-yi duktur Sayyid Ḥusain Naṣr dar zamīna-yi 'ilm-i islāmī', *Asfar*, Autumn and Winter 2018, no. 6, 187–210, and Muḥammad Nizhād-Īrān, 'Naqd-i māhiyyat-i salbī-yi sunnat-garā'i dar andīsha-yi Sayyid Ḥusain Naṣr', *Justārḥā-yi Falsafa-yi Dīn*, vol. 5, no. 1, Spring/Summer, 1395sh [2016], Anjuman-i 'ilmī-yi falsafa-yi dīn-i Īrān, 101–122.

46 Many modern writers within the Sufi tradition are anxious see its influence in all aspects of human endeavour. Thus Nader Ardalan and Laleh Bakhtiar, in *The Sense of Unity, The Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture*, Chicago, 1973, interpret the traditional architecture and forms of the Muslim world through the lens of Sufism and the ideas of Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Unfortunately, their arguments, however attractive, suffer from the fact that there is no contemporaneous historical, documentary support for such views. A further example of the eagerness of advocates of Sufism to see their ideas expressed in all artistic aspects of the Muslim world is the use of the poem by 'an unidentified Sufi poet' describing a carpet. K Schlamming and P L Wilson, *Persische Bildteppiche*, Munich, 1980 (also with English text facing), set much store by this supposed 'Ode to a Garden Carpet' (p. 140 *et seq.*). This poem appears in Vol. xiv of *A Survey of Persian Art*, part A, repr. Tokyo, 1967, pp. 3185–86. No source is given. The editor of the *Survey* is, of course, A U Pope. More attention should have been paid to the precise typography that the poem is by AN UNKNOWN SUFI POET. A U Pope always had a naughty sense of humour. See also Leonard Harrow, *From the Lands of Sultan and Shah*, London, 1987, p. 63, n. 89.

47 Wahyuddin Halim, 'The Complex Relationship Between Sufism and Shi'ism as Reflected in the Concept of *Walāyah*', *Kanẓ Philosophia* 73 Volume 5 Number 1 June, 2015, 73–87, p. 84, comments: 'Nasr argues Shi'ism is the origin of what later came

Sajjad Rizvi assesses the Nasr (and Corbin) approach as one which places ‘the significance of esoteric Shi‘ism in the School of Isfahan, a metaphysic of imamology and a form of Sufism that represented a continuity with the primordial spiritual traditions of Persia, and he noted the importance of Neoplatonism to the thought of the School.’⁴⁸ Nasr added the perennial philosophy to the study of the School of Isfahan, even though Corbin himself was averse to perennialism and traditionalism. He also insisted on the prophetic roots of the thought of the School of Isfahan. A common criticism of the School of Isfahan is the description of its philosophical tradition as theosophy, often mystifying and obscure. Another criticism is that it seems to essentialize the spiritual nature of Persia and to privilege esoteric Shi‘ism, whilst a third suggests ‘a tension and conflict between the practitioners of law and the spiritual and intellectual elite.’⁴⁹

Nasr is an advocate of *sophia perennis*/traditionalism and pluralism.⁵⁰ His association with other eminent, important and eloquent advocates, usually writing in English, includes among others, Frithjof Schuon, Titus Burckhardt, and Martin Lings (and René Guénon indirectly). They were all linked to the Shādhiliyyah *ṭarīqah* (of North African origins), or branches of it (or indeed formed their own branches, as did Schuon and Nasr). We might also note that only Nasr of this group was born into Islam and that none of them, notwithstanding Nasr’s virtual exile after the Iranian revolution, chose to end their days in a Muslim land.

The ills of the modern world in Nasr’s traditionalism are derived from modernism, the dominance of the West’s science and technology and their divorce from the spirituality and religion of Christian tradition. He shares with Corbin an ‘aversion to secularisation’.⁵¹ From this he derives the causes of modern ecological crises. His panacea is a return to the unity of religion and thinking as supposedly seen pre-

to be known as Sufism. He argues Shi‘ism, Sunnism, and Sufism within the Sunni world all derive their authority from the Prophet and Islamic revelation. Henry Corbin presents a different conclusion from Nasr’s in this respect. Corbin seems to understand the Sufism-Shi‘ism relationship as the ‘transposition’ of Shi‘ite concepts in Sufism.’

48 S Rizvi, art. ‘School of Isfahan’, *Encyclopedia Iranica* online [accessed 24/04/20].

49 Ibid.

50 *Sophia Perennis* was also the title of the journal of Nasr’s Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy in the 1970s.

51 Abaza, ‘A Note on Henry Corbin and Seyyed Hossein Nasr ...’, p. 102.

Renaissance in the West, anticipating the emergence of a new Islamic science restoring the unity of spirituality and knowledge.

The practical application of his solution is thin on detail. But he is not naïve and sees that time is needed to develop a new Islamic science to encompass the needs of mankind (which includes a return to metaphysics and teaching of the likes of Mullā Ṣadrā et al., which in his view accommodate Sufism and Shi'ism). Quite how piety and religiosity can reduce global warming or reduce levels of CO² is unclear.

His views criticising the West have become part of anti-Western polemics in Iran.⁵² Such attitudes preceded any post-colonial theory. Perhaps his views critical of the West, along with others (for example Corbin), are helping to provide an alternative intellectual basis which is perverted to support extremes of Muslim ideologies? However, his Sufi and Shi'a credentials would not endear him to many extremist groupings, notably *salafīs* etc.

What is also not clear is Nasr's understanding of Christianity. He hardly seems to be aware of the rich local Christian traditions of the Middle East, including Iran. Is Nasr's experience of Christianity that of an American 'evangelical'?⁵³ Or is his knowledge of Christian tradition even informed by Corbin's Protestantism?

Many contemporary Iranian scholars often see some of his views as sterile, superficial and disconnected from reality.⁵⁴ However, often Nasr's views form part of a progression in esoteric doctrines.⁵⁵

The importance Nasr gives to Sufism worries some commentators that he is moving away from the *sharī'ah*. His promotion of traditionalism is also scrutinised critically and where this leads to his views on religious pluralism it provokes accusations of becoming

52 See, for example, Bostani, , 'Henry Corbin's Oriental Philosophy ...', 997.

53 In the US he attended an eminent boarding high school, the Peddie School, which has Baptist roots.

54 See, for a summary, A'zam Qāsimi, 'Insān-shināsi az didgāh-i Sayyid Ḥusain Naṣr', *Hikmat-i mu'asir*, year 1, no. 1, 1389sh [2010], *Piṣṭūnshāh-i 'ulūm-i insāni va muṭālī'āt-i farhangī* (Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies), Tehran, 77–100; Muḥammad Nizhād-Īrān, 'Naqd-i māhiyyat-i salbī-yi sunnat-garā'ī dar andisha-yi Sayyid Ḥusain Naṣr', 101–122; Mohammed Ghomi Oveli, 'Bar-rasi va naqd-i didgāh-hā-yi duktur Sayyid Ḥusain Naṣr ...'; Ali R Jalali, Farshad Tohidnia, S Hossain Vaezi, 'The Revival of Sacred Essence of Nature, the Solution to Environmental Crisis (criticism and research of the philosophical views of Sayyed Hossein Nasr)', *Philosophical Investigations*, 13.27 (2019), 96–116.

55 Bostani. 'Henry Corbin's Oriental Philosophy ...', p. 9.

un-Islamic. In particular, Nasr's special history of support for the Pahlavi regime does not endear him to modern thinkers in Iran.⁵⁶ Thus, for example, Arīnī is almost contemptuous of his support for the old regime and his coolness towards the Islamic revolution in Iran. Nasr, he says, 'accepts a monarchy or kingdom as a form of government that in the Age of Occultation is the least defective' and 'in some of his books, the only point he makes about the revolution is the looting of his personal library during the revolution.'⁵⁷ A scathing critique of Nasr's views on religious pluralism is provided by Muhammad Legenhausen.⁵⁸

A further criticism levelled at Nasr is that he represents 'American Islam' (*Islām-i Āmrīkā'ī*).⁵⁹ This is a term which does not seem to have any great currency outside Iran. It seems to originate with Khomeini; in the first period of the Islamic revolution in the year 1357 [1979], in talking about Islam and the organisation of government in the Arab Persian Gulf sheikhdoms and Saudi Arabia, he used the term 'American Islam'.⁶⁰ Then in 1988 in an address to the 'martyrs' of artists and their families, he speaks of: '... art that would be the destroyer of modern capitalism and blood-thirsty communism, and the annihilator of the Islam of comfort and luxury, the eclectic Islam, the Islam of compromise and ignobility, the Islam of the indolent affluent ones, and in a single word, American Islam.'⁶¹ Labelling Nasr as such might be seen more as an attack on his political thought than his religious ideas, but Islam is a political system.

56 Ḥusain Arjīnī, 'Zindagī va andīsha-hā-yi Sayyid Ḥusain Naṣr', *Ma'rīfat* 131, Qum, 1387 [2008/9], 145-51, also available online, and S H Nasr, *The Heart of Islam*, New York, 2002, p. 149.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 9. [My translation]

58 Muhammad Legenhausen, 'Responding to the Religious Reasons of Others: Resonance and Nonreductive Religious Pluralism', *The European Journal for the Philosophy of Religion*, 5:2, Summer 2013, 23-46; and 'Misgivings about the Religious Pluralisms of Seyyed Hossein Nasr and John Hick', *Al-Tawhid*, vol. 14, no. 4, <Misgivings about the Religious Pluralisms of Seyyed Hossein Nasr and John Hick | Al-Islam.org> [accessed 30/01/22].

59 Arjīnī, 'Zindagī va andīsha-hā-yi Sayyid Ḥusain Naṣr', p. 10.

60 Henner Fürtig, *Iran's Rivalry with Saudi Arabia Between the Gulf Wars*, Durham Middle East monographs, New York, 2006, p. 222.

61 پیام به هنرمندان و خانواده شهدا (تجلیل از هنر و هنرمندان متعهد) - صحیفه امام خمینی جلد 21 < 146 تا 145 صفحه رحمة الله علیه - سایت جامع امام خمینی (emam.com) > [accessed 30/01/22]. 30 Shahrivar = 21 September 1988. The Persian text is given on website cited; also the English translation given is quoted here. The term is 'two' words.

The ongoing discomfort between traditional Islam and Sufism is still very much at play. This is seen, as noted above, in the conflicts between Sufis and *salafīs*. The way that many traditional, folk practices in Arabia and numerous popular shrines were dismantled through the ideas of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and his followers up to the modern era in Saudi Arabia is well known.⁶² However, *salafī* funding has also enabled it to confront and attack traditional folk Sufism in other areas.⁶³

The tensions between the major Sufi proponents and modern authorities in Iran are seen in modern studies, for example on the Ni‘matullāhiyya and Dhahabiyya orders.⁶⁴ Within the Iranian legal system some Sufi groups were seen by the authorities as ‘deviant faiths’ and subject to legal sanctions.⁶⁵

62 See also Mark J R Sedgwick, ‘Saudi Sufis: Compromise in the Hijaz, 1925–40’, *Die Welt des Islams*, November 1997, New Series, Vol. 37, Issue 3, Shiites and Sufis in Saudi Arabia (November 1997), 349–368.

63 See, for example, Alexander Knysh, ‘Contextualizing the Salafi-Sufi Conflict (From the Northern Caucasus to Hadramawt)’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (July 2007), 503–530. Knysh brings us back to a familiar position when he notes, p. 526: ‘An outside observer is faced with two possible approaches to Sufism—one inclusive and the other restrictive. According to the inclusive, Sufism is what people recognize it to be; according to the restrictive, Sufism is what the normative literature of Sufi classics demands it to be, the rest being nothing but “folk” Islam, “pre-Islamic relics”, “popular superstitions”, and so on.’ However, for an attempt to reconcile these two apparently opposing standpoints, see M Albo, ‘Al-Azhar Sufism in Post-Revolutionary Egypt’, *Journal of Sufi Studies*, 1 (2), 224–244.

64 Leonard Lewisohn, ‘An introduction to the history of modern Persian Sufism, Part I: ...’, 437–464, and ‘An introduction to the history of modern Persian Sufism, Part II: ...’, 36–59. The religious revolution of 1978 saw a continuation of the historical animosity between mulla and Sufi. See idem, Part I, pp. 438, 440 and 460.

65 Thus Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note Iran: Christians and Christian converts*, ‘9.3.1 A Report of the Special Rapporteur [UN Human Rights Council] on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran dated 17 March 2017’ and Version 6.0 February 2020, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/868800/Iran_-_Christians-Converts_-_CPIN_-_v6.0_-_Feb_2020_-_EXT_PDF.pdf> [accessed 08/06/20], reported they were: ‘... concerned about the targeting and harsh treatment of Christians from Muslim backgrounds and members of various Sufi groups, including the Nematollahi Gonabadi order and the Yarsan (also known Ahl-e Haqq), which are considered “deviant faiths” by the authorities and some members of the clerical establishment. These groups continue to face arbitrary arrest, harassment and detention, and are often accused of national security crimes such as “acting against national security” or “propaganda against the State”. Under Iranian law, individuals, including Christians of Muslim backgrounds, can be prosecuted for apostasy, although it is not specifically codified as a crime in the Islamic Penal Code.’ Nematollahi Gonabadi had been leader of this important branch of the

We might also remember the view of perhaps the most eminent Shi‘ah scholar of modern times, the *marja‘i taqlid*, al-‘Allāma as-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusain aṭ-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī (d. 1981), who remonstrates with Sufism and its attitude to exegesis:

The Sufis kept their eyes fixed on esoteric aspects of creation; they were too occupied with their inner world to look at the outer one. Their tunnel-like vision prevented them from looking at the things in their true perspective. Their love of [the] esoteric made them look for inner interpretations of the verses; without any regard to their manifest and clear meanings.⁶⁶

However, for the West what our reflection of Sufism perhaps tells us most about is the state of the study of this area. Rachid Acim in a study on modern converts in the West notes:

... Compared to cults that identify themselves with the Salafi or Wahhabi ideology, the Sufi folk are usually defined as peaceful, tolerant and moderate. ... More particularly, it sheds light on the experiences of some Western converts, whose attraction to and fascination with Sufism is immeasurable. Central to this enquiry is the reception theory, which claims that people receive discourse in different ways.⁶⁷

Ni‘matullāhī *ṭarīqah* since 1997 when he took over from the previous *qutb* and also his nephew. He died in December 2019. See BBC Monitoring, published 20 February 2018, ‘Name in the News: The Gonabadi Sufis of Iran’, <<https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/c1douo4u>> [accessed 01/06/20]. Also, see BBC Persian Service, article, 14 October 2019, Yāsir Mīr Dāmād, ‘Majārahā-yi tashayyu’ va taṣavvuf: az ḥadhf tā payvand’, <<https://www.bbc.com/persian/blog-viewpoints-49951691>> [accessed 09/04/20].

66 Al-‘Allāma as-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn aṭ-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī, *Al-Mizān fī Tafṣīrī l-Qur‘ān*, trans. Sayid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi, Tehran, 1403/1983, vol. 1, preface p. 26 (Arabic ed., Beirut, 1417/1997, vol. 1, p. 10). The whole work in Arabic fills more than 20 volumes. The first 13 volumes are available in English with later volumes in process of translation.

67 ‘The Reception of Sufism in the West: the Mystical Experiences of American and European Converts’, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 2018, vol. 38, no. 1, 57–72, abstract p. 57.

Acim's paper seems over partial with some unorthodox ideas and history. However, it does describe various *ṭarīqas* in the US. It is predictably eirenic, with an emphasis on 1960s clichés of peace and love. There is but a single mention of Massignon and nothing about Nasr or Corbin. A single passing mention of Ibn 'Arabī among others is found.

What is special about these people that embrace Sufism as a way of life is that they are hankering after an alchemical process to transform their very imperfect nature into enlightened beings.⁶⁸

... In fact, most of the American converts, who adopted Sufism, are very much attracted to whirling, mystical dancing and Sufi music, because they are neither elitist nor exclusive. Yet, sometimes they choose Sufism so long as it allows them to 'savour' the spirit of religion and experience a spiritual conversion.

... It is thus fair to say that such compassion and universal love that Sufism conveys to the world could bridge gaps left by sectarian, political and ideological divisions. Compared to the scholars of orthodox organized Islam, who focus on outward matters and see difference in people, the Sufi folk uphold an inward view that make them see likeness and sameness in all mankind.⁶⁹

These are views that most Muslims, sympathetic and otherwise to Sufism, would find difficult to accommodate. However, the picture presented does not look much like the Sufism we have been discussing and which is familiar in academic and not so academic circles in Europe.

We bring our own baggage and all view the subject through our own dim eyes. This is not just a problem of which we need to be aware that is rooted in place; it also has a temporal dimension. Different age groups in different places will inherit a particular perspective onto which they impose their own personality and prejudices. Colonialist or

68 Ibid., p. 65.

69 Ibid., p. 67.

post-colonialist? The view from Paris might look very different from that in Algiers, or in Oxford or Cambridge or London or California. This does not invalidate any such approach but we need to be aware of it and not seek to conceal or obscure it. We need to be ready to amend a point of view in the light of changing time and circumstances.

In a Western context, few see the mass of ordinary Muslims other than through the outward signs of their 'otherness'. The view presented by earlier theological views and 19th- and 20th-century orientalists was partial but for the latter only in the sense that they studied what interested them. There have been shifting perceptions of Islam and Muslims especially since 9/11. This has been met in some way by the ongoing expansion of an interest in things mystical which has often been in the background of the West's perception of Islam. This now offers a softer, eirenic view; but is it really representative of Islam in general and of its Sufi tradition in particular? We should not be blind to the fact that the views of *salafi* extremists and those of the Sufi tradition are often united in their general contempt and mistrust of the Western world and its major religious tradition.

Yet this dimension of the Muslim world is important for the West. What should be a worthy undertaking is to understand the basis of Islam's mystical traditions, its endless varieties, to evaluate and constantly revise its historical trajectory, to examine the validity of its major figures and those who would argue for their importance. Making sense of this is looking through a glass darkly.

CHRISTIANITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST: CURRENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE, THROUGH THE EXPERIENCE OF SYRIA

Antoine Audo

INTRODUCTION¹

Pope Francis, in his Lenten message 2015, draws our attention to ‘the globalisation of indifference’, and makes it clear that ‘this is a malaise that, as Christians, we must all counter.’² I am convinced that the organisation of this day of reflection on Christianity in the Middle East—the Middle East which is shaken by war, violence and discouragement for many Christians—is one of the answers that the Church seeks to bring to the entire region. In the Arab and Muslim context, the fight against ‘globalisation of indifference’ does not mean giving up because it is the fate of poor countries as opposed to the superpowers of this world. It is futile to believe there are no answers for the future.³

So thank you all for giving me the opportunity to speak to you and to address the challenges we face as Christians in Syria, and offering some thoughts to assist us in our struggle against the ‘globalization of indifference’.

After this brief introduction, my reflection will cover two main areas given the subject that was offered to me. I will begin by developing three points which cover the various challenges that trouble our society

1 This lecture had originally been given at the Conference at the Centre for Eastern Christianity, Heythrop College, in association with British Trust for Tantar (Jerusalem), ‘*Christianity in the Middle East: present challenges and future possibilities*’, (2015).

2 <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/lent/documents/papa-francesco_20141004_messaggio-quaresima2015.html> [accessed 29/09/22].

3 See Antoine Audo’s most recent study on theological and ecclesiological thought in the Middle East: ‘The Church in the Middle East. The Future of Christians in the Region’, in Harald Suermann and Michael Altripp (eds), *Orientalisches Christentum. Perspektiven aus der Vergangenheit für die Zukunft*, Leiden, Brill/Schöningh, 2021, 52–65.

including modern living and religious fundamentalism. Then I will develop in the second part what different opportunities are available to us in the future.

So first to the current challenges.

1 THE CURRENT CHALLENGES

a) One of our first challenges is how both Christians and Muslims live alongside each other in today's society. Our society promotes a freedom of conscience and an individualism which does not follow traditional practices which were marked by the membership of an individual to a group and to the religion of the majority. Scepticism, relativism and the right to criticism were not previously allowed. In the religious context of the Qur'an, time is everlasting, from the beginning (Creation) to the end (Eschatology). Nowadays, we have the present and the immediate. Moreover, with the immediacy of all means of communication, we see how the relationship with the sacred and beyond has changed. Modernity, globalisation, secularism and agnosticism are all an imported vocabulary which disrupt traditional religious ways: it is the male/female relationship; master/slave; Jewish/Gentile and so on.

One of our challenges is marrying together this 'modernity' for Christians and Muslims living and growing together. With freedom of conscience we must engage with this 'modernity' for to ignore it would cause conflict.

b) A second challenge that has shaken the Middle East and affects the Christian communities in these countries is the struggle between Sunni Muslims and Shi'ite Muslims. For decades the question was taboo. But today, all over the Middle East, we speak openly about these religious affiliations and from them we build strategies and policies. Let us look at the situation in Lebanon, for example, where Muslims are divided between Shi'ites (Hezbollah) and Sunni (Al-Mustaqbal). As a consequence, the Christians too are divided in their support of one or other of the two groups. The same applies to Syria in its current crisis, although the country has its own history and insists on the secularism of its government. We should also consider Iraq, Iran and several Gulf

countries, for example Bahrain, Yemen and Kuwait. Further the state of Israel is at the heart of these countries, a Jewish identity and at the same time modern!

Within this conflict between the two major branches of Islam, extremist circles are rising up in the name of Sunni Islam. Among them of course is ISIS (Da'ish) and its claim to restore the Muslim caliphate.

Faced with these sectarian struggles within Islam, Middle Eastern Christians are questioning their position and speak of citizenship, religious freedom and interfaith dialogue. This is a second challenge that marginalises the followers of Christ in spite of themselves, but they pull together to rediscover their vocation as Eastern Arab Christians.

c) The third challenge is about insecurity and unemployment that affects the majority of Syrians, especially Christians. We will soon enter the fifth year of wars [2015] in Syrian territories, and attacks from neighbouring countries, especially Turkey and Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon and Israel.

Christians are torn between their attachment to their homeland (we know that every human being is committed to his family) and the desire to emigrate in search of a safer place to work and to live in dignity so as to prepare our children for a prosperous future.

This year we commemorate the centenary of the Armenian Genocide. The Chaldeans, Assyrians and Syriacs, the Christians in the region do not hesitate to compare how they live today compared with the events of 1915 (*Sajfo*, *Saw'kiyat*, *Safarbarlek* ...).⁴ One hundred years after these dreadful persecutions, we cannot forget the stories telling of the martyrdom of so many families.

It is certain that the incessant bombardment of cities and the increasing number of deaths and casualties are a major reason for emigration. Additionally compulsory military service, including the possibility of being recalled as a reserve, spurs Christians to leave everything and go into the unknown. We can finally say that emigration is sometimes a real contagion, with families wishing to group together overseas.

4 *Sajfo* = (time of the) Sword; *Safarbarlek* = Exile; *Saw'kiyat* = expulsion [Eds]

Earning a living, living in dignity, and ensuring a better future for their children are reasons that encourage Syrians to leave their homeland. Remember though that obtaining visas and being permitted to travel are not easy and it is mainly the rich, the ones who can afford it, who leave first. It comes down to this: rich and young people can leave; the poor and the elderly cannot and so have to stay. This is the great challenge we face as a Church on a daily basis with great concern and pain.

Now to the second challenge.

2 THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE THROUGH THE SYRIAN EXPERIENCE

As an introduction to this second part, I would first highlight the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Benedict XVI following the Synod of the Catholic Church in the Middle East in 2010.⁵ ‘Communion and Witness’ itself constitutes a wish list that pleads to be applied in practice: the communion among all Eastern Catholic Churches; ecumenism; interreligious dialogue; a healthy distinction between the political and the religious; not to mention the conversion to a spirit of communion and mission of the Catholic Churches in the Middle East and in the Diaspora. All these themes are a real-life calling for Eastern Christians.

As a participant at the conferences organised by the Centre for Eastern Christianity, I had the honour of addressing and discussing

5 Benedict, Pope, ‘Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation to the Patriarchs, Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the lay Faithful on the Church in the Middle East: Communion and Witness’, in Dietmar Winkler (ed.), *Towards a Culture of Co-Existence in Pluralistic Societies: The Middle East and India*, Gorgias Press, Piscataway, 2021, 183–232. See also Antoine Audo’s discussion ‘Reflections on the Apostolic Exhortation of Benedict XVI and the Papal Visit to Lebanon’, in *Towards a Culture of Co-Existence in Pluralistic Societies: The Middle East and India*, 135–148. Further, Antoine Audo reflects on the Synod in the context of the religious and political crisis in the Middle East, in ‘Between Christians and Muslims a Pathway of Communion’, *The Restless Middle East. Between political Revolts and confessional Tensions*, ‘Oasis’ 13 (2011) <<http://www.oasiscenter.eu/node/7149>>, in which he states: ‘When listening to the demands of the people one cannot fail to notice a mysterious link between the final appeal of the Synod of the Catholic Church of the Middle East and everything that these societies ask for today: justice and freedom. Evidence of a historic opportunity.’

this subject several times before and after the synod. We can now see that this synod was truly prophetic, looking into the discomfort and the political and religious ferment in the Middle East, seeking a better future.⁶

a) One of the first opportunities for the future is that, despite threats and violence, Syrian Christians have revealed a sense of compliance which has been acknowledged by both the government and the armed groups. How can we explain this?

Well, in the field of humanitarianism, Christians are defined by their professionalism, their selflessness and their neutrality. They serve Christians and Muslims alike without distinction or propaganda. There are many very moving and significant examples both at the official level and from the Syrian people.

Muslims on both sides recognise that Christians love their country and can be a model of citizenship and conviviality. Christians do not kill in the name of their religion, they do not steal and they are recognized in Syrian society for their social skills, their professionalism and their honesty! We could cite many testimonies of Muslims who appreciate the importance of Christians as a representative and indispensable group that Syria needs to maintain its national identity.

b) Secondly, Christians in Syria are increasingly overcoming their fear and their emotions arising from their minority status. They have more courage to 'bear witness to the hope that is in them' (cf. 1 Pet 3: 15). The questioning of Islam alone can open a dialogue based on trust and mutual respect. It is certain that this is the figure of Jesus in the Gospels and the opportunity to live a personal relationship with Him in love and trust which would trigger an entry into communion and liberation from a God of terror to a just God.

Christians in the Arab-Muslim environment bear testimony to the Gospel, through the courage to speak out. It is not to repeat, indoctrinate, but to speak the word of truth, the fruit of grace, and to be able to release and create communion. There is much to say in this

6 See Antoine Audo, 'The Current situation of Christianity in the Middle East, especially Syria, after the Synod of the Middle East's Final Declaration (September 2012) and the Papal Visit to Lebanon' in *Living Stones Yearbook 2012: Christianity in the Middle East: Studies in Modern History, Politics and Theology*, London, 2012, 1-17.

area. We need to find a way to communicate our Christian desire to ‘go out’, to ‘live a new Exodus’. As Pope Francis says: do not remain a slave of fear or imagination. Where will we go after all this war and all this destruction?

c) One opportunity that I find important for Christianity in the Middle East is what we see in the humanities.

At the time of the Umayyads, the ‘Abbasids and finally in the 19th and 20th centuries with the Arab renaissance, Christians have been able to discover, through their science and clear paths of humanism, rationality and truth-seeking, one common good.

Personally, I consider that beyond technology, which is important, we have the human sciences representing a broad area of research and openness to the universal and the transcendent.

We can use anthropology, sociology and psychology as respectful ways of researching religion, helping to free it from any exploitation and deliver its policy easily from tyrannical ideologies.

Christians in the Middle East have work to undertake in order to live in dignity and to contribute to the life of many, as requested by the Gospel.

And so let me conclude as follows.

CONCLUSION

Between the current challenges and the opportunities for the future, I have tried to draw you a picture explaining the situation and the role of Christians in Syria today. I undertake this as Bishop of the Chaldean Church and as president of Caritas-Syria—without political or ideological exaltation and without pessimism or discouragement. Other explanations are possible and other religious and political experiences are everywhere working to find a solution to the Syrian crisis and a permanent return of reconciliation and peace.

Two recent developments are worth noting because they reveal the peculiarity of the Christian Syrian at the heart of an Arab country and a Sunni Muslim majority. We already speak of a country ‘pre-war’ and ‘post-war’ by referring to 15 March 2011. We also embrace two government decisions regarding the place of Christians in Syria.

The first decision was made before the Syrian crisis, in recognition of the importance of the Aramaic dialect in Maaloula, near Damascus, the Christian village attacked by armed groups. The government had indeed founded an academy for the study of this dialect and had given it an alphabet that can be transcribed. It had also given it the opportunity to study syntax and grammar and to promote the conservation of its language.

The second decision date was almost a month ago [January 2015] A presidential decree announced the foundation of a Christian theological faculty within the University of Damascus. This is especially novel during the war in Syria. This could provide an example for other countries in the Middle East. Modern Syria is recognising the importance of Christianity in the country and especially the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch.

In closing my reflection, I invite you in this time of Lent to reconsider a sentence from the conclusion of the message of Pope Francis during this time of grace. Speaking of ‘globalisation of indifference’, it gives us an important message, as much for us Eastern Christians affected by globalisation, as for you, Christians of the West who are marked by economic constraints, political extremism and religious threats. In his concluding prayer, the Pope asked the Lord to give us ‘In this way we will receive a heart which is firm and merciful, attentive and generous, a heart which is not closed, indifferent or prey to the globalization of indifference.’⁷

7 <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/lent/documents/papa-francesco_20141004_messaggio-quaresima2015.html> [accessed 29/09/22].

THE ARAB EVANGELICAL CHURCH AND THE REFUGEE CRISIS ESPECIALLY IN LEBANON, IN DIALOGUE WITH OSMER'S PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

Michael Arteen

The following contribution is an extended personal reflection on approaches to the refugee crisis in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in particular Iraq and Syria from the perspective of the Evangelical Arab Church with a focus on Lebanon in dialogue with the model suggested by Richard Osmer's Practical Theology. Hence, this contribution based on theological engagement and research study is offered as a perspective in constructing a religious discourse, albeit from a distinct Protestant understanding on an aspect—the refugee crisis—of the current situation across the Middle East today.

Egyptians have not been able for many decades to visit Palestine and Israel due to political reasons despite the Peace Treaty signed between Egypt and Israel. I was fortunate to hold a US passport, hence able to serve pastorally the local community for a few years (2014-2018). I was born in Egypt. In June 2015, I travelled from Bethlehem through the West Bank, and crossed into Jordan travelling to Amman accompanied by a group of leaders from the Evangelical churches in the Holy Land. As a researcher in pastoral work, I had naturally been aware of the refugee crisis across the Middle East region. However, I was not aware of, or imagined, the scale of the refugee crisis. Growing up in Egypt during the two decades 1980-1990, I knew many Egyptians who journeyed to Iraq (and other countries in the region including Syria, and beyond) for work in the then growing economy.

Reflecting on Iraq and Syria and the current state of affairs brought about by conflict, security and economic instability which displaced large numbers of individuals, families and communities which were the main factors of the refugee crisis, I observed Palestinian Christian students seeking to serve Iraqi and Syrian refugees in Jordan. The stories I heard had stirred emotions of sorrow within me. However,

it was not until I viewed for myself their living conditions during my visit to the refugees in Jordan (2015) and Lebanon (2021), that a deep pastoral concern emerged. There is much work to be done to fulfil the biblical command to ‘love the Lord your God with all your heart ... and your neighbour as yourself’ (Luke 10: 27). I connected this concern to a framework of study. However, my present contribution is pastoral, research academic, combined with a personal reflections and observations.

From a personal perspective, I speak not only in my capacity as an Arab Egyptian citizen who is concerned about the status of his neighbours, but also as a minister who hopes to make a difference within the Middle Eastern region. I cannot help but think of my personal story in this narrative. Growing up in Egypt, it was accepted as prudent not to be too overt about my faith with my Muslim neighbours. Not only has persecution challenged the church in the Middle East during the past few decades, but it has also shaped its faith. Although the church chooses at times not to go outward in its direction,¹ for fear of persecution, I suggest that the chaos caused by radical Islam in the recent past few years has contributed to the idea of the church in the Middle East. The disturbance caused by this ongoing radical religious and political context has moved the church to take down any walls it had in reaching out to the Iraqis and Syrians.

Ironically, I suggest that the starting point to make a change should be to review the positive side of the refugee crisis and the door of service that has opened for the Arab Evangelical Church,² although I understand that this is a distinctive perspective which might not be readily understood. The destruction and dislocation caused by Muslim radical Islamists has in my view led Muslims to ignore traditional religious barriers and to seek an open engagement with the churches. Based upon my own perspective I understand this to be an unexpected opportunity. The church is in a position to be a Good Samaritan by extending the practical hand of love and by sharing the good news. In the long run, it is also my prayer that the barriers between the different ecclesial families be demolished and that unity be established (John

1 Ray Sherman Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis*, IVP, Downers Grove, Ill., 2001, p. 130.

2 Stephan Bauman, *Seeking Refuge: On the Shores of the Global Refugee Crisis*, Moody Publishers, Chicago, 2016, p. 133.

17: 21) as the church seeks to reflect ecumenically and offer hospitality to its refugee neighbours. I am aware that there are other initiatives by other church families in the Middle East that address the crisis of the refugees; however, this paper focuses on the Evangelical church.

This paper adopts Osmer's model of Practical Theology. Firstly, in this contribution I will introduce the Evangelical church in the Middle East. Secondly, I shall offer a perspective on the rise of religious extremism in the Middle East. I propose that this religious extremism is at the root cause of the refugee crisis. However, I understand that the situation in the MENA region is one of geopolitical, cultural, and political complexity—hence my perspective is singular. I then introduce Practical Theology as the academic framework for this research. I then explain my use of Osmer's four-task model for theological reflection on practices directed to refugees. Finally, I answer the questions associated with Osmer's first two tasks: what is going on, and why is it going on? In the third section I answer the questions drawn from the final two tasks of Osmer's model: what ought to be going on, and how might we respond? In this work, I take the role of the interpreter whilst I refer to the Arab church as the practitioner.

INTRODUCTION

This study addresses the role of the Arab Evangelical Church as it seeks to serve Syrian and Iraqi communities impacted by religious extremism. This research is important because it posits the church at the centre of contemporary challenges facing the Christian community. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37) will provide insights to further our reflection on this issue taken in consideration with Osmer's Practical Theology approach. Osmer's four questions 'can guide our interpretation and response to situations ...'.³ In seeking to describe the geographical and historical background of the Middle East, this contribution offers a backdrop of Islam and offers relevant definitions of terms in addressing this problem, such as radical Islam and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as one of the most violent movements in recent history.

3 Richard R Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, William Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 2008, p. 4.

In the context of a rich theological religious heritage, the Middle Eastern church has endured a number of what I understand to be a series of afflictions and persecutions in modern history. In the first century, Tertullian observed that the ‘blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.’⁴ This I understand has enabled the church to witness⁵ all the more its faith amidst a context characterized by religious extremism thus enabling Arab Christians a different encounter with Islam.⁶

EVANGELICALS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The different expressions of Christianity in the Middle East are divided into five ‘families’.⁷ These are the Church of the East (sometimes termed Assyrian Church of the East); the Oriental Orthodox family (Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopian, Eritrean and Syriac); the Eastern Orthodox (commonly referred to as Greek Orthodox), the distinct family of Catholic Churches (Armenian, Chaldean, Coptic, Latin, Maronite, Melkite and Syriac); and the Protestants. The Protestant (or Evangelical) churches of multiple denominations, have roots in modern Western missionary movements, and are a minority within Middle Eastern Christianity.⁸

In Arabic church titles, *injiliyya* (evangelical) is the adjectival title for any congregation whose roots are in the Protestant Reformation. Although the initiation of the evangelical Protestant church was through Western missionaries, the church in the Middle East has on the whole maintained its Arab conservative identity. Evangelicals specifically and the church in general in the Middle East are challenged by Islam. Accad argues that ‘... the Arab church has been in touch

4 Betty Jane Bailey and J Martin Bailey, *Who Are the Christians in the Middle East*, 2nd ed., William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2010, p. 185.

5 Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes, Cultural Studies in the Gospels*, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London, 2008, p. 36.

6 Dale F Eickelman, *The Middle East: An Anthropological Approach*, 2nd ed., Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1989, p. 256.

7 Matthew Baker, ‘Christian Traditions in the Contemporary Middle East: A Bibliographic Essay’, *Theological Librarianship* 4/1 (2011), 69; Anthony O’Mahony (ed.), *The Christian Communities of Jerusalem and the Holy Land: Studies in History, Religion and Politics*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2003, p. 8.

8 Deanna Ferree Womack, *Protestants, Gender and the Arab Renaissance in Late Ottoman Syria*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2020, p. 191.

with its Islamic context through its history, as witnessed by the vast amount of apologetic and polemical literature that has been written to address Muslim challenges to Christianity.⁹ These challenges have acted as a theological stimulus to propel Christians to identify with Christ despite the burden of persecution and oppression.

RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM—RADICAL ISLAM

As narrated by the classic Muslim tradition, Islam emerged in the year 622, the year of Hijra (migration) from the city of Mecca to Medina.¹⁰ I believe that the rise of Islam took place in a distinct social environment, the rise of radical Islam has also taken place in a similar environment. I offer the concept of corruption as a key concept. In any society, a lack of integrity leads to corruption. This corruption often produces fertile soil for new ideologies and radical movements to arise.¹¹ Thus I consider context allows for an understanding of this response to the unjust or corrupt government, that radical Islam adopted a religious-political form in order to gain wider popularity among unjustly treated Muslims. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood is a case, which we will discuss below.¹²

THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD AND THE ARAB SPRING

The Muslim Brotherhood is known to be one of the most important religious-political movements in the Middle East. Founded in 1929 by Hassan al-Banna, it had its origins in Egypt spreading to neighbouring countries. Though it initially stressed Islamic education, it gradually

9 Accad, 'Middle Eastern Theology in Evangelical Perspective', in *Global Theology in Evangelical Perspective: Exploring the Contextual Nature of Theology and Mission*, Jeffrey P Greenman and Gene L Green (eds), IVP Academic, Downers Grove, Ill., 2012, 145–59, p. 157.

10 Timothy George, *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad? Understanding the Differences between Christianity and Islam*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2002, pp. 38–39.

11 Chris Seiple, 'Religion and Responsible American Engagement of the Middle East', *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* 14, no. 2 (2 April 2016): 9, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2016.1184451>> [accessed 12/01/21].

12 Akbarzadeh, Shahrām, and Fethi Mansouri (eds), *Islam and Political Violence: Muslim Diaspora and Radicalism in the West*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2010, p. 5.

embraced a wider political programme.¹³ The goal was to renew the Islamic Caliphate¹⁴ against the backdrop of dramatic changes in Egyptian politics. The Middle East was a fertile environment for the rise of fundamentalist ideology in modern times. More recently, the Arab Spring has stimulated various political trends, including several violent movements.

The long periods of authoritarian dictatorial regimes have generally led to a deteriorating social economic situation in many countries in the Middle East and North Africa. From Tunisia in the west to Iraq in the east, economic hardship and brutal leaders led to the regional phenomenon known as the ‘Arab Spring’ in 2011. One view is that the seeds of the Arab Spring were sown in 2003 with the US invasion of Iraq and subsequent fall of Saddam Hussein. The Arab Spring is best described as a ‘the political tsunami’ that meant nothing would be the same as it was before 2011.¹⁵ On the surface, the Arab Spring succeeded in achieving certain goals. However, at a deeper level it created new problems. Successful regime change took place in Tunisia and Egypt, whilst civil conflict took root in Libya and Syria.¹⁶ From the perspective of this contribution a significant lack of understanding of the social, political, and religious nature of the Arab countries by Western policy resulted in much harm and destabilisation. The changes in Iraq and Egypt after a period of long and stable regimes, along with the civil conflict that broke out in Syria, left the Middle East vulnerable to the creation of radical movements such as ISIS.

THE RISE OF THE ISLAMIC STATE IRAQ AND SYRIA (ISIS)¹⁷ **ISLAMIC STATE IN IRAQ (ISI)**

Islamism was ready to step in and take power when Middle Eastern regimes dramatically changed in political content and direction. The

13 Ibid.

14 Nachman Tal, *Radical Islam in Egypt and Jordan*, Sussex Academic Press/Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Brighton/Portland, 2005, p. 3.

15 Roland Freudenstein, ‘The Arab Spring: What’s in It for Us?’, *European View* 10, no. 1 (1 June 2011): 67, <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12290-011-0172-4>> [accessed 22/02/22].

16 Ibid.

17 ISIS is also known as ISIL (the Islamic state of Iraqi and the Levant) and *Daesh*. ISIS was launched in June 2014 as an extension of ISI in Iraq.

US invasion of Iraq in 2003 eventually led to the deposing of Iraqi president Saddam Hussein who had also been head of the Baath political party. He was executed after being found guilty of crimes against humanity. As a result, chaos spread throughout Iraq already divided by the Sunni and Shi'a traditions. Violent incidents, including bombings and shooting attacks against members of both sects; plus elements of misadministration by the transitional government added to the chaos and turmoil.¹⁸

This chaos and deteriorating situation proved, not only to Iraqis but also to the wider region and the world, that regime change had created more problems than solutions.¹⁹ After his death Saddam Hussein and the ending of his regime, the chaos and divisions that arose paved the way for the Islamic State Iraq (ISI) to grow and expand. In due course Abu Omar al-Baghdadi was named the caliph of this group with a desire to (re-)establish the Caliphate.²⁰ The rise of this radical movement in Iraq further impacted upon the radicalized religious and political situation, especially the relations between the Sunni and Shi'ite communities.

We might note that the difference between ISI and ISIS was chronological and geographical. ISI became ISIS eight years after its initial establishment spread to Syria.

ISI expanded in this area due to wider Islamism support and due to the collaboration of the local population that had felt strongly ignored by the central government in Baghdad. First, forces related to Islamism demonstrated a wish to control the country's resources mainly of oil.²¹ This increased the suspicion and generated conspiracy theories about connections to external commercial and oil agencies.²² An increasingly declining security environment forced many Iraqis to flee their homes. More than half a million Iraqi refugees, including a large percentage of

18 Michael Griffin, *Islamic State: Rewriting History*, Pluto Press, London, 2016, p. 18.

19 Wael Al-Sallami Quora, 'I Grew Up In Iraq During Saddam's Worst Days – Here's What Life Was Like,' Business Insider, <<https://www.businessinsider.com/heres-what-life-in-iraq-was-like-under-saddam-hussein-2014-7>> [accessed 2/06/22].

20 Griffin, *Islamic State*, p. 20.

21 Tim Anderson, 'Syria: Washington Supports the Islamic State (ISIS), the Evidence,' *Global Research* (29 December 2015): 3, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/298215567_Syria_Washington_Supports_the_Islamic_State_ISIS_the_evidence> [accessed 17/02/21].

22 Griffin, *Islamic State*, p. 35.

Christians, were dislocated into neighbouring countries such as Jordan and Lebanon.²³

ISI was founded in 2006 by Musab al-Zarqawi. Al-Zarqawi was the leader or *amir* of 'Al-Qaeda in Iraq' (AQI).²⁴ He had a direct connection with the Al-Qaeda organisation and its leader Osama Bin Laden. ISI was an extension of Al-Qaeda which was already active in Afghanistan. The ISI's movement sought to establish the Islamic Caliphate in Iraq. The Caliphate had been established in the context of available and significant oil and other natural resources; however, ISI was based in a region deeply divided by different religious groups and ethnic backgrounds: Sunnis, Shi'as, Christians, Yazidis, and Kurds. ISI emerged in Iraq due to a wider regional and international policy vacuum. Neither the West nor any other Arab countries came to the rescue.²⁵

The flames of the Arab Spring spread from one country to the next in the MENA region until they reached Syria.²⁶ ISI found an opportunity to extend its territory into Syria. ISIS followed a *takfir* ideology (denoting alienation from Islam of one Muslim by another) in order to frame its violent political-religious approach. Put differently, they labelled Christians and members of other religions, including secular Muslims, as *kuffar* or infidels. They also attacked Westerners from this perspective.

ISIS has shaken the Islamic world especially causing severe damage to the infrastructure, the demography and relations between the various religious and ethnic groups of the Middle East including the displacement of millions of peaceful civilians who have fled their homes and countless families have been separated.

In the next section, we will engage with our main concern: the refugee crisis through the lens of Osmer's Practical Theology model.

23 Bailey and Bailey, *Who Are the Christians in the Middle East?*, pp. 175-176.

24 Griffin, *Islamic State*, p. 14.

25 Roland Freudenstein, 'The Arab Spring: What's in It for Us?', *European View* 10, no. 1 (1 June 2011), p. 71, <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12290-011-0172-4>> [22/02/21].

26 Faith Olanrewaju and Segun Joshua, 'The Diplomatic Dimensions of the Syrian Conflict', *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 1 (1 June 2015), p. 45, <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0973598415608480>> [accessed 27/01/21].

RICHARD OSMER'S PRACTICAL THEOLOGY (TASKS 1 AND 2)

The purpose of this section is to interpret the refugee crisis employing Osmer's model for Practical Theology. Further, it will seek to elicit answers for the first two tasks of Osmer's Model. The First Task is: 'What is going on?' answering this question, this section will incorporate the most recent information about the Iraqi and Syrian refugees in Lebanon. I shall also include an example of a church engaged in serving refugees in Lebanon. In handling the practical role of the Arab Evangelical Church in response to the refugee crisis, this project will adopt Osmer's model for Practical Theology.²⁷ Doing Practical Theology using this scriptural-centred approach best suits the context to which it will be applied, the Middle East and its conservative nature. To conduct practical theological research on the refugee crisis, I have found in Osmer's four-task model, a suitable approach to interpret the complexities of this problem. Osmer divides his model into four tasks. They are as follows: The *descriptive-empirical task* which asks, 'What is going on?' The *interpretive task* which seeks to know 'Why is it going on?' The *normative task* which answers the question 'What ought to be going on?' And the *pragmatic task* which addresses 'How might we respond?'²⁸ Osmer's tasks provide a framework for thorough analysis of the research problem.

THE FIRST TASK: WHAT IS GOING ON?

In Osmer's first task, the *descriptive-empirical task* the researcher identifies patterns in the process of gathering information²⁹ on the lives of individuals, families, and communities involved in the practice under analysis. In the present study, it is important to ascertain what is going on in the developing crises of the Syrian refugees. The particularities of these recent events will reveal some significant examples of the hospitable culture of this region. To answer the question of the first task 'What is going on?' the practitioner³⁰ (here represented by the Arab Evangelical

²⁷ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ In this case, people serving in the Arab Evangelical Church are the practitioners and I am the interpretive guide (interpreter). However, I alternate between 'I' and

Church) has to ask questions such as: What are the details of the crisis? This study gives attention to the current situation of the refugees and collects data concerning the refugee crisis and the circumstances surrounding them. One method of data collecting was conducting written interviews with the leaders of the church studied by this research.

As the Middle East vibrates with the crisis caused by religious extremism (ISIS), the Arab Evangelical Church equally should be concerned about the Syrian refugees who have been displaced from their countries. The church in the Middle East, as a part of society, is impacted by this crisis. However, it should seek to understand in its view how to assist the refugees practically in the current situation. When the Arab Evangelical Church asks, "What is going on?" the obvious answer is that, due to religious extremism, millions of Syrians have become refugees. Although some of the refugees flooding Lebanon are Christians, the majority are Muslims. Some are living in tents within camps in atrocious conditions, particularly in winter and following the COVID-19 pandemic. Data reveals that as of 2020, there are about 9.2 million Iraqis who are refugees or have been displaced within Iraq.³¹ The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) data reveals that there were 6.7 million Syrian refugees in 2020.³²

WHAT IS GOING ON WITH THE REFUGEES IN LEBANON?

Lebanon suffered a long civil war (1975-1990) which significantly drained the country's resources and created a large displacement of communities; the majority were Christians but also a large number were Muslims. Currently Lebanon struggles with a severe economic crisis, high unemployment and an increase in its population living in poverty.³³ The influx of refugees is negatively impacting the social

'the Interpretive guide' when I refer to myself as the author.

31 Watson Institute, 'Iraqi Refugees | Costs of War', The Costs of War, October 2020, <<https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/human/refugees/iraqi>> [accessed 20/04/21].

32 Zoe Todd, 'By the Numbers: Syrian Refugees Around the World', Frontline, November 2019, <<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/numbers-syrian-refugees-around-world/>> [20/04/21].

33 Kenneth R Ross et al., *Christianity in North Africa and West Asia*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2018, p. 125.

security and well-being of the country. Lebanon's population of 4.5 million welcomed 1.5 million refugees making the country host to the largest number of refugees per capita in the world.³⁴

There are some 16,584 Iraqi refugees in Lebanon: 51 percent are Shi'a Muslims, 19 percent Chaldean Catholics, and 12 percent Sunni Muslims. Almost 80 percent of these refugees dwell within the governorate of Mount Lebanon. 42 percent have not finished elementary school and 40 percent of Iraqi children between 6 and 17 were not registered in schools due to high tuition fees. Children within this age category must work and contribute to the financial needs of the family.³⁵ Further, Iraqis have limited refugee access to health services primarily because of its high cost. Mirna, an Iraqi Christian refugee, mourns, 'We've lost our home. It was completely destroyed. What have we got to go back to?'³⁶ Others have expressed their burden: 'It is a life of frustration at best, often leaving psychological scars.'³⁷ Among the daily challenges experienced by Iraqi Christians were depression, health issues and lost opportunities for their children and financial difficulties.

As of August 2020, nine years into the Syria crisis, the Lebanese government estimated that of the Syrian refugees³⁸ 879,598 were registered with UNHCR.³⁹ Although Syrian refugees are legally registered through UNHCR, they are denied residence permits which limits their freedom of movement.⁴⁰

34 Watson Institute, 'UNHCR Lebanon Factsheet, January 2020 - Lebanon', Relief Web, <<https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/unhcr-lebanon-factsheet-january-2020>> [31/01/21].

35 All numbers are summarised from this resource. Jeremy Weber, 'Grapes of Wrath: Refugees Face Steinbeck Scenario in Lebanon's Napa Valley', ChristianityToday.com, August 22 2016, <<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/september/grapes-of-wrath-syrian-refugees-lebanon-bekaa-valley.html>> [31/01/20].

36 UNHCR, 'Sorrow Stalks Iraqi Christians in Lebanon', UNHCR, January 10 2018, <<https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2018/1/59b990f84/sorrow-stalks-iraqi-christians-lebanon.html>> [31/01/21].

37 Ibid.

38 Ross et al., *Christianity in North Africa and West Asia*, p. 123.

39 Relief Web, 'UNHCR Lebanon Factsheet, January 2020 - Lebanon', Relief Web, <<https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/unhcr-lebanon-factsheet-january-2020>> [accessed, 3/01/20].

40 UNHCR 'Preliminary Findings of Country Visit to Lebanon by the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief', Ohchr, April 2015, <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=15791andLangID=E>> [accessed 30/04/15].

Surveys indicate that an estimated 73 percent of all refugees rent housing in overcrowded residential buildings that lack kitchens, toilets, doors, windows, electricity and running water. An estimated 18 percent live in fragile makeshift tents in spontaneously set-up settlements. The remaining 9 percent live in non-residential structures that include garages, shops, worksites, and farm buildings.⁴¹

Refugees living in tents on farmland in the 'Napa Valley' [wine producing area] of Lebanon are exposed to the cold and rain of winter. In addition, they live with mice and insects in their tents.⁴² The children work as farm labourers instead of going to school. Their income contributes to paying the monthly \$200 rent.⁴³ With large numbers living below the poverty line, refugees lack the resources to satisfy their basic needs.⁴⁴

WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH IN LEBANON? RESURRECTION CHURCH BEIRUT (RCB)

There are 6.5 percent of Christians in Lebanon or 20,000 who belong to the smaller Protestant groups.⁴⁵ The Presbyterian and Congregational churches comprise 75 percent of the Protestant community.⁴⁶ The relationship between the evangelical church and the traditional church is stable although there is not much co-operation between the two church families. This might suggest that

41 UNHCR, 'Shelter', UNHCR Lebanon, <<https://www.unhcr.org/lb/shelter>>, [accessed 15/03/21]

42 Jeremy Weber, 'Grapes of Wrath: Refugees Face Steinbeck Scenario in Lebanon's Napa Valley', ChristianityToday.com, August 22, 2016, <<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/september/grapes-of-wrath-syrian-refugees-lebanon-bekaa-valley.html>> [accessed 15/03/21].

43 Ibid.

44 WFP, 'Nine out of Ten Syrian Refugee Families in Lebanon Are Now Living in Extreme Poverty, UN Study Says', World Food Program, <<https://www.wfp.org/news/nine-out-of-ten-syrian-refugee-families-lebanon-are-now-living-extreme-poverty-un-study-says>> [18/12/2020].

45 UNNCR, 'Refworld | Lebanon: Situation of Christians, Including Treatment by Society and Authorities; Treatment of Christians by Hezbollah and Al-Qaeda; State Protection (2011-2013)', Refworld, January 16, 2014, <<https://www.refworld.org/docid/548170da4.html>> [18/12/21].

46 Antoine Haddad, 'Evangelicals in Lebanon', *Evangelical Times*, September 2006, <<https://www.evangelical-times.org/26239/evangelicals-in-lebanon/>> [18/12/21].

historically the relations between the Protestant community and the other Christian churches have not always been straightforward or indeed open. However, that said, Charles Chartouni describes Lebanese Christianity as ecumenical.⁴⁷ Although this fact is promising in terms of working together in unity to serve refugees, sadly it is not taking place on the ground in terms of practical engagement.⁴⁸ For a country that hosts the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC),⁴⁹ it might be expected that Lebanon demonstrate unity between churches in ministry. However, due a complex range of reasons this co-operation has not yet materialised in the sharing of resources and in the distribution of aid to refugees. This indicates a varied and different understanding of the character, identity and consequence of a large refugee population in Lebanon.

One particular Protestant church that has been involved assisting in the crisis of the refugees is the Resurrection Church in Beirut (RCB). The founder and senior pastor of the church, Hikmat Kashouh, explained: ‘The displacement of people from Syria and the presence of Iraqi refugees has created huge social challenges.’⁵⁰ His words reflect the how RCB considers that it has taken on challenging the sociocultural norms in order to reach out practically to those who are displaced. Even though the different denominations lack a common front in their service to refugees at the national level, from my own perspective I consider that the RCB provides an example of a successful ministry to refugees at a local level, through showing love to its marginalised neighbours. Kashouh elaborates:

Before the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011, the Resurrection Church started reaching out to Syrian workers in Lebanon through life groups ... Through natural relationships and connections, we got to meet

47 Ross et al., *Christianity in North Africa and West Asia*, p. 115.

48 Marjorie G Gourlay, ‘Hope Unexpected: An Account of the Lebanese Christians’ Encounter with Syrian Refugees’, (MPhil thesis, University of St Andrews, 2016), p. 10.

49 Mitri Raheb and Mark A Lamport (eds), *The Rowman and Littlefield Handbook of Christianity in the Middle East*, The Rowman and Littlefield Handbook Series, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, 2020, p. 522.

50 ‘Beirut Church Shares Love of Refugees across Arab World » SAT-7 UK’, *SAT-7 UK* (blog), 12 November 2016, <<https://www.sat7uk.org/beirut-church-shares-love-refugees-across-arab-world/>>[accessed 18/12/21].

a lot of refugees who were in desperate need for shelter, food, and medical aid. And as we started to serve them and love them in practical ways, they started sharing their life and pain with us. Through these relationships we had the opportunity to share about our faith in Christ.⁵¹

RCB is a church that has found its way to serve refugees hospitably through opening its door and welcoming visitors regardless of religion, race or background. Currently the church serves, Iraqi, Syrian and Kurdish refugees, not to mention the growing needs of the Lebanese community in the last two years.⁵²

I consider that this diligent labour of the church provides practical aid and support has put the church in a context to be ‘the salt and light’ for the community. As a result, ‘... 70 percent of the people in the congregation are refugees.’⁵³ When asked about the theological motivation behind the church’s help to the refugees, Kashouh answered:

The work of the RCB has provided an example of successful ministry towards refugees in spite of the risks. Two observations summarise the details considered up to this point. First, the church has taken the risk to minister to refugees who are mostly Muslims. The church has chosen to serve those who practise a different religion. Second, the church has chosen to invest financial resources in a rather perilous situation with no guarantee of the outcome.

Having asked Osmer’s first task ‘What is going on?’, in this final section, Osmer’s second task ‘Why is it going on?’ will be addressed.

THE SECOND TASK: ‘WHY IS IT GOING ON?’

I now turn to Osmer’s second task of his Practical Theology model: ‘Why is it going on?’ Osmer explains this phase as ‘Drawing on

51 Hikmat Kashouh (Leader of RCB). Written interview with author, June 18 2021.

52 Ibid.

53 <Love Breaks through in Lebanon>, *World Vision* (blog), <<https://www.worldvision.org/christian-faith-news-stories/love-lebanon-churches>> [accessed 8/02/21].

theories of the arts and sciences to better understand and explain why these patterns and dynamics are occurring.⁵⁴ In the previous section, I collected data about the refugee crisis and the current role of the evangelical church in Lebanon. I identified the following patterns from this data: the majority of the refugees are not legally registered. Therefore, they do not have the legitimacy to work. A lack of work and thus a lack of income will not lead to better living circumstances. Consequently, the children of the refugees are forced to give up school in order to help their parents. This exposes them to being exploited for trafficking. Here is an opportunity for the church to work practically to help the refugees with these needs enabling them and their children to lead a better life.

In this section, I interpret those patterns based on the theories of a number of authors from various disciplines.⁵⁵ In so doing, we aim to answer the following key questions: Why did the refugee crisis take place? Why didn't Western and Arab governments offer immediate help in this crisis? Why were some churches in a position to help whilst others were not? Osmer refers to this second task of his four-task model as *Wise Judgement*. This *Wise Judgement* can be achieved in three interrelated steps: (1) acknowledging the *relevant particulars* of certain events; (2) 'discernment of the *moral ends* at stake'; (3) deciding on the most *effective means* to accomplish these ends taking into consideration the 'constraints and possibilities of a particular time and place'.⁵⁶

WISE JUDGEMENT APPROACH—STEP 1: IDENTIFY THE PARTICULARS.

WHY IS THE REFUGEE CRISIS HAPPENING?

In seeking to interpret daily events in ministry contexts, the value of applying a Practical Theology analysis enriches other psycho-sociological approaches that could be taken. In fact, Practical Theology challenges the interpreter to analyse further why things are happening in our surroundings.

54 Osmer, *Practical Theology*, p. 4.

55 Osmer, *Practical Theology*, p. 6.

56 Osmer, *Practical Theology*, p. 84.

This is not the first refugee crisis in the Middle East. In 1948, the creation of the State of Israel forced the displacement of more than 700,000 Palestinian refugees.⁵⁷ Lebanon and Jordan welcomed large numbers of Palestinian refugees who fled their home country, whilst other refugees were displaced within their own country. In order to apply Step 1 of Osmer's second Task, *relevant particulars* to the refugee crisis, it is necessary to define this phenomenon of refugees. Ethicist Luke Bretherton refers to the refugees as people who seek to live 'outside their country of origin and without the protection of their government.'⁵⁸ Drawing on Bretherton's definition of refugees, there are two particularities that can be drawn from Osmer's second task. Homelessness is associated with shame in Middle Eastern culture. In order to avoid the escalation of homelessness, it is culturally appropriate for the church to practise the Christian faith toward its Iraqis/Syrians neighbours (refugees).⁵⁹

**FIRST PARTICULAR: IRAQIS AND SYRIANS
WERE FORCED TO FLEE THEIR COUNTRIES.**

One possible answer to why the refugee crisis occurred was discussed in the previous section which was the result of an upsurge in religious extremism.

We can further explore other underlying factors by answering other questions associated with the second particular.

**SECOND PARTICULAR: IRAQIS AND SYRIANS WERE DEPRIVED
OF THEIR GOVERNMENT'S PROTECTION.**

Why did Western and Arab governments not offer immediate help in this crisis?

57 Raheb and Lampport, *The Rowman and Littlefield Handbook of Christianity in the Middle East*, p. 501.

58 Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness*, Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester, 2010, p. 128.

59 Stephan Bauman, *Seeking Refuge: On the Shores of the Global Refugee Crisis*, Moody Publishers, Chicago, 2016, p. 34.

First, the absence of an international presence and resulting intervention gave ISIS the ability to displace people, and included the widespread killing of civilians.⁶⁰ Second, I suggest in geopolitical terms the US invasion in 2003 which led to the fall of the Iraqi government occasioned political instability in Syria. This resulted in dysfunctional governments, including widespread corruption, that were unable to protect their own citizens, leading to an acceleration of this crisis.⁶¹ Third, neighbouring Arab countries offered limited assistance due to their own internal and external struggles.⁶²

First: the absence of international intervention. The massacres and instability which is associated with ISIS in Iraq and Syria did not immediately result in a response from Western countries such as the United States or NATO.⁶³ Their response emerged only after millions of refugees were displaced. I consider that this delay by the Western powers was due to a lack of engaged knowledge of the religious-political situation in the region.⁶⁴ I consider there were several possible reasons why the Western powers did not act quickly. My question is, were the Western powers unaware of the gravity of the situation, or did they not want to intervene in a situation that did not directly involve their national security interests?⁶⁵ We might suggest that it would be a problem if they did intervene, and it is a problem if they did not. In geopolitical terms their involvement could have led to even more severe problems because countries in the

60 Washington Institute, 'The Paris Response: Answering Urgent Questions in the Anti-ISIS Fight', *The Washington Institute*, November 19, 2015, <<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/paris-response-answering-urgent-questions-anti-isis-fight>> [accessed 06/05/21].

61 Jewish Virtual Library, 'The Islamic State: International Response', *Jewish Virtual Library*, <<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-islamic-state-international-response>> [accessed 6/05/21].

62 USIP, 'The Jihadi Threat', *USIP* <<https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/The-Jihadi-Threat-ISIS-Al-Qaeda-and-Beyond.pdf>> [accessed 06/05/21].

63 Roland Freudenstein, 'The Arab Spring: What's in It for Us?', *European View* 10, no. 1 (June 1, 2011), 67–72, <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12290-011-0172-4>> [accessed 17/03/21].

64 Anne Aly, 'Is It Fair to Blame the West for Trouble in the Middle East?', *The Conversation*, 5 October 2014, <<https://theconversation.com/is-it-fair-to-blame-the-west-for-trouble-in-the-middle-east-32487>> [accessed 05/06/21].

65 David Sterman, 'Decision-Making in the Counter-ISIS War', *New America*, November 15, 2019, <<http://newamerica.org/international-security/reports/decision-making-counter-isis-war>> [accessed 17/03/21].

region did not want them interfering which would impact upon their countries. Second: the corrupt regimes in Syria and Iraq along with the neighbouring Arab countries which offered little help because of their own struggles. I consider that some neighbouring countries such as Egypt and Tunisia had struggled with the Arab Spring in terms of their own internal political situation, and were in a not in a position to offer assistance in the refugee crisis. Other states Qatar and Kuwait seem to have stood aside.

WISE JUDGEMENT APPROACH—STEP 2: DISCERNMENT

Osmer explains that *Wise Judgement* is essential to determine when an action is ‘courageous, not reckless’. It is also necessary to decide that the means are present to establish a courageous action in a given context.⁶⁶

With respect to the absence of a Western presence, it can be argued that the Western powers, led by the USA, acted with lethargy toward this crisis—particularly at the beginning of the crisis.⁶⁷ An argument from ethics can be made here: the Western powers may have acted unethically by delaying their response to an urgent matter because of the ongoing conflict which I consider reflected a policy orientation to let the Syrian regime and ISIS fight and weaken each other.⁶⁸ The link between the delayed response and the concept of human rights is that it is inhumane to withdraw or delay help from the civilians when governments are in a position to do so.

With respect to the Iraqi and Syrian governments, in political science democratic governments are elected to support and protect their own citizens.⁶⁹ However, that was not the case with both the Iraqi and Syrian governments. Being Shi‘ites they were slow to defend their

66 Osmer, *Practical Theology*, p. 85.

67 ‘Iraq Timeline: Since the 2003 War’, United States Institute of Peace, <<https://www.usip.org/iraq-timeline-2003-war>> [accessed 7/05/21].

68 Dominic Evans, ‘Syria Tells Western Foes to Stop Dreaming Assad Will Go’, Reuters, November 27, 2013, <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-geneva-idUSBRE9AQ0DG20131127>> [accessed 05/06/21]

69 Steven J Heyman, ‘The First Duty of Government: Protection, Liberty and the Fourteenth Amendment’, *Duke Law Journal* 41, no. 3 (December 1991), p. 507, <<https://doi.org/10.2307/1372846>> [accessed 17/05/21].

fellow Iraqi Sunnis from ISIS.⁷⁰ Both Iraqi and Syrian governments had taken the oath to protect their very own citizens from any possible danger but I consider that this did not take place due to unethical policy perspectives which do not relate to Osman's Practical Theology. German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who himself suffered from the ethical immoralities of Nazism, wrote that practising ethics includes recognition of solid unchangeable realities,⁷¹ or fixed principles. The widespread killing of Iraqis civilians is thus undeniably unethical. In addition, the corrupt government also acted in an unethical manner by not assisting those who were displaced.⁷² Naturally, neither the Iraqi nor the Syrian government acted ethically in a biblical sense as they are not governed by Christian conceptual ideas. Grenz asserts that 'ethics is the study of how humans ought to live as informed by Bible and Christian convictions.'⁷³ Since 'ethics is applied faith [and] Christianity is about how to live and what we ought to do,'⁷⁴ one cannot apply faith in hidden ways.⁷⁵ Questions and answers⁷⁶ in this ethical dilemma should be grounded in God's word as an attempt to define what may be termed 'good human action.'⁷⁷ 'Good human action' does not necessarily have to be maintained by Christians exclusively. Governments can still practise good human action.

With respect to the lack of help from other Arab countries, I consider that various neighbouring Arab countries, especially the Gulf countries, could have helped more;⁷⁸ especially as their economies were

70 'Iraq Timeline: Since the 2003 War', United States Institute of Peace, <<https://www.usip.org/iraq-timeline-2003-war>> [accessed 7/05/21].

71 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, Macmillan Publishing Co., New York: 1986, p. xv.

72 Zaid Al-Ali, 'How Maliki Ruined Iraq', *Foreign Policy*, June 19, 2014, <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/06/19/how-maliki-ruined-iraq/>> [accessed 24/05/21].

73 Stanley J Grenz, *The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics*, IVP Academic, Downers Grove; Ill., 2000), p. 23.

74 David Cook, *The Moral Maze: A Way of Exploring Christian Ethics*, SPCK, London, 1997, p. 10.

75 Christopher Wright, *Old Testament Ethics For The People of God*, IVP, Leicester, 2004, p. 470.

76 Samuel Wells, Ben Quash, and Rebekah Ann Eklund, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, 2nd ed., Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken, NJ, 2017, p. 2.

77 Karl Barth, *The Christian Life: Church Dogmatics IV, 4: Lecture Fragments*, Eerdmans Pub. Co, Grand Rapids, 1981, p. 3.

78 Euro News, 'Why Aren't Rich Gulf States Welcoming Syrian Refugees ... or Are They?', *Euro News*, September 30, 2015, <<https://www.euronews.com/2015/09/30/why-aren-t-rich-gulf-states-welcoming-syrian-refugees-or-are-they>> [accessed 07/06/21].

strong due to income from oil.⁷⁹ The policy perspectives of some of the Gulf countries offered a funding environment for the ISIS movement and parts of wider Islamist movement.⁸⁰ Kuwait, on the other hand, had been involved in previous conflicts and wars with the former Iraqi regime which offered a further geopolitical complexity.⁸¹

Thiselton reminds us that ‘Ethics demand fixing one’s eyes solely on the simple truth of God ...’⁸² This leads us to the following section which continues the analysis of Osmer’s Task 2, ‘Why is it going on?’

WISE JUDGEMENT APPROACH—STEP 3: EFFECTIVE MEANS WHY IS THE CHURCH HELPING?

To answer this question, we will draw on Osmer’s third step in achieving *Wise Judgement*: ‘deciding on the most *effective means* to accomplish these ends taking into consideration the constraints and possibilities of a particular time and place.’⁸³ Osmer elaborates that, ‘This is a complex intellectual activity, requiring judgments about the theories most relevant to the case and their contribution to the realization of moral ends defined theologically.’⁸⁴ Karl Barth’s opinion supports the inevitability of ethics in all tasks of theology in presenting the grace of God in Christ as the ground where both anthropology and theology land.⁸⁵ In order for the church to practise its theology faithfully both Christian and moral ethics have to be considered and well maintained.

79 HRW, ‘Human Rights Watch Background Briefing: Iraqi Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Displaced Persons: Current Conditions and Concerns in the Event of War’, <<https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/mena/iraq021203/4.htm>> [accessed 07/05/21].

80 HSDL, ‘Cash to Chaos: Dismantling ISIS’ financial Infrastructure’, <<https://www.hsd.org/?viewanddid=796005>> [accessed 24/05/21].

81 History, ‘Milestones: 1989–1992 - Office of the Historian’, *History*, <<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1989-1992/gulf-war>> [accessed 24/05/21].

82 Anthony C Thiselton, *Approaching the Study of Theology: An Introduction to Key Thinkers, Concepts, Methods and Debates*, IVP Academic, Downers Grove, Illinois, 2018, p. 55.

83 Osmer, *Practical Theology*, p. 84.

84 Osmer, *Practical Theology*, p. 85.

85 Ray Sherman Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis*, p. 132.

This section demonstrates the contrast between the reaction of man-made governments on one side and the church as God's institution on the other. I suggest that due governments are not expected to abide by Christian ethics in either an Islamic or in 'so-called' secular Western context; they may not have seen it a priority to offer help. Even from a humanistic perspective, all governments involved, whether Western, Iraqi or Syrian, failed these peaceful civilians by not keeping and maintaining ethical values. In contrast, the church as the Kingdom of God's representative on earth should always maintain Christian morals. Through the refugee crisis, the Arab Evangelical Church is challenged to determine practical ways to achieve resolutions considering the limitations and circumstances of a particular time and place.⁸⁶ If the church did not collaborate with similar institutions, it would be difficult for it to be a part of this humanitarian aid project.

The circumstances are not ideal in terms of religion, politics, culture, and society in the Middle East. But responding to the overwhelming need of the refugees is characteristic of the practice of Christians ethics. There is room for more churches and individuals to offer practical help. The church is invited to apply biblical wisdom: 'Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed' (Proverbs 19: 17).

In summary, some of the challenges that face the church in the Middle East in responding to the refugee crisis are:

- Limited infrastructure and economical resources in both countries. The resources of the church are limited. The Protestant Evangelicals form double minorities in both Jordan and Lebanon.
- In a context of the Middle East with a dominant Muslim society, any practical help can be interpreted as evangelism which is against the law. Therefore, the church must be wise (Matthew 10: 16) in its approach. This is an important consideration for Christian presence in the Middle East and wider Muslim societies.
- The existence of some political conflicts between one

⁸⁶ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, p. 84.

of the host countries and the refugees' country of origin: for example, the difficult historical relations between Lebanon and Syria further complicates the situation.

- Because of the lack of unity between the different Christian denominations, the Arab Evangelical Church might find itself serving without any local partnerships among refugees.

This section first described the nature of Practical Theology. It then described Osmer's model, and unpacked the first task of Osmer's model (What is going on?) as well as the second task (Why is it going on?).

In so doing, it has attempted to formulate reasons as to why the crisis of the refugees took place and why the Western powers and Arab governments did not immediately intervene. It has also discussed why the church on the other hand was in a position to help. It has reflected on the 'Wise Judgement' approach concluding that theories and Scriptures provide a rationale in explaining why the government failed to accomplish ethically what some churches like Resurrection Church Beirut helpfully and hospitably had done and continue to do.

OSMER'S FINAL TWO TASKS: 'WHAT OUGHT TO BE GOING ON?'

In this section, I answer the questions associated with Osmer's third and fourth tasks in interpreting the practices of the churches responding to the refugee crisis. Osmer's third question is: 'What ought to be going on?' In theologically reflecting on the crisis of the refugees, I draw on the parable of the Good Samaritan. I interpret how the parable of the Good Samaritan is the biblical basis for the churches' practice as they respond to the crisis of the refugees. In this task Osmer also identifies ethical norms and good practice as part of answering the question. Then I turn my attention to Osmer's fourth task by answering the question, 'How might we respond?' This section unpacks the potential of transformational leadership to empower servant-leaders within the church to minister to refugees in crisis.

**THIRD TASK: WHAT OUGHT TO BE GOING ON?
(THE NORMATIVE TASK)**

Osmer's third task is normative, seeking to establish how a given situation should occur in a normal—just—world. He calls it *Prophetic Discernment*. This task encapsulates 'both divine disclosure and the human shaping of God's word'.⁸⁷ Osmer's *Prophetic Discernment* can be summarised by the following three methods: theological interpretation, ethical norms in reflection and guidance, and good practice. Each one of the three methods are examined in this section as demonstrated within the Arab churches. Through this exercise, normative disciplines within the Practical Theology method are brought into the discussion with alternative fields,⁸⁸ such as the field of ethics in this case, and theological reflection.

For Osmer, theological interpretation is informed by biblical and systematic theology, however, it 'focuses on the interpretation of present episodes, situations, and contexts with theological concepts.'⁸⁹ The theological interpretation, in relation to the churches' involvement in responding to the crisis of the refugees, can be done by observing and interpreting successful or unsuccessful ministry initiatives of the churches towards refugees.

In the context of the refugee crisis, the practitioners must first have sympathy according to God's pathos.⁹⁰ Moltmann, describes sympathy as being in 'fellowship with the feelings of God'.⁹¹ The situation of the Iraqi and Syrian refugees deeply touches the feelings of Christians both individually and collectively as churches. Walter Brueggemann, highlights this process as 'the embrace of pathos'.⁹² Since Scripture indicates that God experiences emotions in a similar way to humans (Psalms 34: 17-18), God ultimately feels compassion for the refugees. So, to serve among the refugees begins with sharing God's compassion toward those who are displaced.

87 Osmer, *Practical Theology*, pp. 134-135.

88 Osmer, *Practical Theology*, p. 132.

89 Osmer, *Practical Theology*, p. 139.

90 Osmer, *Practical Theology*, p. 136.

91 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, Harper and Row, New York, 1974, p. 126.

92 Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd ed., Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2001, p. 53.

In discussing the theological interpretation that Christians ought to have as they serve refugees, it would usually be difficult for practitioners to sympathise with those who are considered enemies. Therefore, one theological interpretation that emerges from their ministry is that they ought to be spiritually willing and prepared to serve no matter who they serve. Scripture invites the church to embrace *orthopathos*,⁹³ which denotes correct pity or sorrow concerning the calamities of others (Romans 12: 15). Given the history of enmity between Syrians and Lebanese, the Lebanese generally, and the Christians specifically, are challenged by this command.

The long-term conflict between Lebanon and Syria has engendered a mutually distrustful relationship between Lebanese and Syrians. However, this opportunity to embrace *orthopathos* presents the Lebanese church with the challenge to break the barrier of enmity and to be peacemakers through practically applying Jesus' teaching to 'love your enemies' found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:44).

The vision of the leaders is also evident in their communications with the outer world through newsletters and making use of online platforms to address the needs and challenges of responding to the refugee crisis. The leaders were also driven by a sense of interest in the refugees, intentionally reaching out and providing a better life for the needy by easing their suffering. This attempt of providing a better life is demonstrated through the church reaching out beyond its walls, not only to their immediate neighbours but also to those who reside in other cities and towns, drawing on the mission of Jesus (Luke 4: 18; John 10: 10). It also comes from their commitment to be engaged in the Great Commission (Matthew 28: 16-20; Mark 16: 15-18).

In line with Osmer's focus on biblical themes, a second theological interpretation can be drawn from the Parable of the Good Samaritan as we will discuss below.

93 Palestinian Theologian Yohanna Katanacho defines 'Orthopathos is the kind of human suffering that becomes a source for liberation and social transformation.' Yohanna Katanacho, *The Land of Christ: A Palestinian Cry*, Pickwick Publications, Eugene, Oregon, 2013, p. 63.

**THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD
SAMARITAN (LUKE 10: 25-37, ESV).**

UNDERSTANDING THE PARABLE IN THE GIVEN CONTEXT

Yohanna Katanacho, Palestinian theologian, suggests that this narrative teaches us that though it was difficult to recognise the ethnicity or identity of the injured man from his garments, he was a human being.⁹⁴ He reminds us that ‘When we love God, we love all his creation and we acknowledge that our neighbor, every human, is created in the image of God.’⁹⁵ These truths are a basis for the theological interpretation particularly referring to the crisis of the refugees since at the heart of it, they are humans. We will now draw on three themes relating to the crisis of the refugees.

**REFLECTING ON THE THEME OF LOVE/COMPASSION
IN THE PARABLE**

In this parable there are examples of sacrificial love. The Samaritan’s actions towards the injured man can be described as love that knows no boundaries. Each action that the Samaritan took reflects love. In fact, this parable is embedded in the theme of love. Love towards God and one’s neighbour is central to Christian life and ministry. God requires us to love others (including neighbours and even enemies) as much as we love God. Jesus reveals that the motive behind his actions toward the wounded man was his compassion (v. 33). For this Samaritan, the barriers could have been tradition, enmity, accusation or religious contempt.⁹⁶

Jesus’ life, and personal ministry among Samaritans reflects love, and his use of a Samaritan figure as the hero in this parable inspires the breaking down of barriers in the present

94 Yohanna Katanacho, ‘Religious Extremism in Christianity and Dealing with the Stranger-Part 2’, *Bethbc* (blog), 22 January 2020, <<https://bethbc.edu/acblog/2020/01/22/religious-extremism-in-christianity-and-dealing-with-the-stranger-part-1-2/>> [accessed 24/05/21].

95 *Ibid.*

96 David L Jeffrey, *Luke, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible*, Brazos Press, Grand Rapids, 2012, p. 149.

situation, after a long-term history of a conflicted relationship full of avoidance and enmity.⁹⁷ However, the story portrays other characters who are not driven by love or compassion. The two religious men overlooked the injured man, lest he be dead, as they did not want to be defiled in line with Old Testament laws (see Numbers 19: 13). However, Bailey draws our attention to the fact that in OT laws rescuing life overcomes other laws.⁹⁸ So the inaction of the priest and the Levite is inexcusable.

Desperate for a glimpse of hope, it can be claimed that Iraqi and Syrian refugees, like the wounded man in the parable (v. 30), fell among thieves, who have persecuted them, stolen their homes and even threatened their lives as ISIS did. Priestly and Levitical governments did not offer much help but rather encouraged the refugees to flee to the host countries. Through their practical help to the refugees, the churches have demonstrated their love for God and for their neighbours without calculating the risk of being ‘defiled’. In this situation, the church could face criticism for offering help to Muslims.⁹⁹ The parable is essentially a midrash on Leviticus 19: 18.¹⁰⁰ Jesus’ answer ‘offers definitive instruction both on how and whom we should love.’¹⁰¹ In the following section I will theologically reflect on the theme of love drawing on the points below summarised from Stassen and Gushee in *Kingdom Ethics*.¹⁰²

The Arab church has intentionally entered into the context of the refugees and helped them in their ‘helplessness’ and ‘vulnerability’ (335). Not only is Jesus calling Jews to have community with Samaritans but this is also a message for today where Palestinians have replaced Samaritans,¹⁰³ and where Syrians have also replaced

97 Jeffrey, *Luke*, p. 149.

98 Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes*, p. 293.

99 The plight of the Iraqi and Syrian refugees occurred in a region that is also characterised by religiosity. But, once again that religion could only offer destruction and harm to the victims. The crisis of the refugees ‘underlines the obvious limits of humanitarians, who can neither stop *Daesh* nor readily secure access to their victims.’ Peter J Hoffman and Thomas G Weiss, *Humanitarianism, War, and Politics: Solferino to Syria and Beyond*, New Millennium Books in International Studies, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, 2018, p. 155.

100 G Stassen and D Gushee. *Kingdom Ethics*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2003, p. 334.

101 Crossan in *Parables*, 57 cited in Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, p. 334.

102 Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, pp. 334–338.

103 See Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 337 and N T Wright, *Luke for Everyone*,

Samaritans. The love that Jesus presents in this parable invites the refugees into a new community that is free, just and loving. The parable is about the ethic of the people of Israel, which is to be an ethic of compassionate justice.¹⁰⁴

The church ought to include outsiders along with refugees in its family as an integral part of God's kingdom (Revelation 7: 9). 'Clearly, Jesus is confronting us with the eschatological challenge of a kingdom populated with our enemies, whom God loves and whom we must love.'¹⁰⁵ When the church knows about pressing needs and can do good to those who are in need but does not act accordingly, this counts as sin (James 4:17). The theme of sacrificial love in the parable serves to teach the church how to love refugees who are neighbours as we will theologically reflect below on the theme of neighbour.

REFLECTING ON THE THEME OF NEIGHBOUR

Jesus gave this parable in response to a question from the lawyer, 'Who is my neighbour?' (Matthew 15: 26, 27). For Jesus, the word 'neighbour' is a verb, a method of behaving toward needy people thus offering life to 'both giver and receiver.'¹⁰⁶ Further, the Greek word *gegomenai* (became and remains) is significant to Jesus' question in v. 36: 'who of the three became a neighbour (or showed neighbourliness) ...?'¹⁰⁷ In the same way, the actions and deeds of the church determine if the church is being a good neighbour to others. It is also an invitation for the church to interpret theologically and reflect on what ought to be done in the light of Christian morals, and to make the right moral decisions to help those in need. Interpreting the parable shows a biblical model for the church to define who its neighbours are. It also includes treating neighbours the way they themselves want to be treated (Matthew 7: 12).

In the Middle East, everyone is everyone's neighbour. People take their neighbours seriously, contrary to some Western settings. The

pp. 126-129.

104 Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, p. 338.

105 Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, p. 339.

106 Edwards, *Luke*, p. 323.

107 Ibid.

parable invites the Arab church to reflect on serving its neighbours. By being guided from the Scriptures, (1Thessalonians 5: 11; Galatians 6: 2; Galatians 5: 14; Hebrews 13: 1-2, Matthew 7: 12), the church is in a position to demonstrate the ethics of love to its neighbours.

Challenging any barriers between neighbours whether social, racial, religious, or economic is a key factor in stepping forward to help the refugees. This leads us to theologically interpreting the theme of hospitality in the parable as relevant to the church.

REFLECTING ON THE THEME OF HOSPITALITY

The parable exhibits what it means to practise hospitality to one's neighbour, although the theme of hospitality is not explicitly highlighted by commentators in relation to the parable in the same way that love and neighbours are. The Good Samaritan demonstrates to the church a creative and practical way that hospitality can be improved. Demonstrating practical love, compassion, hospitality and caring for one's neighbour may pave the way to a spiritual response by the recipients. This provide a model to enrich the ministry to Syrian/Iraqi refugees in Lebanon as to 'what ought to be going on.' This description resonates with the situation of the Iraqi and Syrian refugees in both Lebanon and Jordan who could, in their present circumstances, be described as 'marginal people.' Jung Lee, puts forward that 'to be marginal means to be suffering servants, whether socio-political or psychological.'¹⁰⁸

The second part of Osmer's third task is ethical norms which we will examine below.

ETHICAL NORMS

Through ethical reflection, Osmer's interpretive guide uses 'ethical principles, rules, or guidelines to guide action towards moral ends.'¹⁰⁹ Since ministry practices are characterised by norms and values that

108 Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1995, p. 159.

109 Osmer, *Practical Theology*, p. 161.

at times are in conflict, the interpretive guide must identify ethical principles from the faith community's own traditions. Osmer has explained the importance of Christian ethics in his overall approach. This section will identify a few of the ethical principles or values that the interpreter observed in the data. Ethicist James Gustafson draws our attention to the importance of ethical norms, principles, and canons in moral existence.¹¹⁰ Practitioners ought to be committed to the situation of the refugees whilst living by Christian ethics and standards. Since ethics are contextually applicable, they are both divine ordering and commandments in their nature. However, Christian ethics cannot occur without love. In fact, love is the centre of Christian ethics.

Another virtue the interpreter identified from the data collected in the descriptive-empirical task was mercy. Contrary to the governments, both churches demonstrated mercy towards the refugees without questioning the apparent foreignness of the refugees. The mercy that the church had led them to practise hospitality adding to the virtues they already had (1 Peter 4: 7-11; 2 Peter 1: 5-8). They demonstrated 'acceptable religion' (James 1: 27).

The last aspect of Osmer's third task is Good Practice.

GOOD PRACTICE

For Osmer, good practice, whether past or present, provides the interpretive guide with examples to sharpen prophetic discernment in answering the question 'What ought to be going on?' Good practice takes two very different roles in Osmer's model. First, the interpretive guide identifies examples of good practice, 'to reform a congregation's present actions'.¹¹¹ Second, analysis of present examples of good practice 'can generate new understandings of God, the Christian life, and social values beyond those provided by the received tradition.'¹¹² The new understanding of God that the interpreter has generated observing the church operating in a Muslim context is that a loving God cares for the refugees and can turn calamities into blessings. This thought is

110 James M Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective. 1: Theology and Ethics*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1983, pp. 53-55.

111 Osmer, *Practical Theology*, p. 153.

112 *Ibid.*

not explicit within Islam. For example, the ninety-nine names of God in Islam do not include that ‘God is love’. This new understanding leads the church to applying the good practice of loving the refugees as God loves them.

In Middle Eastern culture, Arabs are known to be sociable and hospitable: ‘My home is your home.’¹¹³ Bailey confirms that, ‘Middle Eastern people have a tremendous capacity for showing honor to guests.’¹¹⁴ Today, for the present occupants of the Middle East, refugees being homeless is not acceptable. Their very nature of hospitality explains the willingness of these Arab countries, mainly Lebanon and Jordan, to welcome their Iraqi and Syrian neighbours despite their own struggling economic situations, driven by the urgency of the crisis, and by a desire to offer refuge to those who are homeless. Christians ought to carry out the Kingdom Ethics by being compassionate towards the injured, and challenge the cultural norms by showing mercy. Then ethics can be maintained through the mindset of equalities.¹¹⁵ This is evidenced when one values the well-being of humanity despite any differences. The ‘human well-being’ is merit that goes beyond every culture.¹¹⁶

To my mind the church in the Middle East has not undertaken sufficient reflection and work concerning the crisis of the refugees which is due to the fact that some of the churches have previously little exposure to this issue. However, this will differ from country to country and various contexts in which the churches are present—for example the historical experience of the various Eastern Christian churches at the end of the Ottoman Empire which ushered in a deep rooted and profound dislocation of Christians. Also, one might mention again the situation of Arab Palestinian Christians in 1948. In countries that are known for their deep economic and volatile sectarian environments such as those in the Middle East, the church must have a role in reaching out to the most vulnerable families in their communities. Faith could be the main element that would bring hope and unity to devastated communities. Therefore, church leaders from all denominations should come together in an attempt to deliver a message of faith that would inspire hope.

113 Arabic adage.

114 Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes*, p. 36.

115 Osmer, *Practical Theology*, p. 151.

116 Elvin Hatch, *Culture and Morality: The Relativity of Values in Anthropology*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1983, p. 134.

The Arab church is invited to offer a practical *agape* to the refugees. This research has found the Resurrection Church Beirut an example of practical *agape*, which is what ought to be going on within the other Arab Evangelical Churches situated among the refugees. The following points demonstrate examples of good practice I identified through the work of RCB:

First: The practical way of showing love can provide a new perspective for other churches on how God can work through the limitations of these churches producing a surprisingly great outcome.

Second: Letting go of any hatred that might lead to interpreting this situation as God’s judgement on both Iraq and Syria. Although God is sovereign, human evil deeds and immoral political behaviours are the obvious reasons for this calamity (1 Thessalonians 5: 15).

Third: Instead of drawing away from helping those who historically have been assumed to be enemies, the church ought to step forward with kindness as the refugees suffer, acknowledging that God feels their suffering and suffers with them (Romans 12: 20).

Fourth: Acting with the hope of redemption through humbly aligning one’s heart and motivations with God’s redemptive plan for the displaced ones (Matthew 25: 34-40).¹¹⁷

Having looked at Osmer’s third task of prophetic discernment, I will complete this analysis by addressing his fourth task, ‘How might the church respond?’

TASK FOUR: HOW MIGHT WE RESPOND? THE PRAGMATIC TASK: SERVANT LEADERSHIP.

The fourth task of Osmer’s Model asks and answers the question: How might we respond? In so doing, this section will explore

117 These points are a summary of Osmer, *Practical Theology*, p. 143.

different methods and approaches to the task. The pragmatic task is ‘the task of forming and enacting strategies of action that influence events in ways that are desirable ... *leading change*.’¹¹⁸ It can be achieved through forms of practice that can present to the leaders an idea about the nature of the field in which they might be working and how to develop it in order to achieve desired goals.¹¹⁹ The focus of this task is on leadership. Osmer identifies three forms of leadership: ‘Task Competence ... Transactional Leadership ... Transforming Leadership.’¹²⁰ Task competence is ‘the ability to excel in performing the tasks of a leadership role in an organization ...’,¹²¹ while transactional leadership ‘is the ability to influence others through a process of trade-offs,¹²² or a win-win situation.

The focus of this section is on applying Transforming Leadership to help the congregations become more involved in serving refugees. It also suggests improving existing practices and imagining new practices in identifying ways the two churches can improve their ministries as examples for other churches. Osmer asserts, ‘... it is transforming leadership that is most needed, leadership that can guide a congregation through a process of deep change.’¹²³ For Osmer, this deep change highlights the distinction between the three forms of leadership,¹²⁴ making a real difference. The change may include several aspects such as the mission of the church, welcoming the outsiders who may be different, even the identity of the church if that is necessary, reaching out to the needy, the worship and fellowship.¹²⁵

This section has unpacked tasks three and four of Osmer’s model. It has answered the question of ‘what ought to be going on?’, drawing on the parable of the Good Samaritan as an example from the Scriptures applicable to the crisis of the refugees. It has gleaned theological interpretations from the parable that inform the ethical norms and practices within the church, taking into consideration

118 Osmer, *Practical Theology*, p. 176.

119 Ibid.

120 Osmer, *Practical Theology*, p. 178. The distinction between transactional and transforming leadership goes back to James M Burns, *Leadership*, Harper and Row, New York, 1978. It has been later developed by others.

121 Osmer, *Practical Theology*, p. 176.

122 Ibid.

123 Osmer, *Practical Theology*, p. 178.

124 Osmer, *Practical Theology*, p. 183.

125 Osmer, *Practical Theology*, p. 177.

the good practices of an Arab Evangelical Church in Lebanon. This section has also answered the fourth question related to the fourth task: 'How might the church respond?' It has addressed the significance of the role of transforming leadership leading to deep change within the congregation as a result of embracing attitudes of humility, servanthood, unity and hospitality whilst crossing barriers.

CONCLUSION

In seeking to understand the response of the Arab Evangelical Church with reference to the crisis of the refugees in Lebanon, this study has applied Osmer's four-task analysis in the field of Practical Theology. The article began with an overview of the Evangelical Church in the Middle East and then surveyed the religious context that this church finds itself, namely the origins of Islam in the 7th century and its contemporary reality and the ideology of present-day radical Islam. This radicalism, evidenced by the rise of groups such as ISIS, has played a major role in causing the refugee crisis. However, this radicalism has also paved the way for the Arab church to be involved in providing practical help to Muslim refugees. The reader was then introduced to the field of Practical Theology. This was followed by a thorough exploration of Osmer's first two tasks for analysing a practice: the descriptive and interpretative tasks. In the third section Osmer's third and fourth tasks were explored: the normative and pragmatic tasks. These four tasks provided the reader with a structure for understanding the role of the church in ministering to refugees.

The committed Christian like myself, who is part of the local and global church, is also compelled to participate in making a difference to the lives of those who have been oppressed, marginalised and displaced. Once I had seen what was happening with the refugees in the Middle East, I was determined to help. However, the reader is also invited to go and see, as I hope to do again. The hope is that this research offered such theological engagement, lending the church a renewed sense of vision, mission and practicality to instil hope amidst a catastrophic situation.

POLITICAL PATRIARCHS:
A STUDY OF THE POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE
OF PATRIARCH THOMAS OF THE CHALDEAN
CATHOLIC CHURCH DURING THE CREATION
OF IRAQ

Alexander Humphries

The Chaldean Catholic Church is the largest, and arguably the most successfully integrated, Christian community of Iraq, continuing to survive and expand in the country even after a turbulent history, most notoriously in the last decade. Although some contemporary studies are beginning to redirect academic inquiry towards them, the Chaldean Church has been, for the most part, historically overlooked in favour of the history of other religious communities in the 20th century. With Iraq facing its first centenary later this year (a centenary in the sense of the signing of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1922), it is appropriate that I write this article in support of the continued studies of the Chaldean community and elaborate upon their history and actions around the creation of Iraq itself.

Having studied the subject of the Chaldean Catholic Church and Iraq's early history for my doctoral studies, and spent a considerable time working in the country, I would like to take this opportunity to discuss the church and how it supported and aided the creation and development of Iraq itself. For this to occur, I have chosen to emphasise the life, decisions, and key actions or policies of the contemporary Chaldean Patriarch, Yousef VI Emmanuel II Thomas, which have proven to be essential to the church's successful integration into the nation. Beginning with a brief biographical account of Emmanuel Thomas prior to Iraq's creation, and because of the emphasis upon the patriarch's political and communal role as

Dedication

I dedicate this article, and all its accompanying research, to Dr Suha Rassam who was the one that began, and provided continued support throughout, my long and extensive research into the Chaldean Church, its patriarch and all the Christian communities of Iraq. Together, we hope that this research will benefit the Christians of Iraq and bring them much needed acknowledgement and recognition.

leader, the analysis will then lead into an explanation of the political environment of Iraq and its change from Ottoman *Vilayet* to British Mandate. Once this is established, the article can then explain what the patriarch's main actions and decisions were and how these were to his communities' advantage.

As a point to make clear, there are a variety of reasons why the Chaldean Catholic Church was able to adapt to life in Iraq so successfully, whether these reasons are directly or indirectly related to the patriarch himself, or for other reasons. It also cannot be denied that the success of the Chaldean Church derives, in part, from certain advantages that could not be shared with other religious communities, whether they were Christian or not, as well as the fact that these other, non-Chaldean communities faced difficulties that the Chaldeans themselves never needed to encounter. Nevertheless, instead of listing and explaining every reason or situation that worked in favour of the Chaldeans and comparing it to those that worked against the non-Chaldean communities, it was felt that by focusing upon the Chaldean patriarch himself, a better understanding can be reached regarding how the church conducted itself during the changing political environment. Unsurprisingly, this has meant prioritising the studies of the patriarch from the perspective of his political role and significance, and hence why this article has opted to focus on this angle of the patriarch's leadership.

PRIEST TO PATRIARCH¹

Despite originating from such humble beginnings, the future Patriarch Thomas appeared to have a promising career in the making long before his appointment. Born on 8 August 1852, Yousef, son of Touma (Thomas) hailed from the village of Alqosh, approximately thirty miles

1 All the information about Patriarch Thomas concerning this section has been recorded in an Annex to Despatch No. 31 sent by the British Consulate in Mosul (R A Beaumont) to the Chargé d'affaires of the British Embassy in Baghdad on the 24 July 1947. Although this source portrays patriarch Thomas in a highly positive light and even identifies him as the main reason the Chaldean community survived during the war, the account is predominantly based on locally derived information and there is a risk that the information either has potential biases or cannot be easily verified through other sources.

north of the city of Mosul. Because of his village's strong connection with the Chaldean Catholic Church, Yousef son of Tourma began his religious training in Alqosh before being accepted into the Institution of Jesuit Fathers in Beirut in 1869. He would remain in Beirut for ten years before returning to Mesopotamia to be ordained as a priest in Mosul by the current Chaldean Patriarch Eliya XIV Abulyonan (1878–1894). As a priest, Yousef undertook several tasks and appointments that would prove to be valuable both to his current patriarch and his future appointment as patriarch himself, most significantly his appointment as the director of the Chaldean Seminary and Patriarch Elia's personal secretary.

This capacity as the patriarch's secretary proved to be most valuable, as Yousef was able to travel and expand upon his understanding of political and religious matters, such as when he accompanied his superior to Rome, Paris, London and Constantinople in 1890. This particular trip produced several good results for Yousef. In the first case, while in Rome, the Vatican confirmed him as Bishop Thomas of Siirt, providing him with greater authority over the Chaldean community and more direct relations to leading figures within the Catholic Church. Secondly, because of his new position and the relations he had made with individuals throughout his travels, Bishop Thomas was able to develop a network of contacts to people of power and authority from Constantinople, including the Sultan himself. Due to these contacts, Bishop Thomas was able to ensure or complete developments for the Chaldean community that previous bishops had failed to achieve, one being to secure the Sublime Porte's sanction for the construction of the Chaldean Cathedral in Siirt. However, perhaps the most important of Yousef's pre-war achievements was the fact that he appeared to have established excellent relations with Ottoman political leaders and authorities. These excellent relations would prove to be instrumental to the success and survival of the Chaldean community later in his life, but for now, upon his appointment to patriarch in 1900, the newly titled Patriarch Thomas could enjoy the benefits of his relationship with the Ottoman government and specifically with Sultan Abdul Hamid II.

The significance of these relationships between the patriarch and head of state could be demonstrated by the outbreak of World War I. When war broke out and the Sublime Porte sought to identify its

allies and enemies, Patriarch Thomas was able to present the Chaldean Church as less of a potential enemy to the Ottoman Empire and subsequently less of a target for persecution. As a result, the Chaldean community were proportionally better protected from the horrors that befell other Christian communities of Mesopotamia. When war did break out, the patriarch was charitable and attempted to provide aid to as many Christians as he could, regardless of community or denomination. He provided succour to Chaldean and Armenian refugees who had been driven south from the *Vilayets* of Urfa and Azerbaijan by the Turks and, for at least his immediate community, he was able to feed them during the Mosul Famine.

While this early account of his biography and patriarchal career shows Emmanuel Thomas to be a kind and generous man, his political significance should not be diminished, especially since this was about to face a monumental shift upon the end of the First World War. For this reason, a brief explanation of the Ottoman-era political role that religious communal leaders served is needed before Patriarch Thomas' role in Iraq can be understood.

OTTOMAN MILLET: HEAD OF A NATION

Since the Ottoman conquest of Cairo in 1517, and until the creation of additional categories, all non-Muslim peoples and communities in the regions that would make Mesopotamia, and later Iraq, were initially categorised by the Ottoman administration into three general groupings called 'millets' (Talal: 1994, 77-78):

- Millet-i Yahud—the community of the Jews.
- Millet-i Rum—the community of Greeks or the Ottoman Christian communities that accepted the Council of Chalcedon.
- Millet-i Arman—the community of Armenians or the Ottoman Christian communities that did not accept the Council of Chalcedon.

These three categories represented the beginning of the 'Millet system', a loosely organised structure in which religious communities

were identified and permitted to settle their own internal affairs, maintaining some semi-autonomy including settlement of legal matters between persons within the community. Although initially limited, the number of these ‘millets’ would increase dramatically from 1830 onwards,² with the first Catholic millet being formed in 1830 and the millet for the Chaldean Catholic community being formed in 1844 (Davison: 1977, 37). Because religion was the primary distinguishing factor used to differentiate the Ottoman non-Islamic peoples, the term ‘millet’ was originally defined as a ‘religious community’ and any concept of ‘nation’ or identity within these communities was linked to their religious traditions (Davison: 1977, 33). Crucially, the religious leader of the community (including for example the Chaldean patriarch) was a theocrat, being the recognised head of his millet and representing both his community to the sultan, as well as the sultan and the Ottoman state to his community. In a table detailing the ‘Ottoman Social Structure in 1780–1870’, Kemal Karpat illustrates the dominant elites for Christian communities i.e., the patriarchs and the heads of their millets and their subgroups, as being of comparable significance to the Muslim elites: the Throne and the Bureaucracy (both central and provincial) (1973, 58).

This position of political authority and recognition by the state would prove to be of enormous significance for the patriarchs since, due to the millet system; they naturally assumed a political leadership role in their capacity as representatives. However, a significant difference between the Chaldean and Assyrian communities was that, in contrast to the former, the Ottoman government had only a minimal official presence in the regions belonging to the Assyrian millet. Not being in direct contact with the Ottoman state officials, the Assyrians enjoyed a level of social and political independence that was not shared with other non-Muslim millet communities (Murre-Van Den Berg: 2016, 10). To this end, while the Mar Shimun became more of an (unofficially recognised) ‘temporal chieftain’ with a similarity to the Kurdish Aghas (Stafford: 2006, 102), the Chaldean patriarchs were the recognised heads of their millet or ‘nation’ with much closer ties to the Sublime Porte or, perhaps more accurately,

² By 1914, fifteen millets existed across the Ottoman Empire with eight of them (seven Christian and one Jewish) based in the regions that would eventually form Iraq (Attar: 1967, 56).

the ruling government of the day, a fact that would not be ignored by the next ruling government.

BRITISH MANDATE: A CHANGE OF POWER

With the beginning of the British governance of Iraq upon the end of the First World War and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, many religious-communal leaders who were the former heads of their millets quickly began swearing pledges of allegiance and loyalties to show respect to this new power, and the Chaldean Church was no exception. In a translated document by the Office of the Civil Commission, dated 6 January 1919, Patriarch Thomas and thirty of the most prominent members of the Chaldean Catholic community in Mosul made the following pledge of allegiance between the Chaldean Church and the British government:

We, the community of Chaldean Catholics, greet the Empire of Great Britain which has freed us from the bondage of the Turks and delivered us from the trials under which we laboured. We entreated your Excellency to endeavour to ensure that we remain under the shade of the British Empire. Thus we shall be able, like other nations, in a state of progress, achievement and prosperity, and to pray ever for His Majesty King George V., now happily upon the throne. (*Self-Determination in Iraq: Copies and translations of Declarations and other documents relating to Self Determination in Iraq: 1919, 1*)

What is important to note is that, while Patriarch Thomas was not unique amongst the religious communal leaders to pledge their support to Great Britain, his community was referred to in a number of British documents as the most important millet of the Christian communities and identified the best known Christian families i.e. those which had a role in the politics of Mosul (such as the Halabi, Yusufani and Rassam families) as Chaldeans (Nalder: 1921, 3). A potential reason why the British saw the Chaldean Church as significant for their rule over Iraq may have been due to the location of its communities.

A British document on the Christians of Mesopotamia provided a broad geographical description of the various Christian millets in the former Ottoman territories (*Note on the Christian Communities in and around Mesopotamia*: 1920, 1). According to this report, it appears that the Chaldean Church was the only church whose communities, because of their demography in the *Vilayets* of Mosul and Baghdad, were completely incorporated into the territories that form the nation of Iraq, whereas the other Christian communities were divided by the newly recognised national borders (*ibid.*, 1).

It is possible that, because their communities did not transgress the newly formed borders of the Mandates, the Chaldean Church could maintain its strength, numbers and influences without being weakened by territorial divisions. This is a stark contrast to nearly all the other Christian churches, whose communities were now divided between Turkey, Syria and Iraq. Interestingly, the British not only made a distinction between the Chaldean and the Church of the East millets but, by acknowledging where their communities were located, it appears that the British identified which church may have had greater significance to their role as the mandatory power. This did not mean that the British authorities neglected their relations with other, non-Chaldean communities, but perhaps re-emphasised the significance of the Chaldean Church and maybe prioritised the need for Britain to maintain positive relations with them.

The Chaldean Church was identified by Britain as the most important millet in the Mosul and Baghdad *Vilayets*, which came under their control, and their patriarch was therefore of paramount importance with which to obtain and maintain a healthy relationship. In contrast, and to use as a non-Chaldean example, the original home of the Church of the East was outside the limits of the developing British and French mandates, and the implication created by the document was that the so-called 'Nestorian community' was not their responsibility. This implication is reinforced by the document's referral to the Chaldeans as 'not to be confused with the Nestorian millet, whose original homes are outside the limits of the French and British Mandates' (*Note on the Christian Communities in and around Mesopotamia*: 1920, 1).

On the other hand, it should be considered that Patriarch Thomas' pledge of allegiance, much like his promises to his previous Ottoman

political masters, was made from political obligations rather than genuine loyalty, especially as he began voicing his doubts about the British governance over Mesopotamia in his correspondence to the Vatican. In one report, the patriarch highlighted two potential outcomes of English policy in Mesopotamia that could threaten the Catholic peoples in the country, namely that the English would:

- ‘... disregard the interests of Christian and Jewish peoples in favour of the Muslim population, who will retain their status as masters over them.
- ... support and protect Protestantism and irreligion among the Arabs’ (ACOC, *Chaldean Patriarchy*, pos. 1390/48, ‘General report’, 23rd Apr 1918, 1).

Patriarch Thomas’ comments demonstrate a well-founded belief that it was highly probable that the British, while creating a new centralised government over the former Ottoman *Vilayets*, would prioritise the views and opinions of the largest communities over those that were less populous. Indeed, the evidence suggested that Patriarch Thomas feared the support that other creeds were receiving or could expect to receive under British rule and the social impact these creeds, particularly Protestants, could have upon the Chaldeans and other Catholic communities. Understandably, Patriarch Thomas strove to ensure that the needs of his own community and others were not overlooked for the sake of communities that boasted larger numbers.

He illustrated his fears further in a letter to Cardinal Sincero, one of his numerous calls of assistance to the Holy See for additional funds and support for his community and their needs. In particular, this was to combat the work of Protestant organisations that were, with the financial support and encouragement of what Patriarch Thomas refers to as the ‘English government’, beginning to build orphanages, work in schools and provide general assistance to all non-Catholic peoples (ACOC, *Chaldean Patriarchy*, pos. 1390/48, ref 3153, 25th Dec 1919, 1). Patriarch Thomas concluded that the best way to rival their recent developments was to build a college for the Catholic youth in Baghdad, a boarding school at St Abraham’s convent in the Mosul region and two orphanages (male and female) using the patriarch’s summer residence in Mosul and the former

convent of St Michael outside the city. However, he did admit that these projects would be difficult to undertake due to being in dire need of repair and severe lack of funds (*ibid.*, 2). It is clear that he felt the presence of the British government was forcing the Chaldeans into unnecessary competition against an opponent with which they had not previously had to be concerned.

Even without considering Patriarch Thomas' opinions on what he believed would be the policy the British would adopt in relation to the Christian communities, it is evident that he did not initially have a good personal relationship with these new authorities. A letter addressed to Earl Curzon (British Foreign Secretary 1919–1924) explains a conversation with Patriarch Thomas and two issues unintentionally caused by British authorities that were currently troubling him. One was political misalliance. Upon meeting the British governor of Mosul, the governor had incorrectly accused him of preferring French political rule. In response, Patriarch Thomas commented that 'if the Mandate for Mesopotamia were given to the English, his people would [have] asked nothing better than to live in peace under British rule' (*Scheme for food production in occupied territories*: 1920, IOR/L/PS/11/141, P5078, 1). Secondly, Patriarch Thomas complained about the privileged position that the British authorities proposed to give to the 'non-Uniate patriarch' (Mar Shimun), recognising him as the representative of all the Chaldeans (*ibid.*, 1), an action that was surprising considering how the British authorities had already recognised the significance of the Chaldean community over the Assyrians, though it is possible this was simply one of many misunderstandings the British authorities made about the native Christian communities.

A NEW POLITICAL ROLE AND GOVERNMENT

The Chaldean patriarch always needed to maintain a delicate balance between his political and spiritual leaders (the British/Iraqi governments and Holy see respectively), but Patriarch Thomas had more to offer in maintaining this relationship and was able to establish a positive rapport with the new political leadership. First, he was a very close friend of King Faisal himself, with one account detailing that 'Faisal reputed to have said, upon King Hussein's death [his father],

that he considered the patriarch to be his second father' (Beaumont: 1947, Annex 1). Furthermore, there is evidence to demonstrate that Faisal was invited by Patriarch Thomas to attend a festival at St Oraha's Monastery near Mosul in June 1931. Such an event was not simply an event where the King could enjoy himself, but an opportunity where the patriarch could voice his communities' concerns to Faisal, who in turn gave him 'a very interested ear and was very satisfied with the information I [Emmanuel Thomas] gave him' (ACOC, *Chaldean Iraq*, b. 24, pos. 433/31, Letter from Patriarch Thomas to Card. L Sincero, 8 June 1931, 1). In response, Faisal assured the patriarch, in the latter's words, 'of his great esteem for my humble person, of his conviction of the fidelity of Catholics his subjects, and of his strong disposition to fulfil all our wishes for the present and the future' (*ibid.*, 2).

Arguably a more sustainable advantage was that, through his friendship to the monarch, Patriarch Thomas was accepted into the Iraqi senate by royal invitation and the position of senator became one in which the Chaldean patriarchs would enjoy for many years to come (Ross, Tadros and Johnson: 2018, 169). Even if his political role was reportedly limited, his seat in the senate could ensure that the Christians would not be forgotten or even ignored in the legal and administrative workings of the state. While there are records of Christians from other churches who entered political offices during the British Mandate and beyond, his position as senator made him the highest-ranking Christian in the political spheres of the country and he was thus able to wield more authority and influence than all other Christian dignitaries.

His close relationship to the monarch and his position in the senate each provided another advantage that would be of specific value to the Chaldean Church, as well as being occasionally beneficial to the wider Catholic community. In the first place, as stated previously, the close friendship between Patriarch Thomas and Faisal promoted the king's Catholic subjects in a very positive light, ensuring that they would be remembered and valued as loyal citizens of Iraq. Secondly, a combination of being the sole church leader in the senate and the Chaldean patriarchal offices' control over its communities' political conduct meant that Patriarch Thomas could ensure that his community would be steadfast in their support for the state, refraining from any actions that might have been antagonistic to the emerging nation. For

these reasons, it is understandable why the government regarded the Chaldeans so positively.

His reticence to quarrel with the government of the day may have derived from his personal experience of politics and the variety of political regimes with which he had had to negotiate during his long incumbency. With all the shifting political relationships, Patriarch Thomas needed to demonstrate a significant level of tact and adaptability in order to meet the changing demands of his political masters. In some cases, this may not have been difficult, his personal friendship with many of the older, leading Muslim citizens of Mosul would have continued despite the changes, so that he could garner support from individuals who were likely to have been recognised by the new Arab nationalist government (Beaumont: 1947, Annex 1). Realising that the political and social environment his community had inhabited was changing following the end of World War I and throughout the period of the British Mandate, Patriarch Thomas was generally accommodating of the government's decisions and policies. Perhaps exemplifying his success over his community, as well as the Chaldeans adaptation to life in Iraq, was the continuous demonstration of loyalty to the state or, at the very least, an unwillingness to engage in activities that could be interpreted antagonistic towards the nation, government, or society.

In an interesting perspective, a question can be raised as to whether Patriarch Thomas was successful in achieving a means of retaining the Chaldean patriarchal authority from the Ottoman era. He had come to his church's premiership when it still retained semi-political autonomy in the millet system of the Ottoman Empire granting him, as theocratic leader, limited independence and authority whilst simultaneously needing to demonstrate his—and that of his community—loyalty to the sultan. With the end of the conflict, neither the Ottoman Empire or Sublime Porte existed any longer and new states were being created by the League of Nations in their place, thereby rendering the Chaldean patriarchate's erstwhile relationship with the authorities void. However, in a remarkable act of diplomacy and tact, the patriarch appeared to respond well to the changes and create the best possible outcome for himself and his community. By accepting the changing circumstances and demonstrating both his reliability and practicality to the Iraqi government, Patriarch Thomas was able to retain his political

significance albeit in a different format, essentially exchanging his role as the semi-autonomous political leader of his community for that as a senator and ardent supporter of the new government. He was able to continue his political authority over his community and he could, in his capacity as senator, be the main political avenue for Christians into the government. This ability to metamorphose with their political circumstances but in effect retain his leadership of his community essentially meant that Patriarch Thomas transplanted the role of the head of a millet in the Ottoman system within the emergent nation of Iraq. He was able to maintain the interests and issues of the Chaldean and other Christian communities with his political superiors.

SUPPORT FOR IRAQI UNITY

With the creation of the new nation, Patriarch Thomas continued to demonstrate his community's public support for the Iraqi government in any way he could, especially as they would soon become the sole political authority in the country once the British mandate had ended. He therefore sought to illustrate the connection between the Chaldeans and the country of which they were a part, even if the state over that country was in a state of change. The British and Iraqi government were, throughout the period of the mandate and beyond, developing the notions of Iraqi national identity and what this could mean, especially for a multitude of peoples of various religious, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. With this in mind, the majority of religious communal leaders³ sought to be identified as citizens of Iraq and demonstrate a common sense of unity. While finding and demonstrating a common unity with such a wide and varied national populace was difficult, Patriarch Thomas believed that emphasising this unity could be used as another form of demonstrating his community's national loyalty. To this end, Patriarch Thomas delivered a speech at the Meskinta Church in Mosul in April 1931 in strong support of 'Iraqi unity':

I have been hearing of late of venomous and vicious
utterances having for tearing to pieces of the fatherland

³ Though exceptions did exist, particularly in the form of Mar Shimun of the Church of the East.

and of harmful propaganda (made) in the name of a minority and that of the majority and also in the name of various racial elements and creeds. These are matters which grieve us exceedingly. Our fathers and grandfathers lived for numerous centuries in perfect peace and amity with our Moslem and other brethren, all being co-partners in this dear fatherland in times of both happiness and misfortune. We have all come out of this sacred soil to which we are all bound to return, and we should, therefore, redeem with all that is most dear to us. The advocate of evil attempt ... to fish in the muddy waters of this distasteful propaganda which had proved disastrous to this country and its inhabitants and which I entreat you to combat with all your might. (*Iraqi Press Extracts: 1931, CO730/162/7*).

In this speech, Patriarch Thomas employed Iraq's history to establish a clear connection between his community and that of the general Iraqi populace. His referral to their 'fathers and grandfathers' was clearly an attempt to establish a strong connection to their Ottoman ancestors and how they, the contemporary Iraqi citizens, should seek to maintain the peaceful inter-religious relations of their ancestors, even if they were citizens in an imperial society that no longer existed. The patriarch's statement of they all are having 'come out of this sacred soil' is a direct reference to the common history of the country's citizens, which in turn was used to highlight the importance of the territory, people, and ancestors of Iraq itself, rather than the Ottoman Empire in general. In these two quotes alone, Patriarch Thomas fulfils two of the central components that Smith identified as necessary for the creation of, and identifying with, a national identity. First, Patriarch Thomas was clearly looking to the past for an ideal 'golden age' which he wished to replicate in the present or use as a future model for his community to follow (Smith: 1997, 36; Smith: 1999, 58). Secondly, by making a direct connection to the soil and the people who reside on it, he had emphasised the importance of a 'sacred homeland' or a territory which all indigenous peoples can identify with and unite behind, which in turn could be one of the 'shared ideals and meanings' needed to develop the national identity (Smith: 2000, 807-808; Smith:

1997, 41; Smith: 1991, 6). Even if this logic was not the same line of thinking used by the Iraqi government to create national identity, it was what Patriarch Thomas used to show his communities' loyalty and publicly demonstrate their desire for unity.

THE MOSUL DISPUTE

While there were various ways in which the patriarch could demonstrate his support of the state, they were mostly through policies that followed in his non-activist approach. However, an exemption to this approach, and one in which he could be argued to have made a positive action with regards to the forming Iraqi nation, was his contribution to the resolution of a rather notorious political event that has been the subject of much academic scrutiny: the Mosul Dispute. It is possible the patriarch saw the dispute, and its resolution, as an opportunity to demonstrate several strengths of his community. Not only would the Chaldean community be demonstrating its loyalty to the new nation over its former imperial masters, but it would be contributing to securing Iraq's borders and defining its territories before an international audience.

The dispute arose when, despite the League of Nations allocating possession of the Mosul *Vilayet* to Iraq in 1920, Turkey refused to give up claims to the former Ottoman province (Beck: 1981, 256). After several failed attempts to resolve the matter, the League of Nations organised a Commission of Inquiry in September 1924 that would consider the geographical, ethical, historical, economic and strategic factors of the Mosul dispute, as well as the views of the Mosul inhabitants, and conclude which state would have legal possession of the region (ibid., 262–264). The Christian communities of Iraq, especially the Chaldean community, were predominantly based in the Mosul province and, with the memory of recent Ottoman/Turkish atrocities still present, were very keen to remain under Iraq's jurisdiction. In this vein, Rassam has opined that the Christian communities residing in Mosul contributed greatly to ensuring the *Vilayet* was granted to Iraq (2016, 133). Patriarch Thomas, alongside his deputy Yousef Ghanima and Fr Sulaiman al-Sayegh, participated in the dispute and presented robust opposition to Turkey's annexation demand of Mosul. Through

Father Ghanima (who could speak French) Patriarch Thomas made his case to the fact-finding delegation of the League of Nations, presenting ‘the wish of the Mosul people to [remain] under nationalistic rule and their attachment to Iraq’ (Afas: 2005, 37).

In addition, the patriarch then showed the ‘President of Second Commission refugees from Zakho from a recent Turkish pogrom as an example of what would happen if Mosul remained in Turkish rule’ (Beaumont: 1947, Annex 1). The League of Nations’ Committee sympathised with the patriarch’s account (and even was believed to have been moved to tears by his testimony) reassuring him of the Christians well-being. After the committee reported its findings, the high commissioner then returned to the patriarch to inform him that the committee had voted in favour of Mosul being a part of Iraq (Rammo: 2006, 251-252). Even if their contributions were not the decisive factor that affected the outcome of the Mosul Dispute, it is clear that much of the Chaldean community, particularly through the efforts of the patriarch, made significant contributions to the dispute in favour of Iraq, contributions which may be argued to have been influential with the authorities in making their final decision.

This overt demonstration of support may appear contradictory to the patriarch’s usual non-interventionist approach but considering what was at stake and what the potential benefits he could gain for his community and himself if he succeeded, perhaps he considered that the action was worth the risk. He could create an image for himself as ‘defending his homeland’ as both a Chaldean patriarch and an Iraqi senator and that he was prepared to do the best for his church and country by creating a better future for them rather than trying to return to the past. Such a portrayal of would undoubtedly have benefited his role as a leader, whether politically by confirming the *Vilayet* remained a part of Iraq, communally by exemplifying his intent to do the best for the Chaldeans and other Christian communities, and religiously by demonstrating how much influence and involvement he had in Iraq’s practical matters compared to the apostolic delegate or the Holy See.

THE HOLY SEE: COSTS AND BENEFITS

As head of the Chaldean Catholic Church, Patriarch Thomas obviously had more than just the desires of his political masters to be concerned with and maintaining a balance between these and those of his spiritual masters was one which every Chaldean patriarch has had to reflect upon. To make matters complicated, this relationship to the Holy See was not always harmonious and history has notable examples of patriarchs who have struggled to maintain this balance. Patriarch Thomas himself was no exception, and there are multiple sources that imply the Holy See was more confident with expressing itself through either Vatican-backed organisations or the apostolic delegate rather than through the Chaldean patriarch. One source from the Holy See claimed that the reason they chose to negotiate with the British high commissioner through their apostolic delegate rather than Patriarch Thomas was because they 'felt the Chaldean patriarch was not sufficiently conversant in the technicalities involved, and because, apparently, the other Catholic authorities on the spot neglected to keep the Vatican fully informed' (Destani: 2007, *Catholic Communities*, Confidential despatch No. 75, 546).

Nevertheless, despite this at times difficult relationship, it cannot be denied that being a patriarch in the Catholic Church provided an enormous advantage for the Christians of Iraq, and not one that was associated with Patriarch Thomas' character or personal contributions. The Vatican could, and did, seek to influence Iraq's legislation for the benefit of the Christians, beginning in July 1929 with the drafting of the personal status law and of its impact upon Catholic Iraqi citizens (ACOC, *Chaldean Iraq*, b. 22, pos. 534/30, doc. 65, 1932, 5). The Iraqi government did not reject the Vatican's efforts and it was recognised by the two states that a mutually beneficial relationship between the two could exist. For the Vatican, they could obtain government assurances in favour of Iraq's Catholic peoples, providing further support for the Chaldean Church, while an alliance with the Vatican would be regarded positively by the Iraqi government, as well as the member states of the League of Nations, who could further support the Iraqi governments' application for membership into the league (ACOC, *Chaldean Iraq*, b. 22, pos. 534/30, doc. 60.2, 1932, 2).

For the Chaldeans, and other Catholic communities in Iraq, such a relationship between these two states, and maintenance of their religious and political loyalties by their patriarch, would have provided a very unique advantage that could not be shared by other, non-Catholic communities. It would mean that they could rely on an external transnational religious power that could come to their aid in civil matters while others did not have the means to receive a similar backing. Jewish communities could get support from other Jewish communities in either Palestine or Europe, but other Christian denominations (Syrian Orthodox and Armenian Orthodox) or non-Christian communities (Yezidis) could expect virtually no foreign support to come to their assistance.

**THE POLITICAL PATRIARCH: A LESSON FROM
THE PAST TO THE PRESENT?**

While he would eventually pass away in 1947, Patriarch Thomas had demonstrated his fundamental value, both to his community and to the young nation, because he fully understood his role and capacity as a leader and the need to adapt this role according to the environment in which his community were a part. His capacities refer not just to his religious and spiritual leadership, but particularly his position as a political leader. His ability to keep a form of political leadership while being able to adapt according to the times did much to ensure the Chaldeans' survival and integration. By contrast, the well documented problems and struggles of the Assyrians appear to have stemmed largely from Mar Shimun's inability or refusal to adapt to the new horizons of Iraq's nationhood.

It is perhaps ironic then that both the Chaldean and Assyrian patriarchs descended from the line of Church of the East patriarchates, yet Patriarch Thomas (belonging to a line of patriarchates that split off to enter into communion with Rome) appeared to have learnt from his predecessors and followed their example. The positions of the patriarchate's religious and political leadership are factors that all patriarchs have had to consider, even before there was a Chaldean Catholic Church to lead. Indeed, Patriarch Thomas' adaptability as a political leader may have been guided by a precedent established long

before the Chaldeans and Assyrians Churches and one which many patriarchs of the Church of the East felt was the best strategy to follow. Arguably one of the most notable figures in this respect was Patriarch Timothy I (780–823) who, apart from having to satisfy the demands and views of five successive Abbasid caliphs, had to continually demonstrate his community's loyalty to the state despite the changing times (Wilmshurst: 2011, 144). His close friendships with the caliphs, identifying with the state of which he was a subject, and his emphasised distinction from the Byzantine Church would demonstrate his loyalty to and gain him support from the Abbasid rulers, which he could in turn use to benefit his own community.

Even if it was not an officially established precedent, the tradition of previous patriarchs (of both the Church of the East and the Chaldean Church) seeking to maintain a close relationship with the state would have been considered by every new patriarch. The livelihood of the Christian communities in the past, as well as their survival, had depended on the strong and healthy relationship between the church and the state and the patriarch and sultan were paramount to this relationship. Patriarch Thomas would have known how important it was for his community to keep good relations with the state, as well as the potential consequences if he fell out of favour. It is therefore reasonable to believe that he felt that this relationship was essential and was on the forefront of his mind for all his decisions. Indeed, its significance would have been far more valuable to him than to his predecessors, who had the added advantage of maintaining an already existing relationship with a state that had existed for centuries. Patriarch Thomas was now having to work, not with the sultan of the Ottoman Empire, but with a king of a very new state and nation in his homeland and one that was being created by a foreign European power.

Perhaps it was because of this reality that Patriarch Thomas chose to adopt and use Patriarch Timothy's example for the benefit of his community. He began his incumbency as the political head of his 'nation' while maintaining his loyalty to the Ottoman sultan. Yet as the political environment changed, he quickly demonstrated his allegiance first to the British government, and then to Faisal and his government, as Iraq developed. His loyalty was recognised and rewarded, as demonstrated by his place in the Iraqi senate and close friendship with the Faisal. Remarkably, Patriarch Thomas was able to

keep his political power by exchanging his role of ‘head of his nation’ for that of senator in the new nation. The names and titles may have changed, but he could continue his role as a political leader, albeit in a different format, and ensure his community benefited as a result.

The example that Patriarch Thomas set for his successors to follow, particularly his non-interventionist approach and continual presence in Iraq’s political sphere, could perhaps be regarded as a reinterpretation of this unofficial precedent followed by previous patriarchs. For this reason, many of Patriarch Thomas’ immediate successors have reacted to changing political environment with a similar structure. An example could include how Patriarch Cheikho also had to tread lightly while Iraq experienced three changing regimes, the rise of Ba’athism, an Arabisation programme and the destructive Iran-Iraq War, all while considering the desires to his spiritual and political masters (Monier: 2020, 367), or the Chaldean Church acting in recent times as a mediator to the Iraqi government and representative of ‘the local historical religious tradition’ (O’Mahony: 2004, 435).

CONCLUSION

Throughout this article, the underlying theme that has been ever present is the importance of Patriarch Thomas’s role as a political leader and, when used successfully, what advantages this was able to provide to the Chaldean Catholic Church. It has been one of the primary reasons for why the Chaldean Church has been able to remain of value, and in touch, with the government of the country, even when that government has changed form and structure. Moreover, despite the religious duties and obligations of Patriarch Thomas, he did not reduce the political significance of his office, instead opting to treat them both equally essential and balance them accordingly. The delicate balance between upholding and maintaining the demands and wishes of both the church’s political and spiritual masters is one that patriarchs continue to face to this day. Indeed, so important is this reality that even Chaldean bishops and archbishops must regularly demonstrate their capabilities as political and communal leaders, as exemplified by the founding, and assumed leadership over recently created educational institutions.

By providing an explanation of a community leader in the Ottoman Empire and British Mandate, as well as some of the difficulties encountered, this article has sought to illustrate a little of the vast changes the patriarch was facing and the potential precariousness of his situation. Examples of some of his actions and policies are explained to demonstrate his approach to the new nation and how he felt was the best way for his community to act. Underneath all these actions and policies, from his close friendship to Faisal to exchanging his role as head of his own nation for senator in a new one, emphasising his desire for unity in the new nation to actively working to resolve the Mosul dispute etc., a singular, common theme continues to flow: his people and church are always seen as loyal to, and dependable by, the government. Regardless of the difficulties and uncertainties faced, the Chaldeans are always portrayed as loyal to Iraq and native to the nation. By ensuring his community would be regarded by the government as an indigenous Iraqi community that was continuously loyal to the state, Patriarch Thomas provided the Chaldeans with a security and assurance of their survival in the new nation.

This article has sought to examine one of the key and essential reasons for the Chaldean Church's survival and significance in the form of the patriarch during Iraq's beginning, but it is by no means the sole reason. Further studies are needed of the Christian communities of Iraq, especially given the events that have occurred in the country since 2003, and it is hoped this article may provide a starting point for like-minded academics and enthusiasts of Iraqi history. For now, it is vital that the studies the Chaldeans of Iraq continue and, as further connections between their communal/ecclesiastical history and that of their nation are uncovered, their significance is further demonstrated and publicised.

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THE CHALDEAN CATHOLIC COMMUNITY IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT: MIGRATION, ECUMENISM, AND ECCLESIOLOGY IN BRITAIN (1965–2013)

Kristian Girling

This article examines the Chaldean Catholic Church in the UK by exploring the role of ecclesial institutions in preserving community identity in a diaspora context. It analyses the efforts of Chaldean patriarchs to engage with and formulate a Chaldean ecclesiology for a diaspora-focused Church with reference to the impact of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), which encouraged Eastern Catholic churches to assert their status as ecclesial communities *sui juris*. The UK experience highlights the complexities of a denomination that is in communion with the Holy See but wishes to maintain its ecclesiological and cultural distinctiveness in contemporary British society.

INTRODUCTION

Since the 2003 Iraq War, the Chaldean Catholic Church has been substantially challenged to maintain its ecclesiastical organisation and ecclesiological identity worldwide. With the emergence of the so-called Islamic State in 2014 as a pseudo-state across much of central and northern Iraq—contiguous with the Church’s historical heartland—the continued existence of the largest Iraqi Christian community was called into question. In such a context, the dispersal of the Chaldean population internationally as a result of social, economic, and political changes in Iraq is of significance to the community’s future and the self-understanding of what it means to ‘be’ a Chaldean as a result—whether as part of Iraqi society or in different and often comparatively novel arenas such as Detroit, Chicago, Södertälje (Sweden), Sydney or London with all the attendant alterations in character and identity which relocation can bring.

This article will initially consider contemporary trends in ecumenical and ecclesiological discourse among the Chaldeans and, secondly, consider their influence on the Chaldean diaspora in Britain. I will take into account the efforts of Chaldean patriarchs to engage with and formulate a Chaldean ecclesiology for their increasingly diaspora focused Church as well as the impetus for such change derived from the Second Vatican Council's encouragement for Eastern Catholic churches to assert their status as ecclesial communities *sui juris*. This status granted Eastern Catholics full responsibility for the direction and management of their ecclesial affairs. The Council saw the substantial development of ecumenical discussions between Eastern Catholics and their progenitor communities which for the Chaldeans was with the Assyrian Church of the East.

Inter-communal discussion and shared activities in pastoral and liturgical arenas were facilitated by the Chaldean patriarchs Raphael I Bidawid (1989–2003), Emmanuel III Delly (2003–2012) and Louis Raphaël I Sako (2013–) and by the Church of the East's patriarchs Dinkha IV (1976–2015) and Giwargis III (2015–21) who was succeeded by Patriarch Awa III (2021–).¹ Their efforts were especially coalesced around popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI using ecumenism as a means of attempting to ensure the Christians of Iraq and the Middle East more widely were better able to withstand the often violent socio-political changes which Iraqi society has encountered since the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988) and the subsequent invasions and occupations of the

1 Please note the article focuses on the period until 2013 and thus does not include more recent developments within the communities to 2021. Unless otherwise noted postnominal dates throughout this article indicate duration of office as patriarch, bishop or king. [For the situation of Middle Eastern Christians in the United Kingdom and wider Europe see the following studies: F McCallum Guiney, 'Middle Eastern Christian identities in Europe', *Mashriq and Mahjar*, vol. 8, 2020, no. 1, 1–14; A P Hunter and F McCallum Guiney, 'The quest for equal citizenship: Middle Eastern Christian narratives of migration and inclusion in the United Kingdom', *Mashriq and Mahjar*, vol. 8, 2020, no. 1, 15–43; F McCallum Guiney, 'Middle Eastern Christianity Outside of the Middle East', in M Lamport (ed.), *The Rowman & Littlefield Handbook of Christianity in the Middle East*, Rowman and Littlefield International (The Rowman & Littlefield Handbook Series), 2020; L P Galal, A P Hunter, F McCallum, S L Sparre and M Wozniak, 'Middle Eastern Christian spaces in Europe: multi-sited and super-diverse', *Journal of Religion in Europe*, vol. 9, 2016, no. 1, 1–25; F McCallum, 'Shared religion but still a marginalized Other: Middle Eastern Christians' encounters with political secularism in the United Kingdom', *Journal of Church and State*, vol. 61, 2, 2018, 242–261. [Eds]

country (1991 and 2003 onwards) as well as the internationalization of the communities generally over the last one hundred years. At present perhaps up to 50 percent of their populations reside outside of Iraq particularly in northern Europe, North America, the Levant, and Australasia.²

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHALDEAN CATHOLIC CHURCH TO 2003

The Chaldean Catholic Church is the descendant of that faction of the Church of the East which entered into union with the Holy See in the mid-16th century. The Church of the East was the Christian community which developed in west Asia from at least the 2nd century forming a distinctive ecclesial and linguistic identity (East Syriac) apart from the church in the territories of the Roman Empire. Following the Oecumenical Council of Ephesus in AD 431 and disputes regarding the human and divine natures of Christ, the Church of the East separated from the rest of the Christian world through unwillingness to condemn the perceived Christological views of the Patriarch of Constantinople, Nestorius. As a result of the separation, the Church of the East determined an eastward focus for its ecclesiastical activity and undertook a period of near continuous missionary expansion from the 5th to 11th centuries, which saw ecclesial structures developed throughout the Middle East and Central Asia to China, and the first period of internationalization of the East Syriac tradition. The Church substantially declined from the late 1300s and consolidated in northern Mesopotamia, eastern Asia Minor, and north-west Persia.

From the unification with the Holy See in 1553, the Chaldean community grew through gaining the affiliation of members of the Church of the East and by the early 20th century appeared set to become the largest East Syriac community in Mesopotamia. The Chaldeans remained the numerically smaller community until the First World War. With the massacres of the Syriac and Armenian Christians of the Ottoman Empire from 1915–1918, at least ten percent of the Chaldean

2 Eden Naby and Jamsheed K Choksy, 'The End of Christianity in the Middle East?', *Foreign Policy*, 2 November 2010, <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/11/02/the-end-of-christianity-in-the-middle-east/>> [accessed 8/12/15].

population was murdered with up to a third of all members of the Church of the East also killed including its then patriarch Shimun XIX Benjamin (1903–1918).³ This had an immense impact upon the Church of the East and is an event from which it has still arguably yet to fully recover. By 1918, large numbers of East Syriac refugees from eastern Asia Minor and northern Mesopotamia came to reside in the cities of Basra, Kirkuk and Baghdad. The formation of the Kingdom of Iraq in 1921 gave Christians an opportunity to take part in a relatively plural society which welcomed their socio-economic contributions. The first king of Iraq, Faisal I (1921–1933), was committed to emphasizing an Arab Iraqi identity over religious or other sectarian interests. The anti-sectarian outlook of Faisal and his successors was largely welcomed by the Christian leadership who grasped the opportunity to consolidate their weakened congregations.⁴

Despite the overthrow of the monarchy in a republican coup of 1958, successive governments oversaw an ethos of *laïcité* in government and society. The rule of the Baath party from 1968–2003 was no exception and until the final years of Saddam Hussein's rule, Iraqi governments were staunchly anti-Islamist. Prohibitions on the intrusion of an overtly Islamic culture in Iraqi society were welcomed by Christian leaders who were recognizant of the revival of Sunni Islamism and revolutionary Shiism in surrounding states from the 1970s and its detrimental effects on non-Muslims. Nevertheless, Christians had an uneasy relationship with the Baath state, with Christians often grievously affected by Iraqi army attacks against Kurdish rebellions in northern Iraq where a substantial minority of East Syrians continued to reside.⁵

Migration as a widespread cause of concern for the Chaldeans and as detrimental to the contiguous nature of effective ecclesiastical organization appears to have gained a limited response from the church's leadership until the 1980s. Migration had been ongoing from the late 19th century but was expedited with declining standards of

3 David Wilmshurst, *The Martyred Church: A History of the Church of the East*, East & West, London, 2011, pp. 436–37, 446.

4 Kristian Girling, 'To Live Within Islam: The Chaldean Catholic Church in Modern Iraq, 1958–2003', in Methuen, Spicer and Wolffe (eds), *Christianity and Religious Plurality. Studies in Church History 51*, Boydell Press, New York, 2015, pp. 372–373.

5 Sargon Donabed and Shamiran Mako, 'Ethno-Cultural and Religious Identity of Syrian Orthodox Christians', *Chronos* 19 (2009), p. 75.

living, the desire to find a better future, and to live in a politically stable environment. This led to practical responses manifested through new ecclesiastical organization including establishing dioceses in the USA (1982 and 2002), Australia (2006), and Canada (2011).⁶ Yet the theoretical responses and indeed a theological/ecclesiological awareness of this, although discussed in some contexts, appears to have been largely neglected until the start of the patriarchate of Louis Raphael I Sako in 2013.

Limited theoretical engagement with the effects of migration is perhaps understandable insofar as migration before 2003 was not a precipitate theme in Chaldean ecclesiology and church leadership could not foresee the turmoil that the 2003 Coalition invasion and occupation would bring. Iraq by way of contrast to other states in the region for the period 1968–2003, such as Lebanon or Israel-Palestine, was not faced with as great social changes or internal conflict. Instead, Christians were in a relatively strong and even privileged position.

**ECUMENICAL ETHOS IN IRAQ, CHALDEAN-CHURCH OF THE EAST
RELATIONS AND THE INFLUENCE OF
POPES JOHN PAUL II AND BENEDICT XVI**

The political changes which Iraq saw from the overthrow of the monarchy in 1958 until the eventual coming to power of the Baath party in 1968 took place concomitant with the commitment of the Holy See to implement the modernist theological changes of the Second Vatican Council during the 1960s. Whilst the two episodes in and of themselves were unconnected, the impetus of both encouraged Iraqi Christian leaders to look for participation in new types of ecclesial engagement. The Second Vatican Council encouraged a revised meaning of church unity in general as per the conciliar documents ‘Unitatis Redintegratio’ (1964),⁷ and specifically among eastern Christians in ‘Orientalium Ecclesiarum’ (1964).⁸ Ecumenical discussion was

6 Joseph Seferta, ‘Iraq’s Catholic Exiles’, *The Tablet*, 4 September 2004.

7 Paul VI, ‘Unitatis Redintegratio—Decree on Ecumenism’, Holy See, <https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html> [accessed 31/4/22].

8 Paul VI, ‘Orientalium Ecclesiarum—Decree on the Catholic Churches of the Eastern Rite’, <https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/

perceived as a means to maintain a unified Christian voice in Iraq and, in view of substantial migration from Iraq, came to be seen as a means to suggest new ecclesiological models to meet the demands of an internationalized community. Efforts to pursue such discussions were encouraged among the churches in Iraq themselves but principally undertaken under the aegis of the Pro Oriente Foundation. Pro Oriente had originated as the main vehicle for re-developing the relationship between the Holy See and Eastern Churches. Based in Austria, successive meetings from 1964 were held to provide opportunity for frank but cordial debates on all aspects of ecclesiology especially on the Christological professions of each church.⁹ Specific meetings focusing on the East Syriac communities began in 1993 and continued on a regular basis.¹⁰ The meetings have proven very popular and included contributions from all of the churches of the Syriac tradition and representatives of the Holy See and the Latin Church more widely.¹¹

The renewed relationship between the Church of the East and the Holy See developed from the 1970s following meetings between John Paul II and Dinkha IV and these engagements became the foundation for a Common Christological Declaration in 1994. The purpose of the document is to emphasize that both communities—the Holy See and Church of the East—hold to two ‘expressions of the same faith’ regarding the orthodox title of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the human and divine natures of Christ.¹² Subsequent outworking of the ecumenical discussions led to a Joint Synodal Decree in 1997 between the East Syriac churches affirming co-operation in pastoral areas,¹³ an

documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_orientalium-ecclesiarum_en.html> [accessed 31/4/22].

9 Alfred Stirnemann, ‘The Vienna Dialogue Between Catholic and Non-Chalcedonian Theologians and Its Treatment of Nestorius and Nestorianism’, in Stirnemann and Wilflinger, (eds), *First Non-Official Consultation on Dialogue within the Syriac Tradition*, Pro Oriente, Vienna, 1994, p. 28.

10 The most recent meetings have been carried out under a revised grouping entitled *Colloquium Syriacum*.

11 Raphael I Bidawid, ‘Greeting Message—Chaldean Patriarchate of Babylonia’, in Stirnemann and Wilflinger (eds), *First Non-Official Consultation on Dialogue within the Syriac Tradition*, p. 24.

12 John Paul II and Mar Dinkha IV, ‘Common Christological Declaration Between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East’, Holy See, <https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1994/november/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19941111_dichiarazione-cristologica.html> [accessed 4/4/22].

13 Mar Raphael I Bidawid and Mar Dinkha IV, ‘Joint Synodal Decree for Promoting

agreement in 2001 for admission to the Eucharist between the East Syriac churches¹⁴ and a common statement in 2002 on sacramental life between the Holy See and Church of the East.¹⁵

The continuance of discussions was in part inhibited by the 2003 war but also came to form the basis of the necessity of continuing the discussions. On 20 March 2003, it would have been difficult to predict the likely outcome for the Iraqi Christian population but the necessity of ensuring stability regardless of the new Iraqi *status quo* acted as a spur for the Chaldeans to re-engage with the Church of the East once the initial shock of the invasion had passed. A major difficulty for the Chaldeans was in having a crisis of leadership during 2003. Patriarch Bidawid died in July 2003 and his successor, Emmanuel III Delly, was selected as a compromise candidate by the Holy See after the Chaldean synod to elect a new patriarch failed to reach a satisfactory conclusion. Delly whilst a capable church administrator, was perhaps not a sufficiently strong personality to withstand the competing claims of the church in Iraq, the demands of the increasingly autonomous Chaldean dioceses of the United States and the overall decline of Iraqi socio-economic life. Therefore, ecumenical engagements and consideration of how to meet the challenges of migration could be said to have stalled at a macro level.

PATRIARCH SAKO AND ECCLESIOLOGICAL CHANGE

The establishment of the Chaldean community and its subsequent gradual growth to become the numerically largest East Syriac church in Iraq was facilitated by the role of dynamic and often highly charismatic

Unity Between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Church 15th August 1997', in Stirnemann and Wilflinger (eds), *Third Non-Official Consultation on Dialogue Within the Syriac Tradition*, Pro Oriente, Vienna, 1998, 185–88.

14 Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 'Guidelines for Admission to the Eucharist between the Chaldean Church and the Assyrian Church of the East', Holy See, <<http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiesa-assira-dell-orientale/altri-documenti/testo-in-inglese.html>> [accessed 31/4/22].

15 'Dialogues Between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East', <<http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiesa-assira-dell-orientale/commissione-internazionale-di-dialogo-tra-la-chiesa-cattolica-e.html>> [accessed 31/3/22].

leaders. Such leadership is typified by the efforts of Patriarch Sako who endeavoured to assert a place for the East Syriac tradition in Iraq, in the Middle East and internationally despite the rapidly changing nature of modern Iraq.

Sako, prior to becoming head of the Chaldean community in 2013, had been the Archbishop of Kirkuk for ten years, thus experiencing the full gamut of changes in Iraqi national life following the 2003 invasion. Kirkuk was a vital city in which to have strong Chaldean leadership due to its communal plurality. Sunni and Shia Arabs, Sunni Kurds, Turkomen and Christians of several denominations were all present. Furthermore, Kirkuk came to exist as a focal point for attempts by members of the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government in northern Iraqi territory to extend further their influence into central Iraq. Sako became well acquainted with the need to deploy a variety of inter-communal encounters to maintain the Chaldean presence and to ensure a united Christian narrative when faced with so many groups all competing for dominance.¹⁶ One of the first documents which Sako produced as patriarch was his first anniversary pastoral letter, 'The Church: Unity and Communion' which focused in some depth on the future of the Chaldeans.¹⁷ This letter presents an overview of the normative position of the Chaldean body within the context of Iraqi and diaspora life, the wider Catholic community in union with the Holy See, and the necessity of ecumenical efforts to shore up the Chaldean presence on a temporal basis. It also emphasised the theological imperative of working towards the reformation of the relationship between the East Syriac churches internationally. Thus, Sako views ecumenism as not only having a specific purpose of reviving East Syriac Christian life worldwide but also ensuring that churches through mutual support continue to present the Christian narrative in Iraqi society. The letter considers the relevance of closer

16 Louis Sako, 'Relations Between Christians and Muslims in Iraq—A Brief Statement', in Winkler (ed.), *Syriac Churches Encountering Islam Past Experiences and Future Perspectives*, Pro Oriente Studies in the Syriac Tradition 1, Gorgias Press, Piscataway, 2010, pp. 219–21; Joseph Mahmoud, 'Kirkuk Christians and Muslims Unite in Prayer to Our Lady for Peace in Iraq', *Asianews.it*, 31 May 2011, <<https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Kirkuk-Christians-and-Muslims-unite-in-prayer-to-Our-Lady-for-Peace-in-Iraq-21705.html>> [accessed 31/04/22].

17 Louis Sako, 'The Church: Unity and Communion', Chaldean Patriarchate, <<https://saint-adday.com/?p=4876>> [accessed 13/10/21].

ties between and among the Chaldeans resident in the diaspora and those still in Iraq with the foundation of the faith between the two groupings to be the basis of the future stabilization of the Church. This is to be accomplished through a self-analytical process and in efforts 'to contribute to the renaissance of our Church and serving our brothers.' In considering the Chaldeans from this perspective, Sako brings together the spiritual and temporal factors which affect the communities in their respective locations and as to how they may support each other. Sako goes on to emphasize the situation of the Church and calls for an end to divisions related to 'personal, sectarian, and geographic reasons.' This comment is presumably looking to affirm the internal unity of the Chaldean Church with the intention of providing a more balanced paradigm and one in which strength as a community is shown outwardly to the non-Christian groups in Iraq. This outward appearance of unity is of significance because of the nature of the splits so prevalent in the global Christian milieu.

Sako's emphasis on separating the Church from sectarian interests appears to focus on opposing the attempts to assert some form of political separatism along the lines of an autonomous region for Christians such as the area ruled by the Kurdistan Regional Government has become for the Kurds in Iraq. The Christian population having no indisputable ethnic affiliation would appear to be better served by supporting a state in which they continue to operate as a presence at all levels of Iraqi life. This situation is increasingly difficult to achieve, however, due to the general neglect which has built up with regards to what purpose the Chaldeans have in Iraqi society and as to how they should affirm their presence in the West. That Sako seeks to re-integrate the Christian presence shows he is mindful of the limits which hostile political and religious factions place on his efforts in Iraq but also of the significance of manifesting East Syriac Christianity in a variety of environments. His comments also indicate an awareness of the need for avoidance of a ghettoized mentality in the diaspora. As once Chaldeans were integral partners in the development of the modern Iraqi state, so should diaspora states be arenas in which Chaldeans contribute and incarnate their presence.

THE CHALDEAN CONTEXT IN BRITAIN

We will now turn to consider the Chaldean presence to Britain, its origins and development, and how it fits within the scope of contemporary Chaldean ecclesiology. The position of the Chaldeans in Britain is quite distinctive both in terms of ecclesiastical organization and the particular plurality of British ecclesial life. As an Eastern Catholic church in union with the Holy See, the Chaldeans normatively should have a strong relationship with the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales, for example, but are present in a state which self-identifies officially as Anglican. Developing links with the established religious and political elites offers the Chaldeans a point of legitimation in British society which may not be permitted to them in other states. The study of the Chaldean community to Britain is in its infancy and apart from this article and papers produced around the DIMECCE project at St Andrews University, <https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/dimecce/>, no study has been produced since Madawi Rasheed's book published in 1998.¹⁸ The following should not be seen as a comprehensive account but instead an outline of the major developments in the community and an attempt to categorise the Chaldean presence in Britain within the international Chaldean context.

A sustained Chaldean community presence in Britain originated from the second half of the 20th century, however there were patriarchal visits before this. Emmanuel II Thomas (1900–1947) visited England in 1920 to raise awareness of the massacres in the Ottoman Empire, and Joseph VII Ghanima (1947–1958) visited thirty years later in December 1950 following a meeting with Pope Pius XII in Rome.¹⁹ The emergence of a Chaldean presence to Britain can perhaps be traced to the de facto economic control which its empire held over Iraq from 1921–1958. The second language of many Chaldean professionals was often English with those who came to Britain for training thus having a greater opportunity for integration and the chance to contribute to British society. One incentive for some was also presumably to leave the continuing political uncertainty in Iraq.

The earliest Chaldean migrant to Britain to settle permanently and

¹⁸ *Iraqi Assyrian Christians in London: The Construction of Ethnicity*, Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, New York, 1998.

¹⁹ 'News from the Dioceses—Southwark', *The Tablet*, 28 February 1920.

of whom I am aware of among the contemporary community arrived in 1958. However, a consistent interest to move to Britain from that time on a widespread scale does not appear to have been manifested in the same way as took place to the USA. I suggest this lack of presence can be accorded to a perceived greater degree of economic opportunity in the USA, and the longer term and more well-established presence of Chaldeans to the USA from the late 19th century. It appears these early communities in America took advantage of the relative openness of the state to economic migrants from the 1880s and 1890s and the need for workers to commit to its rapid industrial development into the 20th century. By the mid-1950s the evident declining status of the British Empire in the geopolitical order and the rise of the USA to prominence may also have been a major cause in expediting Chaldean migration to the USA.

It appears that the formalization of the Chaldean ecclesial presence to Britain took place as a result of the effects of the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988) with the first appointment of a permanent Chaldean chaplain, Fr Philip Nagim, in the mid-1980s. Subsequent chaplains were Andraws Abouna (1990–2001); Habib al-Naufaly (2001–2014) and Nadheer Dhako (2014–). The gap between the first chaplain and the first arrivals from the 1950s was dictated, to an extent, by the lack of need. In being a *sui juris* church which is in union with the Holy See, religious obligations could be fulfilled at Latin Catholic parishes. Also, as discussed above, the consideration of how to best serve the European diaspora does not appear to have been a priority matter for the Chaldean hierarchy until the 1980s. Migration from the 1990s was expedited primarily by a decline in living standards especially in medical care as a result of punitive sanctions against Iraq: ‘The World Health Organization (WHO) concluded that [as of 2001] the health system had been set back by some fifty years ... not surprising in the light of the fact that per capita GDP in the 1990s was lower than that of 1950.’²⁰ Persecution also increasingly affecting the Chaldeans from the 1990s and was a cause for departure. This reflected Saddam Hussein’s contemporary paradigm of broadening his support base to include constituents who would previously have been perceived as a threat to the Baathist social order: segments of the Sunni community

²⁰ Abbas Alnasrawi, ‘Iraq: Economic Sanctions and Consequences, 1990–2000’, *Third World Quarterly* 22 (2) 2001, p. 214.

keen to see a rigorous implementation of Islamic customs and law. This led to an environment in which Chaldeans at all levels of the social order were challenged. Thus, migration was perceived as a response to a decline in Iraq's formerly plural society. The war in 2003 and the destruction of the old order of Iraqi social relations proved a further catalyst for departing Iraq. A particular difficulty for the community was in attempting to retain a critical mass in Iraq itself to ensure that the functioning of parish, communal, diocesan, and cultural life could continue. The Chaldeans who remained in Iraq also faced the challenge of other communities entering the social spaces which Chaldean migrants left behind and were no longer able to manifest as comprehensive and distinctive Christian difference to Iraqi life.

**CONTEMPORARY STATUS OF THE CHALDEAN COMMUNITY
IN BRITAIN—COMMUNITY SIZE, LEADERSHIP AND PRAXIS**

The greatest concentration of Chaldeans in Britain is in and around southwest London with Mass being celebrated in the Latin Catholic parish church of the Holy Family in Acton. The chaplaincy house which also doubles as a community centre and is often used for weekday Masses is a short distance away in Ealing. There is a wide geographical spread to the Chaldean community, however, with significant minorities also present in Cardiff, Birmingham, Manchester and Scotland.

It is difficult to determine the exact size of the community and I suggest as an estimate that there were between 1,500–2,000 baptised Chaldeans (c. 400–500 families) currently resident in Britain—a figure which is derived from anecdotal evidence among the community. It seems likely that the contemporary population was the largest ever in Britain with some possibility that it was slightly higher in the years 1998–2003 with people having since moved on at a time when greater economic opportunities and a more well-developed Chaldean communal life could be found in North America or Australasia. Churches and academics were becoming better aware of the need for accurate statistics and thus better at accounting for Eastern Catholic migration, a process which is vital for the provision of resources in the right location and for the development of ecclesiastical organizational

structures to meet new demands. The consolidation of accurate statistics will prove challenging, however, and even what we might suppose are apparently reliable sources of information such as the *Annuario Pontificio*²¹ can have errors. According to the *AP*, between 2000 and 2010, the total Chaldean population increased by 170,000 from 320,000 to 490,000. These figures have plateaued somewhat, such that in 2014 the worldwide population was stated as 530,000. Yet there was no number provided for British or European communities and we ‘know’ that there are tens of thousands of Chaldeans in Europe.

In some respects the Chaldean community in Britain is lay led; with only one priest to serve the Mass the responsibility for the day-to-day maintenance of church organization can fall to senior laity albeit under the overall direction of the priest. This is somewhat of a novel situation for Chaldeans to see the growth of the community without the strong direction or support of the church leadership. The provision of only one priest I suggest derived from the lack of episcopal oversight for the Chaldeans across Europe and limited awareness which the hierarchy in Iraq have of the realities of life outside of the larger Chaldean diaspora concentrations in North America and Australasia. Sunday Mass is the greatest focal point of community life each week. The importance of the Mass and the fellowship which the gathering permits is not just a religiously significant occasion but facilitates social interactions to ensure that Iraqi and Chaldean culture and Syriac and Arabic language is retained. For those who are most closely attached to their homeland this appears to be the time at which the normalisation of their life in the diaspora environment can occur.

The situation for Chaldeans in Britain, by comparison with other diaspora Chaldean groups in Europe, is challenging: the lack of their own church building or a school is to the severe detriment of the community in the long term. Moreover, there is only one Chaldean chaplain in Britain whereas in Germany, the Netherlands, France, and Scandinavia two or more priests are present.²² Some Chaldeans instead choose to worship in their local Latin church rather than attend the

21 The annual directory/almanac of the Holy See and churches with which it is in communion.

22 The contemporary situation in Britain mirrored that found in Jordan where, by 2013, the Chaldean population was perhaps as large as 10,000 people and had only one priest.

Chaldean liturgy both during the week and for Sunday Masses. This is a pastoral difficulty for the Chaldean chaplain and there is no clear resolution given the dominance of Latin Catholic religious life in Britain and its appeal for many Chaldeans due to the resources which the Latin community offers in terms of schooling and more comprehensive pastoral support.

COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTIONS

The British Chaldean community is to a large degree a microcosm of Chaldean life in Iraq with many of those in Britain having previously resided in Baghdad or in and around Mosul. They are often drawn from groups of higher socio-economic status working as physicians, dentists, engineers, architects or in other technical professions and continue to practise these professions in Britain.

Despite the relatively small size of the community, Chaldeans in Britain have influence inversely proportional to their numerical size. Prominent members of the community based in the UK such as Suha Rassam (author, researcher and founder of the charity Iraqi Christians in Need) and Joe Seferta (author and journalist) have raised awareness of the situation of Chaldeans and Christianity in Iraq through their work.²³ This has led to coverage in popular and academic literature as well as secular and Christian media.²⁴ Community members have also sought to build relations with the British political and religious establishment, particularly focusing upon specific events in the region which have severe implications for Iraqi Christians. For example, Charles, Prince of Wales held a reception for Eastern Christians in 2013 and visited the Chaldean community in December 2014.²⁵ The

23 E.g., Suha Rassam, *Christianity in Iraq: Its Origins and Development to the Present Day*, new ed., Gracewing Publishing, Leominster, 2010; 'The Plight of Iraqi Christians', *One in Christ* 42 (2) (2008), 286-301; Joseph Saferta, *The Chaldean Church of Iraq—A Story of Survival*, Blackfriars Publications, Chapel-en-le-Frith, 2008; 'Caught in the Middle', *The Tablet*, 3 September 2005.

24 Simon Caldwell and John Pontifex, 'Half of Iraq's Christians Flee as Islamic Civil War Gathers Pace', *The Catholic Herald*, 11 August 2006; 'Sunday Service from the Syrian Orthodox Cathedral of St Thomas, London 2014', *Inside Lent*, London: BBC Radio, <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03ymr4p>> [accessed 12/10/21]; Ed West, 'This Easter, a Church Is Being Killed', *The Catholic Herald*, 21 March 2008.

25 The Prince of Wales also visited with the other Syriac communities in Britain

particular interest of the Prince of Wales as future head of the Church of England is not without significance and it is notable that the visit of Bashar Warda CSsR, Chaldean Archbishop of Erbil to London in February 2015 was at the invitation of the office of the Archbishop of Canterbury and not the Roman Catholic hierarchy of England and Wales. Whilst not directly related to the Chaldeans per se, the Cardinal-Archbishop of Westminster, Vincent Nichols, has been a member of the Congregation of the Oriental Churches since 2014 and holds some responsibility for the Holy See's oversight of the Eastern Catholic churches.

CHALDEAN RELATIONS WITH THE LATIN HIERARCHY OF ENGLAND AND WALES

The continued presence of the Chaldeans and indeed all Eastern Catholics in Britain is to an extent reliant upon the co-operative relationship which they have with the Roman (Latin) Catholic Church in England and Wales. The Latin Catholic hierarchy in Britain has extended pastoral care to the Eastern Catholic communities present within their geographical remit owing to the spread of eastern Catholics throughout England and Wales and the necessity of meeting their demands in a Latin dominated Catholic ecclesial environment. It is apparent from a variety of efforts expended by the Latin hierarchy that there is a keen interest in maintaining and supporting the various minority Catholic groups in Britain with an especial focus on those in London.²⁶ Nevertheless, there are limits to the awareness of the specific problems each community has whether of Indian, Ukrainian or Iraqi origin.²⁷ This is perhaps best emphasized by the placement of the Eastern

affected by the rise of the so-called Islamic State. Sara Malm, 'Prince Charles reveals his heartbreak at the "appalling atrocities" and "soul destroying tragedy" facing Christians persecuted across the Middle East', *The Daily Mail*, 19 November 2014, <<https://tinyurl.com/576kxu5s>> [accessed 12/10/21].

26 To my knowledge there are communities of sixteen out of twenty-three of the Eastern Catholic churches in London.

27 Francis Davis, Jolanta Stankeviciute, David Ebbutt, and Robert Kaggwa, *The Ground of Justice: The Report of a Pastoral Research Enquiry into the Needs of Migrants in London's Catholic Community*, Von Hugel Institute, Centre For Faith In Society, Migration and Itinerant Peoples Groups, Cambridge, <<https://www.vhi.st-edmunds.cam.ac.uk/system/files/documents/ground-justice.pdf>> [accessed 13/10/21].

Catholics under the aegis of the 'ethnic' Latin chaplaincy organization. Whilst many Eastern Catholics are ethnically or nationally related to one another within their churches such as the Ukrainian or Romanian Catholics, not all are, such as the Chaldean or Syrian Catholic, who may be Iraqi, Lebanese, Jordanian, Iranian, or Syrian. As a result of being part of the ethnic chaplaincy Eastern Catholics are, for example, put in the same grouping as the Filipino or French Latin Catholics. The ethnic Latin chaplains in this grouping have no particular cultural closeness with the Chaldeans and only religiously bound together through the affirmation of union with the Holy See. Until 2013, Alan Hopes, an auxiliary bishop in the Archdiocese of Westminster, had provided oversight in pastoral duties for the Eastern Catholic churches in England and Wales. However, he was subsequently appointed to lead the Diocese of East Anglia and co-ordination as of 2015 appears to be the responsibility of Nicholas Hudson, another auxiliary bishop of Westminster.

The uncertainty of how to relate to the Chaldeans and Eastern Catholics more generally is not malicious but often attributable to lack of awareness given that the Chaldeans, for example, make up less than 0.1 percent of the global Catholic population. However, given the interest that recent popes have had in the Middle East and Iraq in particular, it is somewhat surprising. Significant problems, for example, are encountered with schooling, with a lack of awareness of what the Eastern Catholic communities are: are their children actually Catholic and as such permitted to attend Latin Catholic schools, and the validity of their sacraments, have they been properly confirmed for example?²⁸ The Latin Catholic context can become so all-encompassing in British Catholic life that those who are distinctive in their practices are subsumed into the Latin milieu. Such a scenario is not conducive to the maintenance of individual Eastern Catholic ecclesial identities and considered evidence of the lack of awareness of the strong plurality in the international Catholic community by Latin Catholic leaders in Britain.

28 As the eastern Christian tradition is to chrismate (confirm) and give first communion at baptism whereas the western (Latin, Anglican, etc) tradition is to stagger the conferral of these sacraments. When eastern Catholic students attend a Latin school, disputes can arise over whether the student ought to be included in confirmation classes and in some instances the potential for 're-confirmation' arises despite their already having received these.

Limited acknowledgement of the variegated nature of Catholic identity is detrimental both to the Latin and Eastern Catholic communities in that the conceptual boundaries between the churches can become lost and indeed avoid a full reception of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council on the Eastern Catholic churches. The Council fathers envisioned an ecclesiological model of a communion of Catholic churches centred around the institution of the Holy See, with the pope as first bishop, *primus inter pares* and 'presiding in love'. The association of the Latin Catholic community with 'the Church' then for the modern papacy is the incorrect perception of Catholic ecclesiology and inhibits the maintenance of often ancient and venerable expressions of Christian tradition in the Eastern Catholic churches in the diaspora.

DELOCALISATION OF THE CHALDEAN COMMUNITY IN THE DIASPORA

The Melkite Greek Catholic priest Jean Corbon has identified a process of 'delocalization' during the 20th century whereby a church has origins or long-term residence in one place but subsequently the community migrates in whole or in part to one or more locations often some distance from their place of origin.²⁹ The Melkites are a prime example of this: with a global population of 1.6 million nearly half of all Melkites live in South America. Causes of population displacement inherent to delocalization vary—from economic decline to persecution—and such a process can even be placed in the context of the normative Christian missionary impulse resulting from geographical displacement. The process is not necessarily negative with the opportunity to pursue the revivification of ecclesial life in new environments and can act as an encouragement for the development of an ecclesiological vision which more effectively meets the needs of an international church.

There are strong precedents for the delocalisation of the Chaldeans from their heritage as part of the undivided Church of

²⁹ Jean Corbon, 'The Churches of the Middle East: Their Origins and Identity, from Their Roots in the Past to Their Openness to the Present', in A Pacini (ed.), *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East: The Challenge of the Future*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1998, p. 98.

the East. The missionary impulse which saw the propagation of the East Syriac tradition throughout Asia from the Late Antique to Late Medieval period and which continued in some form to the 19th century with one Chaldean patriarch, Joseph VI Audo (1847-1878), attempting to reclaim jurisdiction over the East Syriac communities in India. The difference of conception between delocalization and that of missionary activity should be one more of terminology than of nature given the propensity of migration to provoke interest in the religious identity and practices of a migrant community much as active missionary work does.

The chief barrier to delocalisation becoming an active missionary process during the spread of the Chaldeans in the 20th and 21st centuries is due to the negative connotations attached to the causes of migration from a context of persecution, extended conflict, and socio-political disenfranchisement in Iraq. In contrast, the spread of East Syriac Christianity in the period from the 5th to 13th centuries, came during an era of particularly active propagation of the faith from a community proportionately larger in size and with greater resources during a sustained era of the expansion of socio-economic development throughout Asia. The level of hardening of religious communal boundaries in the 20th century; the militant Muslim opposition to the spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Middle East and the ambivalence of populations in the West to Christianity has caused active missionary work perhaps to be more challenging than any time since the foundation of the church. Nonetheless, the leadership of the Church into the 1980s remained slow to grasp what to 'do' with the Chaldeans who were resident outside of a familiar Mesopotamian-Iraqi social and political milieu. This was unfortunate given that Chaldean delocalisation had been seen internally and externally to Iraq as an ongoing process since the late 19th century.

At this time, it appears the Church is severely limited in its ability to consolidate community or ecclesial structures to meet the needs of its members in large part due to a prevailing parochial mindset by which bishops and lay leaders seem to be affected. The limits of the Chaldean Church are perceived to end at the boundaries of their respective individual geographical jurisdictions, thus lacking a sense both of 'being' part of an international community and that

‘being’ internationally minded is the norm for members of the East Syriac tradition.

EPISCOPAL DIRECTION IN EUROPE

It is unusual for a Chaldean community or indeed East Syriac communities in general to function for extended periods without a bishop. During the formative era of the Chaldean community from the 16th to 19th centuries, bishops would be regularly consecrated for newly established Chaldean dioceses to ensure effective ecclesiastical oversight, maintenance of a Chaldean identity, and that the local community was not solely dependent upon the intervention of the patriarch for day-to-day functioning. The bishop could ordain new priests, for example, and in an era of limited direct daily communication and poor transport infrastructure to northern Mesopotamia, the necessity for the derogation of such functions was essential. That no diocese has ever been established in Europe and in the context of the establishment of the Chaldean diaspora is surprising even in an era where communication with the Patriarch in Baghdad is only a phone-call away. The lack of a bishop inhibits communal solidarity and cohesion, especially significant in retaining a distinctive ecclesiastical identity in the diaspora. This appears indicative of the limited awareness of the Chaldean leadership to fully comprehend the changes in Chaldean population distribution into Europe and also a consequence of prioritization of the more well established and numerically larger Chaldean communities in Australasia and North America. It is notable that the two most recent Chaldean chaplains to Britain have gone on to become bishops, whilst Philip Nagim became the patriarchal vicar for Europe. Andraws Abouna, having served the Chaldean community in Britain from 1990–2001, became an auxiliary bishop of the diocese of Baghdad in 2002 and his successor, Habib Naufaly, became the bishop of the Archdiocese of Basra in 2014. We might suppose this indicates that the British environment is a potential proving ground for future high level clergy and indeed as it is a relatively demanding situation in which to operate, it is understandable that experience of supporting a disparate and separated community in

the diaspora is a foreshadowing of supporting a community in Iraq, which faces uncertainty over its future and the underlying threat of physical violence. However, this does lead us to question why then a specific bishop would not be appointed if not for Britain at least for the Chaldean diaspora in Europe? As of 2013, the provision of ecclesiastical guidance was devolved on Ramzi Garmou, as Apostolic Visitor to the Chaldeans in Europe having succeeded Philip Najim. Garmou is in effect responsible for pastoral oversight of the entire European Chaldean population, however, his responsibilities are split with his role as Chaldean Archbishop of Tehran. Garmou was appointed to his European role in July 2013 having been head of the Tehran Archdiocese since 1999. He is also patriarchal administrator for the Chaldean Archdiocese of Ahvaz (Iran) and head of the Iranian Catholic Bishops Conference, positions he has held since 2013 and 2015, respectively. For a man in his seventies this is a remarkable collection of responsibilities. Whilst the Chaldean population in Iran is not numerically large, perhaps no more than 5,000 people, it retains a great significance as a voice of Christian difference to the Shia political and cultural narratives in the Islamic Republic as well as representing the great heritage of East Syriac Christianity which was once so strong in Persia.

To combine the European and Iranian responsibilities is somewhat puzzling to the external observer especially given the very distinctive context of the European Union and its member states varying attitudes towards migrants from the Middle East. It could be that there is a lack of suitable candidates among the Chaldean clergy for the European position or it is perhaps perceived by the Chaldean leadership that the challenging Iranian environment has granted Garmou sufficient experience to comprehensively deal with and overcome problems faced by the Chaldeans in Europe. The plurality of life and cultural experiences in Europe is challenging to contend with and requires meeting the needs of communities whose relationships with the states in which they reside is variegated. Sweden, for example, has a long standing and very prominent Christian Iraqi diaspora community who have strongly consolidated their presence to Swedish society.³⁰

30 Sara L. Sparre, Alistair Hunter, Anne Rosenlund Jørgensen, Lise P. Galal, Fiona McCallum, and Marta Wozniak, *Middle Eastern Christians in Europe: Histories, Cultures*

The Chaldean community despite its emerging links with the religious and political establishment in Britain does not have as clearly enunciated presence perhaps largely as a result of its relatively small size. For a distinctive Chaldean presence to Britain to be maintained and across Europe more widely, it would seem prudent to establish a diocesan structure of some kind and to ground the episcopal presence in European ecclesial life. However, this is not without challenges: there may be political concern as to the presence of Chaldean bishops in what are territories which are predominantly covered either by Latin Catholic, Anglican, or Lutheran dioceses and the degree of influence which the Chaldeans may gain in the overall ecclesial milieu as a result. At least in Britain, there is precedent for the establishment of an Eastern Catholic diocese with the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of the Holy Family of London established in 2013. The Ukrainian Catholic community is c. 10,000 people and is more established than the Chaldeans with over 20 parishes across Britain with often their own church property. The episcopal presence has made the Ukrainian Catholic community a distinctive part of British ecclesial culture and suggests its status as one of permanence and its leadership as sufficiently forward thinking to maintain it effectively in the long term.

We ought also to note that other churches of the Syriac traditions and with large Iraqi populations such as the Church of the East, Syrian Orthodox Church, and Ancient Church of the East all have a bishop in or for Europe. Their establishment may be due to their being outside of communion with the Holy See and as such face no dependency on it for determining the establishment of new diocesan or episcopal structures as would the Chaldeans as a *sui juris* Eastern Catholic church. If Sako's apparent plans for the revivification of Chaldean life internationally are to come to fruition, it would seem necessary for greater engagement with the Holy See and Latin hierarchies in respective European countries to ensure that the reasoning for and explanation of the necessity to establish Chaldean bishops—and eastern Catholics more generally—is fully considered. In the East Syriac tradition, this is the normative means for maintaining and incarnating ecclesial presence and identity in any region in which the Chaldeans come to reside.

and Communities, University of St Andrews, St Andrews, 2015.

INTER-COMMUNION IN THE DIASPORA CONTEXT

The inter-communion agreed between the Church of the East and Chaldeans since 2001 is the first of its kind as the only formalized procedure between any eastern Catholic Church and its respective progenitor community.³¹ The Holy See in supporting and ultimately permitting such an arrangement indicated the concern which was had for the sacramental life of all East Syriac Christians. Diaspora communities can lack regular access to priests whilst even in Iraq itself, regular pastoral care can be limited due to the vagaries of the social and political situation. In Britain if the Chaldean chaplain is celebrating Mass externally to the main centre of activity in London, the alternative is either to attend a Latin parish that Sunday or, for many, attend the Church of the East which has a church in London.

There is no data at the present time to assess how widely inter-communion has been utilised by the faithful in Iraq or the British diaspora. It seems likely that some succour has been gained through access to the Sacrament but in many instances was already a *de facto* procedure especially in cases of mixed marriages. This was certainly in evidence during research fieldwork in London and Iraq in 2013 where I was consistently informed of and observed inter-communion taking place between East Syriac community members and was regarded as a normative and long-standing aspect at least since the mid-1960s of ecclesial life. It is evident from conversations with Chaldean community members in Britain, that there is awareness of juridical boundaries and a desire to be recognized as a member of one or other church. However, through the prism of extended persecution and the disruption of a normal life, East Syriac community members when attending one or other church will conceive of no reason not to receive the Eucharist. This is perhaps paradoxical: asserting loyalty to one institution but willing to engage strongly with another for practical reasons. Furthermore, in the context of the regular practice of Chaldeans' receiving communion in Latin Catholic environments,

31 Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 'Guidelines for Admission to the Eucharist between the Chaldean Church and the Assyrian Church of the East', Holy See, <<http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiesa-assira-dell-oriente/altri-documenti/testo-in-inglese.html>> [accessed 31/04/22].

the notion of sacramental life as spread across church boundaries is effectively habitual.

CONCLUSION

Essential to re-formulating an idea of ecclesial consolidation and expansion is to offer leadership and to engage regularly through community instruction and offer a sustained vision for the church. The re-discovering of an apostolic vocation for the Chaldeans is inherent to Patriarch Sako's vision of the church both through consolidating communities of the East Syriac tradition via ecumenism and re-assuming the zeal formerly present to the Church. Sako notes:

Isn't it that our country launched Christianity to Asia: Tibet, China, India, Afghanistan, and the Gulf, being the widest spread of faith in history? This achievement is credited to the cultural, theological, spiritual, and missionary effort of our early fathers. We have to remember them to stay a Universal Church open to all people, languages, and nationalities and not locked in a certain ghetto!³²

Such a notion passionately argued for by Sako with his cognizance of a newly internationalized church of the East Syriac tradition is entirely in keeping with its past experience of delocalized communities across Asia. However, such visions for the church are increasingly difficult to implement owing to the lack of leadership in the European diaspora, limited resources, and a communal inclination to assume a more missionary focused mindset. If the patriarch seeks to implement such a vision, radical engagement to a level not seen previously with those Chaldeans on the current ecclesial periphery, such as in Britain, is essential.

The Chaldean position in the diaspora, and in general, is also one of questioning identity. The Chaldean identity of the 20th century was so closely formed and aligned with Iraqi life and culture that to

32 Sako, 'The Church: Unity and Communion'.

internationalize a Chaldean identity is a metaphysical re-organization of what it means to be Chaldean. How do community members associate themselves with the example of missionaries who took East Syriac Christianity to Tibet, for example, when one's own upbringing was in the Arab Muslim dominated context of 1960s Baghdad? This is not a process to which a church community even during a period of relative normality can commit universally.

Nevertheless, the role of Sako as patriarch is possibly one of the most crucial for many generations in the leadership of the East Syriac tradition given his responsibility for the largest part of the community and the significant resources which can be utilized via the Holy See to consolidate many aspects of Chaldean life in Iraq and worldwide. It falls to Sako to implement solutions for the safety and future of the Chaldean population in religious, social, and economic arenas. Therefore, if he considers ecclesiological change and inter-communal dialogue as means to in some way alleviate the situation for the Chaldeans, it reflects his awareness of the relevance of theological and historical study of the East Syriac churches to their interactions with a variety of societies and cultures. However, at a basic level day-to-day Chaldean life in Britain is not affected by ecumenical prerogatives per se when the lived reality of inter-communion, inter-marriage, and engagement with British Christian and other Syriac ecclesial cultures are already strongly in existence in the diaspora. Nor as yet is the community noticeably affected by the call for a renewed ecclesiology. Such notions appear to lack resonance and whilst they may be acknowledged as overarching ideas to be aimed for, the capability of the community to absorb and adopt them and encourage a more outward looking and expressly missionary focused engagement with the West have yet to be realized. The lived reality of a more generic Iraqi Christian identity albeit expressed on Sundays preferably in a Chaldean context appears to be the prevailing norm and concerns about juridical union between church communities or incarnating a particular East Syriac Christian perspective in British ecclesial life are not popularly considered. To be Chaldean in Britain is to be actively Christian and open to absorbing British life, but which permits the free practice of religion in a distinctive manner whilst maintaining a cultural connection with Iraqi Christian paradigms and concerns.

A HISTORIC MILESTONE IN
ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE:
THE AGREEMENT ON THE EUCHARIST
BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND
THE ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST

Máté Szaplóczay

Since the earliest times of Christianity, a vibrant local church developed in Mesopotamia. Located outside the Roman Empire's eastern borders, this church became commonly known as the *Church of the East*. A part of this church entered into full communion with the Apostolic See of Rome in 1552. Since then, the church in full communion with Rome took the name of the *Chaldean Church*, while the other church is commonly known as the *Assyrian Church of the East*.¹ These particular churches, however, still share the same theological, liturgical and spiritual tradition; they both celebrate the sacraments or sacred mysteries according to the East-Syriac tradition with only a few minor differences.

The improvement of the relationship between the two churches was changed significantly by a Common Christological Declaration, signed in 1994 by Pope John Paul II and Mar Dinkha IV, Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East. This Declaration removed the main doctrinal obstacle between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. Both church leaders declared:

Whatever our christological divergences have been, we experience ourselves united in the confession of the same faith in the Son of God who became man so that we might become children of God by his grace. We wish from now on to witness together to this faith in the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, proclaiming it in appropriate ways to our contemporaries, so that the world may believe in the Gospel of salvation. (...) Living by this faith and these sacraments, it follows as a

1 Official name: Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East.

consequence that the particular Catholic churches and the particular Assyrian churches can recognise each other as sister churches.²

The subject of this paper is of considerable interest at the international ecclesial level in the last decades and has been addressed by many scholars.³ In addition to the fact that the following are very

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- 2 John Paul II–Mar Dinkha IV, ‘Common Christological Declaration between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East’, in *L’Osservatore Romano*, 2 November 1994, p. 5.
 - 3 Some important bibliography: Sebastian Brock, ‘The Syriac Churches and Dialogue with the Catholic Church’, *The Heythrop Journal* 45 (4), pp. 466–476; Emmanuel Joseph Cutrone, ‘The Lord’s Prayer and the Eucharist. The Syrian Tradition’, in *ΕΥΛΟΓΗΜΑ—Studies in Honor of Robert Taft, SJ (Analecta Liturgica 17)*, Rome, 1993, 93–106; Thomas Eleanal, ‘Some of the Characteristics of the Anaphora of the Apostles Mar Addai and Mar Mari’, *Christian Orient* 8 (1987), 27–36; Anthony Gelston, *The Eucharistic Prayer of Addai and Mari*, Oxford, 1992; Cesare Giraudo, ‘The Genesis of the Anaphoral Institution Narrative in the Light of the Anaphora of Addai and Mari: Between Form Criticism and Comparative Liturgy’, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 78 (2012/1), 15–27; Cesare Giraudo (ed.), *The Anaphoral Genesis of the Institution Narrative in the Light of the Anaphora of Addai and Mari, Acts of the International Liturgy Congress, Rome 25–26 October 2011*, Rome, 2013; Sarhad Yawsep Jammo, ‘The Anaphora of the Apostles Addai and Mari: A Study of Structure and Historical Background’, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 68 (2002/1), 5–35; Martin Lugmayr, ‘The Anaphora of Addai and Mari and its Historical; Liturgical and Theological Background’, *The Harp* XIX, 2006, 413–451; Thomas Mannoorampampil, ‘The Anaphora of Addai and Mari. Its Origin, Development and Theology’, *Christian Orient* 20 (1999/2), 97–108; ‘The Structure of the Anaphora of Addai and Mari in the Syro-Malabar Qurbana’, *Christian Orient* 23 (2002/1), 26–35; Stelyios Muksuris, ‘A Brief Overview of the Structure and Theology of the Liturgy of the Apostles of Addai and Mari’, *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 43 (1998), 59–83; *The anaphorae of the liturgy of Sts. Addai and Mari and the Byzantine liturgy of St. Basil the great: a comparative study*, Durham, 1999; Ferenc Nagy, ‘Eucharisztikus ökümenizmus Krisztus egyházában’, *Távlatok* (2003/4), 557–562; Anthony O’Mahony, ‘Syriac Christianity in the Modern Middle East’, in Michael Angold (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, Cambridge, 2006, 511–36; Edward Craddock Ratcliff, ‘The Original Form of the Anaphora of Addai and Mari: A Suggestion’, *Journal of Theological Studies* 30 (1929), 23–32; Awa Royel, ‘The Pearl of Great Price: The Anaphora of the Apostles Mar Addai and Mar Mari as an Ecclesial and Cultural Identifier of the Assyrian Church of the East’, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 80, Rome 2014, 5–22; Nicholas V Russo, ‘The Validity of the Anaphora of Addai and Mari: Critique of the Critiques’, in Maxwell E Johnson (ed.), *Issues in Eucharistic Praying in East and West*, Collegeville, 2010, 21–62; Louis Sako, ‘Reply to the paper of Mar Bawai Soro on Holy Leaven’, in *Syriac Dialogue—Fifth non-official consultation on dialogue within the Syriac Tradition*, Vienna, 2003, 114–122; Bawai Soro, ‘The Sacrament of the Holy Leaven “Malka” in the Church of the East’, in *Syriac Dialogue—Fifth non-official*

unique and ancient ecclesiastical traditions, the main reason for the recent research is that the issue has important ecumenical relevance. The pastoral care of the faithful of the Chaldean Church and the Assyrian Church of the East is much hampered by the situation in the Middle East and the fact that many of members of these churches are scattered throughout the diaspora, especially in North America. The request for admission to the Eucharist between the Chaldean Church and the Assyrian Church of the East is thus connected with this particular geographical and social situation in which their faithful are actually living. As there cannot be a priest for every local community in such a widespread diaspora (Middle East, Scandinavia, Western Europe, Australia and North America), numerous Chaldean and Assyrian faithful are confronted with a situation of pastoral necessity with regard to the administration of sacraments. The principal issue for the Catholic Church in agreeing to this request, related to the question of the validity of the Eucharist celebrated with the Anaphora of Addai and Mari.

Currently, there are three Anaphoras⁴ in use in the liturgical practice of the Assyrian Church of the East, which are attributed to Theodore of Mopsuestia, Nestorius, and to Addai and Mari. According to the unanimous opinion of liturgical scholars, the Anaphora of Addai and Mari is one of the most ancient Anaphoras in Christianity, dating back to the time of the very early church. However, from the point of view of Catholic canon law and sacramental theology, certain questions had been raised about the legitimacy of this Anaphora because, from time immemorial, it has been used without a recitation of the Institution Narrative. As the Catholic Church considers the words of the Eucharistic Institution a constitutive and therefore indispensable part of the Anaphora or Eucharistic Prayer, a long and

consultation on dialogue within the Syriac Tradition, 88–101; Brian Spinks, ‘The mystery of the Holy Leaven (Malka) in the East Syrian Tradition’, in Maxwell E Johnson (ed.), *Issues in Eucharistic Praying in East and West*, Collegeville, 2010, 63–71; Baby Varghese, ‘Reply to the paper of Mar Bawai Soro on Holy Leaven’, in *Syriac Dialogue—Fifth non-official consultation on dialogue within the Syriac Tradition*, 102–113; Stephen B Wilson, ‘The Anaphora of the Apostles Addai and Mari’, in Paul Bradshaw (ed.), *Essays on Early Eastern Eucharistic Prayers*, Collegeville, 1997, 19–37.

4 In the Eastern Syriac tradition they are called *Qudaša*, however, in Greek-speaking Eastern Christianity and in the academic language ‘Anaphora’ is the usual name for the most solemn part of the Divine Liturgy, during which the offerings of bread and wine are consecrated as the body and blood of Christ.

careful study was undertaken of the Anaphora of Addai and Mari, from a historical, liturgical and theological perspective. Among the arguments put forward for the validity of the Addai-Mari Anaphora, we find a distinct aspect which connects with the Mystical (Last) Supper in a special way, in its depiction by means of symbols instead of words. Hence the discussion relates to the significance of the sacrament of the Holy Leaven.

There had been wide-ranging consultation in order to examine the possibility of intercommunion, as a result of which, on 26 October 2001, the Holy See promulgated a document, namely the *Guidelines for admission to the Eucharist between the Chaldean Church and the Assyrian Church of the East*,⁵ which was considered by the recently deceased, distinguished liturgical scholar, Fr Robert Taft, to be ‘the most remarkable magisterial document since Vatican II’.⁶ This agreement was indeed very important and represented a unique ecumenical stance.

After its promulgation, the document received much criticism, mostly from the Catholic side. Fr Taft, who himself had taken part in the redaction of the *Guidelines*, defended the document,⁷ and among other reasons he used the tradition of the Holy Leaven to argue in favour of the validity of the Anaphora of Addai and Mari:

Though Addai and Mari may lack the institution ad litteram, it contains it virtually, in explicit, if oblique, references to the eucharistic institution, to the Last Supper, to the Body and Blood and sacrifice of Christ, and to the oblation of the Church, thereby clearly demonstrating the intention of repeating what Jesus did in obedience to his command: ‘Do this in memory of me.’

This clear intention to express the links joining the Last Supper, the eucharistic institution, the sacrifice of the

5 Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Guidelines for Admission to the Eucharist Between the Chaldean Church and the Assyrian Church of the East*. L'Osservatore Romano, English edition, 31 October 2001.

6 Robert Taft, “Mass Without the Consecration?” The Historic Agreement on the Eucharist Between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East Promulgated 26 October 2001’, *Worship* 77 (2003/6), p. 482.

7 Taft, “Mass Without ...”, and R Taft, ‘The 2001 Vatican Addai and Mari Decision in Retrospect: Reflections of a Protagonist’, in Cesare Girauda (ed.), *The Anaphoral Genesis ...*, 317-334.

Cross, and the oblation of the Church, is confirmed by the other Assyrian anaphoras, by all the East Syrian liturgical commentators, as well as by the peculiar Assyrian tradition of the malka or Holy Leaven added to the eucharistic loaves as a sign of historical continuity with the Last Supper.⁸

After presenting briefly the Liturgy of Addai and Mari, we examine the question of intercommunion with special regard to the Vatican document, *Guidelines for admission to the Eucharist between the Chaldean Church and the Assyrian Church of the East*. This is followed by an introduction to the sacrament of the Holy Leaven (*Malka*), with its historical, liturgical and symbolical aspects.

THE LITURGY OF ADDAI AND MARI

The Liturgy of Addai and Mari has at its centre the unique Anaphora of Assyrian Church of the East. The liturgical scholarship of the 20th century has enthusiastically attached great value to this ancient text and claimed that it is one of the earliest Christian Anaphoras that exists today. John Neale already in the middle of the 19th century stated that the liturgy of Addai and Mari is ‘one of the earliest, and perhaps the very earliest, of many formularies of Christian sacrifice.’⁹ While such an assertion of *absolute antiquity* may, and already does, carry the risk of serious criticism, the inherent historical value of Addai and Mari is evident from three important facts, based on the research of Stylianos Muksuris:¹⁰

1. it is clearly a liturgy of Semitic origin, with very little or practically no known adulteration by Greek or other sources;
2. Addai and Mari, so far as can be ascertained, makes

8 Taft, “Mass Without ...”, p. 486.

9 John Mason Neale, *General Introduction to a History of the Holy Eastern Church*, London, 1850, p. 319.

10 Stylianos Muksuris, *The anaphorae of the liturgy of Sts. Addai and Mari and the Byzantine liturgy of St. Basil the great: a comparative study*, Durham, 1999, p. 10.

exclusive use of Syriac biblical texts when scriptural citations are included in the liturgy;

3. the body of the eucharistic prayer is addressed not only to the Father, but in part to the Son, a further sign of Addai and Mari's 'antiquity, and not an exceptional peculiarity'.¹¹

From the middle of the 20th century, most liturgical scholars share the common opinion that the then-known versions of the Addai-Mari Anaphora (six manuscripts, two of which date from the 16th century and four from the 17th century) were revised versions of the original Anaphora, or even revisions of the version revised by Patriarch Isho'yahb in the 7th century. In 1966, Fr William F Macomber, former Jesuit and scholar of Eastern Christianity, published a list of earlier manuscripts, supplemented by a critical publication of the Addai-Mari based on the text of a *budra* (voluminous Syrian ceremonial book) of the Mar Esa'ya church in Mosul. We currently consider this last named to be the oldest known version of the Anaphora of Addai-Mari.

The *Instruction for Applying the Liturgical Prescriptions of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* draws our attention to the value of the ancient Eastern Anaphoras:

In the celebration of the divine Mysteries, the text of the Anaphora shines like a precious treasure. The Eastern Anaphoras date back to venerable antiquity: often attributed to the Apostles, according to the living awareness of the Churches, or to saints of the primitive Church, or to other important personages in the history of the Churches, the Anaphoras are, in the act of the offering, the proclamation of praise and thanksgiving to God, and the epiclesis, which is the invocation of the Holy Spirit.

From the treasure of the Anaphoras, rather numerous according to the various Churches, care should be taken to offer the possibility of using, as is deemed suitable, more texts of the Anaphoras, some of which are no

¹¹ Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, London, 1945, p. 180.

longer in use today but should be restored. Considering that the Anaphora is a true masterpiece of mystagogical theology, it is appropriate to study the ways in which, at least in some circumstances, it could be pronounced aloud, so as to be heard by the faithful. The pastors should see to it that the people are formed according to that theology which is present in so pre-eminent a way in the Anaphora.¹²

THE QUESTION OF INTERCOMMUNION

According to Catholic canon law Catholic ministers licitly administer the sacraments only to Catholic Christian faithful, who, likewise, licitly receive the sacraments only from Catholic ministers.¹³ However, there are some exceptions, as the canon continues:

If necessity requires it or genuine spiritual advantage suggests it and provided that the danger of error or indifferentism is avoided, it is permitted for Catholic Christian faithful, for whom it is physically or morally impossible to approach a Catholic minister, to receive the sacraments of penance, the Eucharist and anointing of the sick from non-Catholic ministers, in whose Churches these sacraments are valid.¹⁴

And

Likewise Catholic ministers licitly administer the sacraments of penance, the Eucharist and anointing of the sick to Christian faithful of Eastern Churches, who do not have full communion with the Catholic Church, if they ask for them on their own and are properly disposed.¹⁵

12 Congregation for the Eastern Churches, *Instruction for Applying the Liturgical Prescriptions of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, Rome, 1996, p. 54.

13 CIC can. 844 §1, CCEO can. 671 §1.

14 CIC can. 844 §2, CCEO can. 671 §2.

15 CIC can. 844 §3, CCEO can. 671 §3.

In his *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation*, Pope Benedict XVI emphasised again the significance of the possibility of intercommunion between the Catholic Church and the Eastern Churches:

An emphasis on this eucharistic basis of ecclesial communion can also contribute greatly to the ecumenical dialogue with the Churches and Ecclesial Communities which are not in full communion with the See of Peter. The Eucharist objectively creates a powerful bond of unity between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches, which have preserved the authentic and integral nature of the eucharistic mystery.¹⁶

THE VALIDITY OF THE LITURGY OF ADDAI AND MARI

As mentioned before, a question has emerged about the validity of the Eucharist of the Assyrian Church of the East, since in their ancient Anaphora of Addai and Mari, we cannot discern the narration of the Last Supper, so it lacks the Words of the Institution as well. Until recent decades, the Western perception had been that the consecration of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ would happen in that moment. Recent research, however, has already shown that the oldest eucharistic prayers did not include the narration of the Last Supper, nor—consequently—the Words of the Institution. Robert Taft states that we have no knowledge of any eucharistic prayer before Nicea that contains the Words of the Institution, and he claims in agreement with many liturgical scholars that the early eucharistic prayers were short, independent blessings and thanksgiving without narrating the institution. An example of this fact can be found in the IX chapter of the *Didache*:

Now concerning the Thanksgiving (Eucharist), thus give thanks. First, concerning the cup: We thank you, our Father, for the holy vine of David Your servant, which You made known to us through Jesus Your

16 Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation*, 22 February 2007, p. 15.

Servant; to You be the glory forever. And concerning the broken bread: We thank You, our Father, for the life and knowledge which You made known to us through Jesus Your Servant; to You be the glory forever. Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let Your Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Your kingdom; for Yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever.¹⁷

Liturgical scholars now increasingly agree that in the beginning, the Words of the Institution did not form the core of the Anaphoras, but they were later included in the anamnesis ('*embolism*'). This is evidenced by the Anaphora of Addai-Mari, which is one of the oldest of them. Despite the lack of the institution narrative, the germs of it can already be discovered in the text:

And we also, Lord, your lowly, weak, and miserable servants, who have gathered and stand before you, (and) have received through tradition the form which is from you, rejoicing, glorifying, exalting, commemorating, and celebrating this great mystery of the passion, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁸

Mass without the Consecration?

The above mentioned liturgical scholar, Fr Robert Taft, published an article with the same deliberately provocative title. In the introduction he explains that he owed it to a high-ranking Catholic prelate who, upon hearing of the historic decree of the Holy See recognizing the validity of the eucharistic sacrifice celebrated according to the original redaction of the Anaphora of Addai and Mari, without the Words

17 *Didache. The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations*, trans. M B Riddle, in Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and Cleveland Coxe (eds), *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 7, Buffalo, NY, 1886. Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight, <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0714.htm>> [accessed 27/07/22].

18 Ronald C D Jasper and Geoffrey Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed*, Collegeville, 1990, p. 43.

of Institution, exclaimed in perplexity: 'But how can there be Mass without the consecration?'¹⁹

Obviously that cannot be. However, we can clearly understand behind the question the Western position that attributed the consecration to the Words of Institution. To fully comprehend the issue we need to recall that since scholasticism there has been a sharp difference between East and West in the question of consecration. The question did not arise before the Middle Ages, and perhaps we can say that a solution has been found today. However, in the intervening centuries, theologians were seriously concerned about which is the *moment of consecration*, that is, exactly when we can say of the bread and wine that it is the body and blood of Christ.

In the West, the moment of transformation was clearly seen in the Words of Institution, while in the East, the critical moment has always been the epiclesis, or the calling down of the Holy Spirit on the gifts of bread and wine and the assembly. One of the most typical examples of the Eastern conception is found in the epiclesis of the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom:

[...] we ask, pray, and entreat You: send down Your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts here presented. And make this bread the precious Body of Your Christ. (He blesses the holy Bread.) And that which is in this cup the precious Blood of Your Christ. (He blesses the holy Cup.) Changing them by Your Holy Spirit. (He blesses them both.) [...]

One of the main aspects of Western reasoning is that while the scriptural foundations of the Words of the Institution are obvious (Mt 26: 26-29; Mk 14: 22-25; Luke 22: 19-21; 1 Cor 11: 23-26), the role of the epiclesis cannot be similarly demonstrated from the Bible. However, the Church Fathers (including St Basil the Great)²⁰ clearly attest to the ancient practice of eucharistic epiclesis. St John Chrysostom puts it this way: 'it is not the priest who creates anything, but the Holy Spirit, who, by spreading and covering with his wings, creates this secret sacrifice.'²¹

19 Taft, "'Mass Without ...', p. 482.

20 Jacques Paul Migne (ed.), *Patrologia graeca*, vol. 32, Paris, 1857, p. 188.

21 Migne, *Patrologia graeca*, vol. 50, Paris, 1862, p. 459.

Reviewing the differing views, Eastern and Western theologians today agree that both the Words of the Institution with the anamnesis, and epiclesis are vital, and that the eucharistic prayer should be taken as a whole. According to the Munich document on ‘The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity’, the Spirit transforms the sacred gifts into the body and blood of Christ in order to bring about the growth of the body which is the church. In this sense the entire celebration is an epiclesis, which becomes more explicit at certain moments. The church is continually in a state of epiclesis.²²

Based on that said above, it is very conceivable that the ‘imperfection’ of the Anaphora of Addai and Mari merely demonstrates the preservation of the original character of the Anaphora regarding the missing Words of Institution, while the praying community implicitly considered the link to the Last Supper just as important and significant. This clear intention is expressed in other ways, as we will see later.

The question of the high-ranking Catholic prelate—*Mass without the Consecration?*—reflects a false starting point. The Words of Institution, as we have seen, do not form the core of the eucharistic prayers from the beginning. Nevertheless, we clearly do not consider the eucharistic prayers before Nicea to be invalid, as they clearly show the intention of the Christian community to carry out the Holy Mysteries which Jesus left to them before his death and resurrection. The ancient eucharistic prayers shed light on the fact that the Anaphora of Addai and Mari is valid, even if it does not contain explicitly the Words of Institution.

THE HOLY LEAVEN (*MALKA*)

As we have already mentioned, among other reasons Fr Taft used the tradition of the Holy Leaven to argue in favour of the validity of the Anaphora of Addai and Mari: the emphasis on the close connection with the events that took place in the ‘Upper Room’ has become topical in the last decades, as it relates to the conditions for intercommunion between the Chaldean Church and the Assyrian Church of the East

²² Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue Between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, *The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity*, Munich, 1982, §5c.

in difficult pastoral situations. The intention expressed by tradition to link the given Liturgy to the Institution of Christ, taking into account other aspects, indeed makes the Anaphora of Addai and Mari valid, a position which the Catholic Church officially declares. The sacrament of *Malka* in the Assyrian Church of the East also carries a unique antiquity that in itself enriches the treasury of the Christian East.

The tradition of the Holy Leaven, also known as *Malka* ('the King'), is a unique phenomenon in the Assyrian Church of the East. In his main work, *Liber Marganitae*,²³ Mar 'Abdišō' of Nisibis, metropolitan (+1318), lists the seven sacraments that exist in their Church, five of which are also considered sacraments in the Catholic Church.²⁴ In virtue of its venerable origin, theological meaning and liturgical stature, the Holy Leaven was ranked by Mar 'Abdišō' of Nisibis among the sacraments ('Razeh' or 'Sacred Mysteries') along with the Sign of the Cross.

During the fourth and fifth sessions of the conference 'Fifth Non-Official Consultation on Dialogue within the Syriac Tradition' organized by *Pro Oriente*, on 28 February 2002, the participants examined the tradition of the sacraments of the Holy Leaven and the Sign of the Cross in the Assyrian Church. Mar Bawai Soro, Bishop of the Assyrian Church of the East,²⁵ offered a lecture on the Holy Leaven, which was followed by a long and exciting discussion. Mar Bawai emphasized the importance of the *Malka* in the Eastern Syrian tradition and recalled that in sacramental theology it is more important to keep the *realities* in mind and not to limit the mysteries to things and numbers. His conception reflects the ancient Eastern tradition.²⁶

23 Mar Eshai Shimun (ed. and trans.), *The Book of Marganitha (The Pearl), On the Truth of Christianity: Written by Mar O'Disboo Metropolitan of Suva (Nisibin) and Armenia. Together with several pertinent passages quoted from the various Church Fathers; a successive list of the patriarchs of the East; and an index of Biblical and ecclesiastical writings*, Trichur, 1965, p. 46.

24 Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Reconciliation, and Holy Orders.

25 After 20 years of episcopal service in the Assyrian Church of the East, Mar Bawai Soro (along with nearly one thousand Assyrian Christian families) was received into communion with the Chaldean Catholic Church in May 2008. He was the eparch of the Chaldean Catholic Eparchy of Toronto until 2021, when his resignation was accepted by Pope Francis.

26 Bawai Soro, 'The Sacrament of the Holy Leaven "Malka" in the Church of the East', in *Syriac Dialogue—Fifth non-official consultation on dialogue within the Syriac Tradition*, 88-101.

Responding to his presentation, Louis Sako, the current Patriarch of Babylon and head of the Chaldean Catholic Church noted that the Assyrian Church of the East could now easily accept that the *Malka* is not a separate sacrament, but an important part of the celebration of the Eucharist. He added that neither the very glorious tradition of the Holy Leaven nor the theological meaning expressed in it would be undermined by accepting this. He considered this view important because, for the ecumenical movement, as he pointed out, it is more important to seek an expression of the Church's faith in sacramental theology than to try to make a historical reconstruction of different traditions and practices.²⁷

As the Common Statement on 'Sacramental Life' signed by the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East declares, 'In different ways the early Church practised a partition of Eucharistic bread, combined with a distribution of these particles among the churches or the celebrants of a specific area.' The document reminds us that 'such liturgical practice existed both in the Christian East and in the Christian West. One of these practices, called the "fermentum", consisted in a distribution of small Eucharistic particles by the bishop to the priests of the surrounding area; each priest had to dip this particle into the cup of his eucharistic celebration, hence the name "fermentum" or "leaven".' The statement then confirms, that these kind of practices gradually disappeared in the Western Church and in most of the Oriental Churches. The Assyrian Church of the East, however, 'faithfully conserved such a liturgical practice, called "Holy Leaven" or "Malka". Every year on Holy Thursday, the local parish priest renews the Holy Leaven by mixing the old Leaven with the new one. This Leaven is subsequently to be used during the year in all the eucharistic loaves prepared by the priest before the eucharistic celebration. In the sacramental tradition of the Assyrian Church of the East, this Holy Leaven has an integral and necessary part in the overall process of consecration. Further, the Holy Leaven functions as a visible sign of historical continuity between every Qurbana or eucharistic celebration and the Last Supper (cf. Mt 26: 26).'²⁸

27 Louis Sako, 'Reply to the paper of Mar Bawai Soro on Holy Leaven', in *Syriac Dialogue—Fifth non-official consultation on dialogue within the Syriac Tradition*, p. 117.

28 Joint Committee for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East, *Common Statement on 'Sacramental Life*, 24 November

The origins of the Holy Leaven are quite obscure, and there are several theories as to the development of this custom, which tradition dates back to the Last Supper. We have sources on the origin of the Holy Leaven only since the 10th century. For reasons of length, we do not have the opportunity to present them in detail, so we will only mention some of them briefly. According to the unanimous opinion of the scholars, the oldest of the texts currently available, in which *Malka* is mentioned, is the Code of Patriarch Yohanan bar Abgareh (+905), which was preserved for us by Joseph Kelaita. Canon 15 states: 'A priest is obligated to prepare the Eucharistic bread for the Holy Qurbana and to mix the Holy Leaven with it, in addition to the simple leaven.'²⁹

An important witness of this tradition is Pseudo-Gewargis's commentary on the Divine Liturgy, which was written in the same region in the 10th century. The first description of the origins of the Holy Leaven can be found in Shelêmôn of al-Basra's *Diburita*, written in the 13th century:

Some have a tradition that when our Lord broke His body for His disciples in the upper chamber, John the son of Zebedee hid a part of his portion until our Lord rose from the dead. And when our Lord appeared to His disciples and to Thomas with them, He said to Thomas, 'Hither with thy finger and lay it on My side, and be not unbelieving, but believing.' Thomas put his finger near to our Lord's side, and it rested upon the mark of the spear, and the disciples saw the blood from the marks of the spear and nails. And John took that piece of consecrated bread, and wiped up that blood with it; and the Easterns, Mâr Addai and Mâr Mârî, took that piece, and with it they sanctified this unleavened bread which has been handed down among us.³⁰

2017, IV.

29 Joseph Kelaita (ed.), *The Liturgy of the Church of the East*, Mosul, 1928, p. 211.

30 Ernest Wallis Budge (ed.), *Diburita or 'The Book of the Bee' by Shelêmôn of al-Basra*, Oxford, 1886, p. 90.

A century later, Yohanan bar Zo'bee already offers a much more complex account of the origins of the Holy Leaven.³¹

In Syrian, '*Malka*' literally means 'King'. As elsewhere, the title King was applied to Jesus Christ among many other titles. According to scholars, this title could later be applied to the Holy Leaven as well, because the faithful of these very churches have never lived under a Christian ruler, leaving their only King the Lord himself, who was revered and appropriately worshipped in the Holy Leaven.

The significance of the Holy Leaven

Horizontally:

Perhaps this aspect is most visible in India today.³² The practice of the Church of the East in India (Kerala, South India) is that the metropolitan renews the *Malka* together with all of his priests on Holy Thursday, and then each priest takes a portion of the new sacrament to his parish church, to use it in the making of the eucharistic bread for the Divine Liturgy for a year. The horizontal significance is expressed in the fact that this makes the unity of the priesthood according to Christ, and obedience and unity with the hierarch even more visible.

Vertically:

Although we do not find the Words of Institution in the Anaphora of Addai and Mari, the obligatory addition of the Holy Leaven to each eucharistic bread clearly expresses the intention to link the current eucharistic celebration with what happened in the Upper Room, the Mystical (Last) Supper. Just as Latin canon law considers the Roman Mass to be invalid without the Words of Institution, so Syrian canon law regards the use of the Holy Leaven as a condition of validity. The words are replaced by the symbols. Their clear intention is to be vertically attached to the Last Supper, preserving its memory in continuity by the Holy Leaven.

31 George Percy Badger (ed.), *The Nestorians and Their Rituals*, vol. 11, London, 1853, 151-153.

32 Awa Royel, 'The Sacrament of the Holy Leaven (Malka) in the Assyrian Church of the East', in Cesare Giraudo (ed.), *The Anaphoral Genesis ...*, p. 380.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, Catholic canon law clearly defines the admission of the sacraments. In these canons, there are some distinctions, which are made for situations of real pastoral necessity, and which allow Catholics to admit the Eucharist to the faithful of the churches, where this sacrament is valid according to the Catholic point of view, and vice versa. Considering the difficult situation of the Middle East and the widespread diaspora, the pastoral necessity was obvious. However, in this context, the Assyrian Church of the East had a Liturgy (the Liturgy of Mar Addai and Mar Mari) from which the Words of Institution are missing. Since in the Catholic Church, these words are considered to be consecratory and thus necessary, the validity of this ancient Anaphora was thus a serious question, which they examined on a historical, liturgical and theological basis. The final conclusion was that the Anaphora of Addai and Mari can be considered valid. The *Guidelines* gives the following explanation:

The words of Eucharistic Institution are indeed present in the Anaphora of Addai and Mari, not in a coherent narrative way and ad litteram, but rather in a dispersed eucharological way, that is, integrated in successive prayers of thanksgiving, praise and intercession.

As we have seen, the historic document of 2001 also takes into consideration, with regard to the Assyrian form of the anaphora of Addai and Mari, the presence of the Holy Leaven in the Assyrian Eucharist, ‘thereby linking the present celebration with all previous ones back to the Mystical Supper itself.’ We are now twenty years after the promulgation of this document which declared the validity of this ancient Anaphora. It is important to note, that the document did not only take into consideration the ecumenical rapprochement between the two sister churches, but—in the spirit of the Decree on Ecumenism of Vatican II, *Unitatis Redintegratio*—it also significantly professed the orthodoxy of the Assyrian Church of the East in terms of her doctrine and liturgy, for:

the Catholic Church recognises the Assyrian Church of the East as a true particular Church, built upon orthodox

faith and apostolic succession. The Assyrian Church of the East has also preserved full Eucharistic faith in the presence of our Lord under the species of bread and wine and in the sacrificial character of the Eucharist. In the Assyrian Church of the East, though not in full communion with the Catholic Church, are thus to be found ‘true sacraments, and above all, by apostolic succession, the priesthood and the Eucharist’ (UR n. 15).³³

³³ Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Guidelines...*, §3: 3.

THE IMPACT OF THE NEW JULFA-‘NEW GENEVA’ SCHOOL OF THEOLOGIANs AGAINST THE CRISIS OF PROSELYTISATION AND APOSTASY IN SAFAVID IRAN

Vrej Nersessian

INTRODUCTION

Armenia and Armenians came into contact with Islam before their contact with the Ottomans and Safavid Iran. The first Arab incursions into Armenia occurred in 644–645. The high-handed Byzantine policy of imposing Chalcedonianism on Armenia provoked a council held in Dvin in 648 where prince T’edoros R’shtuni broke all ties with the Byzantine empire. In 652 T’edoros R’shtuni concluded a treaty with Caliph Mu‘awiya, the text of which is available in Sebeos’s *Armenian History*. According to this treaty Armenia was bound to pay tribute to the caliphate and to provide a supporting army to the Arabs in times of war.¹ Freedom of religion was also assured by a treaty cited by the Arab historian al-Baladhuri:

In the name of Allah, the compassionate, the merciful. This is a treaty of Habib ibn Maslamah with the Christians, Magians, Jews of Dabil [Dvin], including those present and absent, I have granted you safety for your lives, possessions, churches, places of worship, and city wall. Thus you are safe and we are bound to fulfil our covenant, so long as

1 Sebeos, *Պատմություն Աղթնոյի կաթողիկոսոյսի ի Հերակլին*, Tiflis, 1913, Chapter xxxv, pp. 222–8. English translation, see Nina Garsoian, ‘The Arab invasions and the rise of the Bagratuni’ in *The Armenian people from ancient to modern times*, R G Hovannisian (ed.), New York, 1997, vol. I, 117–42. For a critical text of Sebeos, with introduction and notes, see G Abgaryan, *Պատմություն Աղթնոյի* (The Armenian History of Sebeos), Erevan, 1979. The most recent translation, with historical commentary, is by R W Thomson, and J Howard-Johnson, *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, Translated Texts for Historians, Liverpool, 1999. This is based on the critical edition of the Armenian text by G V Abgaryan.

you fulfil and pay poll-tax and *keharaj*. There unto Allah is witness, and it suffices to have him witness.²

The Muslim occupation paradoxically contributed to the preservation of Armenian distinctiveness, slowed and reversed the incipient process of Byzantinisation. There are historical parallels between the agreement made by T'eodoros R̄shtuni with the Muslims and the obligations imposed on Armenians by the Sasanian rulers as set out by Eghishe in his *History of Vardan*. The continuation of the customary military and taxation obligations made it easier for Armenians to acknowledge Muslim control as long as the latter did not impose religious restrictions—unlike the policy of doctrinal unity pursued by Byzantium³ and Zoroastrianism by Sasanian Iran.⁴ Armenians never gave the Muslims a name related to 'Islam'. One expression that gradually became predominant was the word *aylazgi* which means someone of a foreign tribe or race used in the Armenian Old Testament to describe the enemies of Israel, the Philistines. The adaptation of *aylazgi* for Muslims indicates the continuing dominance of the Old Testament image. The historian Ghewond likens the suffering of Armenians under Muslim rule to the suffering of the Jews of old. God inflicted punishment on them for their sins by means of foreign races 'All these misfortunes befell us like the catastrophes

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- 2 Al-Baladhuri, *The Origins of the Islamic State*, trans. Ph K Hitti, New York, 1968, vol. II, pp. 314–15; see N Garsoian, op. cit., p. 121; Aram Tēr-Ghewondian, *The Arab Emirates in Bagratid Armenia*, trans. Nina G Garsoian, Lisbon, 1976; M Ghazarian, *Armenien unter arabischen Herrschaft*, Marburg, 1903; J Laurent, *L'Arménie entre Byzance et Islam depuis la conquête Arabe jusqu'en 886*, nouvelle édition revue et mise à jour par M Canard, Lisbon, 1980. Arabic sources, see Vrej Nersessian, *The T'ondrakian movement. Religious movements in the Armenian church from the fourth to the tenth centuries*, London, 1987.
- 3 Karine Melik'yan, 'Narratio de rebus Armeniae', Հայ-Քաղկեդոնական երկր վաղ միջնադարյան հայոց պատմության կարևոր սկզբնաղբյուր ('Narratio de rebus Armeniae', Armenian-Chalcedonian document as an important source for early medieval Armenian church history), Erevan, 2007; G Garitte, 'La Narratio de rebus Armeniae, édition critique et commentaire', *CSCO*, vol. 132, Louvain, 1952; H Bartikyan, Greek translation, *BM* 6 (1962), pp. 457–70; J P Mahé, French translation, *REA*, t. 25 (1994–95), 429–38.
- 4 'Armenia in the eight and ninth centuries: A social, economic and political survey', in Vrej Nersessian, *The Tondrakian movement*, 25–36; William Muir, *The Caliphate, its rise decline and fall*, 3rd ed., London, 1891.

of the Jews in the past which we are now facing in like manner.⁵ It was not new to suggest that God punished Armenians for their backsliding but to assign this as a feature of the Muslim period was new. It is taken to its furthest extreme in the 11th century by Aristakes Lastiverttsi.⁶ In the Middle Ages as in previous centuries the Armenian Church was the dominant institution and every social discontent in their left or right complexions was directed against the leadership of the church. An important theme of Armenian Church history must embody the perennial and repeating emergence of sects that challenged the church's authority. In the early centuries of its formation the church had to combat a number of sects among them the Borborites (Բորբորիտներ) and the Messalians (Մծղիւն).⁷ The emergence of sects and dissidents in the Armenian Church with Islamic connotations begins with the occupation of Armenia by the Arabs in the shape of the Paulician and T'ondrakian movements, the latter according to some emerging in a slightly different guise during the Safavid period.⁸

5 Ghewond, *History of Ghewond the Eminent Vardapet of the Armenians*, translation, introduction and commentary by (Rev.) Zaven Arzoumanian, Philadelphia, 1982, Chapter III, p. 51.

6 Aristakes Lastiverttsi, *Récit des malheurs de la nation arménienne*, trans. and commentary by M Canard and H Berberian, Bibiothèque de Byzantion 5, Brussels, 1973; R W Thomson, 'Christian perception of history. The Armenian perspective', in J J Van Ginkel (ed.), *Redefining Christian identity*, Leuven, 2005, pp. 38-40.

7 Levon Khatchikyan, *Փոքր Հայքի սոցիալական շարժումների պատմությունից IV դար* (From the history of social movements in Minor Armenia in the 4th century), Erevan, 1951; Ervand Tēr Minasyan, *Միջնադարյան աղանդների ծագման և զարգացման պատմությունից* (From the history of the emergence and developments of sects in the Middle Ages), Erevan, 1968.

8 Vrej Nersessian, *The Tondrakian movement.op.cit.*, 1987 (reprinted in the Princeton Theological Monograph series, 1988); Janet Hamilton and Bernard Hamilton, *Christian dualist heresies in the Byzantine world c. 650-c. 1405*, Manchester, 1998; N Garsoian, *The Paulician heresy*, The Hague, 1987; St T Melik'-Bakhshyan, *Պալիկյան շարժումը Հայաստանում* (The Paulician movement in Armenia), Erevan, 1953. For an extended bibliography, see Vrej Nersessian, *The Tondrakian movement*.

Outside the hagiographical accounts of martyrs,⁹ significant information is provided on Islam by Armenian historians.¹⁰

THE PERCEPTION OF ISLAM IN ARMENIAN SOURCES

The *History of Sebeos* covering the period from 632 to 788 provides considerable information on Arab-Byzantine relations and includes the lengthy polemical letter of Emperor Leo III (717–41) to Caliph 'Umar II (717–20) on the question of the respective merits of Christianity and Islam.¹¹ The Armenian historian in contrast to the statement made by Theophanes and Michael the Syrian that 'Umar 'forced many Christians to accept Islam and made many martyrs of those who refused', are full of praises for 'Umar II:

'Umar, son of Abdlaziz ... was the most noble of them all. He wrote a letter on the faith to Leo, Emperor of the Greeks; and receiving a response from him expunged many of the most fabulous things from their Qur'an,

9 H Manandyan and H Acharian, *Հայոց Նոր Վկայականք (1155–1843)* (The Acts new Armenian martyrs), Ejmiadsin, 1903, 454–83; (The Acts of Sirun Aliwrts'i, 5 August 1655; Mkhit'ar Vanets'i, 12 November 1655; Avetis Ostants'i, 20 March 1656; Nikoghayos Tigranakertts'i, 15 April 1642; Khatchatur Tigranakertts'i, 20 August 1652 and Loys Grigor, 30 July 1703). Cf. Arak'el Davrizhets'i, *Գիրք Պատմութեանց* (Book of Histories), critical text, introduction and notes by L A Khanlaryan, Erevan, 1990, chapters 44–49, 400–24; M Ch'amch'ian, *Հայոց Պատմություն «Յարազու նահատակութեան ոմանց որք էին յազգէ հայոց»* (Concerning the martyrdom of those who were from the Armenian nation), vol. III, chapter 30, 651–56; Leon Arpee, 'A role of modern martyrs', in *A history of Armenian Christianity from the beginning to our time*, New York, 1946, Appendix IV, 361–65.

10 Ghewondyan Tēr Aram, «Հայ եվ Քրիստոնյա Արաբական մատենագրական անընդունների պատմությունից» ('From the history of the relations between Armenian and Christian Arab literature') in *Collected studies*, Erevan, 2003, 397–403; «Արաբական աղբյուրների ուսումնասիրությունը եվ օգտագործումը հայագիտության մեջ» ('The study and use of Arabic sources in Armenian studies'), *ibid.*, 617–42; 'Auteurs Chrétiens Arméniens. Bibliographie du dialogue Islamo-Chrétien', *ibid.*, 455–63; David Thomas and John Chesworth (eds), *Christian-Muslim relations. A bibliographical history*, vol. 12, Asia, Africa and the Americas (1700–1800), Brill, 2018, pp. 901.

11 Ghewond *vardapet*, *History of Ghewond*, 70–105; A Jeffery, 'Ghewond's text of the correspondence between 'Umar II and Leo III', *HTR XXXVII* (1944), 269–332.

for he recognised the true power [of Leo's argument]. Although he did not dare to remove them all, yet being very confounded and ashamed he abandoned the falsehood that was refuted by the Emperor and thereby showed great benevolence to the Christian peoples.¹²

Sebeos's account is important for much of what he says about the origins of the new religion conforms to Muslim tradition and probably approximates to the truth: 'At that time a certain man from among those same sons of Ismael whose name was Mahmet, a merchant, as if by God's command appeared to them as a preacher [and] the path of truth. He taught them to recognize the God of Abraham, especially because he was learned and informed in the history of Moses.'¹³

Catholicos Yovhannes III Ōjnetsi (717-728) had a meeting with 'Umar II. One of the things most talked about was the manner in which he dressed. The catholicos had a profound insight into the manner in which the Arab mind worked and the way he dressed reflected the dignity of his office. Yovhannes had left such an impression on the governor of Armenia, who recounted to 'Umar about 'the phenomenal Catholicos'. The caliph ordered that the catholicos should present himself at the court with all his finery. When 'Umar saw the catholicos he 'marvelled and was amazed at his elegance, graceful stature and splendidly magnificent appearance' and the caliph asked: 'Why do you bedeck yourself with such studied neatness, for your Christ honoured the modest and poor dresses, and his disciples the same?' He answered and said 'Though Christ our God is accepted among us with his body, his divine glory was hidden as through with a curtain: the marvels and miracles of divine power, however, were not hidden but were poured out upon all men. He gave the same gift of signs and miracles into the hands of his disciples which brought sufficient power to awaken the minds of men to the fear of God and they had no need for imposing dresses. But because their gift of diverse miracles is barred from us, on account of that we contrive with awe-inspiring garments to awaken the foolish ignorance of men unto the fear of God.' Then Yovhannes

12 Thomas Artsruni, *History of the House of the Artsrunik*, trans. and commentary by R W Thomson, Detroit, 1985, Book, II, Chapter 4, p. 171.

13 Sebeos, *The Armenian History*, Part I, Chapter 42, p. 95; G R Evans, *The Church in Early Middle Ages*, London, 2007, p. 26.

asked the caliph to dismiss all his courtiers, whereupon he stripped himself of his fine outer garments showing the shirt of goat's hair he was wearing on his naked body. When the caliph touched the sackcloth he was taken aback and exclaimed in bewilderment, 'How is the body of a man able to endure with patience such an intolerable garment of sackcloth, unless patience be given to him by God.'¹⁴

The next Armenian to engage in formal correspondence with a Muslim on religious themes was Grigor Magistros Pahlavuni (990–1058). A major work of his is called *To Manutche for great are the works of God* (Առ Մանուչէ Մեծ են գործք Աստուածայիւն) is a poem of a thousand lines written in the *kafa* format of Arabic rhyme addressed to Manutche, an Arab scholar, whom Grigor met in Constantinople in 1045. In his discussion on religious matters the former had insisted that the Qur'an was superior to the Bible because it was written in verse. Magistros wagered that unlike Muhammad, who took forty years to write the Qur'an, he could put the Bible into verse in four days. Accordingly, Grigor condensed the story of the Bible into 1016 lines (*Հազարսոսնէսն*), beginning with the story of Adam and ending with the Second Coming of Christ. The poem concludes with the declaration 'when we Christians pray, the Holy Spirit supports us to tell us the truth', to which Manutche responded 'great is the God of the Christians'.¹⁵

In Armenian literature the genre of composing epic poems expounding Biblical themes was a response to the increasing rivalry between the merits of the Bible and the Qur'an. The most impressive among such works is Nerses Shnorhali's (c. 1101–1173) vast poem on the life of Christ which he wrote in 1152 called *Jesus the Son* (« Յիսուս Որդի ») made up of 4,000 lines in which he traces the events of the

14 Yovhannes *Kat'oghikos* Drasghanakertts'i, *Պատմություն Հայոց* (History of Armenia), Tiflis, 1912, pp. 100–101, English trans. Krikor Maksoudian, *History of Armenia*, Atlanta GA, 1987. Cf. Sidney H Griffith, *Syriac writers on Muslims and the religious challenge of Islam*, Kerala, 1995.

15 Grigor Magistros, *Տաղասացությունք Գրիգորի Մազխարոսի Պսիլասունկոյ* (The poems of Grigor Magistros), Venice, 1868; A Terian, 'Magnalia De'. *Biblical History in Epic verse by Grigor Magistros*, critical text with introduction, translation, and commentary, Leuven-Paris, 2012; idem, 'Bible in verse by Gregory Magistros', *Armenia and the Bible*, Ch Burchard (ed.), Atlanta GA, 1993, pp. 213–19; extracts in English translation included in *The heritage of Armenian literature*, vol. II, *From the 6th to the 18th century*, Agop J Hachikyan (ed.), Detroit, 2002, pp. 329–31.

Old Testament, the ministry of Christ, and His Crucifixion.¹⁶ Aṭak'el Siwnets'i (1356–1422), the nephew of Grigor Tat'evatsi, is the author of three epic poems called *Book of Adam* (« Ադամագիրք ») composed between 1401–1403, one of the major monuments of medieval Armenian literature in which the author recounts the Biblical story of Adam and Eve and deals with the theme of mankind's expulsion from paradise in consequence of original sin. His sequel *The Book of Paradise* (« Դրախտագիրք ») written in 1416 is a detailed description of Heaven and Hell in which the author guides the reader through the supernal and infernal regions.¹⁷ Aṭak'el's subject matter is not very far from that of the Qur'an: Satan's burning envy of Adam, Adam struggling between his love for Eve and his conscience, Eve's ambition to surpass her partner and to equal God, God's anger and compassion—the major topics explored in the Qur'an.

Mkhit'ar Gosh (c. 1130–1213), primarily known for his compilation of secular law called the *Book of Judgment* (« Գիրք Դատաստանի ») has a chapter called « Յաղագս թէ ոչ է պարտ հաւատացելոց ի Քրիստոս յատեան երթալ դատաստանի անհաւատից ի Քրիստոս. Բազում ունել միջոցս » ('Those who believe in Christ should not agree to appear in judgment before the court of unbelievers in Christ').¹⁸ Mkhit'ar Gosh begins his advice by quoting the command of St Paul to the Corinthians 'Be you not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion has light with darkness? ... and what has he that believeth

16 *Jesus, the Son*, trans. Mischa Kudian, London, 1986; Hagop J Hacikyana (ed.), op. cit., 396–413; Vrej Nersessian, 'Das Beispiel eines Heiligen: Leben und Werk des Hl. Nerses Clajensis mit dem Beinamen Schnorhali', in Friedrich Hayer (ed.), *Die Kirche Armeniens. Eine Volkskirche Zwischen Ost und West*, (Die Kirchen der Welt, Band XVIII), Stuttgart, 1978, 59–69. This work was so popular that between 1643 and 1928 it has had 13 editions, the most recent being Erevan in 1991.

17 Aṭak'el of Siwnik', *The Adam Book of Aṭak'el of Siwnik*, trans. Michael E Stone, Oxford, 2007. For the Armenian critical text, see M Madoyan, *Առաքյալ Միակնից Ադամգիրք*, Erevan, 1989. The form is an eastern parallel to the *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* of John Milton (1608–1674).

18 Mkhit'ar Gosh, *Գիրք Դատաստանի* (Book of Judgment), critical text, with introduction and annotations by Khosrov T'orosyan, Erevan, 1975; earlier edition, *Մխիթարայ Գոշի Դատաստանագիրք Հայոց: Իրաւաբանական հետազոտութիւնը հանդերձ ծանօթութեանը* (The Book of Judgment of Mkhit'ar Gosh accompanied with legal study and notes by Vahan *ds. vardapet* Bastameants'), Ejmiadsin, 1880. In this edition the second half of the title has « զի բազում է միջոցն, որպէս այժմ ցուցանել քսևս », 59–64.

with an infidel' (2 Cor. 6: 14) for the Lord said 'He that believeth not the Son the wrath of God abide on him' (John 3: 36) and if 'he is not born of water and of the Spirit, he shall not see the kingdom of God' (John 3: 5). He continues in the same vein quoting the Apostle John, 'He who confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, he is the antichrist' («*անուն*») (2 John 1: 7). For this reason the Apostle instructs the Corinthians 'there is not a wise man among you, no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren ... but brother goes to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers'(I Cor. 6: 5-6). He is condemning those Christians who testify against fellow Christians in Muslim courts, although they pretend to uphold the laws of Moses but have evil and corrupt practices. He highlights the following unacceptable practices:

1. «Ձկանայս ի վարձու ունին և երբ զմտաւ ւծեն զչար գործս իւրեանց, տան զվարձս զինչ զտան փի և թողուն և գորդիս այլոց: Անսահման և անխնայ գործեն զամենայն չարիս, զոր պատահի նոցա» ('They hire wives and when they have done their evil deed, they give them their wages and leave their sons to others. Boundless and cruel are the evil deeds they commit').
2. «Զլուացումն մարմնոյ սրբութիւն հոգոյ համարին, զհեշտութիւն մամրմնոյ պատուեն և յոչինչ չարեաց յետ չգան» ('The cleansing of the body they consider as cleansing of the soul, they value the voluptuous of the flesh and no evil deed is considered by them out of bound').
3. «Զարքայութիւն Աստուծոյ կանանմբ ասեն առնուլ և զդրախտն պոռնկանց» ('The Kingdom of God can be bought through women and the paradise of prostitutes').
4. «Աստուծոյ սիրելի ասեն զմոլորեցուցիչ առաջնորդն իւրեանց, զայն որ զարուգիտութիւն և զանանսնապղծութիւն քարոզեաց» ('They regard their corrupt leader as the beloved of God, him who preaches homosexuality and bestiality').
5. «ԶԱստուած ասեն պաշտեմք և զբան նորա ուրանան: Յարութիւն խոստովանին և հոգոյ բաժին ոչ տան: Հատուցումն ասեն գործոց և զամենայն մեղս գործեն և միայն զգերեզմանսդեղագործեն: Զգինի հարամ

ասեն և ամենքին արբենան, և զի մի՝ երկայնեցից զչարիս ւնցա» ('They claim to worship God but reject his teachings. They confess Resurrection but give no role to the spirit. They believe in the remuneration for good acts but commit every evil and only whitewash the graves. They consider wine haram [vile] but are always drunk').

And concludes with this recommendation:

Therefore, if there is such a distance between us and them in our beliefs and actions and their laws are so contradictory to ours ... a true believer in Christ should not be judged by their laws, for we confess the Holy Trinity as one Godhead to whom is power and glory for ever. Amen.¹⁹

For compiling his *Book of Judgment* he includes among his sources the books of the Old Testament, particularly the book of Exodus, Leviticus, II Deuteronomy and the canons of the Ecumenical Councils. The third source he identifies is the *jus naturale codes* («*բնասկորական*») which Muhammad borrowed from Moses in particular the Ten Commandments.²⁰ His dependence on Muhammadan laws for secular use is understandable since, though in his time the mainland of Armenia had freed itself from Muslim occupation, the *Book of Judgment* was widely used in Armenian communities in Europe and Asia. In Lemberg and other cities of Poland, kings recognised it through royal decrees (1346, 1356, 1469, 1476, 1510) as the official legal instrument governing the Armenian

19 Mkhit'ar Ghosh, *Գիրք Դատաստանի: Գրուի Թ «Յադագս թէ ոչ է պարտ հաստատելոց ի Քրիստոսի յատնան եղթալ դատաստանի անհաւատիցն ի Քրիստոս. Բագում ունել միջոցս»* (Book of Judgment), Erevan, 1975, 1st edition, pp. 21-22 and 3rd edition, pp. 297-298.

20 «Երրորդ՝ առնում է ի մահմետականաց, ոչ գոր նոքա ուսան ի Մահմետալ զախտատոր բանս, կամ զդատաստանս, այլ գոր առին ի Սովսիսի օրինացն մեք զայս ընտրենք էս առնումք», Chapter X, p. 65, in Smbateants' while in T'orosyan the text reads: «Երկրորդ՝ զի մահմետականք առեալ զբնաւորական արիւնաց, էս զգրաւորական առնումք ոչ ի նոցունց, զի ոչ է նոցա որպէս ցուցեալ է յառաջագոյն, զի գոր ինչ սեփական է մերոցս արիւնաց ընդունիմք, իսկ զախտատոր խառնուածնս ի բաց լուծանենք, երբեմն իսկ զարիւնաւորն լրմամբ ինդունիք Աւետարանին», p. 23.

communities. A Tartar translation was used for Armenians in the Crimea. The same code was retained by the Russians in Georgia and in Armenia until 1911.²¹

The most elaborate account of Muhammad's life in Armenian is provided by the Chronicler Mkhit'ar Anets'i (of Ani), writing at the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries. Chapters 25 and 26, entitled 'Concerning the fables of the impious Mahmet and his falsehood, which his disciples corrupted' and 'Now we shall tell of his death—truly worthy of derision', are found in a manuscript dated to 1273 (Jerusalem MSS. no. 1288) which was published as an appendix by Babgen Bps. Kiwleserian.²²

The next Armenian author to write a coherent understanding of Islam as a religion is Grigor Tat'evats'i (1344–1409), rector of the University of Tat'ev in his encyclopaedia of theological dissidence called *The Book of Questions*,²³ covering the various branches of theology from non-Christian and heretical theories to an exposition of the position of the Armenian Church in the form of questions and answers. *The Book of Questions* was completed in 1397 seven decades before Armenians came into contact with the Ottoman Turks in 1453. *The Book of Questions* contains a section called «Ընդդէմ Տաճկաց»²⁴ ('Against the Turks').

21 Khatchik Samuelyan, *Հին հայ իրավունքի պատմությունը* (A history of ancient Armenian law), Erevan, 1939, vol. I, p. 81; Ruben Avagyan, *Հայ իրավական մտքի գանձարան* (Treasury of Armenian legal thought), Erevan, 2001, vol. I, pp. 383–86.

22 Babgen Kiwleserian Bps., *Բարանէլ հայ մատենագիտության մէջ* (Islam in Armenian literature), Vienna, 1930, «Վասն առասպելաց անարբէն Մահմէտի եւ նորին ստուրթեան, զոր խայտառակէ նորին աշակերտն» (Chapter 25), «Վասն մահվան նորա» (Ch. 26), «Վասն Մահմէտա կրկին» (Ch. 27) (St Petersburg, 1879), reprinted in Bishop Babgen Kiwleserian, *ibid.*, pp. 195–21; English translation in Robert W Thomson, 'Muhammad and the origin of Islam in Armenian literary tradition', in Dickran Kouymjian (ed.), *Armenian Studies=Études Arméniennes in Memoriam Haig Berberian*, Lisbon, 1986, 846–53.

23 Grigor Tat'evatsi, *Գիրք Հարցմանց*, Constantinople, 1729; facs. reprint Jerusalem, 1993. For a summary in English, see A Jeffrey, 'Gregory of Tattew's 'Contra Mohamedanos'', *TMW* 32 (1942), 219–35; Mesrop Krikorian, 'Grigor of Tat'ew. A great scholastic theologian and philosopher', *XVI Internationaler Byzantinistenkongress Akten* 11/4, 321–330; Sergio La Porta, 'Gregory of Tat'ew', David Thomas and Alex Mallet (eds), *Christian-Muslim relations. A bibliographical history*, Volume 5 (1350–1800), Brill, 2013, 229–38.

24 In the early Armenian historians the term *tachik* («Տաճիկ») refers to the Arabs of northern Mesopotamia. When the Arabs became Muslims the word became synonymous with 'Islam'. For the etymology, see H Acharian, *Հայերեն Արմատական Բառարան* (Armenian etymological dictionary), Erevan, 1979, vol. IV, pp. 365–66; H Hübschmann, *Armenische Grammatik*, Leipzig, 1897 (reprinted 1962), pp. 86–87.

At the time when Grigor composed his apologetics he had in mind the Muslim Arabs and the Persians. It was common in his times for members of different religious faiths each armed with evidence from their respective sacred scriptures to debate the merits of their faiths. When the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople Yovhannes *Kolot* commissioned the printing of *The Book of Questions* in Constantinople in 1729 the section on Islam was left out in fear of reprisal.²⁵

The sixteen 'errors' of the Muhammadans discussed are:

- 1) Their denial of the Trinity
- 2) Their teaching that God is the author of evil as well as good
- 3) Their denial of the Incarnation
- 4) Their denial that Christ is God but only a prophet (*P'eghbambar*) («*փեղեպար*»)
- 5) Their refusal to recognise the Old and the New Testaments
- 6) Their claim that Muhammad was a Prophet
- 7) Their idea that the Resurrection is material
- 8) Their belief that souls and angels are mortal
- 9) Their condemnation of the Cross and holy images
- 10) Their making no choice in food, but eating everything save pork
- 11) Their condemnation of wine as forbidden (*haram*)
- 12) Their imagination that ablution will efface their sins
- 13) Their practice of circumcision (*սուլսթղիւ* = *sunat'eln*, from the Arabic *sunnat*)

25 Gregory of Tat'ev, MS. Arm. e.11, chapter iii, fl. 13, 'Against Mohometanism'; see S Baronian and F C Conybeare, *Catalogue of the Armenian manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*, Oxford, 1918, pp. 190-94, and MS. Arm. e. 31 'Refutation of the Koran', New Julfa, 18th century. It contains a refutation of the Qur'an, in three books, by an anonymous author written in a cursive hand of the 18th century in New Julfa. Begins: 'That the Koran is not from God True history about Mahmet says thus: A certain priest from the Nestorian heresy, called Sargis, because of his evil deeds, was banished from the monastery in Constantinople and came to Arabia as far as Maveen, where were two settlements, one of Jews and one of pagans', *ibid.*, p. 228. A similar apocryphal of 'History of the birth and upbringing of that minister of Satan, Mahmet and of his reign' is found in British Library MS. Or. 4580 (fl. 212) and repeated in MS. Or. 5260; see F C Conybeare, *A catalogue of the Armenian manuscripts in the British Museum*, London, 1913, pp. 277 and 298.

- 14) They do not know the true method of fasting
- 15) Their refusal to eat of the offering of Christians
- 16) They are without laws.

At this point it is worth pointing out that there is no indication that any of the above listed authors had access to the Qur'an in the Armenian language with the exception of Yovhannes Vanakan (13th century) and Vardan Areveltsi who mention *Surat al-Baqara* and *Surat al-Fatiba*, in their Arabic form. The Latin translation of the Qur'an made in 1143 by Peter the Venerable, the Abbot of Cluny (d. 1156), and Robert of Kenton (1136-1157) published in 1543, ushered a new era in the study of Islam, making possible translations into Italian, Hebrew, German, and Dutch. The Armenian translation by Step'annos Lehatsi (of Poland 1620-1689) in 1680 from the Latin belongs to this lineage.²⁶

Vardan Baghishets'i, an author of the 17th century, after listing the works of Grigor Tat'evatsi and AĀak'el Siwnetsi mentions the works of Matt'eos Jughayetsi'i (1352-1412),²⁷ a student of Grigor Tat'evatsi. In one of his long sermons called «Վասն հարցմանց անօրինաց. զանազան պատասխանիք» ('Concerning the questions raised by the lawless and their refutation'), composed in 1393 in Akht'amar, is an

26 Conybeare F C., *A Catalogue of the Armenian Manuscripts in the British Library*, MS. Or. 5627, pp. 350-51; Vrej Nersessian, *A Catalogue of Armenian manuscripts in the British Library acquired after 1913*, London, 2012, MS. Or. 15966, 853-59. Modern translations into Armenian are credited to Abraham Amirkhaneants (Varna, 1904, 2nd ed., 1909-10); L Larents (Asadurian) from the French translation by Albert Kasimirski (1911) and H Gurpetian (1912).

27 Norayr Pogharian, Bps., *Հայ գրողներ* (Armenian authors), Jerusalem, 1971, pp. 402-05, H Acharian, *Հայոց անձնանունների բառարան* (Dictionary of Armenian personal names), Erevan, 1946, vol. III, pp. 223-224 (Մատթէոս վարդապետ հայոց). It is worth reminding readers that of all the movements, the one that succeeded splitting the Armenian Orthodox Church were the founders of the Mkhitarist Congregation in whose literary heritage there is no mention of Matthew Jughayetsi or any of the other representatives of the School of Tat'ev or New Julfa, who were avowed defenders of the doctrinal position of the Armenian Church against the papists. Catholicos Simeon Erevants'i I (1763-1780) in his famous book called *Գիրք որ կոչի Պարտավճար* (A book called acquittal), Holy Ejmiadsin, 1779 [reprinted in Erevan, 2004], on defending the identity of the Armenian Orthodox Church from the encroachments of Catholic missionaries in Eastern Armenia characterises the followers of Mkhit'ar Sebastatsi (1676-1749) the founder of the Mkhit'arist Congregation as being 'small foxes' (*Աղուկսր փոքունք*), 'Messengers of satan' (*Կարասպետք նեղինն*), 'venomous reptiles' (*Չատրդուն թունատր*), 'destructive mites' (*Աւերիչ ցեղք*).

account of his debates with a certain *danishman* named Ali. In this work he provides very lucid and plain responses to ‘Seven Questions’ posed by Muslims to the Armenians.²⁸ Similar issues are aired in a sermon called «Յարեցան սուտ մարգարէք» (‘There arose false prophets’).²⁹ The whole sermon is a commentary on the text of St Mark’s Gospel ‘false prophets shall rise’ (13: 22) in which he defines their teachings as: (a) ‘vanity’ («*մեւայն*») (Eccl. 1. [2]), (b) ‘for nought’ («*ձրի*») (Isaiah 52.3), (c) ‘nothing’ («*ոչինչ*») (Isaiah 40.17), (d) ‘fables’ («*ստասույեղ*») (Daniel), (e) ‘man is like to vanity’ («*մասնիր*») (Ps. 144.4), (f) ‘this evil in thy sight’ («*սար*») (Ps. 51.4). In the main body of the sermon he gives the reasons why he defines the teaching of Muhammad in such terms in every instance justifying his reasoning by quotations from scriptures. In another sermon he says ‘Thus they (Muslims) preach that if any one plunders Christians or kills them they shall inherit the kingdom of God («*Արդ, ասէն, դոքա [մուսուլմանք=Muslims] եթէ որ քրիստոնէայ կողոպտէ կամ սպանանէ՝ արքայութիւն նմա է*»)).³⁰

He concluded his sermon by saying ‘God fancies no one and this is also the view of the Apostles “Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers will inherit the kingdom of God” (I Cor. 6: 9). And Muhammad did not denounce any such evil practices.’³¹

The most exhilarating aspects in his replies is that he meritoriously avoids causing offence to their religious ‘sentiments’ nor ‘wound’ their convictions. In his estimation the Muhammadans are required to obey their prophet’s commandments ‘for you are obliged to honour

28 1. Describing Christ as Son of God, implying that He [i.e. God] took a wife and had a Son, 2. Proclaiming the Divinity of Christ, 3. Rejecting the Prophethood of Muhammad, 4. Rejecting Circumcision, hence the ‘Impurity’ of Armenians, 5. Rejection of Ablution, 6. Genuflection toward the East, hence Pagan Sun worship, 7. Rejecting the Muslim’s Fasting at Ramadan (from the sermon ‘There arose false Prophets’).

29 Matt’eos *vardapet* Jughayets’i, *Թարգմանք (Ուսումնասիրություն, Քննական բնագրեր) Հրատարակություն պատրաստուց Խոսի քահանա Ղազարյանի* (Sermons and studies, critical texts prepared for publication by Khad *k’hn.* Ghazaryan), Ejmiadsin, 2015, 407–20. The full title of the sermon is: «Նորին Մատթէոս վարդապետի քարոզ ի բան. «Յարիցեն սուտ մարգարէք եւ տացեն [եշանս եւ արուեստս առ ի մոլորեցուցանելոց, եթէ հնար ինչ իցէ, եւ զընտրեալսն]». This is a sermon on Mark 13.22.

30 Levon Khatchikyan, «Մատթէոս Ջուղայեցու կյանքն ու մատենագրությունը» (‘The life of Matt’eos Jughayetsi and his literary works’), *BM* 3 (1956), p. 70; MS. no. 2229, fl. 188b.

31 Matt’eos *vardapet* Jughayets’i, *Sermons*, op. cit., p. 419.

and obey him for he brought you to faith in God and converted you from idolatry’ («զի զձեզ ի հաւատք երէր և ի կռապաշտութենէ դարձոյց»). The situation is different for Christians. Muhammad appeared several hundred years after Armenians had rejected paganism and converted to Christianity, and hence they have the right not to recognise and not to accept him. He concludes ‘Your Muhammad has done us no favour since when he appeared he found us in faith, and we were God worshippers, and he has taught us nothing and we have not received our faith from him and for that reason we do not recognise him’ («Մահմատն ձեր մեզ ոչինչ երախտիք չունի, զի երեկ՝ զմեզ ի հաւատք գտաւ, և մեք աստուածապաշտ էաք երբ նա երեկ՝ և մեզ ոչինչ է ուսուցել և ի նմանէ հաւատք չենք առել. վասն այնորիկ և ոչ ճանաչեմք զնա»):³² The passage singled out reinforces Matt’ eos’s splendid conciliatory approach to bring peoples of various religious convictions towards mutual respect and solidarity but at the same makes an eloquent defence against the Muhammadan intent to convert Armenian Christians to Islam.

Another source of evidence left untouched in previous studies is the colophons of Armenian manuscripts of the 17th century.³³ From many inscriptions I will single out one significant memorial in a *Miscellany* copied in the city of Surat Bandar in India in AD 1656 (Arm. MS. 56, fls. 2v–93) in the Collections of the University of California, Los Angeles.³⁴ The inscription has the title ‘Against the damned nation of *tachiks* who are the heralders of antichrist’ («Ընդդէմ կորուսեալ ազգին տաճկաց որք կարայապետ»³⁵ են նեոինն»). The part of a later inscription on the history of the relevant manuscript is on folio 128 that reads ‘In the year 1157 of the Armenian Era (=AD 1708), on the 17th of May, I, the sinful and unworthy *mabtes*»³⁶ Eghisabet, came to Jughay (that is, New Julfa

32 Mat. MS. no. 3854, fl. 302 quoted by Levon Khachikyan, op. cit., p. 71.

33 Vazgen Hakobyan, and Ashot Hovhannisyán Հսերեն անապոհորի ժԷ դարի հիշատակարաններ (Colophons of 17th-century Armenian manuscripts), Erevan, 1974–1984: vol. I 1601–20; II 1621–40; III 1641–60.

34 Avedis K Sanjian, *Medieval Armenian Manuscripts at the University of California Los Angeles*, Los Angeles, 1999, 230–33. On 17 May 1708 the manuscript found its way to New Julfa. The manuscript was formerly in the collection of New Julfa resident Dr Caro Owen Minassian, whose collection came to the University in 1968.

35 *Karapet* is the Armenian name given to John the Baptist as the messenger heralding the coming of Christ.

36 *Mabtes*: a person who has made pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

in Isfahan). Our attention now will be centred on the 16 points of doctrinal importance:

- 1) That they deny the Trinity
- 2) That they claim God is responsible for good and evil
- 3) That they deny the interaction of the Logos
- 4) That they do not recognise Christ as God but claim that he is man and prophet
- 5) That they reject the Old and New Testaments
- 6) That they profess that Muhammad was a prophet or messenger (*karapet*=harbinger)
- 7) That they say that the Resurrection of Jesus was corporeal
- 8) That they claim that the angels and the souls of men are mortal
- 9) That they disparage the cross and holy images
- 10) That they eat all kinds of animals indiscriminately except for pork
- 11) That they drink impure wine
- 12) That they always wash themselves with water and claim that they are cleansed of all sins
- 13) That they practise circumcision and disparage us that we are not circumcised
- 14) That they do not fast
- 15) That they do not eat meat sacrificed by Armenians³⁷
- 16) That the Muslims are wicked but think they are righteous (fols 2v-93; there is a lacuna between fols. 84 and 95).³⁸

It is highly intriguing that the section concludes with Catholicos Nerses the Great's (I, c. 329-c. 373) 'Divination and Prophecy Concerning the End of the World and the Coming of the Antichrist,

³⁷ According to Grigor Narekats'i, the T'ondrakian sectarians: 'They deny the venerated sign (i.e. the Cross)'; 'They did not accept such Orthodox practices as fasts, the offering of sacrifice (*aiunun*).' See Vrej Nersessian, *The Tondrakian movement*, pp. 57-58, notes 17-20, p. 117. The Kaysite emir Aplvard is called 'a rod of wrath in the hand of Christ' and 'sword of the avenging infidel' who killed the heresiarch Smbat of Zarehawan around 830-840 'who maintained 'that Christ is a mere man.'

³⁸ Avedis K Sanjian, op. cit., p. 231.

whom the Muhammadans call *Mahdi*³⁹, ending with the incipit ‘Then shall come to pass the word of the Gospel which says “There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be destroyed ...”’ («Յայնժամ կատարի խօսք Աւետարանին եւ ասէ. Ոչ ինչացէ այրք քար ի քարի վերայ որ ոչ քակտեցի ... » [lacuna between fols 97 and 98]).³⁹ The 16 points with minor variations seem to echo the arguments raised by Grigor Tat’evatsi and Matt’eos *vardapet* Jughayetsi.

THE EMERGENCE OF SECTARIANISM IN THE DIOCESE OF NEW JULFA IN THE 17–18TH CENTURY

One of the most intriguing phenomena which has escaped the attention of scholars is the emergence of several dissident movements in New Julfa in the 17th century. New Julfa, as one of the most affluent and mobile Armenian community outside the homeland, principally composed of merchants and craftsmen, and owning large capital, was a firm supporter of the national church, while a second smaller group under strong Islamic influence and a large elite number who had converted to Islam attacked the hierarchy of their mother church. Alongside these two conflict-ridden factions there emerged several disillusioned and disenfranchised groups who founded sects fundamentally opposed to the doctrines of the Apostolic Orthodox Church. The primary sources of these sects are two contemporary chroniclers, Zak’aria *Sarkavag* (i.e. Deacon, 17th century) and Grigor *vardapet* Daranakhtsi (or Kamakhetsi, 1576–1643).⁴⁰

The founder of the first movement was a flamboyant, fanatic figure named Mekhlu *baba* or Mekhlu *vardapet* (*Մեհլու բաբա* or *Մեհլու*

39 Ibid.: ‘The prophecy invoked the apocalyptic vision of history set forth in the book Daniel, involving the fate of the four kingdoms of the Medes, the Persian, the Greeks, and the Romans, adjusted now to take account of the rule of the Arabs.’ See S H Griffith, *Syriac writers on Muslims and the religious challenge of Islam*, Kottayam, 1995, pp. 15–16; N G Garsoian, ‘*Quidam Narsens?* A note on the mission of St Nerses the Great’, in *Armenia between Byzantium and the Sasanians*, London, 1985, pp. V, 148–64.

40 Zak’ariay *Sarkavag*, *Պատմագրություն* (History), Vagharshapat, 1870; Grigor *vardapet* Kamakhetsi’ (or Daranakhtsi’, *Ժամանակագրություն* (Chronicle), published by Mesrop vard. Nshanian, Jerusalem, 1915. The chapter on Mekhlu is called «Վասն հպարտացեալ կրօնաւորի փոյ, որ մականուն Միլոյ ասէին» (456–72). Henceforth ZS and GK.

վարդապետ).⁴¹ He was mentored by Catholicos Hovhannes VIII of Aghvank' in Gandzasar receiving the archdeacon's order. 'But he goes and pretending to be a *vardapet*' embarks on a preaching mission circulating 'erroneous and corrupted blasphemy and lies against the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox church' («Իսկ նա գնացեալ ձևացոյց զինքն վարդապետ, և քարոզեր թիւր և անուղիղ հայիոյանս և չարաբանութիւնս»).⁴² On hearing the news of his misdeeds the catholicos recalls him, defrocks him and orders him to remain in the monastery and 'serve the brotherhood'. The news reaches the prince of Gandzak, Dawut-Khan, who orders the Catholicos to reinstate him, raise him to the rank of *vardapet* and give him authority to continue his preaching in the eastern provinces reaching as far as New Julfa.⁴³ In his preaching he denounces the sacraments of the church, the doctrine of the incarnation and the veneration of the cross. He is principally against the hierarchy of the church singling out the celibate clergy whom he defines as 'black clerics' («սև հոգևորականութիւն») who are the personification of 'unclean religion'.⁴⁴ In a single passage the Chronicler sums up the schismatic's teaching: 'He rose and began preaching unorthodox views. He became an enemy of *abeghas* (unmarried priests) and where he saw any he would undress them and flog them. And he would tell the people if any one gives protection to an *abegha* he will descend into hell. For in his view an *abegha* is not worthy to conduct liturgy for they are fornicators and adulterers while married priests are clean to celebrate liturgy for they are in holy matrimony.'⁴⁵ According to Zak'aria *Sarkawag* Mekhlun's persecution

41 H Acharian, *Հայոց սահմանունների բառարան*, vol. III, p. 308. *Մեխլու* Arabic = Turkish *mexluc*: with nails; Arm. *մեխ* = nail. *Բարբա* abbr. form of *խարբա* (liar). Acharian also provides a short biography.

42 ZS, p. 48.

43 GK, p. 456.

44 «...ի վերայ արեւելից սեւագլխացն, հրովարտակ հանելով ի Շահէն եւ այլ խաներացն, ուր եւ գտանիցի թէ արեղայ անուն, թէ եպիսկոպոս անուն, եւ թէ վարդապետ անուն, ըսպանանիցէ եւ զբազումս հալս ծեսցէ յաշխարհէն Հայոց .որպէս արար բազմաց» (... regarding the black hooded in the Eastern regions, he secured edicts from the Shah and other khans, and wherever he found [order of clerics] called *abeghay*, or *episkopos* or *vardapet* [he] had them killed and many he drove out of the land of the Armenians and he did so to many), Daranakhtsi, *Chronicle*, p. 470.

45 «Եւ եկեալ քարոզեր զարտուղի: Եւ եղև թշնամի արեղայից և ուր տեսանէր արեղայ, մերկացուցնէր և բրածեճ առնէր: Եւ ասէր ցժողովուրդն. ով ոք արեղայի տայ ինչ, ինքն ի դժոխքն իջանէ: Քանզի ոչ է արժանի արեղայն առնել պատարագ,

of celibate clergy (*Աբեղախալածություն*) reaches such a fervour that he begins to organise killings of the 'black heads'.⁴⁶ In a sermon delivered in a church at K'anak'er (his birthplace) he says 'Whosoever kills an *abegha*, he will not be questioned for his crime but will enter into the kingdom of God.'⁴⁷ Zak'aria informs us that Melkhum's sermon had such an impact on the congregation that some were attempting to kill an *abegha* in the quest to enter the kingdom of God. Such a person from K'anak'er named Hakob Tut'akents goes to Mekhlum to confess his sins and seek repentance. He receives this advice 'Go and kill an *abegha* and bring me his flesh and blood, so I can consume his flesh and drink his blood and celebrate liturgy and when I have raised him from the dead after forty days, I shall forgive your sins.'⁴⁸

According to Zak'aria he had five hundred followers comprising not only civilians but also ignorant priests and wealthy famous men. The movement had also a certain structure. From among the five hundred followers he had appointed Twelve Apostles whom he armed with lances and clubs. According to the evidence cited above the shah and the khans issued edicts supporting him and inciting the mob to revolt against the celibate clergy and expel them from the land of the Armenians which he achieved.⁴⁹ Mekhlum's movement had two distinctive features which were poverty and sober frugality. 'He would not take anything from any one ... and would maintain that if Christ's disciples would not take gold or silver nor wear expensive garments but clothing of coarse hair' so should the *abeghas*.

His name 'Mekhlu' derives from the course clothing he wore to which he strapped a bed of nails and required that *abeghas* should also

վասն զի շնացողք են և պիղծ: Այլ երիցուն արժան է աննել պատարագ, զի սուրբ ամոսնաւ կայ», ZS, pp. 48-49.

46 GK, pp. 48-49. The term 'black clerics' derives from the black silken headgear called *vegbar* (cowl or hood) worn by the celibate clergy in the Armenian Church, GK, pp. 48-49.

47 «Ով ոք որ սպանանէ արեղայ մի, այլ ոչ զոյ հարցուն մեղաց նորա, այլ երթայ յարքայութիւնն Աստուծոյ», ZS, p. 52.

48 «Երթ, սպան արեղայ մի և բեր ի մտոյն և յարենն, զի կերայց զմիսն և արբից զարիւնն և արարից պատարագ և զքառասնամեայ մեռեալն յարուցից, յայնժամ լիցի թողութիւն մեղաց քոց», ZS, pp. 52-53. Coincidentally the same claim was made by Smbat Zarehawantsi, founder of the T'ondrakian movement.

49 «... Ի վերայ արնէլից սևագլխացն հրովարտակ հանելով ի Շահէն և այլ խաներացն, ուր և գտանիցէ թէ արեղայ անուն, թէ եպիսկոպոս անուն և թէ վարդապետ անուն, սպանանիցէ և զբազումս հալածեսցէ յաշխարհին շայոց, որպէս և արար բազմաց», GK, p. 470.

dress like him. He receives the nickname խաբէբայ meaning ‘liar’.⁵⁰ While according to Daranakhtsi ‘he was called Mekloy for having a lance (*intq*) like a spear (*նիզակ*) by which he killed the ‘black heads’ (*գլխազուխըն*).⁵¹

According to Zak’aria *sarkavag* Mekhlun’s activities begin in Gadzasar during the reign of Catholicos Yovhannes VIII of Aghvank (1578–1602).⁵² His appearance in Armenia is placed during the vicarship of Catholicos Awetis (1620–1624), and Amirgun, the governor appointed by Shah ‘Abbas in 1604.⁵³ According to Zak’aria *Sarkavag* ‘in the year of the Lord 1610 the heretic Mekhlu came to K’anak’er and was expelled from the city by the orders of the khan and the catholicos.’⁵⁴ Grigor Kharanakhtsi places his death around 1640.

In a very short period the New Julfa merchants and traders developed a complex network, stretching from the Far East to Europe, earning vast capital supporting the church while another faction emerged inclined towards Catholicism and a third group, the small traders and craftsmen, provoked internal religious dissension under religious banners by leaning towards sectarian movements. One such movement was that outlined above. Another chronicled by Khatchatur *vardapet* Jughayetsi in his *History of the Persia*, emerged in the Armenian Era 1091 which corresponds to the Year of the Lord 1642 during the reign of Shah Safi I (1629–1642). ‘There appeared an evil and filthy man named T’omas (or T’omik) who blasphemed against the Orthodox faith of Christ, which was more evil and destructive than that of Arius, Nestorius and the Sadducees.’⁵⁵ The Chronicler lists his teaching which leaves no doubt that these were truly extreme compared to the teachings of

50 ZS, vol. I, p. 49.

51 GK, p. 472: « Եւ Միւրյ վասն այն կոչէին, որ տէգ ունէրով ի ձեռնն որպէս նիզակի եւ նովաւ հարկանէր մահուամբ գետազուխըն, որպէս մէկ եպիսկոպոս եւ ւին արեղայ փախուցեալ ի յաիէ չարին ... ».

52 Makar *Bps.* Barkhudarian, *Պատմութիւն Աղուանից* (History of Armenian Albania), vol. II, pp. 59–60.

53 Aʿak’el Davrizhetsi, *History*, chapter 56, p. 634.

54 Grigor Daranakhtsi, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

55 « Չայտու ժամանակաւ յարեաւ ոճա ժանդ և դժնաբարոյ Թօմաս անուն, որ խօսէր գիայիոյութիւնս ընդդէմ ուղղափառ հաւատոյս Քրիստոսի, որ էր չարագոյն և դժնդակագոյն, քան գԱրիոս, գՆեստոր և գՄատուկեցիս ... », Khatchatur *vardapet* Jughayets’i, *Պատմութիւն Պարսից* (History of Persia), published by Babgen *vardapet* Apawealeants’, Vagharshapat, 1905, p. 115.

the many sects the Armenian Church had confronted in its long history. These are the main tenets of the sect:

- 1) Christ is not equal to God the Father, but is a mere man and the Blessed Virgin Mary had human birth.
- 2) Like the Sadducees they rejected the Resurrection and the Last Judgment.
- 3) The Cross of Christ, the Liturgy and the reconciling Divine Communion they blasphemed against *like the Muhammadans*.
- 4) He dishonoured the established Apostolic canons, the God sanctioned codes, and rejected the seven Sacraments of the Church.
- 5) He scorned, reproached the primates, *vardapets* and priests and servants of the church, disrespected them and called them liars.

‘And thus this evil and odious man wished to introduce a new schism into the church of Christ.’⁵⁶ It is obvious that the church could not tolerate this ‘new evil man’ and his teaching. So, the primate of the time, Khatchatur Kesarats’i (1590–1646), who in 1620 had established a school in the precinct of All Saviour’s Monastery and founded the Armenian printing press in 1638 in New Julfa, the first in the East, closed the doors of all the churches and summoned a ‘great council’ (*synodos*), to decide on what actions to take against T’omas.⁵⁷

In a *Chronicle* (Mat. no. 8233) compiled by Isahak *vardapet* (18th) called ‘The Enthronement of the Persian King in T’avrez’(Tabriz)’ («Պարսից թագաւորի թախտ նստիլն ի Թաւրէզ»), which begins with the murder of Shah T’ahmaz in 1576 and ends in 1744 under the year 1642 (AE 1091), has this historical testimony on the origins of a sect: ‘When Khatchatur *vardapet* was primate of Julfa, he became an apologist of the laws of Christ, he closed the doors of all the churches

56 «Եւ այսպէս այրս այս դժնդակ և անագորոյսն կամեր նոր իմս չարագոյն հերձուած մուծանել յեկեղեցին Քրիստոսի», Khatchatur *vard*, Jughayets’i, op. cit., p. 115.

57 «Յետ բազում անգամ խրատելոյ զնա, եւ նորա ոչ զալոյն ցուղութիւն, ի բաց եհատ զխիսայթեալ և զապականեալ անդամս ի յողջանդամոյն Քրիստոսի, զի մի փոքր մի Եւս մնացեալ ի յայլոյղջ անդամսն փոխադրեսցի զայն ապականութիւն», Khatchatur Jughayets’i, op. cit., p. 116.

summoned a synod (*սինհոդոս*), in respect of a certain individual nicknamed “Black Petros” («Սև Պետրոս»), who had started a new schism with his followers and like Arius and Nestorius had gathered a large number of followers.⁵⁸ Then the Chronicler lists their teachings:

- 1) They first maintained that Christ is not equal to the Father but is junior and called Christ man and Mary was born of a man and not God begotten («Սստուածածին»)
- 2) The Cross as life-giving symbol and the liturgy as reconciling sacrament and holy communion they cruelly blasphemed against
- 3) They did not accept the Judgment of Christ and the Resurrection of the dead
- 4) They rejected the canons of the church, confession, and the divine liturgy of the church
- 5) They defamed the primates, *vardapets* and priests of the holy church and called them liars. And Khatchatur called a synod, refuted their evil teachings and corrected many.⁵⁹

The teachings of ‘Black Petros’ display close affinity with those of T’omas. But despite the link in their teachings it is inconceivable that ‘Black Petros’ was an alternative name for T’omas (or T’omik) as some scholars have assumed. The combined testimony of Zak’aria Sarkavag and Khatchatur Jughayetsi on Black Petros suggest that he was also a leader of a sect. The latter informs us that at the inquisition in Holy Ejmiadsin called by Catholicos Hakob IV Jughayetsi (1655–80) to try Onop’rios Erevantsi (Օնոփրիոս Երեվանցի), ‘present in the meeting was a man from Julfa, who had been a leader of sect, whom they called Black-Petros’ («եկին ամենեքեան հանդերձ իշխանաշուք արամբբ:

58 Vazgen A Hakobyan, *Մանր Տամանակագրություններ XIII–XVII դդ* (Minor Chroniclers XIII–XVIII c), Erevan, 1951, vol. I, 297–305: «Թվին ՌՂԱ (1642) պատրիարքն Խաչատուր վարդապետն Ջուղայու առաջնորդ, ջատագով եղև Քրիստոսի օրինացն, փակեաց զեկեղեցիսն արար սինհոդոս, զի այր ոմս մականուամբ Սև Պետրոս նոր հարձուած խօսեցաւ իւր համախոհիսն, իբրև զԱրիոս և Նեստոր և ստացաւ իւրն համախոհք բազում».

59 V Hakobyan, *Minor Chronicles*, pp. 302–303. Some of the concepts of this movement resemble with those of the T’ondrakians as reported by the historian Aristakes Lastivertsi in his *History of the Armenians*, Venice, 1901, p. 125; Nersessian, *The T’ondrakian movement*, pp. 59–60.

էր անդ այր մի Ջուղայեցի, որ ունէր հերձուած ինչ, որում ասէին Սէաւ-Պետրոս».⁶⁰ Zak'aria's testimony although very ambivalent does reveal that Black Petros was a civilian leading a sectarian movement. There is the view that Black Petros was probably one of the followers of T'omas who had remained faithful even after the movement had been censured. This view is unsustainable, for if Black Petros was invited to attend the trial of Onop'rios Erevantsi, he must have denounced his heretical teachings as one of those many whom Khatchatur Jughayetsi, in 1642, had 'corrected' (« ուղղեաց զբազումս ») and returned to the fold of the church.⁶¹

What association have these movements originating in New Julfa with that of the T'ondrakian sect on one hand and the Protestant movement (Calvinist or Lutheran) on the other? The T'ondrakians were an Armenian heretical movement founded by Smbat of Zarehawan (Zarehawantsi) during the catholicate of Yovhannes IV Ovayetsi (833-855) who had found a favourable soil within the Arab caliphate—their extreme iconoclasm, disapproval of an organised church hierarchy, rejection of the sacraments and a Christology that had connections with the earlier Adoptionists. Notable intellectuals among them, Bishop Khosrov Andjewatsi, his son Grigor Narekatsi and Anania Narekatsi, were accused of collaborating with the sectarians. The most talented intellectual of the age, Anania Narekatsi (943-65), had to write a 'Doctrinal Admonition' (« Գիր Խոստովանութեան ») and the poet Grigor Narekatsi wrote a 'Letter to the Abbot of the Monastery of Kchaw' protesting against the false accusation, anathematizing the T'ondrakians. Anania Narekatsi in his Letter lists the 14 teachings of the T'ondrakian sect which, according to contemporary sources, the 'learned champion radically demolished.'⁶² The objection to Christ being called Son of God and the Virgin Mary Mother of God. (« Աստուածածին »), the rejection of the Resurrection, the Holy and Divine Liturgy, the veneration of the Cross enumerated by Grigor Narekatsi and Anania Narekatsi have many features present in the teachings of the New Julfa dissidents.

60 ZS, vol. II, p. 68. V Hakobyan, op. cit., vol. I, p. 300.

61 Hakobyan, *Minor Chronicles*, note 4, p. 300.

62 Nersessian, *The T'ondrakian movement*, pp. 56-58; an English translation of this Letter is given by F C Conybeare in his *Key of Truth* and reprinted by Leon Arpee, *A history of Armenian Christianity from the beginning to our times*, The American Missionary Association, 1946, Appendix I, pp. 319-24.

Grigor Narekatsi in the above mentioned Letter honours the Saracen Kaysite emir Abu'l-Ward (Aplvard) 'who proved himself a rod of wrath in the hand of Christ' and 'sword of avenging infidel', 'a certain valiant man' who destroyed and put to an end in famous death their accursed Smbat of Zarehawan and his supporters around 830–840. According to Grigor Magistros Abu'l-Ward executed the self-styled Iamres saying: 'Since you call yourself Christ, and Christ rose on the third day, I will slay you and bury you, and if you rise after thirty days I will know that you are Christ.'⁶³ This claim is also made by the schismatic Mekhlu in New Julfa.

In 1791 the Catholicos Ghoukas I Karnetsi (1780–1799) informed the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople that he had imprisoned a certain Yovhannes who had associated himself with the wicked sect of the T'ondrakians. A copy of their catechism written in Taron in 1782 was translated into English called *The Key of Truth* (Բախալի ճշմարտութեան) and published in 1898.⁶⁴ F C Conybeare and N Garsoian maintain that the manual *The Key of Truth* belongs to the medieval Armenian T'ondrakians but this is untenable and irrelevant. The author of *The Key of Truth* is not Smbat of Zarehawan (founder of the T'ondrakian movement) as suggested by Conybeare and Garsoian but the work of Ohannes (Yovhannes) Vahaguni.⁶⁵ In *The Key of Truth* the T'ondrakians call Christ 'New Adam', 'Man Jesus', 'New Man Jesus', 'New Creature and not Creator', and Mary a 'mere woman'.⁶⁶

63 Nersessian, *The T'ondrakian movement*, pp. 44–45. The assessment of Seta B Daoyan in her *The Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World*, London 2011, vol. II, p. 204–05 makes this most absurd observation: 'His [i.e. Narekatsi's] significance and success lay in the introduction of secular learning after the Islamist model, into Armenian schools ... and had the Church adopted, by some miracle, the theology of Narekatsi, the Reformation would have happened hundreds of years earlier, and it would have happened in Armenia, not in Germany.' Leo Arpee, in his *History of the Armenian Christianity*, considers T'ondrakianism was 'the beginning of Armenian Protestantism' (p. 285). Both views are untenable and irrelevant.

64 Conybeare, *The Key of Truth. A manual of the Paulician Church in Armenia*, Oxford, 1898. His copy of the manuscript he made is now in the British Library's collection: See *A Catalogue of Armenian manuscripts in the British Museum*, under MS. Or. 7596, Cat. no. 103, pp. 261–263.

65 Nersessian, *The T'ondrakian movement*, Appendix III, pp. 89–96; Cf. Janet and Bernard Hamilton, *Christian dualist heresies in the Byzantine world, c. 650–c. 1405*, Manchester, 1998, Appendix 2, pp. 292–297.

66 Conybeare, *The Key of Truth*, pp. 11, 12, 29, 45, and 51–52.

It is significant that parts of the tenets of T'omas are identical with those that were the themes of controversy between Christians and Muhammadans. Tomas (or Tomik), Mekhlu, Black Peter may have been Persian-Shi'i sympathizers. According to Grigor Magistros and Aristakes Lastiverttsi the founder of the Tondrakian sect Smbat Zarehawantsi was said to have been trained by a *majusik* (or *mjusik*) Persian-astrologer-physician.⁶⁷ Could the teachings of T'omas be the first reflections of the infiltration of Protestantism in New Julfa? The teachings of T'omas are more extreme than those of the old or the new T'ondrakians. The Tondrakanism of *The Key of Truth* emerged in 1791. Finally, Protestantism received a foothold in Turkey in 1827.⁶⁸ So it is not conceivable that T'omas' teachings were an offshoot of Protestant missions. It would be much more profitable to compare the Armenian sectarian movements of the 16th and 17th centuries with those emerging in Europe. in particular with John Wycliff (c. 1330-84) and that of T'omik with the Quakers George Fox (1624-1691), founder of the Society of Friends and James Naylor (1618-1660).⁶⁹

**THE SCHOOL OF NEW JULFA (1620) AND ITS ROLE
DEFENDING THE ARMENIAN CHURCH AGAINST
CATHOLIC PROPAGANDA AND ISLAMIC REPRESSION**

As for the Armenians, they are so obstinately fixed to their own religion, that they will hear of no other; and nothing, but money has sometimes caused them to feign the embracing of another

J B Tavernier, *The Six Voyages*, London 1677, iv, 160.

Intermittently throughout the 17th century Armenia was the arena of Ottoman and Safavid wars. Shah 'Abbas I (1587-1629) conducted a series of campaigns against the Ottomans in Armenia and Georgia

⁶⁷ Seta B Dadoyan, *The Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World*, London, 2013, p. 39.

⁶⁸ N Taghavarian, *Քրիստոնէական Բողոքականութեան և Գրգէլյաշնէլու աղանդին ծնունդը* (Christian Protestantism and the origin of the sect of the Qizilbashis), Constantinople, 1914.

⁶⁹ T'adeos Avdalbegyan, «Անհայտ աղանդավորներ հայոց մեջ ԺԶ ու ԺԷ դարերում» ('Un-investigated sects among Armenians in the 16th and 17th centuries') in *Հայագիտական հետազոտություններ*, Erevan, 1969, 203-11.

between 1603 and 1604. After his initial successes he prudently decided to evacuate the entire populations of Erevan, Nakhijevan and Julfa so that the Turks would be deprived of territory into which they might forage before engaging in further hostilities. The scribe and artist Mesrop of Khizan in the colophon of a Gospel copied in 1609 gives this vivid account of the deportation:

Copied in [...] in the reign of Shah Apas who in the year 1052 (=1603) came with a great army against the royal city Tawriz (Tabriz) to avenge his sire's blood; and he utterly destroyed the race of Ausman [Ottomans] by his valour and his resources; and crossing the Eraskh (Araxes), he entered the canton of Ararat and attacked the Berd (fortress) at Arevan (Erevan), and he slew the enemy, and laid waste all the country in the year 1053 (1604). Mourning fell upon Armenia, for he destroyed and made desolate all houses and habitations, so that men fled and hid themselves in fortresses and clefts of rocks. Some he found and slew, others he led captive and sent to that city of Shaush or Aspahan, ... And he settled us on the south side of the river Zandar or *Agbi* (salty), where we built houses and habitations and churches for our prayers. And we called the name of our village Tchadjughay (unlucky Tchoghay) and not Jughay. For though the king's heart was well disposed towards Christians, yet the inhabitants of the city were evil and opposed and blasphemers of our religion.⁷⁰

In another manuscript of the Four Gospels copied by the same scribe in 1608 he recounts 'in this last embittered time all the believers of Christ have been left prisoners of the Persians, without hope of rescue,' remembering Nerses' words, 'that there shall come the race of Franks, and then be a renovation of Christian churches and of all the faithful.'⁷¹ Mesrop of Khizan was among those deported and over

70 Baronian and Conybeare, *Catalogue of the Armenian manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*, MS. Arm. d.13, 107-12.

71 Conybeare, *A catalogue of the Armenian manuscripts in the British Museum*, MS. Or. 5737, 42-44. The Nerses mentioned in the colophon is Nerses I the Great, Patriarch

forty-five manuscripts copied by him have survived, all commissioned by wealthy Armenian merchants who welcomed the shah with open arms and enthusiasm.⁷² Yarutiwn Tēr Yovhaneants' in his *History of New Julfa Isfahan*⁷³ provides a comprehensive list of the notables of the city and among them the Aghanurians, whose family genealogical chart dating back to 1605 is among the British Library's collection of Armenian manuscripts.⁷⁴

**KOSTAND JUGHAYETSI (1630–1702) AND HIS
THE COMPENDIUM (ASHKARAZHOV)**

The Armenian merchants wielded great economic power and it was this factor that prompted Shah 'Abbas I to relocate the Armenians *en masse* from their homeland to Isfahan. By relocating the merchants who conducted trade among Persia, Central Asia and India, and the Mediterranean for the benefit of the Ottoman empire, they would now continue their dominant role in the silk trade for the benefit of the shah.⁷⁵ Shah 'Abbas also gave them privileges not otherwise enjoyed

of Great Armenia between 353–373 who in the battle waged against the Persians in Dzirav saw a vision up on the summit of the mountain Npat' (Cf. Exod. 17: 8ff). See N G Garsoian, 'Quidam Narseus? A note on the mission of St Nerses the Great' in *Armenia between Byzantium and the Sasanians*, Variorum Reprints, London, 1985, 148–64.

72 Nersessian, *Armenian illuminated Gospel Books*, The British Library, London, 1987, 32–36, and *Treasures from the Ark*, 2011, 'The Marcy-Indjoudjian cope', *Ars Orientalis* 40 (2011), p. 208.

73 Պատմություն Նոր Ջուղայու որ Յասպահան, New Julfa: St Saviour's Monastery, 1880–81, vols I–II, pp. 497 and 317, 1880–81. For modern Eastern Armenian translation, see Poghos Khn. Petrosian, New Julfa, 1979, 1981.

74 Nersessian, *A catalogue of the Armenian manuscripts in the British Library acquired since the year 1913*, MS. Or. 14359, II, 970–72. Title «Եկեալս ի Հին Ջուղայէ ի 1054 թիին հայոց եւ յամ տեառն 1605: Յեղաբանութիւն տոհմին Աղանուրեանց գոր վարեալ մեծ եւ Առաջին Եահ[ա]բաս արքայն Պարսից ի Հայաստան Աշխարհէ եւ Նախիջեան գաւառէ ի Պարս եւ ի տեղի բնակութեան ի ջրնաղաշէն եւ ի վայելչագեղն ի Նոր Ջուղայ».

75 John Carswell, *New Julfa. The Armenian Churches and other buildings*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1968, pp. 4–6. Quotations from western travellers on 'Foreign trade' are provided on pp. 76–77; Edmund M Herzig, 'The deportations of the Armenians 1604–1605 and Europe's Myth of Shah 'Abbas I' in (ed.) Charles Melville, *Persian and Islamic Studies in Honour of P W Avery*, Cambridge, 1990, 59–71; idem, *The Armenia merchants of New Julfa, Isfahan. A study in pre-modern Asian trade* (thesis on British Library's MS. Lansdowne 1047 and 1048 submitted to the Faculty of Oriental

by a Christian minority. Shah ‘Abbas manipulated the Armenian community to his own advantage. The *millet* system in the Ottoman empire by which an ethnic-religious identity was acknowledged at the highest level of the state’s legal structure, was replaced in Safavid Iran with the concept of a self-governing administrative unit composed of five *mahāl* (district) the unit being called *mahāl-i Khamsa*, governed not by the qizilbāsh chiefs but by appointed meliks which did not have the same juridical status as the *millet* structure but was rather used loosely to designate a group bound by ethno-religious and linguistic ties in a meaning near to that of a ‘nation’.⁷⁶ All this was being done to win over the upper levels of Armenian leadership and put an end to the Russian orientation of the Armenians. Among the Armenian merchant community there have been several notable traders who have been the subject of renewed interest in pre-modern Armenian trade and commerce. The best known of these are Yovhannes Jughayetsi and Yovhannes Tēr Davt’ian.⁷⁷ Central to the expanding deep commercial knowledge and practices in the New Julfa trade community was the school founded by Khatchtuar Kesaratsi in 1620 in the complex of the All Saviour’s Monastery. On the circumstances of the creation of such an institution the historian Khatchatur Jughayetsi testifies ‘He established this university where he taught and trained the most inexperienced in the knowledge of the Old and New Testament, the natural science and metaphysics.’⁷⁸ The historian Yarutiwn Tēr Yovhaneants confirms that from the start of its foundation the All Saviour’s Monastery was endowed with a school.⁷⁹ The most notable among the teachers was Kostand Jughayetsi, a very wealth merchant,

Studies at the University of Oxford, 1991). For MS. Lansdowne 1047 and 1048, see Conybeare, *A catalogue of the Armenian manuscripts*, 352–53.

76 Vartan Gregorian, ‘Minorities of Isfahan: The Armenian community of Isfahan 1587–1722’, *Iranian Studies. Journal of the Society for Iranian Studies*, vol. VII (Summer–Autumn 1974), 665–68; H P’ap’azian, ‘Armenia and Iran. vi. Armeno-Iranian relations in the Islamic period’, *Encyclopedia Iranica*, vol. II, p. 253.

77 Levon Khach’ikyan, *Աշխատություններ* (Collected works), Erevan, 2008, vol. III, pp. 777–788 and 789–870; ‘The ledger of the Merchant Hovhanes Joughayetsi’, *JAS* 8 (1966), 153–186.

78 «Սա յօրինեաց զհամալսարանս՝ յորում ուսուցանէր և մարգէր զհամբալագոյնսն ի զիտութիւն հինգ և նորոց կտակարանաց, և զհամայն արհեստս ազատականս, և զգէրբնագանցականս»; see *Պատմություն Պարսից* (History of Persia), published by B Aghaweants, Vagharshapat, 1905, p. 116.

79 Yovhaneants Tēr Yarut’iwn, *Պատմություն Նոր Ջուղայու որ յԱպսխասն* (History of New Julfa which is called Isfahan), New Julfa, 1880, vol. II, p. 253.

who changed his occupation to become a teacher and pass his knowledge to Armenian youth in New Julfa. His major contribution, published recently, is *Compendium Concerning Commercial Advice to the Adolescent and to young merchants* (Աշխարհամորով : շարքունք եւ պատասխանի).⁸⁰ A manuscript of this work copied in 1687 in New Julfa has this short colophon: 'Class Book in Questions and Answers' composed by Kostand (Costantin), son of Ramaz (*Ramshuq*, master of a school of 300 children in the college of the All Saviour's at Julfa in 1685, in the reign of Shah Suleiman and in the Catholicate of Tēr Eghiazar [Aynt'aptsi, 1681–1691]) when Step'annos was archbishop [of New Julfa] (1684–1698) and *kbwaja* Avetis was the *kalant'ar* (civil governor).' It begins with Catechism of the Christian Religion (ff. 10–30) followed by 'Merchant's Handbook, being commercial geography enumerating the products with their qualities, and giving measures and monies of different countries in Asia and Europe'. The text begins 'O, Brother, if you are a merchant or if you desire to become a merchant' («Ով եղբայր վաճառական եւ՝ թէ կուզես վաճառական լինես».⁸¹ In his brief colophon Kostand Jughayetsi identifies himself as a teacher and choir master (*ղարապետ*) of over 300 'on the subjects of mathematics, *ragham*' (Arabic *raqm*, *raqam*, numbers and calendar), which are the contents of his textbook *Compendium Concerning Commercial Advice to the Adolescent and to young merchants* (Հասն նորայրու մանկանց ել երիտասարդաց վանաստականաց խրատ).⁸² Before becoming a teacher he was a very successful merchant who had massed a great wealth. He used part of his accumulated wealth to purchase Armenian books for distribution in New Julfa. The list of books all printed in Amsterdam in the printing House of St Sargis and Holy Ejmiadsin founded by Voskan Erevantsi include:

80 Kostand Jughayetsi, *The Compendium*, critical text, study and commentary by Sargis Baldaryan, Erevan, 2021. The critical text is based on several manuscripts: New Julfa MS. no. 64 (1680–1695), Mat. MS. no. 8443 (1685–1687), Mat. no. 10704 (1710); Oxford Bodleian Library MS. Arm. f. 14 (1712), Mat. MS. no. 5994 (18th century).

81 Baronian and Conybeare, *Catalogue of the Armenian manuscripts in the Bodleian library*, No. 119, MS. Arm. f. 14, 244–245. A second copy of the same manuscript is Bodleian MS. Arm. f. 15 copied in Constantinople in 1712 by the scribe Yakob of Julfa 'for the use of children of merchants', *ibid.*, No. 120.

82 All Saviour's Monastery New Julfa, MS. No. 12, fol. 221b, manuscript copied in 1686.

- Bible: Books of the Old and New Testaments, 1666 (30 copies)
- The New Testament, 1668 (30 copies)
- Book of Histories by Atak’el Davrizhetsi (100 copies)
- The Geography to which is attached the fables and legends (*Aghvesagirke*), 1668 (7 copies)
- Ovasap’*: Calendars of the Armenian and Roman Churches, 1668 (84 copies)
- Bnaban* (unrecorded 8 copies)

In 1675 after the printing press had collapsed and moved to Marseille the same press produces the title called *The art of complete and perfect arithmetics* (Արիեսուն Համարողութեան: Անքողը եւ Կատարեսայ). In bibliographies this work is recorded as Christophorus Clavius’s *L’Abrège d’arithmétique* (Rome, 1583) translated into Armenian by Yovhannes of Constantinople. This attribution has been proved to be mistaken. We are informed ‘Seeing the need among our merchants who do not command perfectly the art of calculation ... wrote this in the modern style [i.e. modern Armenian] to remove the cause of idleness and disclaimer so that if it is studied once with love and with attention all difficulties in calculating will be mastered ... completed this small book on calculation for the grand glory of God for the benefit of Armenian merchants in the year of the Incarnation of our Lord 1675 on the 21st of the month of November.’ The name of the author or the compiler is not mentioned in the title or the colophon. But the fact that the book was written in modern Armenian (not classical Armenian) and specifically in the dialect of New Julfa is a clear indication that the work was intended for the students of the New Julfa and its author is Kostand Jughayetsi who in 1680 was teaching mathematics in the school of All Saviour’s Monastery using his own textbooks on mathematics: the *Compendium* (Աշխարհածողով) and *Door to the art of counting* (Դուռն Համարողական Արիեսոսին). Both the books are accounting manuals on international markets, the first historical (giving the monetary measures, weights and taxes) and the second practical knowledge (arithmetical problems).⁸³ Finally

83 Hakob Anasyan, « Հայերէն թուարանական դասագրքերի պատմութեան համար » (‘For the history of Armenian arithmetical textbooks’) in *Մանր Երկեր* (Minor works), Los Angeles, 1987, 671-74; Sebouh Aslanian, ‘The circulation of men and

one other title that has been restored to the authorship of Kostand Jughayetsi is *Treasury of Measures, Weights, Numbers and Currencies of the entire world* (Գումնձ չափոյ, կշռոյ, թրոյն և դրամից բոլոր աշխարհի) previously attributed to Ghukas Vanandetsi.⁸⁴ Several scholars who have devoted their studies to tracing the history of Armenian commerce have concluded that this work also should be attributed to Kostand Jughayetsi. The information in the colophon presents the book as being a compilation by Ghukas Vanandetsi printed at the cost and request of Mr Petros son of Khatchatur Jughayetsi ‘for the use of our Armenian merchants in New Julfa’.⁸⁵

This enterprise had a very serious purpose. The Catholic missionaries had established a web of schools to which a significant number of Armenian youth were drawn to master certain skills which were essential to becoming a merchant. The youth of New Julfa were most impressed in the first instance in the language skills offered by the Jesuits, Carmelite and Capuchin friars. For instance in a letter of 9 August 1653 Balthazar, a Carmelite preacher, writes ‘The wealthy merchants wish to have their sons learn foreign languages.’⁸⁶ Equally interesting is the observation of Tavernier about the Capuchin friar Ambrosius: ‘Those Armenians who wish to establish firm trading relations with the west send their children to Jesuit-run institutions to learn French.’⁸⁷ On the course of studies offered by the Jesuit institutions Villotte provides extensive evidence. ‘For the parents whose sons were destined to trade in India they learned Portuguese, while another group of

credit’, *JESHO* 50/Part 2-3 (2007), p. 137.

84 Nersessian, *Catalogue of Early Armenian Books, 1512–1850*, p. 58, no. 67.

85 Nersessian, op. cit., p. 58, no. 67. Ghukas Vanandetsi is also listed as the printer of the ‘Double Hemisphere World Map’ (Համասարած Աշխարհացոյց մեծ) engraved by the brothers Hadrianus and Petrus Damianus Schoonebeck (Amsterdam, 1695) soon followed by *Key to the Map of the World* (Բանասի Համասարածի Աշխարհացոյցն) (1696). For the Map and the Key, see Nersessian, no. 58 and the Map, no. 677. The Map was one of the exhibits in Peter Barber and Tom Harper (eds), *Magnificent Maps. Power, Propaganda and Art*, The British Library, 2010, pp. 124–25.

86 Anon (Herbert Chick) (ed.), *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia, the Safavids and the Papal Mission to Persia of the 17th and 18th Centuries*, London, 1939, vol. I, p. 378; V Bayburdyan, «Նոր Ջուղայի հայկական գաղութի և կաթոլիկ միսիոներների կազմակերպությունները» (‘The Catholic missionary organization in New Julfa’), *Teghëkagir* 9 (1964), 41–42.

87 Jean Baptiste Tavernier, *Les six voyages ... en Turquie, en Perse et aux Indes*, The Hague, 1718, p. 478.

Armenian students studied Italian for use in those regions of the world where Italian dominated.’

We have alluded to the fact that the missionaries worked towards encouraging general apostasy among the heirs of the prominent New Julfa capital-owning families. The merchant class relying heavily on European trade could not openly display a hostile position towards the Catholics, for fear of the inevitable retribution from Europe and the need not to undermine the Persian government’s prevailing stance towards Europe. Chardin sums up the situation very well: ‘The Armenians respected the Catholics as long as the Persian government was respecting the Europeans.’⁸⁸ The merchant class contrary to their inner convictions not only continued displaying friendly relations but also provided them funds to open schools and churches in Julfa and Isfahan. To educate the Armenian children in the spirit of Catholicism a priority for the missionaries was to establish schools in New Julfa. In a letter to Rome the Carmelite missionary Juan Tadeo de San Eliseo writes: ‘We believe we will achieve greater results if there was a school for Armenian children. That is imperative because if they are among us we will teach them our laws, after which it would be possible to send them to Rome, where after receiving higher education they will return to their homeland to serve for the glory of God.’⁸⁹ The Carmelites succeeded opening schools in Shiraz, Isfahan and New Julfa exclusively for Armenian children. *Khwaja* Nazar was among the first to send his son to the Carmelite school. In return, *Khwaja* Nazar with the Carmelite missionary Juan Tadeo in 1629 was preparing to travel to Rome on behalf of the Armenian merchants to plead with the pope to grant the Armenian merchants special privileges to trade in European markets exempt from taxation. Obviously Rome was not going to satisfy the wishes of the Armenian merchants. In response to *Khwaja* Nazar’s request the Propaganda Fide responded that the pope would extend that privilege to only those Armenians who were Catholics. The hierocratic papacy, because of its megalomaniac power politics, aid and protection, was dependent on submission to the papacy, the supreme arbiter of the period.⁹⁰ A

88 Jean de Chardin, *Voyage en Perse*, Langlès (ed.), Paris, 1811, t. VIII, p. 110.

89 *A Chronicle*, op. cit., I, p. 378.

90 Malachia Örmanian, *The Church of Armenia*, trans. G Marcar Gregory, Oxford, 1912, p. 80.

member of the Augustinian brotherhood Antonio de Gouveia in his memoirs has this recollection: 'Addressing myself to Shah 'Abbas, now that for the second time you are sending me to Europe, order the Armenian patriarch to accompany me with the other patriarchs to kiss the feet of the Pope as an expression of their submission to him.' In reply the shah says, 'You know that in my country everyone is free to live the way they desire, adhere to the religion that is closer to their hearth. Therefore, I cannot force the Armenian patriarch to accompany you.'⁹¹ Juan Tadeo de San Eliseo, a Carmelite missionary, adds this warning: 'You must not assume that Shah 'Abbas will allow us to convert his citizens to Catholicism, on the contrary if given the opportunity he will force the Armenians, the Franks and Christians of other nations to convert to Islam.'⁹²

Armenians adhered doggedly to their separate linguistic and religious traditions, while at the same time they assimilated fairly easily into the indigenous population. In the words of Charles Peguy: 'A nation is not only a state and a frontier, it is above all a mission.' In the case of Armenia, 'this mission was to serve as intermediary and interpreter between East and West. Armenia played that part in antiquity between Rome and Parthia and pursued it in the Middle Ages between Byzantium and the Arab empire and in the modern times between Europe and the Muslim Persia.' Khatchatur Khizantsi, in the colophon of a manuscript he copied in 1607 reflects on the positive changes in place in his time:

For a while ago in the city of Shosh [Isfahan] the Persians saw a Christian merchant they would plaster his face with their spittle and condemn him to death ... but now thanks to God our enslaved nation freely worships, has erected everywhere churches, and has magnificently decorated them. The church beadle rings the bells louder than the Turkish mullah. The dead are buried in procession with crucifix and cope wearing

91 Vahan Bayburdyan, « Նոր Ջուղայի հայկական գաղութը եվ Կաթոլիկ միսիոներների կազմակերպությունները » ('The Armenian community of new Julfa and the organizations of the Catholic missionaries'), *Teghekegir*, no. 9 (1964), p. 46.

92 Ibid.

priests. On the Feast day of Epiphany they freely bless the water, singing the hymns as if in the times of the Illuminator [Gregory] and King Trdat.⁹³

Montesquieu acknowledges Shah ‘Abbas’ tolerance towards the Armenians. He writes: ‘It is understood that the proscription of the Armenians would have extirpated in a single day all the merchants and almost all the artisans in the Kingdom. I am sure that the great Shah ‘Abbas would rather have lost both his arms than have signed such an order; in sending to the Mogul and to the other kings in India the most industrious of his subjects, he would have felt he was giving away half of his dominion.’⁹⁴ Shah ‘Abbas I and his successors routinely invited western missionaries to Persia as part of their well-known pursuit of multifaceted economic strategy. As well as the Armenians, the Portuguese Augustinians, the Italian Carmelites and the French Capuchins had establishments in Isfahan.⁹⁵ Armenians reacted violently to the influx of ‘Frank’ missionaries. In the eyes of the Armenians the concern of the Roman Church was not so much with missions to Muslims as with the attempt to create or to strengthen the Uniate Churches, those groups from the ancient Eastern patriarchates which at one time or another had entered into communion with the See of Rome. Throughout the century Roman missions moved heaven and earth to ‘re-educate’ the believers of the Armenian Church to draw them away from their own church into the allegiance of Rome to what they believed was a better form of Christianity.⁹⁶

93 Vazgen Hakobyan and Ashot Hovhannisyan, Հայկերի անուգրկերի ժԷ դարի հիշատակարաններ, vol. 1, MS. 6785, p. 259.

94 Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, newly translated into English with notes and memoir of the author, by John Davidson, London 1892: privately printed, Letter LXXXVI, p. 22; H Mirzoyan, «Մոնտեսքյոն հայերի և Հայաստանի մասին» (‘Montesquieu on Armenia and the Armenians’), *Nork’ 7* (1989).

95 Yovhaneants Tēr Yarut’iwn, in a separate chapter headed «Պապականութիւն ի Ջուլֆայ» (‘The Papists in New Julfa’), numerates those Armenian churches and convents belonging to the Catholic denominations within the city of Isfahan, op. cit., 264-77.

96 Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Mission*, Penguin Books, London 1971, pp. 420-422; Robin E Waterfield, *Christians in Persia, Assyrians, Armenians, Roman Catholics and Protestants*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1973, 64-72; Roberto Gulbenkian, ‘Religious relations between the Armenians and the Portuguese Augustinians in Persia in the 17th century’, *JEC.S* 1-2 (2011), 5-43.

THE *FATWA* OF SHAIKH AL-ISLAM SANCTIONING THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LAW OF IMAM JA'FAR

The patronage of the Armenians did not endear Shah 'Abbas to the more fanatical of his Muslim subjects, but he dismissed his critics by maintaining that the older Armenians would die off and the next generation would switch their allegiance to Islam, while persecution would make martyrs of them. Afak'el Davrizhets'i observed that the shah silenced his critics by maintaining this explicit explanation: 'Do not get angry and do not blame me, for I spent considerable wealth, effort and cunning to bring them to our land not for their benefit, but for the good of us, for they will build our land and add to its grandeur. For that reason I display benevolence towards them, so that they remain loyal to our land.'⁹⁷ As an expression of 'benevolence' to bind the immigrants to his land and secure their unreserved loyalty, he forcibly transported to Isfahan the relic of the right arm of St Gregory and stones from the cathedral of Holy Ejmiadsin and placed them in the church of St George in 1614–1615, for in the words of Davrizhets'i, 'the loyalty and unity of the entire Armenian nation was rested on the right arm of St Gregory the Illuminator and the Cathedral of Holy Ejmiadsin.'⁹⁸ The Safavid rulers believed that it would be 'a vile injustice for people that laboured for the good of the kingdom, by their industry and commerce, to be excluded from the enjoyments of peace and that plenty of which they were the principal instruments.'⁹⁹

The Safavid dynasty slipped into steady decline during the reigns of Shah Sulaiman (1666–1694) and Shah Sultan Husain (1694–1722). As the century neared its end the discrimination and repression aimed at assimilation instigated by the Muslim clerics gradually intensified, oppressing and robbing the populace and persecuting the Armenian clergy.¹⁰⁰ Among Shi'ism there existed the so called *Imam Ja'fari* law

97 Loreta Daneghyan, *Առաքել Դավրիժեցու երկը որպես Սեֆյան Իրանի XVII դարի պատմության սկզբնաղբյուր* (The History of Afak'el Davrizhetsi as a primary source for the history of Safavid Iran in the XVIIIth century), Erevan, 1978, pp. 175–76.

98 H Hakobyan, «Հայերի պաքարը կաթոլիկական միսիաների ասիմիլյատորական ձգտումների դեմ Իրանում (XVII–XVIII)», *Eastern Studies*, vol. I (1960); V Bayburdyan, «Նոր Ջուղայի հայկական գաղութը և կաթոլիկ միսիոներների կազմակերպությունները», *Teghekgagir (Vestnik)* 9 (1964).

99 Sir John Chardin, *Travels into Persia and the East Indies*, London, 1686, vol. II, pp. 58, 60.

100 H P'ap'azyan, «Սեֆյան Իրանի ասիմիլյատորական քաղաքականության հարցի

according to which those among the *zimmi* (*dhimmi*) communities who had converted to Islam had the right to inherit the property of their Christian relatives and deprive them of their inheritance for ever. In numerous 16–17th century land ownership documents the names of persons buying or selling property are prefixed with the term ‘New Mohammedan’ (*jadid al-Islam*) which indicates that the person has recently converted to Islam. In Armenian sources there are several testimonies of instances where there is a Muhammadan exercising the Shari‘a law and courting fictitious witnesses to prove that he was a relative of such and such an Armenian and thus seize his entire property or part of it. The historian Zakaria *Sargavag* in his *History* tells the story of how a Persian brings a court case against Bishop Mik‘ayel and appealing to Shari‘a law insists that he is a relative of the bishop and accordingly his wealth should be confiscated and given to him.¹⁰¹ From the material point of view there was every inducement for a Christian to apostatise to Islam and the documents reveal the extent of conflict in courts between those who had apostatised and those relatives who had remained Christian and were reclaiming their shares. The law code devised by Mkhit‘ar Gosh had specifically such cases in mind.¹⁰² In the archives of the Matenadaran there are over 50 *fatwas* issued by *Divan al-sadarat* (the religious court of the capital) or by the Shari‘a courts in major localities (Tabriz, Nakhijevan, Erevan). Of particular interest are those *fatwas* whose legal formulations were intended to encourage assimilation. According to the Shari‘a laws ‘all Christian peoples among them, also Armenians who were paying head-tax or *jizya*, had total freedom to remain faithful to their faith. Such communities were called “*jizye gozar*” (those who paid *jizya*) or *zimmi* (“debtor communities”). In all the *fatwas* and *firman*s it is regularly emphasised that of “those Armenians who regularly pay their *jizya* no one has the right to force them to abandon their Christian faith and

շնրքը» (“The problem of Safavid Iran’s assimilation politics”), *BM* 3 (1956), 85–99. The author reproduces images of two *firman*s from the *Matenadaran’s Collection of Persian documents* (a) The *fatwa* of She[i]kh al-Islam concerning the wealth of Babay which after his death should only pass on to his relatives who had converted to Islam and to deprive his Christian relatives’ and (b) the 1669 decree of Shah Sulaiman decreeing that those Armenian Christians who had paid their *jizya* taxes be allowed to perform Christian marriages, funerals and other sacraments in their churches, pp. 90 and 94.

101 Zakaria *Sarkavag*, *Պատմագրություն* (History), Vagharshapat, 1870, vol. I, p. 73.

102 See above notes 12–16. Persian Documents in the Matenadaran, File no. 44, fols. 1a.

adopt Muhammadanism.”¹⁰³ To enforce and legitimise the rights of those Armenians who had converted to Islam to inherit the wealth of their Christian Armenian relatives most significant is the *fatwa* issued in Erevan which incorporates these four questions and their answers. Here are the proceedings of two such cases.

First Question. ‘Wise clergymen and experts of Shi‘a doctrine, whose pronouncements should remain for eternity—what is their verdict regarding the following question: if a new Muslim by the name of Mehdikoul dies and has one son named Shahnazar also a convert to Islam and two grandchildren Mariam and Fat‘ma from a second Muslim son named Zakaria, in this instance following this ruling, “all the close relatives forbid the distant relatives”, the named Mehdikouli after having retained all the necessary expenditures, does the entire inheritance belong to the above mentioned Shahnazar or not? Clarify.’

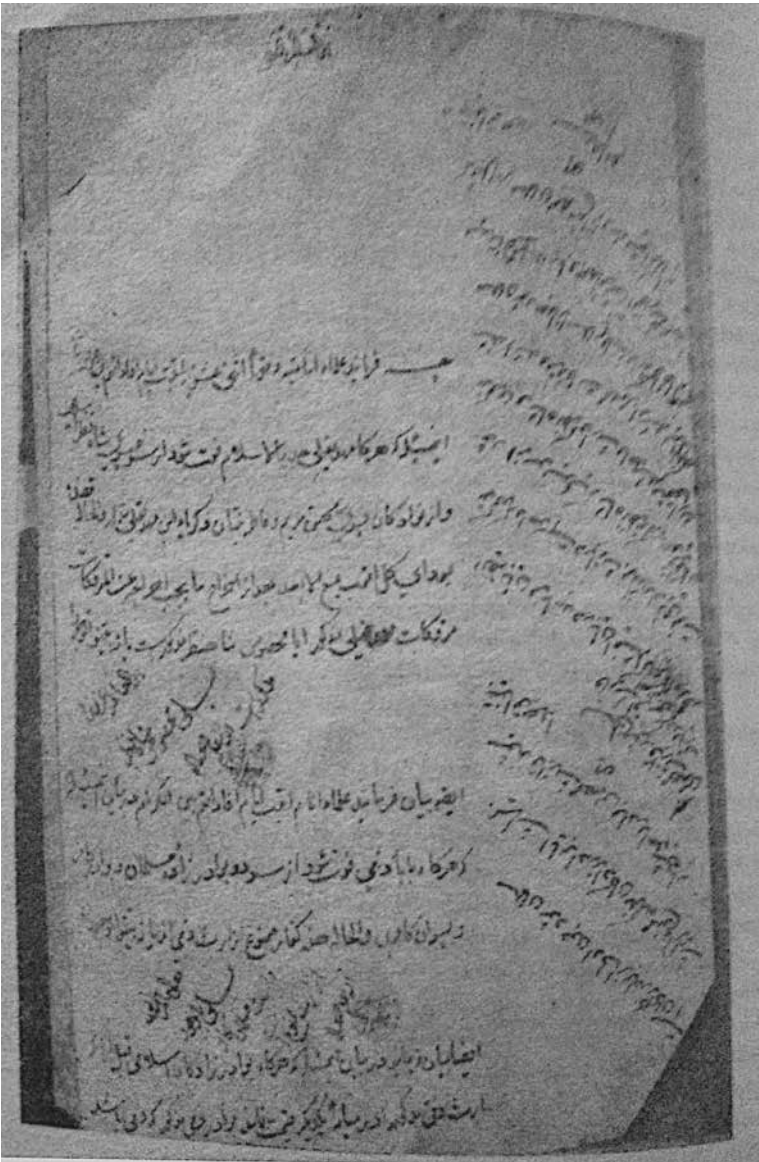
The Shaikh al-Islam replies ‘Yes it belongs to Shahnazar’ and seals the verdict.

Second Question. ‘Wise men—whose pronouncements shall remain for ever among noble men, let them respond similarly to the following question. If a *zimmi* individual named Baba dies and has two sons from a Muslim brother and one from an infidel brother and brother’s sons, in this instance the disbelievers are deprived of the *zimmi* heritage or not? Clarify.’

The Shaikh al-Islam replies ‘Yes, if there is a Muslim inheritor the infidel is deprived of the heritage.’

Thus, we have the following picture. A certain Armenian by the name of Baba has died. Having no descendants, his wealth goes to his brothers. Baban had two brothers one of whom had become a Muslim and died leaving behind two sons, while the other brother who also had two sons continued to remain a Christian. But because in this instance according to the Shari‘a *fatwa* the inheritance goes to the sons of the brother who had converted to Islam and not to his *zimmi* brother, the

103 Institute of Ancient Manuscripts Persian Archives, file 1b, documents Nos. 132a, 132b, 132c, 145 etc.



The fatwa of Shaikh al-Islam of Erevan city ordering that the inheritance left by Baba shall be given to his Mubammadan and not to his Christian beirs. MPD. No. 44, fl. 1a (20s of the 17th century).

latter hurries to become a Muslim, as a result of which he becomes a closer heir and gets the right to inherit his brother's wealth.

This makes it clear that the *zimmi* heirs [Christians], no matter how close they were to the deceased were deprived of the inheritance if there were Muslim heirs, however distant they were from the deceased.¹⁰⁴

The assimilation tendencies and persecutions of Armenian Christians increased during the rule of Safi Quli Khan (1666–1674). New *fatwas* were passed giving any Muslim the right to enter an Armenian Church and stop the performance of Christian rituals. In 1678, Catholicos Hakob Jughayets'i I (1655–1680) called the *meliks* to a secret meeting at Ejmiadsin. In a letter to the catholicos Pope Alexander VII had promised support for liberation on condition that Ejmiadsin recognises the supremacy of the Roman Catholic Church. In 1670 a European traveller who had fully understood the subtlety of the offer commented, 'The Armenian patriarch is as far from the intention of submitting his church to a foreign jurisdiction as far as Armenia is from the Roman Catholic See.'¹⁰⁵

THE POLEMICS BETWEEN ARMENIAN THEOLOGIAN AND THEIR CATHOLIC COUNTERPARTS

The 16th and 17th centuries in spite of the tumult in Europe opened new worlds for the Catholic countries of Spain and Portugal. If in the

104 « Էթէ կա մուսուլման ժանանգ անհավատները ժառանգութիւնից զրկվում են », H P'ap'azyan, op. cit., p. 75.

105 « Հայոց պատրիարքը նոյնքան հեռու էր մի որեւէ օտար եկեղեցիին հպատակուելու դիտաւորութիւնից, որքան Հայաստանը հեռու է հռոմէական կրօնի աթոռից », M Ormanian, *Ազգայաւանդ* (National History), Beirut, 1960, vol. II, part 2, p. 2609. Before him Catholicos Step'annos I Salmastets'i in 1548–1549 had made the same journey to seek support to free Armenia from Persian rule. The author Assemanus writes: 'The Catholicos of Armenia came to Rome to express his loyalty to Pope Paul III (1534–49) and accepted the doctrine formulated at the Council of Florence (1438 and 1554). Pope Julius III (1550–1544) gives the catholicos letters of introduction to the German King Carlos V and Sigmond II. The mission failed because "*plura fuerunt et gravia, quae de religione inter nos disseruimus*". The Catholicos had no authority to acquiescence to the latinising demands of the popes.' See Y S Anasian, *Ստեփանոս Սալմաստեցի (Հաստաւանդը նոր ուսումնասիրութիւնից)* (Step'annos Salmastetsi), Jerusalem, 1981, pp. 3–24; Vrej Nersessian, 'The See of Holy Ejmiadsin and the Vatican: A Chronicle of the contacts between the Armenian Catholicos and Popes', *Sion* 1–7 (2021), pp. 78–87, 183–94.

earlier period missionary work was done by great apostolic men, with little support from their home base, the new period was one in which the initiative would be taken, not by the governments, but by religious orders, beginning with the founding in 1622 of the Congregation de Propaganda Fide, by Pope Gregory XV, then in 1627, the College of the Propaganda acted as a seminary for the training of missionaries; and the French, not to be outdone by Rome, founded their own society, the Société des Missions Etrangères in 1658. If the inspiring motive was commerce, that of evangelisation was not far behind. ‘First the missionary, then the trader, then the soldier’: this was to become a common complaint against missions.¹⁰⁶

In the 17–18th century the proselytising by the Catholic Church was a greater threat than apostasy to Islam. In 1633, Pope Urban VIII wrote to the Armenian catholicos and to the archbishop of Julfa reminding him of the union the Armenian Church had concluded with the Catholic Church at the Council of Florence in 1439, with Pope Eugene IV. New Julfa became the anti-Latinophile centre, the ‘Armenian Geneva’ and the famous intellectuals—Mat’eos, Simeon, Step’annos, Aghek’sandr and Yovhannes Jughayetsies—were the Armenian equivalents of Luther and Calvin.¹⁰⁷ The arrival of the missionaries reinvigorated the Armenian community as is evidenced by the emergence of the wealth of polemical literature produced against ‘unionism’ under the patronage of All Saviour’s Monastery with its theological school, library and printing press established by Khatchatur Kesaratsi (1590–1646) in 1636–38. New Julfa became the principal Armenian centre of intellectual, literary, and artistic activity.¹⁰⁸ Yovhannes *Mrkuz* Jughayetsi made the most important contribution resisting the Latinisation of the Armenian Church meriting the epithet ‘Theologian of the kings’ and ‘Universal light giving philosopher’ (*Թագաւորաց աստուծաբան, Տիեզերալոյս փիլիսոփա*).¹⁰⁹ Even his

106 J W C Wand, *A history of the modern church from 1500 to the present day*, Methuen, London, 1971, 137–148.

107 H Gh Mirzoyan, *XVII դարի հայ փիլիսոփայական մտքի քննական վերլուծություն* (A critical overview of Armenian philosophical mind in the XVIIth century), Erevan State University Press, Erevan, 1983, pp. 54–61 and 155.

108 Nersessian, *Catalogue of Early Armenian Books 1512–1850*, 21–24.

109 These are epithets that are not endorsed by all Armenian experts. M Örmianian says that Khatchatur Jughayetsi’s assessment that ‘there was no one in Europe among the Franks with the in depth knowledge of the books and the extent of reasoning accumulated in a single mind’ as displayed by Yovhannes Mrk’uz in his debates

indefatigable Latinophile critic and contemporary Step'annos Dashtetsi, an Armenian who had become Catholic, in a letter to Yovhannes writes, 'vardapet, I will confess most sincerely without exaggerating that among all the Christian individuals I have debated, among them English, Swedish, Danish and Dutch Lutherans and Calvinists who do not recognise the Catholic Church and are opposed to the Pope and the Orthodox, I met no one so courageous and resolute as you.'¹¹⁰

The missionaries confronting difficulties in obtaining conversions among the Muslim population turned their attentions on the Armenians. To coerce Armenians into submission to Rome members of the society of Fratres Unitores founded in 1334 in Great Armenia translated into Armenian works of Dominican theologians designed for dogmatic instruction or for private devotion: *Profession de la foi orthodoxe* (Rome, 1584, 1596, and 1678), *Doctrina Christiana* by Robert Bellarmine (Rome, 1623, 1630, 1680, Paris, 1634, and Livorno, 1669), *Jardin des prières* (Բուրաստան Աղօթից) (Venice, 1685), *Flos virtutum* (Նորագոյն Ծաղիկ Զօրութեանց) (Venice, 1685), *Speculum Veritatis* (Հայեկի Ըշնարստութեան) (Venice, 1680), Thomas à Kempis, *Imitatio Christi* (Համստեանտունն Զրիստոսի) (Rome, 1674), Paul Piromalli, *De verité de la foi chrétienne* (Յարսագս Ըշնարստութեան), composed in Latin for Shah 'Abbas, translated into Armenian by Barsegh Kostandnupolsetsi (Rome 1674), and Giovanni Bona, *Manuductio ad coelom* (Ձեռքածութիւն Յերկինս) (Rome, 1674, Amsterdam, 1705). These are some of the titles which formed part of those used by the missionaries of Europe from the end of the 16th century.¹¹¹ A second group of works attempted to reduce the conflict between the Roman and Armenian Christians on the basis of either common ancient roots or the teachings of the

with Shah Sulaiman and Shah Husain is an exaggeration 'for his debates were of school standard' and are more a reflection on the low intellectual level of the Muslim clerics than the erudition of Mrk'uz'; see *National History* (Ազգայնամբ), Sevan Press, Beirut, 1960, vol. II, Bk 2, p. 2657; while Leo suggests that the use of those epithets are more 'a reflection on the period when an Armenian vardapet employing dreary and outdated medieval scholastic arguments for solving complex theological problems impresses his opponents'; see *Երկերի Ժողովածո* (Collected works), Hayastan, Erevan, 1986, vol. V, p. 268-71.

110 Step'annos Dashtetsi, *Կոչնակ Ըշնարստութեան*, Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (Matenadaran), MS. no. 8111, fols 156b-157b.

111 Vrej Nersessian, *Catalogue of Early Armenian Books 1512-1850*; N A Oskanyan and others, *Հայ Գիրքը 1512-1800 թվականներին* (Armenian books printed between 1512-1800), State National Library of Armenia: Erevan, 1988.

most reputable Armenian theologians. Such is the case with the fake *Lettera dell'amacitia e dell'unione di Constantino gran Cesare, e di san Silvestro sommo Pontefice, e di Tridate Re dell'Armenia, e di S. Gregorio Illuminatore della Nazione Armena, scritta nell'anno del Signore* (Venice, 1683, Padua, 1690) commonly called *Letter of Concord* (Գաշանց Թուղթ), composed between the years 1141 and 1238 coinciding with the third and fourth Crusades. M Shirinyan¹¹² suggests that the origin of *The Letter of Love and Concord* dates back to the monstrous forgeries called *Donation of Constantine*,¹¹³ that still appear in *Codex Iuris Canonici* revised under the supervision of the curia and promulgated in 1983 by John Paul II.¹¹⁴ Latinophile Armenians like Yovhannes Kostandnupolsetsi (*Yolov*) who translated the work from Italian to Armenian were reiterating this legend in the 17th century deliberately, hoping that the Roman Church would assist them in achieving their national aspiration of setting up a printing press in Rome.¹¹⁵ The other document widely quoted by missionaries was called *Concordia Armenorum cum Sancta Romana Ecclesia et declaratio articulorum septem, novae legis sacramenta pleraque alia concernentium. Sub Eugenio papa IV in concilio florentino, anno 1439 facta*, the bilingual edition of which was printed by the order of Pope Gregory XV in 1623,¹¹⁶ and

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- 112 M E Shirinian, 'The Letter of Love and Concord between Rome and Armenia. A case of forgery from the Crusader period' in K Ciggaar and H Teule (eds), *East and West in the Crusader States, Context—Contracts—Confrontations*, Leuven, 2003, 79–99.
- 113 Paul H Hollingworth, *Donation of Constantine (Constitutum Constantini)*, ODB, Oxford, 1991, vol. I, p. 649.
- 114 Hans Küng, *The Catholic Church. A short history*, New York, 2003, pp. 74–76; Margaret Deanesly, *A History of Early medieval Europe from 476 to 911*, London (2nd ed.), 1960, 'Donation of Constantine to Sylvester, of Pepin, of Charles, of Louis', pp. 291–3, 345–49.
- 115 «Թուղթ Սիրոյ եւ Միաբանութեան Մեծի կայսերն Կոստանդիանոսի եւ սրբոյն Մեղրեստրոսի Վեհագունի Փափին եւ Տրդատայ Հայոց Արքային եւ Սրբոյն Գրիգորի Հայոց Լուսաւորչին շարագրեցեալ յամի տեսնն երեք հարիւր եւ տասն եւ վեց». See Nersessian, *Catalogue of Early Armenian Books*, p. 11 and pp. 18–19 for Archbishop Yovhannes Kostandnupolsetsi (surnamed *Yolov*); Vrej Nersessian, 'Did Trdat meet Constantine I the Great', *HHH XIX* (1999), 65–70; H. Bartikian, «Դաշանց Թուղթ». Կազմը, ստեղծման ժամանակը, հեղինակն ու նպատակը», *Studia Armeno-Byzantina*, Institute of History, Erevan, 2006 III, 179–216.
- 116 «Միաբանութիւն Հայոց ընդ Հռոմեական սուրբ եկեղեցոն վասն պարզաբանութեան նոր արիւնացն եւ է [7] խորրորոյն սուրբ եկեղեցոյ եւ այլ բազում սուրբ խորհրդոց. որ եղեւ հրամանաւք Եւճենիոսի չորրորդ սուրբ փափին ի ժողովս Ֆիարենցոյ Թ. ՌՆԼԹ [1439]. Եւ հրամանաւ սրբազան Գրիգորիոսի հնգիստասն երրորդի սուրբ փափին»; see Vrej Nersessian, *Catalogue of Early Armenian books*, p. 49 (no. 9).

in a more fundamental way, the Theatine Clement Galanus's *Conciliatio Ecclesiae Armenae cum Romana* in three volumes (1650-1661 and 1690) in which he pleads for reunification of the Armenian Church with Holy See of Rome.¹¹⁷

These actions of the Catholic missionaries increased the historical antagonism between the two churches. Under the primacy of three successive primates—Step'annos, Aghek'sandr and Yovhannes Jughayetsi Mrk'uz—the community took effective action to stem the Latinisation through a series of important publications. The printing press established in the All Saviour's Monastery was reactivated. The first book printed in 1687 was called *Book of controversies also called discussion* by Aghek'sandr Jughayetsi¹¹⁸ addressed to 'the Christ-loving and faithful Armenians ... declaration in the form of debate against the nation of the Franks'.¹¹⁹ A year later in 1688 came a second substantial volume called *Collection of writings against the Dyophysites and specially against the world destructive Council of Chalcedon*.¹²⁰ The book contains the works of the following Armenian Church fathers—Matteos Siwnetsi, Poghos Taronatsi, Step'nnos Siwnetsi, Grigor Tat'evats'i, and Michael the Syrian—refuting the decision of the Fourth Ecumenical Council and the Tome of Leo. Beyond the theoretic discussions, the practical and human reasons for the conflict are clearly stated in the title of a letter, written probably in 1709, to Pope Clement XI by Aghek'sandr Jughayetsi who, in 1706, had become the Catholicos of All Armenians:

117 Միաբանութիւն Հայոց սուրբ եկեղեցւոյն ընդ մեծի սուրբ եկեղեցւոյն Հռովմայ շարադրեալ ի յերկուս հատորս ի պատմական եւ վիճաբանական ի կարգէ Թէատինոսաց Կղմես վարդապետէ. See Vrej Nersessian, *Catalogue of Early Armenian Books*, pp. 50-51 (vols. 1-II), p. 5; Robert Dulgarian, 'Conciliatio aut distinctio: Preliminary observations on history and theological method in Clemens Galanus, *Conciliatio Ecclesiae Armenae cum Romana*, Rome, 1650-1661', *BM* 21 (2014), 471-86. And a recent study by Vrej Nersessian called 'The role of Holy Etchmiadzin and the Vatican: A chronicle of the contacts between Armenian Catholicos and Popes', *Sion* 1-2-3 (2021), 78-87 (Part I, Chronicle of events from 440-1431).

118 *Գիրք Առնեակաւն որ ստի վիճաբանակաւն*, New Julfa: All Saviour's Monastery, 1687; reprinted in Constantinople in 1783; reprinted in Ejmiadsin in 2018 by Ter Het'um *kbn* T'arverdyan

119 R H Kevorkian, *Catalogue des Incunables Arméniens (1511/1695)*, Patrick Cramer, Paris, 1986, p. 122 (no. 100).

120 Step'annos Jughayetsi, *Գիրք Տողովածոյ Ընդդէմ Երկրաբնակաց*, All Saviour's Monastery, New Julfa, 1688.

‘Letter ... concerning the regrettable conduct of missionaries who, in blatant injustice, create problems amongst the innocent sheep of the saintly Church of Armenia’.¹²¹ The books by Aghek’sandr and Yovhannes Jughayetsi from the perspective of contents may have today lost their worth and importance but we should not dismiss the fact in their time these were indispensable tools in defence of the position of the Armenian Church. It is not altogether surprising that Yovhannes Mrkuz’s book had a second printing in the same year and in the same press (1713), while Aghek’sandr’s volume was reprinted in Constantinople in 1783. So impressive was the impact of these works in the fight against the Latinophiles that the famous contemporary Armenian Catholic intellectual Step’annos Dashtetsi wrote refutations against Aghek’sandr in 1706 and Yovhannes Mrk’uz in 1714, both of which have survived in manuscript form.¹²² The religious antagonism between the Armenians and the Jesuits reached its peak in 1680 and ultimately led to the eventual ‘demise of the once prosperous Armenian colony of New Julfa’.¹²³ Another theologian not from Julfa but from Constantinople who has received very little attention is Gevorg *vrđ*. Mkhlayim (1681–1758). He was the person whom the French imprisoned in the Bastille between 1711–1713 for the charge of attempting to save from prison his compatriot the Patriarch of Constantinople Awetik Evdovkiatsi (1657–1706), whom the Jesuits abducted and jailed in the Bastille in 1704, where he died in July 1711, and is better known as ‘The Man Behind the

121 «Յոզնապատիւ եւ գերահռչակ պատուով մեծարեալ պետականին ժամանեցելոյ գահին շնորայ, տեսնող Գլխնստոսի երիցս երջանիկ պապի»;
see M Ormanian, *Azghapatum*, vol. II, part 3, pp. 2768–70. In his evaluation of this important document Ormanian suggests ‘for the Catholics the polite, courteous and loving tone of the letter were grounds to declare the writer of the letter a Catholic, unable to understand that it is possible even with an opponent to use graceful language free of curse and anathema, which was an admirable trait of the Armenian Church’s enduring tolerance.’

122 Step’annos Dashtetsi, «Խնդիր ճշմարտութեան կամ Ուղղութեան» and «Կոչնակ ճշմարտութեան, որ ընդիմաբանութիւն է Տէր Յովհաննէսի Ջուլֆայեցոյ մեծահռչակ փիլիսոփայի մանկանուամբ Մրքուզ» (MS. 9049); see Simon Simonian, *Նոյահայտ տաղասաց մը Ստեփանոս Գաշտեցի* (Step’annos Dashtetsi: a newly found poet), Sewan, Beirut, 1981, pp. 23–25.

123 Hratchya Acharian, *Հայ Գաղթականության Դատմություն* (A history of the Armenian Diaspora), Erevan, 2002, p. 231; Dennis Half, ‘Hovhannes Mrk’uz Jughayetsi’, *Christian-Muslim relations A bibliographical history*, 260–65.

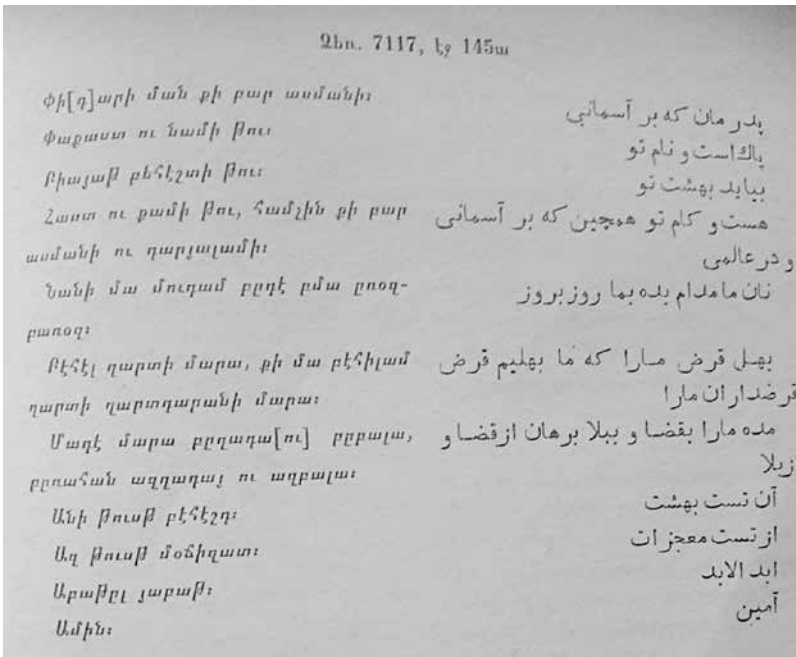
Iron Mask'.¹²⁴ Gevorg Mkhlayim in a work of his called 'A book of disputation against the Dyophysites' in exasperation writes 'who forever flattering themselves before simple minded folk, like honey dripping from their lips, hound them and cast them in their nets of corruption.'¹²⁵ Paramount for him is his defining of the term Catholic. 'Catholic' is term employed by the Romans [i.e. Greeks], which means 'all' or 'entire' (*ᾠλη*) and translates 'universal' and has two meanings. First and foremost it denotes the entire people of all Christian nations taken as a whole. According to this definition no individual Christian nation is Catholic nor can a group of Christian nations together claim to be Catholic, for the term Catholic which translates 'all' or 'universal' encompasses not one nation nor many nations but the entire Christian nations together. Therefore, no church on its own, or many churches together can call themselves catholic. But all churches together, can be Catholic united in a single faith in Christ, having only Christ as their vicar.¹²⁶ Rejecting Rome's claim to primacy his central argument was to accept the historic faith of the church, faith in God as Trinity, faith in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, faith professed by the whole church before the disunion of East and West. He concludes his definition with these two Scriptural quotations: 'And other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd' (John 10: 16) and St Paul's definition 'One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, and Father of all, who is above all, through all and in your calling' (Eph. 4: 5).

124 John Noone, *The Man behind the Iron mask*, St Martin's Press, London, 1994, 99–106.

125 Ge[v]org *vrđ* Mkhlayim, *Գիրք վիճաբանության ընդդեմ երկաթեակաց* (Book of disputation against the Dyophysites), Constantinople, 1734, in the colophon «որք յաւետ շողորթութիւլ զինքեանս առաջի պարգամտաց, որպէս թէ մեր կաթեցուցեալ ի շրթանց իրեանց, որսան գնտս, և այնու ձգեն յուրկանս մոլորութեան իրեանց».

126 Ge[v]org *vrđ*. Mkhlayim, *Ճշմարիտ նշանակության Կաթողիկէության* (The true meaning of Catholicism), Constantinople, Ejmiadsin, 2018, pp. 97 and 103–04. Reprint of 1734.

His name derives from the word *մրիւ-մնիւ* from which the name *մրիպայրներն* which is the name given to the craftsmen who 'nails the stone to the ring, i.e. goldsmith'. See H Acharian, *Թուրքերեն փոխառյալ բառեր հայերենի մեջ* (Words borrowed from Turkish in Armenian), Moscow, 1902, p. 235.



Matenadaran MS. 7117, fl. 145a. The Lord's Prayer in Persian in Armenian letters, for Persian-speaking Armenians. H Acharian dates the original of these fragments to the 10th-11th centuries. Text found in a Bible, MS. No. 184, copied by a Dominican friar in 1405.

THE LIFE AND CAREER OF YOVHANNES MRK'UZ JUGHAYETSI

Not only man shows humility towards the meek, but if it is not arrogance to say, that God also shows humility towards the meek.'

The principal sources for a biography and career of Yovhannes Mrk'uz¹²⁷ (1642–1716) are the following:

- 1) Colophons of his publications.
- 2) The work of his principle opponent Step'annos Dashtetsi (1630?-1725) called 'The Bellclapper of Truth'

¹²⁷ Mrguz or Mrk'uz means 'worthless, humble'. H Acharian, <u>սլերին Արմատուկսն բարարսն</u> (Armenian etymological dictionary), 1977, vol. III, p. 369.

(«Առնակ Ճշմարտութեան»),¹²⁸ which is a criticism of Yovhannes Mrk'uz's book 'Abridged book regarding the real and true faith'.¹²⁹

3) 'The History of Persia' by Khatchatur *abeghay* Jughayetsi¹³⁰ in which the author presents the circumstances and contents of the debates Yovhannes Jughayetsi conducted with the Persian shahs and in addition the titles of the works he wrote in Armenian and Persian languages 'which he had seen and read.'¹³¹ From a biographical point the most important colophon is the one he attaches to his highly significant work completed in 1687 called 'The Art of Debating' («Տրամակացութիւն ճշմարտութեան») ¹³² which with minor changes we find nine years later included in his 'Book of Divinisation' («Գիրք որ կոչի Սրբազնագործութիւն») ¹³³

Conflating the information gleaned from the above mentioned sources we can confidently say that Yovhannes Jughayetsi was born in 1643. At the age of fifteen in 1658 he entered the theological Seminary of All Saviour's Monastery. In 1659 he was ordained deacon by the primate David and three years later in 1662 became a priest, in 1670 he became a *vardapet* (unmarried priest) and at the age of 36 was granted the privilege of holding a teacher's staff (*vardapetakan gavazan*). Despite the

128 Step'annos Dashtetsi, *Առնակ Ճշմարտութեան*, Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, Erevan, MS. No. 9049; Bodleian Library, *Catalogue*, op. cit., MS. Arm. e.22, pp. 223-24.

129 Yovhannes Jughayetsi *Mrk'uz*, *Գիրք Հաննուոն Վասն իսկապէս եւ ճշմարիտ Հաստոյ*, All Saviour's Monastery, New Julfa, 1688.

130 Khatchatur *abeghay* Jughayetsi, *Պատմութիւն Պարսից*.

131 *Ibid.*, p. 208.

132 Jerusalem MS. No. 665, fols 431-464 See N Pogharian, *Մայր ցուցակ ձեռագրաց սրբոց Յակոբեանց*, St James's Press, Jerusalem, 1967, pp. 98-100.

133 The full text of the colophon is published by H Mirzoyan in *Հիվաննէս Մրբոց Ջողայեցի*, Erevan, 2001, 221-26, Yovhannes Jughayetsi Mrk'uz, «Գիրք որ կոչի Սրբազնագործութիւն: Ճողովեալ ի ցոց աստուածայնց եւ ի լուսաւոր բանից սուրբ վարդապետաց: Աշխատասիրութեամբ Նոր Ջողայու Ս. Ամենափրկիչ զերահոչակ վանից միաբան Յովհաննէս մեծիմաստ քաջ հոգետորի եւ բանիբուն աստուածաբան վարդապետի», Sargis Dsatur Aghavaghyan, Madras, 1812. The Bodleian Library's MS. Arm. d.18, called 'Theological, and Commentary, 19th cent.' This is a copy made from the printed edition of Madras in 1809, as far as chap. XVI, where the copyist states, on f. 60b, that he had no time to continue it. No. 102, p. 222-223.



British Library MS. Or. 15,894. Manuscript belonging to the theologian, scribe and artist Yovhannes Jugbayetsi, called Mrk'uz', New Julfa, Isfahan, c. 1643–1715. This is the only surviving copy of a Textbook of Disputation used by its author during his debates with Muslim clerics, including Shah Suleyman I (1666) and Shah Husain I (1694).

The opening folios represent section IV containing «**ԺԱ** [51] **Վկայութիւնք ի սրբոյ աւետարանէն երեք զիւ. յովհաննու**» (Witnesses from the Gospels). The two quotations from the Gospel of Matthew (not from John as stated in the title). (a) Matt. III, v.16: 'And after Jesus was baptised he at once rose out of the water, and the heavens opened and he saw the spirit of God descending like a dove, upon him, and heard a voice from heaven saying this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased'; and (b) Matt. X, v. 32: 'Every one who confesses of me before men, I will bear witness for him before God who is in heaven. And he who denies me before men I will also deny him before God who is in heaven.'

The rest of the quotations covering fols 52–68a are verses confirming that Jesus is the Son of God.

The incipits are in red letters and give the name and chapter of each Gospel while the Arabic numerals in red in the margins indicate the verse number.

See V Nersessian, A catalogue of Armenian manuscripts in the British Library acquired since the year, 1913 ..., vol. II, pp. 809–816.

persuasion of his friend and later Catholicos Aghek'sandr I Jughayetsi (1706–1714), he declined to be ordained a bishop. He wrote most of his works before 1696. Two works composed after 1707 are available only in manuscript form. The first (St James' Jerusalem MS. 1610) is called 'Letter addressed to Louis Alestianos bishop of the Franks' and the second completed in 1713 is a Commentary on the Book of Songs (Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, MA No. 111). In 1673–74 when Catholicos Yakob Jughayetsi was in Isfahan, he summoned a council with the representatives of the pope, Gaspare Gasparin and Francesco Gill, with a request to intervene before King Louis XIV (1638–1715) to consider the proposition that if the Armenian Church was willing to accept the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon and the primacy of the pope the French were prepared to support the Armenian merchants. Among the bishops attending the meeting was Yovhannes Jughayetsi. Of the works that have not survived, mostly those he wrote in Armenian and Persian, Khatchatur Jughayetsi has fortunately left a summary of their contents.¹³⁴ The crucial identifying information the historian provides concerns the characteristic feature of his work: 'On the one side of the page he wrote in Armenian letters and language and on the facing side of the page he wrote in Persian letters and language line by line, page by page. Some of these are even today read by Persian philosophers, and many of his works are in the possession of the Persians.'¹³⁵

There are over twenty manuscripts in the Institute of Ancient Manuscripts in which his name is mentioned either as author, compiler or scribe. Of these the earliest is MS. 8608 a compilation of his early works, the compiler and copyist of which was most probably one of his pupils. His published works, some during his lifetime, include:

1. *Գիրք Համառօտ Վասն իսկասպես եւ ճշմարիտ հաւատոյ եւ դաւանութեան ուղղափառ կաթօղիկէ ընթանուր (sic) Հայեաստանեաց (sic) եկեղեցոյ* (Brief council on the authentic and true profession of faith of the Armenian

134 Khatchatur Jughayetsi, *Պատմութիւն Պարսից*, pp. 204–06.

135 «Եւ զմի երես թղթոց սոցա գրեաց ի գիր եւ ի հայոց բարբառ եւ զմիս երեսն դէմ յանդիմանի գիր եւ ի բարբառ պարսից, տող առ տող, եւ երես առ երես: Որք եւ մինչև ցայսօր ընթերցեալ լինին ի պարսից իմաստասիրաց, քանզի բազում գիրք գտանի ի գրոց նորա առ իմաստասէրս պարսից»; see Khatchatur Jughayetsi, *Պատմութիւն Պարսից*, p. 206.

Orthodox Church), New Julfa: All Saviour's Monastery, 1688.¹³⁶

2. Համառօտ Քերականութիւն եւ Տրամաբանութիւն: Որ ի Քերթութիւն բառի, և կրթութիւն բանի (Brief grammar and logic on eloquence of speech), Amsterdam: Vanandetsi, 1711.

3. Կրթութիւն Հաւատոյ: Գիրք համառօտ վասն ճշմարտութեան հաւատոյս Քրիստոնէա կանի և ուղղափառ դասանութեան ընդհանուր կայտորիկէի հայաստանեայցս եկեղեցոյ (Brief instruction on the true Christian beliefs and the orthodox doctrine of the Armenian Church which we received and taught from St Gregory the Second Illuminator), Constantinople: Grigor Marzvanetsi, 1713.

4. Դասանութիւն Հայասոյ: և ներածութիւն անտղից: Բ. Գիրք Համառօտ վասն ճշմարիտ եւ ուղղափառ դասանութեան կայտորիկէի եկեղեցոյս հայաստանեայց (Abridged account of the authentic and true doctrine of the Armenian Orthodox Church), Constantinople: Astuadsatur Kostandnupolsetsi, 1713–1714.

5. Վիճաբանութիւն առ Շահ Սէլմանն Պարսից: Գիրք Պատմութեան արարեալ ի նորն Ջուղայու Սրբոյ Անննափրկչի գերահրաշ վանի միաբան Յովհաննէս ճգնագգեաց վարդապետին՝ Վիճաբանութիւն առ Շահ Սէլմանն Պարսից (Debate with Shah Sulaiman of Persia), Calcutta: Hovsep' Step'anosian, 1797.¹³⁷

6. Գիրք որ կոչի Սրբազնագործութիւն: Ժողովեալ ի գրոց աստուծայնոց եւ ի յուսար բանից սուրբ վարդապետաց (Book called Divinisation: Collection of writings from the

136 For a refutation of this work, see Bodleian Library's MS. Arm. f.12 'Concerning the Holy Catholic Faith written in 1688 by Hieronymus *vardapet* of Lemberg, and addressed to Baron Astouadzatur Spondowski, judge of the Armenians in Lemberg', Baronian and Conybeare, *Catalogue of the Armenian manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*, no. 104, p. 224.

137 Mesrop T'aghidian (1803–1858) gives the following significant information about this book. Only the Armenian text of this book was published by Tēr Yovsep' Step'anosian in Calcutta in 1797, while the original which was in Armenian and Persian was donated to the Bishop's College Library in Calcutta', see *Azgasar*, 12 (1845). In the same article the author informs us that Yovhannes Jughayetsi's translation of the Four Gospels into Persian in Armenian letters was also gifted to the Bishop's College Library by Tēr Yovsep' Step'anosian, p. 95.

Holy Fathers), Madras: Sargis Dsatur Aghavaleants, 1812.¹³⁸
7. *Լղձալի Քրիստոսի Օրենքը* (The desirable law of Christ),
Աշխ. Պրոֆ. Գ.Ս. Նալբանդյանի, Erevan: Zangak, 1998.
His final unpublished work is a *Commentary on the book
of Song of Songs* (Մեկնութիւն Երգոյ երգոյն) which has
survived in a single manuscript now in the Institute of
Ancient Manuscripts under Nr.1111¹³⁹

The most significant evidence of Yovhannes Mrk'uz' participation in the Christian-Muslim dialogues is the recently discovered MS. Or. 15894 by the author and purchased for the British Library.¹⁴⁰

The author, illuminator and scribe of the manuscript is Yovhannes Mrk'uz Jughayetsi. The manuscript has no title page but all the external features agree with the details set out by Khachatur Jughayetsi above and its contents leaves little doubt that the work belongs to his pen. It is a bilingual text with Armenian on the left and Arabic on the right. The Armenian text is in *shaghagir* (cursive) script and the Persian on the facing page is in elegant *naskhi* script. It is the only surviving copy of a 'Debating Manual' used by the Armenian theologian in his dialogues with Muslim clergy. The content is made up of 'Quotations' (*Վկայութիւնք*) from the Old and New Testaments beginning with the Book of Genesis (49: 10-11) ending with the Gospel of St John (20: 28-31). A total of 135 biblical citations are made divided under the following subheadings:

- I) Fol.2. Բ « Վկայութիւնք սակս Գալուստեանն Քրիստոսի ի յաշխարհ » ('Witnesses on the coming of Christ into the world') [*Incarnation*]
- II) Fol.25 a. « ԻԶ « Յաղագս չարչարանացն Քրիստոսի: Վկայութիւնք յԱստուածաշունչ գրոց եւ մարգարեականց » ('Concerning the death of Christ. Witnesses from the Bible and the Prophets').

138 For bibliographical details of all these publications, see N A Oskanyan and others, *Հայ Գիրքը 1501-1800 թվականների, 1512-1800*, Erevan, 1988; Hayk Davt'yan (1967), *Հայ գիրքը 1801-1850 թվականներին: Մասնենագիտություն*, Erevan, 1967.

139 H Gh Mirzoyan, *Hovhannes Mrk'uz*, 86-91.

140 Nersessian, *A Catalogue of the Armenian Manuscripts*, 809-16; 'Two Faiths in New Julfa', *A Cabinet of Oriental Curiosities*, The British Library, London, 2006, No. 36.

- III) Fol. 37. ԼԷ «Յաղագս թէ Երրորդութիւն է անձանց յաստուածութիւն եւ մի բնութիւն» ('Concerning the Godhead being a Trinity of Persons and one Nature')
IV) Fol. 51. «ԾԱ Վկայութիւնք ի սրբոյ աւետարանաց» ('51 Witnesses from the Gospels').

To support the study of the newly discovered manuscript it is helpful to discuss in some detail the Armenian account of the public confrontations Yovhannes Jughayetsi had with Shah Sulaiman. The author's record of his confrontations were published after his death under the title 'A history of the confrontations of the eminent member of the brotherhood of All Saviour's Monastery Yovhannes *vardapet's* with Shah Sulaiman of Persia'.¹⁴¹ The printer informs his readers, that he has printed 'this spiritually beneficial garden of our enlightened *vardapet* for the gain and good of the Armenian people in two scripts, that is in Armenian and Persian letters, completed on the 13th of December 1173'[AE]'. This suggests that the publisher Hovsep' Step'anosian had in his possession not the author's original manuscript, but a copy made in 1724. This is also evidence that Yovhannes Jughayetsi's debating manual was copied and circulated both in the Armenian and Persian languages. A total of nineteen volumes of Armenian-Persian language debating manuals are attributed to his pen. He died at the age of 74 in 1716.¹⁴²

Khatchatur Jughayetsi refers to an incident in which Shah Husain, in order to humiliate Yovhannes, invites an Armenian Yohan («որոյ անուն ըստ պարսկական դէնին կոչիր շէխուսին և կամ Մահմատալի Բէկ»), an apostate to Islam to enter into the debate. Yohan asks 'Why do you not adhere to the message of the Gospel and the prophets who promised to send you a prophet' (Matthew 23: 33). For a moment this confuses Mrk'uz who confesses 'he dug a deep hole in front of me, for I could either say that is a lie or explain why I do not believe? If I had said the former I would have angered the shah and all his ministers and caused trouble for myself and if I had said the latter he

141 *Գիրք պատմութեան արարեալ ի Նորն Ջուղայոյ սրբոյ Աննափրկի գերասիրաշ վանի միաբան Յովհաննէս ճգնագգեսց վարդապետին վիճարանութիւն առ Շահ Միլէանն Պարսից, Calcutta, 1797.*

142 H Acharian, *Հայոց Անձնանունների Բառարան*, vol. III, p. 699; idem, *Հայ գաղթականության պատմություն*, pp. 230-33; Gaʻnik Step'anyan, *Կենսագրական Բառարան*, Hayastan, Erevan, 1981, vol. II, pp. 59-60.

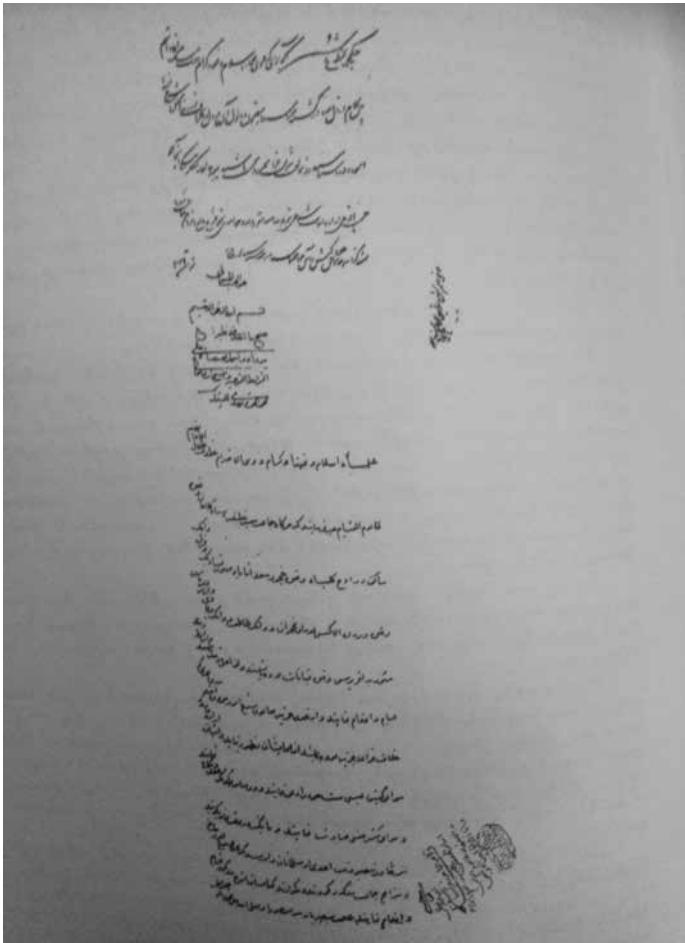
would then have invited me to confess my doctrine.¹⁴³ A manuscript entitled 'Questions and answers of Yovhannes vardapet of New Julfa against Shah Sulaiman king of Persia' (« Հարց եւ պատասխանիք Յովհաննու Վարդապետի Նոր Ջուղայեցոց ընդ Շահ Սիլվանս արքայի պարսից») which is Yovhannes Mrkuz's Armenian text of the debate with a Persian translation copied in the 18th century, which contains the donor's name Tēr Yovhannes *khatchakir awag kbn* with the following annotation. After hearing Mrk'uz the king tells the mayor (*k'alant'ar*) of New Julfa 'there is no one in France and among the Franks like him.' It is also not unusual or surprising that during such debates the opposing side would revert to deceit and chicanery to outwit the opponent. For instance on one occasion Shah Sulaiman Husain tells Yovhannes that he cannot believe that a man, whoever he be, can live a life of celibacy. To convince himself he entrusts someone to investigate if the Armenian priest does not have a secret liaison.¹⁴⁴ Among the recorded debates the most interesting is the one on the sacrament of Holy Communion. Yovhannes Jughayetsi, commenting on the verse from the Psalms 'O taste and see that the Lord is sweet' (34: 9), defends the sacrament of Communion (in particular the use of wine) not only from a theological perspective but also expounds the moral-philosophical stand according to which not only man humbles himself to the humble but also God. He writes 'If God humbles himself towards the meek, so much so must the entire creation, the heavenly and the earthly, the holy and the unholy, kings and peasants, all need to display humility towards the meek.'¹⁴⁵

A manuscript in the All Saviour's Monastery in New Julfa of Yovhannes Mrk'uz work called 'Questions and answers of Yovhannes vardapet of New Julfa with Shah Suleiman king of Persia' (« Հարց եւ պատասխանիք Յովհաննու վարդապետի Նոր Ջուղայեցոց ընդ Շահ Սիլվանս արքայի պարսից»), the Armenian text with a Persian translation of the above work, has in it an interesting annotation by the learned priest of the Armenian community in Calcutta Yovhannes archpriest Khatchikian (1804-1897) who

143 Khatchatur *abeghay* Jughayetsi, pp. 168-69.

144 Khatchatur *abeghay* Jughayetsi, pp. 216-17. It is interesting that a century earlier identical conversation had taken place between Shah 'Abbas and a Catholic missionary, see R V Gulbenkian, *Հայ-պորտուգալական հարաբերություններ* (Armenian Portuguese relations), Erevan, 1986, pp. 190-92.

145 Yovhannes Jughayetsi, *Գիրք որ կոչի արքայազգործություն*, p. 259.



The edict of Shah Suleyman issued in 1669 and the fatwa in Divan al-Sadarat' permitting the jizya-paying Armenians to conduct Christian worship, weddings, funerals and rites and church ceremonies. However, in a series of fatwas in the archives of Catholicos Yakob IV Jughayetsi (1655–1680) there is evidence that he, on behalf of Armenian merchants abroad, brought 'the existing code that Armenians paid their taxes only once in the places of their residence and if they travelled to other places they were not obliged to pay again.' The contents in other fatwas imply that Armenian merchants who had travelled to other cities on work under compulsion adopted Islam to avoid paying the tax and on returning home were re-baptised which brought upon them the accusation of duplicity and apostasy by the Muslim high-ranking clerics.

MPD, File 1a–b, Documents Nos 132a–b. See H P'ap'azyan, 'The assimilation policy in Safavid Iran', BM 3 (1956), 85–99 (in Armenian).

donated the manuscript to the All Saviour's Monastery. He reports that he witnessed in 1840 a debate that flared up in the palace in Tehran between Haji Mirza Aghasi the viceroy and Ismayil Khan Jdid confirming the Revelation of the Son of God while the latter following the Mosaic code rejecting the claim.¹⁴⁶ In the context of protecting the Christian community from Mohammedanism the most common tool was to question the authenticity of the Qu'ran. It is not surprising then that in the All Saviour's Monastery manuscript copies of 'The history of Mahmed', copied in the 17th century, the fundamental aim of the content is to combat the claim that Muhammad was a prophet. In the same collection there is a manuscript 'Book against Mohammedanism' («Գիրք հակաճառութեան ընդդէմ մահմետականաց») written in the 19th century by Bishop Yovhannes Surenian.¹⁴⁷

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF STEP'ANNOS DASHTETSI TO CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM DISPUTATION

Another 17-18th century intellectual, polemist and poet, whose writings have direct bearing on our discussion is Step'annos Basilios Shirup'alakian, better known as Step'annos Dashtetsi (1650?-1725?).¹⁴⁸ Step'annos Dashtetsi was a contemporary of Catholicos Aghesandr I Jughayetsi (1706-1714) and Yovhannes Mrk'uz. In the introduction of his work called 'Brief offering for disputation against the heretical nation'¹⁴⁹ which is a letter addressed to Yovahannes Mrk'uz, he gives some biographical information about himself. He mentions that he had received his education at the Theological Seminary of the All Saviour's

146 Tēr S Awetisian, *Catalogue of Armenian manuscripts in the New Julfa All Saviour's Monastery*, Vienna 1970, vol. I, pp. 774-775.

147 Tēr S Awetisian, *Catalogue*, pp. 803-03, 773-74.

148 Simon Simonian, *Նորայայտ տաղասաց մըր Ստեփանոս Դաշտեցի: Ուսումնասիրություն եւ տարկեր*, Siwan Press, Beirut, 1981; R Abrahamyan, «Ստեփանոս Դաշտեցի», *Teghekgagir* 12 (1956), 101-117; H Gh Mirzoyan, «Ստեփանոս Դաշտեցու <Զրույց-բանավեճերի> պատմամշակութային արժեքը», *BEH* 3 (1995), 106-119.

149 «Համառոտ ընձեռնուժն փիճաբանութեան ընդդէմ հեճուածողաց ազգի մերոյ ի մանկութենէ վարժեալ եւ դաստիարկեալ ի դպրատանն ի ճեմարանին փիլիսոփայութեան եւ աստուծաբանութեան Ամենափրկչի վանացդ Նորոյ Ջուղայի եւ աշակերտեալ Ստեփանոսի Խաշաշորդոյ վարդապետողի վանացդ», Mat. MS. no. 781, fl. 29a.

Monastery, and was a pupil of Step'annos Jughayetsi, specialising in philosophy and theology. By profession he had been a merchant. In manuscripts preserved in the Institute of Manuscripts (MS 8746) and St James' Monastery Jerusalem (MS. 346) there is a letter he wrote to Alek'sandr Jughayetsi, in which he informs us that being a merchant he is constantly (վաճառականութեան սղագրու) on the move. In his work called *Debates* (*Հակադասումներ*) under the section 'The problem of Truth' («Խնդիր ճշմարտութեան») in a very passionate way he defends the policy practised by the Tuscan Duke of Livorno who gave free access to his kingdom of merchants from all nations. In many of his correspondences and colophons he dwells on his experiences as a merchant in India, Persia, Turkey, Greece, Italy, which have made him more 'circumspect and patient while debating with representatives of other faiths on religious matters'. In a letter to Yovhannes Mrk'uz he gives a colourful description of his travels. In his discussion with Armenian clergy he emphasises that being a merchant by profession, having travelled the world over, and being in touch with people of different practices, faiths and tongues, debating on all sorts of questions and issues, whenever called to defend the merits of the Christian faith he was never shy of labouring for the cause of the truth in word and speech throughout the world, not only among Christians but also among foreign nations be they Persians, Arabs, or Indians.¹⁵⁰ In MS. 346 kept in St James's Library and another MS. 8111 in the Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, copied in Rome in 1725, folios 187-255 contain the texts of seven discussion-debates, which he had conducted with Persian Muslim merchants, intellectuals, poets, among them Armenians who had converted to Islam. The themes of the dialogues were philosophical, religious, ethical and aesthetical, many of which are relevant even today. The dialogues of Dashtetsi are important not only for the themes they raise and answers provided but are first-hand reflections on the experiences of the various diaspora communities in 17-18th century Iran. The dialogues expose the important role the merchant class played not only in establishing links between peoples of different countries in the fields of economy, politics, science, and culture but also of religion, faith, doctrine and practice. To this end an exceptional role was played by merchant houses and caravansaries,

150 Step'annos Dashtetsi, *Մտախոս փշրանագ*, Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, MS. no. 8111, fl. 215b.

which by the definition of the author were 'neutral belts' (*զեղոք գոտիներ*) where every individual found himself incomparably freer than in his homeland. The theme of most of the dialogues was the interrelationship of Christianity and Islam, their sacraments and practices, ethical and aesthetical principles. From this perspective the most significant is the first disputation which is entitled 'My objections and answers to Persians in debates among renowned philosophers whose names are too long to record [conducted] in the year of the Lord 1707 in the Indian city called Badar Surat'.¹⁵¹ 'Sensing from the very first question and answer that continuing the argument could lead to unexpected consequences, Dashtetsi says that he requested the disputants 'either not to oppose us ... or threaten us or accuse us for being evil when we have committed no wrong against their faith. For the purpose of our dialogues is nothing more, but to know the most relevant, for neither you can betray the belief you have chosen and devoted yourself to with all your heart, nor neither can I accept and follow your faith absolving myself from the love of our saviour Christ.' (p. 189) At the dawn of the 18th century in a 'neutral' land a Christian and a Muslim could debate and seek elucidation for the sake of 'enlightenment' (*զնորագրոյնս*) without condemnation—by association or seeking to undermine one's convictions by scurrilous kinds of polemic, at a time when such dialogues would be near impossible in Iran where the criticism of Islam was punishable by death, although all the evidence suggests that he had conducted such dialogues in Iran. Of these the most significant is the 6th debate (pp. 231-38) which took place in Isfahan 'in the *kehanate* of Mirzaquarter with a famous merchant'.¹⁵² The 'famous merchant of Mirzaquarter' was his 'master' (*սոլսն*) and his opponents defending the merits of Islam were not Persians but Islamised Armenians, among them a former cleric named Yovhannes *vardapet* Tchulfayetsi (of Julfa). It was not uncommon that during this period the Persians conducted their Islamisation through those Christians who had converted to Islam. According to the historian

151 «Առարկութիւնք ի պարսից ոմանց եւ պատասխանատութիւնք ի մենջ ի պատահիլն ի բազում տեղիս, մանաւանդ ի թվիս Փրկչին հազար եօթն հարիւր եւ եօթին, յորժամ էաք ի Բանդար Սուրաթ անուանեալ քաղաքում ի Հնդիկս ընդ ոմանս փիլիսոփայս անուանիս, զորոց անուանքն երկարութիւն? է ստորագրիլ» (pp. 187-202).

152 «ի խանութիւն Միրզաթաղի ումեմն մեծ վաճառականի մեր ... Հովհան Չուլֆայեցին ... որոյ անունն ըստ պարսկական դենին կոչիւր Շեխումին եւ կամ Մահմատ ալի Բէկ», see Khatchatur Jughayetsi, *History of the Persians*, p. 168.

Khatchatur Jughayetsi in the debates Yovhannes Mrk'uz had with Shah Sulaiman and Shah Husain, the above mentioned cleric is also in attendance under the name Shekhumi or Mahmat Ali Bek (Շեխումի կամ Մահմատ Ալի Բեկ) 'who prostrated before the king' before being invited to speak.¹⁵³ The 5th debate is entitled 'Question on the use of wine' (« Հարցումն ինչ վասն զինոյն »):

Among us we often reflect on the question that Christ also drunk wine. He also commanded you to drink wine whether indiscreet or not? And when we responded that not only Christ drunk wine, but also Abraham, Moses, Solomon and all the other prophets and gave others to drink as well as we read in the books of the Testaments, which the Jews call *T'ovrat*. We know also that our Lord Christ at the wedding in Cana Galilee when the wine diminished ordered the governor of the feast to fill the vessels with water and the steward found that the water had turned into wine which was much better than that they had been were drinking, as reported by the holy Gospels. Therefore, when the wine was found it should have been obligatory to immediately change it back to water and on reflection not to turn the water into wine. After hearing all this they disagreed and sought to undermine the entire writings of the Bible, that is the Old and New Testaments by asserting that Bible account is hearsay. After hearing this it was our turn to point out by reasoning that wine is prepared from grape vines and is clean and more honourable than other drinks for the benefit of man if drunk in moderation. If wine is consumed by all nations and grapes are used to prepare many kinds of foods and, if this is true, therefore wine by its nature is holy and clean. So it is not the wine that is unclean but the decadent consumer. After listing the various elements from nature which human beings consume the debate concludes: 'Therefore, our ancestors and Christ recommend moderation and condemn

153 H Gh Mirzoyan, 'The historical-cultural value of Step'annos Dashtetsi's dialogue-debates', *BEH* 87, 3 (1995), pp. 109-111.

covetousness of wine and everything else.' The subject of the next debate was the verse from the Gospel of Matthew Chapter 23: v. 33.

'You serpents, you generation of vipers how can you escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes' (Matt. 23: 33), therefore why do you not revere the command of your Gospel and the prophets which he vowed to send and so he sent our prophet ...

We began our response with a question. You who were at one time a *vardapet* of the Armenian Church erudite in poetry and a student of the school of New Julfa, in saying 'I will send you a prophet', you assume the plural in place of the singular name. The Islamised [*vardapet*] replied, your Christ, whom you worship in place of God. In that case our Christ which you say, we worship in place of God, is the commandant and sender of your supposed prophet, is Christ and is the fulfiller. Therefore, according to your interpretation no insane man will permit the sent to serve the sender, because no one who is sent can be more reverential than he who sent him. I expanded this conclusion with several supporting ideas which to enumerate here will be too tedious'.¹⁵⁴

The last of Step'annos Dashtetsi's debate-conversation takes place in 1707 in the Indian city of Bandar Surat.¹⁵⁵ There are a

154 H Gh Mirzoyan, «Ստեփանոս Դաշտեցու “Զրույց բանավեճերի պատմամշակութային արժեքը”» («The historical-cultural significance of Step'annos Dashtetsi's debates and conversations»), *BEH* no. 3 (1995).

155 «Առարկությունք ի Պարսից ոմանց եւ պատասխանատրությունք ի մէջ ի պատահիլն մեր ի բազում տեղիս, մանաւանդ ի թիվս փրկչին Հազար էօթն հարիւր եւ եօթին, յորժամ էաք ի Բանդար Սուրաթ անուանեալ քաղաքում ի Հնդիկս ընդ ոմանս փիլիսոփայց անուանիս զորոց անուանք երկարություն է ստորագրել» («Conversation among some Persians and answers on several occasions particularly in the year of the Lord 1707 when I was in the city called Bandar Surat among Indians some of whom were philosophers whose names because of being too long I will not enlist»); see H Gh Mirzoyan, «Ստեփանոս Դաշտեցու առաջին Զրույց-Բանավեճը» («Step'annos Dashtetsi's first Dialogue-Debate»), *BEH* 3 (1997), 89-100.

total of four debates. Here I will just list the debates under the headings of the Gospel quotations which will I hope give an idea of their contents.

For every individual from earliest times the most important thing has been his individuality, which is his self-preservation

1. 'And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell' and 'Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 10: 28 and 5: 10) and finally 'Rejoice and be exceedingly glad; for great is your reward in heaven' (5: 12).

Secondly, the most sought thing for humankind has been the food, drink and clothing for the protection and preservation of his self-identity.

2. 'And seek not you what you shall eat, or what you shall drink, neither be you of doubtful mind', 'Consider the ravens; for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn and God feedeth them' (Luke 12: 29 and 24); and 'Take therefore no thought for the morrow as to what you shall eat or what you shall wear', 'Let not up for yourselves treasures upon earth'; and in another place 'the soul is greater than food' (Matt 6.34), and finally as for clothing Luke 12: 27 commands 'Consider the lilies how they grow; they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these ... the grass which is today in the field, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, how much more God will clothe you of little faith.' (Luke 12: 28)

Every man seeks to have a partner in life in the form of a union with a woman.

3. 'If any man come to me and hate his wife or son ... and his own life he cannot be my disciple' (Luke 14: 26) and 'Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart' (Matt. 5: 27). Each debate ends with the words: 'This is what your

prophet says and this is what our Christ says' («Ահա՛ և այս ևս մարգարէինն ձերոյ և այն՝ Քրիստոսինն մերոյ»).

The fourth thing that man seeks and pursues is time and effort to attain gold, silver and money and knows that many sections of humanity perished in their drive to accumulate treasures.

4. 'And when you go preaching, heal their sick cleanse the lepers, cast out devils, freely you have received, freely give, do not receive either gold or silver, or brass and in your belt one scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither two shoes; one shoe and one staff' (Matt. 5: 27) and 'And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek, offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak do not prevent him from taking your shirt. Give to every man that asketh of thee...' (Luke 6: 29-30).¹⁵⁶ Each debate or conversation ends with the words 'And here is what your prophet says and this is what our Christ says' («Ահա՛ և այն ևս մարգարէինն ձերոյ և այն՝ Քրիստոսինն մերոյ»).

His most widely read and copied works listed briefly by Simon Simonian and Sukias Somal¹⁵⁷ are :

1) *Makhabh P'sbranats* (Մախաղ Փշրանաց) written in 1700 in which he comments on the Nicean Creed. Under this title, 'Pocket of Reminders', the author has assembled all his works.¹⁵⁸

2) *The Problem of Truthfulness* (Խնդիր Ուղղութեան). This is an account of the disagreement he had with Catholicos Aghek'sandr I Jughyetsi's (1706-1724) over the latter's book *Girk' Atenakan* (Գիրք Ատենական որ սաի Վիճարանական) (New Julfa 1687) in which the author in the most forceful way attacks the Chalcedonian

156 H Gh Mirzoyan, «Ստիանու Դաշտեցու առաջին Զրույց-բանավեճը», 89-100.

157 Somal Sukias, *Quadro della storia litteraria di Armenia*, Venice, 1829, pp. 171-2.

158 The Mkhitarist library in Vienna has three manuscript copies of this work—MS. no. 20 (copied in 1744); MS. no. 251 (copied in 1782); MS. no. 284 (copied in 1774). This work contains all the three works of the author.

positions of the Catholics and in particular the work of Clemens Galanus.¹⁵⁹

3) ‘Bellclapper of Truth’ (« Կոչնակ ճշմարտութեան »). A manuscript copy in the Bodleian Library is described as ‘A Romanising Polemic’ (18th cent.) by Step’annos Basil Shir-P’alankian, surnamed Dashtetsi’, being a refutation of Yovhannes *vardapet* called Mrk’uz’s, book entitled *Book of the True Faith and Profession of the Armenian Church, and of Controversy against the Dyophysites*’ (Գիրք Համառոտ վասն իսկապէս եվ ճշմարիտ հաւատոյ) by the archbishop of Julfa published in Julfa in 1688 (reprinted in Constantinople twice in 1713). The text of Mrk’uz is reproduced, section by section on the left hand of the page and his refutation of it on the right pages of the volume. After discussing the Christological aspects of the two natures Dashtetsi then proceeds, from a Catholic perspective, to deal with the questions of the unmixed chalice, the supremacy of the Pope, the Communion of Latins under one kind, and the doctrine of Purgatory.

4) The second part of the manuscript is ‘An Appeal’ (« Հրաւիրակ կոչումն »), a call to the illustrious *vardapets* and bishops of the Armenian Church to lay aside the ‘misleading’ publications by Grigor Tat’ewatsi, Vardan *Vanakan*, Step’annos Siwnetsi, Michael the Syrian and Gevorg Skevratsi. He concludes by giving ‘the true history of the Council of Chalcedon’, which according to him Movses Khorenatsi had written, but malicious authors destroyed (f. 125b). He ends his treatise with ‘A faithful’ translation of the Tome of Leo with commentary (« Առ ի կատարեալապէս ճանանչել զուղղափառութեան հաւատս բաւական էր »).¹⁶⁰

159 The only copy of this work is contained in MS. 284 in the Vienna collection.

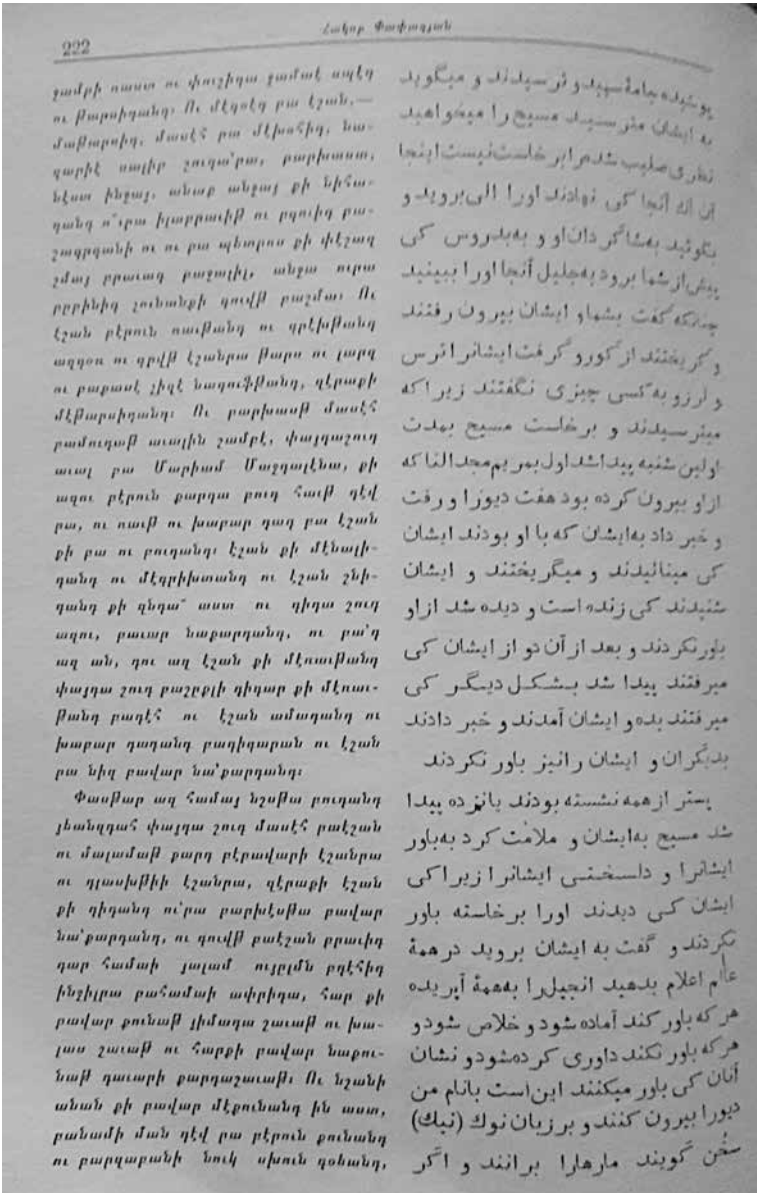
160 Baronian and Conybeare, *Catalogue of the Armenian manuscripts*, MS. Arm. e.22, pp. 223-4; Mat. MS. nos. 673, 781, 6111, 8746, 9049, 9689.

THE TRANSLATION OF THE GOSPELS INTO PERSIAN IN ARMENIAN
LETTERS: TOOLS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST APOSTASY

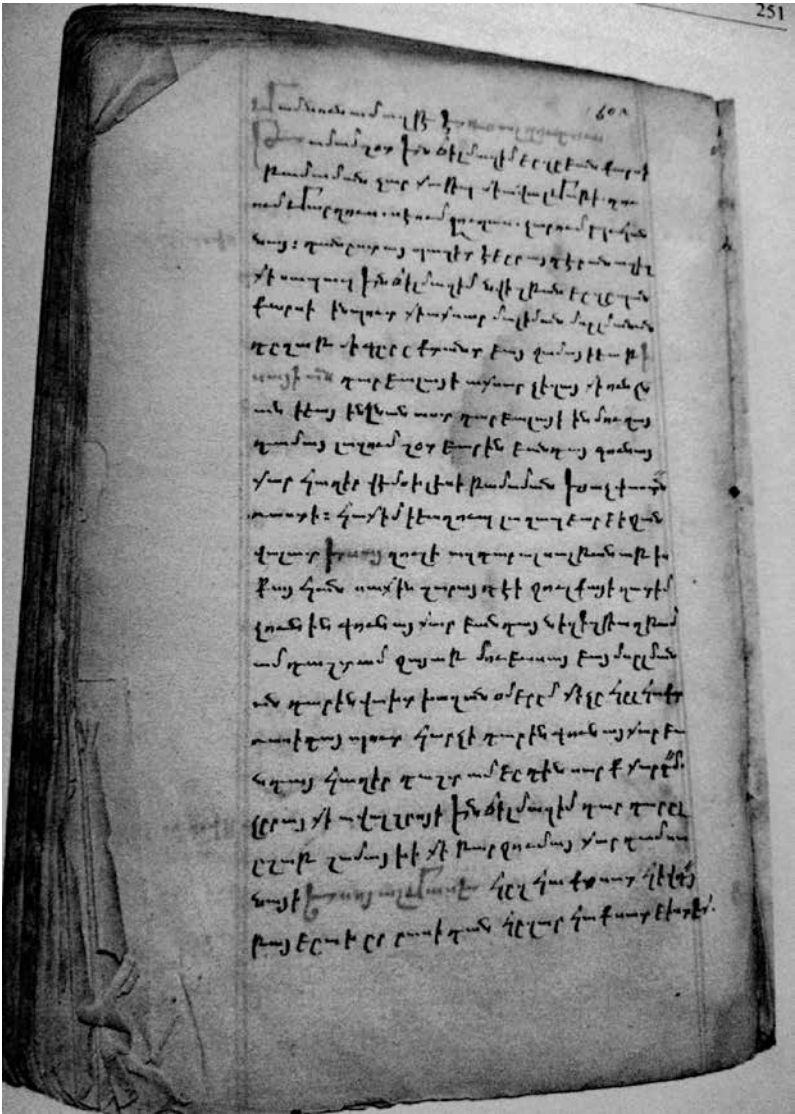
H P'ap'azyan's study on foreign literature in Armenian characters (Latin, Turkish, Kipchak, Polish, Kurdish) published from Mat. MS. No.7117 the text of the Armenian 'Lords Prayer' (fl. 145a) and 'Holy God' (fl. 144a/b) («Սուրբ Աստուած») and from MS. No. 184 extracts on the Resurrection of Christ from the Gospel of St Matthew (fl. 288a) and St Mark (fl. 296) in Persian in Armenian letters.¹⁶¹ In the Bible MS. no. 184 (dated 1401) the scribe Yohan has inserted in the margins (of fols 288a and 296a) the versions of the narratives on the Resurrection of Christ from St Mark's and St Matthew's Gospels. The author Mesrop T'aghiadyan in an article informs us that Hovhannes Jughayets'i (*Mrkuz*) had translated into Persian in Armenian letters 'The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, the fourteen letters of the Apostle Paul, the Catholic Epistles and the Revelation of John into Persian and Arabic. This translation in Armenian letters Ter Yovsep' Step'anian donated to the English Bishop's College in Calcutta.'¹⁶² This citation is proof that the translation of the Gospels into Persian and into Persian in Armenian letters was an important instrument in the conflict to defend the independence and national character of the Armenian Church and combat the proselytization by the Catholic missions on the one hand and the assimilation by the Muslims on the other. The preferences attached to the translations give honest elaboration on their purpose. The Armenian alphabet was used by the Armenians as a basic script for teaching Persian. This was conditioned by the difficulty of the Arabic script. The Armenian population of Iran were largely Persian-speaking and the children were not obliged to learn the Arabic script needed to read the Qur'an. This view is reinforced by the availability of bilingual Turkish and Persian dictionaries written in Armenian characters. Such examples are *Tuhfe-i Shaidi*, a bilingual

161 Hakob P'ap'azyan, «Մերոպատան այլալեզու գրականության մասին» ('Foreign language literature in Armenian characters'), *Հոդվածներ* (Collected Articles), Erevan, 2020, vol. I, 245-60; reprinted from *BM 7* (1984), 209-24; H A Step'anyan (comp.), *Հայաստան թուրքերեն գրքերի մասին նագիտություն 1727-1968* (Bibliography of Turkish books in Armenian letters 1727-1968), Erevan, 1985. 1,150 titles printed in 32 cities in 135 printing houses.

162 *Azgasar Monthly*, no. 12 (1845), p. 95; Robert Gulbenkian, *The translation of the Four Gospels into Persian*, Immensee, 1981, p. 69.

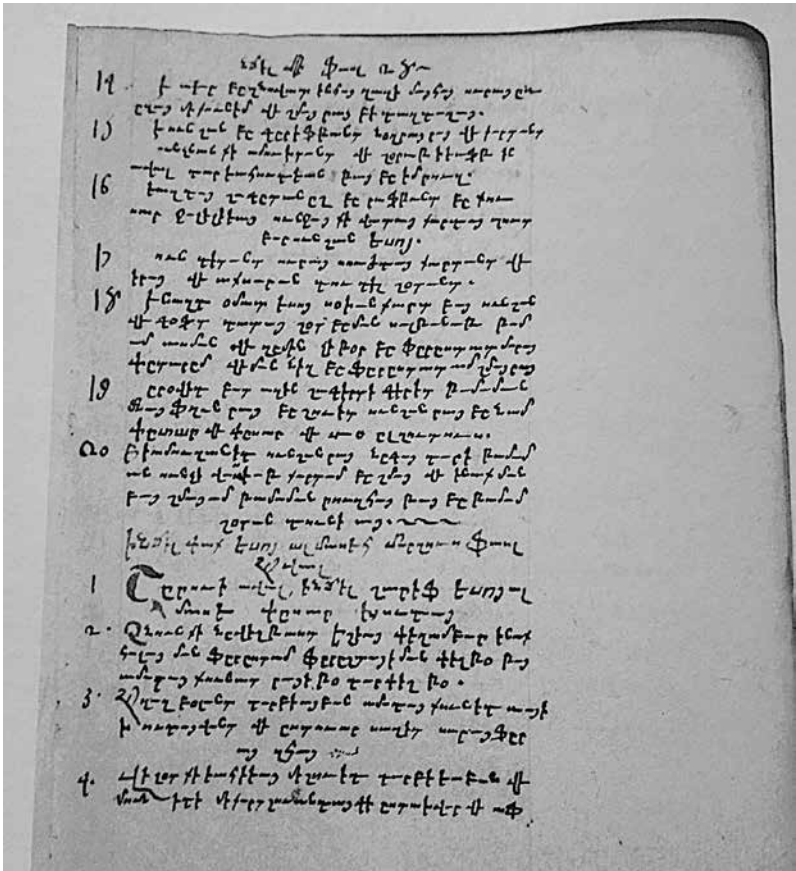


Matenadaran MS. 184, fl. 296a. Persian translation of *St Mark's* narrative of the Lord's Resurrection in Armenian letters: «Չուն զուղաշո շամբէ, Մարիամ Մաղդալէա ...».



Matenadaran MS. No. 8492, fl. 236b. Shamakhi-Tiflis (1717-1721), scribe and translator Hak'im Eaghup Barijan (Hakob vardapet), colophon of the scribe «Մամսունան ազթէ է յօսւղուտուս Թամսան շօս Ինճիլ».^a

^a Ibid.



Matenadaran MS. No. 3044, fl. 54a, Gandzak (AD 1780), scribe Mik'ayel Astapatetsi. The beginning of St Mark's Gospel, «Ինձիլ փար Եսոյ Մասեհ Մարդու: Ֆասլ Ավլալ Շրրուի ավլալ ինձիլ շարիֆ Եսոյ ալ Մասե փըսար խոլդայ».^b

^b Hasmik Ts Kirakosyan, 'The colophons of the two Persian manuscripts in Armenian letters (Matenadaran 3044, and 8492)', *Ejmiadsin* 5 (2018), 47-62 (in Armenian); idem, 'The scribal rules of the Armenian script Persian-Gospel manuscripts in the Matenadaran (Mat. 8492 and 3044)', *Banber Matenadaran* 26 (2018), 111-34 (in Armenian); idem, 'On the principles of transcription of Armenian script Persian Gospels (XVIII century)', *International Conference. Linguistic and Literary Studies on the Caucasus, 24-25 May, 2018*, University of Verona, Italy (in English); idem, 'The Armeno-Persian codices (18th century) of the Matenadaran in the context of circulating Christian knowledge', *Persian as a Lingua Franca in the Ottoman Empire, 12-13 July 2019*, Hamburg University (in English).

Persian-Ottoman Turkish dictionary in verse in Armenian letters (Mat. MS. 10586) written in 1721 by priest Ovannes, and a second MS. 3658 in the collection of St James's Monastery in Jerusalem written in 1696 by the scribe Ovannes. These bilinguals were also in demand with the Armenian youth who were receiving their education in Catholic run institutions in Europe .

The Gospels in Persian in Armenian letters were more accessible, for the Persian language was preferred. The inscription of the scribe Yovhannes Ibn Eyvaz, an Armenian from Tabriz, in manuscript (Mat. 3044, fl. 94), testifies 'The entire Christian community has the Holy Gospel, which is read to them in its own language, but because of daily hustle they know the Persian language better than their own language, which they hear but do not understand. It was no secret that the members of the Christian community spoke Persian far better and it was widely understood.'¹⁶³ The Persian manuscripts of the Gospels written in Armenian letters were ways of preserving and strengthening the Armenian community's separate identity from that of the other denominations. Bearing in mind the proselytising propaganda methods of the missionaries and the tactics of Islamization bearing upon the community simultaneously, it was not a coincidence when on the order of Shah Sultan Husain (1694-1722) in 1703, the Gospel was translated into Persian using the Arabic script in order to increase the knowledge of the Shi'i clerics. Thus the Armenian script used for the Gospels in Persian was also symbolic, since it was explicitly a differentiating factor from the Gospel written in Arabic script. Another motive for creating the Armeno-Persian Gospels was its use in the context of the dialogues and debates among the various faiths. The availability of the Gospels in Persian in Arabic script was powerful ammunition against the Armenian Church by the Catholics and Shi'i clergy. The former created schism within the Armenian Christian community, and the latter led to the assimilation and annihilation of the Armenian community.

163 « Քրիստոնյա ողջ համայնքը սուրբ Ավետարանն ունի, որ իր լեզվով իր համար ընթերցվում է, սակայն առօրյա զբաղվածության պատճառով նրանք պարսկերեն ավելի լավ գիտեն իրենց իսկական լեզվից, որը նրանք հաճախ լսում, սակայն չեն հասկանում ... Չորս ավետարանները պարսկերեն գրեցի և այս նախաբանը կազմեցի», Mat. MS. 3044, fl. 19b.

Hasmik Y Kirakosyan has published recently the Persian language Gospels in Armenian script available in the Matenadaran collection.¹⁶⁴ The scribes of both manuscripts Mss nos 3044 and 8492 have left colophons in Persian in Armenian letters. Here I will provide an English version of both memorials (*Հիշատակարաններ*) which in the most lucid fashion set out the reason why these bilingual Gospels were needed.

The scribe of the manuscript Mat. 8492, copied in Shamakh-Tiflis in 1717-1721, writes:

Glory to the Holy Spirit

Completed the translation of the Gospels into Persian. First Matthew, second Mark, third Luke and fourth John. Know dear brothers the reason for translating the Gospels into Persian is that many learned Muslim intellectuals conduct debates on several issues with the Christian community arguing that it should be so and not that. The need to add this inscription to the Preface was on the request of a faithful worshiper of the Cross, the faithful Hak'im Yaghubis, nicknamed Barbijan, son of Isaghuli Dar-i Saltanat [Hakob *vardapet*] (the royal title of Isfahan until the first half of the 19th century) from Isfahan a resident of Old Julfa. Since I, this sinful servant, also had a great wish to engage in debate with Muslims during the sunset of my life (lit 'in the autumn of my life') when I had reached the age of forty-seven, sold all that this sinful humble servant had and began translating the Gospels in Shamakh [Tiflis] in the Christian year 1717 and completed in 1721, the day when the sun completed the beginning of spring in the Tiflis vilayet, the residence seat of the governors.¹⁶⁵

The scribe of the manuscript Mat. MS. 3044 fl. 141a informs us:

164 Hasmik Ts Kirakosyan, *Մատենադարանի Հայաստան Պարսկերեն Ավետարանի ձեռագրերը: Քննական ուսումնասիրություն* (The manuscripts of Armeno-Persian Gospel of the Matenadaran), Erevan, 2020.

165 Kirakosyan, *Մատենադարանի Հայաստան Պարսկերեն*, pp. 22-23.

Thanks to the Holy Spirit. Completed the translation of all the Four Evangelists Gospels: first Matthew, second Mark, third Luke, fourth John. Know my dear brothers, the reason for me writing the Gospels in Persian is that learned Muslims debate on many questions with Christians, that it is not so and should be this. The obligation to add this Preface was requested by a true worshipper of the cross (*խաչապաշտներին*), devoted Mik'ayel the priest son of Margar, from the city of Naqsh-i Jahan.¹⁶⁶ In the Christian year 1780, the other date being 1228 in the month of Muharram.¹⁶⁷

CONCLUSION

During the reign of Nadir Shah (1736-1747) one of the distinctive features of his religious policy was to show compassion and tolerance towards the Christian minority and one of the most explicit expressions was his wish to have the fundamental sacred books of the Christians and the Jews translated into Persian, in order to encourage public discourse with the representatives of the different religious communities and not to hinder the preaching of foreign missionaries. The invitation to Nadir Shah of Catholicos Abraham Kretatsi III (1734-1737) to Ejmiadsin was also meant to gain better knowledge of Christianity: 'He sat [i. e. the king] in front of the main altar and ordered us to pray and sing chants. And we began the Evening Office which was the exact occasion. After the completion of the prayers and chanting the khan began blessing in Turkish our patriarch for he had fluid and erudite grasp of Turkish. After hearing this, the shah was visibly happy and relaxed, rose from his throne, and kissed the Holy Gospel which the patriarch held in his hands.'¹⁶⁸ During the first audience,

166 'Adornment/Image of the world' is the name of the main square in Isfahan.

167 Hasmik Ts. Kirakosyan, *Մատենադարանի հայտնաբերված Պարսկերեն Ավետարանի ձևապահիր*, p. 22-23. Reproduces plates 1. Beginning of St Matthew's Gospel (MS. No. 3044, fl. 11); 2. The beginning of St Luke's Gospel (Mat. MS. 8492, fl. 121a).

168 Abraham Kat'oghikos Kretatsi, *Պատմաբրույթիւն անցիցն իւրոյ եւ Նասր-Շահին Պարսից* (The Chronicle of Abraham of Crete), Vagharshapat, 1870, chapter 13, pp.12-13; George A Bournoutian, *The Chronicle of Abraham of Crete*, annotated

the shah ‘granted me a document confirming me as Patriarch and three other official decrees.’ The first dealt with the property of those whom Shah [‘Abbas I] had driven out from their lands ... they had left [their property] in the care of Holy Ejmiadsin ... the Ottomans, learning this, had seized these properties so that the owners could not reclaim them. These were restored to Ejmiadsin. Second [decree] stated that those [Armenians] who had converted to Islam would lose their inheritance. The third—no one could come to the monastery, without the Shah’s permission, or oppress its inhabitants.¹⁶⁹ The shah was so pleased that after the conclusion of the prayers he sent through his private secretary [*mirza*] 300 florins as alms and departed. In 1740 on the instructions of Nadir Shah the Gospels were translated into Persian with the participation of Armenian Orthodox and Catholic priests. We find evidence of this in Yartut’iwn Tēr Yovhaneants’ ‘History of New Julfa called Isfahan’. ‘In the year of Lord 1740 he commanded that the Gospels be translated into Persian and the execution of that command was undertaken by the Arab Mirzay Meyt’oy who was a wise man and he called upon the bishops and priests of the Armenians and the friars of the Franks in Isfahan.’¹⁷⁰ In the library of the All Saviour’s Monastery several leaves of the 1740 translation of the Gospels are preserved ‘the letters of which are Armenian but the words or sayings are in accordance to the Persian language.’ When the court historian of the King Mirza Mahdi, accompanied by four educated Jews, eight Christian and four Muslims presents the translation to the shah, the latter gives mocking interpretations to the readings from the Gospel but also insults and mocks Muhammad and Imam Ali and thinks of creating a new religion with the admixture of the two religions.¹⁷¹ ‘... he openly declared to the world that he hearkened to create a new

translation from the critical text with introduction and commentary, Los Angeles, 1999, Chapter XI, 30-34.

In the practice of the Armenian Church every rite ends with the ‘Blessing of the Dismissal’, when the officiating clergy turns to the congregation holding the Gospel-Book inviting them to approach and kiss the Gospel saying ‘May the Lord grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfil all thy counsel.’ (Ps. 20: 4)

169 Bournoutian, *Chronicle*, p. 32; M Ōrmanian, *Azgapatum*, vol. II, Part 3, pp. 2888-90; Vasili Bratisheva, *Izvestie o proizshedsikh mezhdū Shakhom Nadirom ... 1741 to 1742*, St Petersburg, 1763, Armenian translation by Artak Maghalyan, Erevan, 2009.

170 Yovhaneants Tēr Yartut’iwn, *Patmut’iwn*, vol. I, p. 254.

171 R Gulbenkian, *The translation of the Four Gospels into Persian*, pp. 70-73.

religion for if it is the case that the Lord wishes to grant me a life in which I need to choose between these two religions I will create a new more benevolent faith by which whole humanity can conduct itself.¹⁷² The upper classes in Safavid Iran were interested in learning about the structure of the Christian faith by encouraging Jesuit missionary activity and conducting debates with the Armenian Church, with the sole purpose of affirming the superiority of Islam to advance the cause of Muhammadanism.

In this study my aim has been to present the thesis that beginning from the 17th century there emerged a new intellectual revival in one of the most dynamic and vibrant Armenian diaspora created by Shah 'Abbas in 1604. The reaction of the Armenian Church in New Julfa acting on behalf of the entire Armenian Church put up a vigorous campaign against the Catholic organisations to convert Armenians to Catholicism and the Shi'i clergy's effort to implement their policy of assimilation. The community brought forth in the history of Armenian culture a phenomenon not witnessed in previous periods—the creation of a bilingual Armenian-Latin/Armenian-Persian/Armenian-Turkish doctrinal, philosophical, theological rich literature.

Robert Thomson concludes his article on 'Muhammad and Islam in Armenian tradition' with the comment 'it is perhaps strange that the Armenians did not develop a more precise and coherent understanding of the religion of their enemies or engage in dialogue with them as did the Byzantine Greeks and the Syriac speaking Christians.'¹⁷³ This assessment is not supported by the available literary evidence set out above. The Armenians did not consider Islam 'their enemies'. In defence of their national identity they confronted both Latinisation and Islamisation, remaining steadfast to the most eminent representatives of the Armenian ecumenical tradition, namely of Nerses Shnorhali (1102-1173) and Nerses Lambronatsi (1152/53-1198). Step'annos Dashtetsi in a letter to Yovhannes Mrk'uz writes: 'the Armenian nation has the taste of love and unity for inter-ecclesial relations and inter-confessional

172 «... զի կամեր զնոր տրոն իմն հաւատոյ հնարել .Որպէս և հայտնապէս ի լու ամենեցուն ասեր. եթէ Տէր կամեսցի շնորհել ինձ զկեանս յերկոցունց օրինացս այսոցիկ զբարեգոյն կրօնն մի յորինեցից որ լաւագոյն քան զայլ ամենայն կրօնս լիցի հաւատոց, որովք յառաջն վարեցան զմարդիկք յաշխարհի». See Yovnaneants T'ēr Yarut'iwñ, *Patmut'ivñ*, vol. I, p. 255.

173 Robert W Thomson, 'Muhammad and the origin of Islam in Armenian literary tradition', p. 858.

debates, be it with the Greeks, Georgians, Russians, Latins, Ethiopians and maybe Dutch, Swedes, and Danes, although these are peoples outside the fold of the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, for the love and unity amongst these peoples, I have the vision to inherit glory and joy now and in the life after.¹⁷⁴

Abbreviations

BM—*Banber Matenadaran: Annual of the Institute of Ancient Manuscripts*
(Matenadaran)

CSCO—*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*

HTR—*Harvard Theological Review*

J ECS—*The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*

JESHQ—*Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*

Mat.—*Matenadaran: Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, Erevan*

MPD—*Matenadaran Persian Documents*

REA—*Revue des Études Arméniennes*

TMW—*The Muslim World*

Tegbekagir—*Armenian Academy of Social Sciences*

174 P Muradyan, *Կովկասյան Մշակութային աշխարհը և Հայաստանը* (The cultural scene in the Caucasus and Armenia), Armenian Academy of Sciences, Erevan, 2008, p. 334.

REFLECTION ON MODERN HISTORY AND THE CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE MODERN MIDDLE EAST

Anthony O'Mahony

Christian presence across the Middle East (West Asia) region is facing a variety of significant challenges which are increasingly considered as existential.¹ In terms of history the current situation might be considered similar to that faced by Eastern Christianity as a consequence of the geopolitical changes brought about in the late period of Ottoman rule during the First World War,² including the Armenian Genocide,³ the Syriac Sayfo,⁴ and the displacement of the entire Eastern Orthodox population during the early 1920s with the establishment of the modern states of Greece and Turkey.⁵ Since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the wider geopolitical and ecclesial situation has significantly impacted upon Eastern Christianity, including the Bolshevik Revolution and the near destruction of the Russian Orthodox Church which virtually ended its historic relations with the Eastern Churches in the Middle East until after the Second World War.⁶ In the aftermath of these traumatic events, determined efforts were made by the Christian communities in the

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- 1 Tigrane Yégavian, 'Les chrétiens d'Orient ont-ils encore un avenir?', *Études* (Paris), no. 6, 2022, 67-78. The 'bench-mark' for the current concern for the future of the Middle East is the wide-ranging study published nearly three decades ago Jean-Pierre Valognes, *Vie et mort des chrétiens d'Orient des origines à nos jours*, Fayard, Paris, 1994.
 - 2 Benny Morris and Dror Ze'evi, *The Thirty-Year Genocide: Turkey's Destruction of Its Christian Minorities, 1894-1924*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2019.
 - 3 Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History*, I B Tauris, London, 2011.
 - 4 David Gaunt, Naures Atto, and Soner O Barthoma (eds), *LET THEM NOT RETURN: Sayfo—The Genocide Against the Assyrian, Syriac, and Chaldean Christians in the Ottoman Empire*, Berghahn, London, 2017.
 - 5 Nikodemos Anagnostopoulos, *Orthodoxy and Islam: Theology and Muslim—Christian Relations in Modern Greece and Turkey*, Routledge, London, 2017.
 - 6 L Leustean (ed.), *Eastern Christianity and politics in the twenty-first century*, Routledge, London, 2017.

region to rebuild the Eastern Orthodox, Armenian and Syriac and the Eastern Catholic Churches in the context of new nation-states and mandatory governance in the interwar Middle East. The Second World War was followed by the imposition of Communist rule in the Eastern European states and the Cold War was felt by all Eastern Christians in the Middle East.⁷ Regional conflict across the Middle East also impacted all Christians, from the Arab-Israeli conflict in the post-war era to conflict in Iraq and Syria. The effects of war have challenged Christianity in the Middle East to the point that many are concerned for its survival. This has included the forced displacement leading to emigration of Christians from across the entire region. It is critical to understand the dynamics of Christian emigration from the Middle East, the first phase of which began in the latter part of the 19th century and continued until the First World War. During that period, thousands of indigenous Christians left the Ottoman Empire in search of economic opportunities. After the Second World War, socio-economic factors continued to influence the emigration of Christians and to a lesser extent, of non-Christians. In the post-independence period, from the late 1940s to the present time, Christian emigration continued to rise, primarily due to economic and societal insecurity, including political instability and military conflicts: the 1948 Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990), the Islamic revolution in Iran, and the series of wars in the Persian Gulf—the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1989), the First Gulf War (1990–1991), and the US-led invasion of Iraq, which began in 2003. To this should be added the Russian Federation’s invasion of the Ukraine in February 2022 which has an effect on the Eastern Christian Churches in the Middle East, sharpening relations between the Patriarchates of Constantinople and Moscow and allowing for an increasing influence by non-Christian states in the region on ecclesial affairs in a changing geopolitical situation.⁸ Added to this is the rise of radical currents including forms of ‘religious nationalism’ which offer no account of

7 Leustean, *Eastern Christianity* ...; Anderson Kjartan, ‘Pilgrims, Property and Politics: The Russian Orthodox Church in Jerusalem’, in Anthony O’Mahony (ed.), *Eastern Christianity: Studies in Modern History, Religion and Politics*, Melisende, London, 2004, 388–430.

8 ‘ASIA/IRAQ—The alarm of Chaldean Patriarch Sako: world crisis and war in Ukraine aggravate the “alarming” exodus of Christians from the Middle East 23 August 2022’, <<http://www.fides.org/en/news/72688>> [accessed 10/10/22].

Christianity as a sustaining difference to the religious, cultural, and societal character of the region.⁹ Therefore, to focus on emigration¹⁰ and persecution in isolation from the demographic and socioeconomic factors, regional conflicts, the lack of human rights, and the rule of law is to risk viewing Christians solely as victims of persecution and mere relics of a fading past. Such a narrow focus robs Christians of agency as significant actors in their own societies.¹¹ Antoine Audo SJ, Chaldean Bishop of Aleppo, has correctly opined: 'If we want to reflect on the future of Christians in the Middle East, we cannot ignore the strategic, economic and religious interests that encompass the entire region, both regionally and internationally.'¹²

Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen sums up the current situation and attendant challenges:

The taking of Mosul by the Islamic State (Daesh) led to a massive exodus of Christians from the plain of

9 Joseph Yacoub, *Une diversité menacée. Les chrétiens d'Orient face au nationalisme arabe et à l'islamisme*, Salvator, Paris, 2018; Brynjar Lia and Mathilde Becker Aarseth, 'Crusader Hirelings or Loyal Subjects? Evolving Jihadist Perspectives on Christian Minorities in the Middle East', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 33, 2022, no. 3, 255–280.

10 Bernard Heyberger provides an overview on Christian migration in 'Migration of the Middle Eastern Christian and European Protection: a long History', in A Schmoller (ed.), *Middle Eastern Christians and Europe Historical Legacies and Present Challenges*, Lit Verlag, Vienna, 23–42. Kristian Girling, 'Displaced Populations', in Kenneth R Ross, Mariz Tadros, and Todd M Johnson (eds), *Christianity in North Africa and West Asia*, Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity 2, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2018. Scholarly studies have been rightly preoccupied with the migration of Christians from the Middle East for a number of decades: E Austen, 'L'émigration massive des chrétiens d'Orient', *Etudes*, 373/1–2 (1990), 101–106; H Teule, 'Middle Eastern Christians and Migration: Some Reflections', *The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, 54 (2002), 1–23.

11 In contrast to this perspective the theological and ecclesial thought of Antoine Audo offers a reflection which is both creative and imbued with courage: 'The Current situation of Christianity in the Middle East, especially Syria, after the Synod of the Middle East's Final Declaration (September 2012) and the Papal Visit to Lebanon' in *Living Stones Yearbook 2012 (Christianity in the Middle East: Studies in modern History, Politics and Theology)*, London, 2012, 1–17; 'Reflections on the Apostolic Exhortation of Benedict XVI and the Papal Visit to Lebanon', in Dietmar Winkler (ed.), *Towards a Culture of Co-Existence in Pluralistic Societies: The Middle East and India*, Pro Oriente Studies in the Syriac Tradition, No. 4, Gorgias Press, Piscataway, 2021, 135–148.

12 Antoine Audo, 'The Church in the Middle East. The Future of Christians in the Region', in Harald Suermann and Michael Altripp (eds), *Orientalisches Christentum. Perspektiven aus der Vergangenheit für die Zukunft*, Leiden, Brill/Schöningh, 2021, 52–65, p. 52.

Nineveh to Iraqi Kurdistan. The payment of a tribute (jizya) imposed on the last Christians of Raqqa in Syria in February 2014 by a ‘pact’, then the beheading of 21 Copts in Libya a year later, together with the ostentatious destruction of churches, indicate the Christianophobia at work in the ideology of Daesh. It is important to always bear in mind that the refugees (11 million displaced people out of 22 million Syrians) and victims of the war are largely Muslims, that destruction has affected Muslim holy places as well as ancient sites, and that the taking of Mosul was accompanied by the decapitation of recalcitrant Sunni imams: Daesh and the wars of the region are a catastrophe for everyone. And we can fear that enforced departure and massacres may end by emptying these countries of their Christians, already few in number. Confronted with a general wave of migration, which for Christians seems like a haemorrhaging, prophets of the ‘death’ of ‘Eastern Christians’—a literary genre in a West which feels itself threatened—are not short of arguments for condemning the millions of Christians living in the Near East to imminent disappearance.

How is it possible, in such a climate of violence, to escape a logic of victimisation which leads to separation or departure, but also to avoid a logic of denial which hides reality? In fact, Christianity has become an ultra-minority in the Near East, its historic birthplace. In Egypt, Palestine and Lebanon, the departure of the educated and dynamic middle classes, especially for economic reasons, has long been happening. To these original reasons is added the rapid confessionalisation of conflicts, aggravated by the American invasion in 2003. The role of local actors (Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, Qatar, Israel) has followed community and confessional lines. In the current regional confrontation between Shi’a and Sunnis, beginning in 2005, concerns for the future of a multi-confessional Lebanon have increased. In Egypt, the rise of a ‘Coptic question’ and the exercise of power by the Muslim Brotherhood (2011-2013) have altered the traditional

image of peaceful coexistence. The oasis of Jordan looks fragile. Palestinian Christians have long suffered from the political impasse, the economic crisis, and in general from the violence in the occupied Palestinian territories. Today, with the rise of political Islam and jihadism, Christians are threatened or killed in the Middle East because they are Christians, like the Yazidis, even more harshly treated and exterminated by Daesh. Are the increasing attacks on Middle Eastern Christians the inescapable continuation of the 1915 genocide, and proof of the deadly threat which Islam represents for Christians? Has the life of Eastern Christians come down to a series of death throes? Have they not left simply because they have been persecuted? How then do we explain that they survived until now, and prospered during certain periods? Their history amounts neither to their relations with Muslims, nor to their recourse to the assistance of a sympathetic West. The current ultra-confessionalisation and communitarianism do not explain the whole of a long history. We need to turn our attention to Eastern Christians themselves, who are neither a fifth column of the West, as the jihadists accuse them, nor the eternal victims of Muslims, as a number of Islamophobic Western sites claim.¹³

The trend towards the study of 'world Christianity' with a focus on Asia, Africa, and Latin America has in recent times emerged. However, little attention has been given to the Eastern Christian Churches despite the fact that the Eastern Christians constitute one of largest Christian traditions in the world.¹⁴ Dyron B Daughtry, however, has posed a prudent consideration: 'the "North to South"

13 Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen, 'Les chrétiens au Moyen-Orient à l'heure de Daesh', *Annuaire français des relations internationales*, Vol. XVII, 2016, 681-695, p. 681.

14 S M Kenworthy, 'Beyond Schism: restoring Eastern Orthodoxy to the History of Christianity', *Reviews in Religion and Theology*, 15/2 (2008), 171-178. See also Ch. Miller and A O'Mahony [guest editors], 'The Orthodox churches in contemporary contexts', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 10/2 (2010); A O'Mahony and J Flannery [guest editors], 'Eastern Orthodoxy: Modern History and Contemporary theology', *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, 63/1-2 (2011); A O'Mahony and John Flannery (eds), *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East*, London, Centre for Eastern Christianity/Melisende, 2010.

metaphor has been helpful and challenging, but before we adopt it as rigid paradigm, we must face up to the absence of the East in that typology.¹⁵ Eastern Christian Churches are mainly concentrated in Russia, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, East Africa and in diasporas in the West.¹⁶ Eastern Christianity has somewhere between 250-300 million members worldwide, and estimates can vary, which makes it one of largest Christian traditions with approximately 12 percent of the global Christian population.¹⁷

Eastern Christianity in its various traditions is the dominant character of Christianity in the Middle East.¹⁸ The Churches of the

15 Dyron B Daugherty, 'Christianity Is Moving from North to South—So What About the East?', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 35, no. 1, 2011, 18–22, p. 21. See the trilogy by Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002; *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006; *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam and Europe's Religious Crisis*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007.

16 See the Pew Foundation report on 'Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population' in 2011 Online version of *Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population* (hereinafter *Report*) at <<http://pewforum.org/Christian/GlobalChristianity-worlds-christian-population.aspx>> [accessed 09/10/22]. The *Report* estimated that there are some 2.18 billion Christians, representing nearly a third of the estimated 2010 global population of 6.9 billion. Christians are to be found across the globe which today means that no single region can indisputably claim to be the centre of global Christianity, which is not the case for other religious traditions. This is in contrast to the past when Europe held that position, for example in 1910 about two-thirds of the world's Christians lived within the continent. Today, however, approximately one quarter of all Christians live in Europe (26%); the Americas (37%); in sub-Saharan Africa (24%), in Asia and the Pacific (13%). The *Report* noted extraordinary changes in the global configuration of Christianity—in sub-Saharan Africa a 60-fold increase, from fewer than 9 million in 1910 to more than 516 million in 2010, and in the Asia-Pacific region, a 10-fold increase, from about 28 million in 1910 to more than 285 million in 2010. In China today it is estimated that up to ten percent of the population is Christian, which is set to increase dramatically making this country, in due course, having the largest concentration of Christians in the world outstripping the US. There is a growing awareness of the Eastern Christian tradition today among Chinese Christian intellectuals as the first Christian encounter with Chinese culture and civilization: B Vermander, 'The Impact of Nestorianism on Contemporary Chinese Theology', *Jingjiao: The Church of the East in China and Central Asia*, Collection Serica, 2009, 181–194; J Norman, 'Eastern Christianity in China', in Ken Parry (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity*, Oxford, 2007, 280–290.

17 <<http://www.pewforum.org/Christian/Global-Christianity-orthodox.aspx>>.

18 Dietmar W Winkler, 'Christianity in the Middle East: some historical remarks and

Middle East can be grouped into five families: Oriental Orthodox—Armenian, Coptic and Syriac; Eastern Catholics—Armenians, Chaldeans, Copts, Latins, Maronites, Melkites and Syriacs; Eastern Orthodoxy—the patriarchates of Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem; the 'Assyrian' Church of the East; and the various Protestant dominations.¹⁹

The ecclesial context for Middle Eastern Christianity is one of great complexity. Its origins are those of Christianity itself expressed in deep cultural, linguistic and theological diversity.²⁰ Middle Eastern Christianity, despite being a small element in global Christianity has a significance and importance for the wider Christian tradition. Sidney H Griffith, however, locates the Middle East for the history of Christianity:

It is important to take cognizance of the seldom acknowledged fact that after the consolidation of the Islamic conquest and the consequent withdrawal of 'Roman/Byzantine' forces from the Fertile Crescent in the first half of the seventh century perhaps 50 percent of the world's confessing Christians from the mid-seventh to the end of the eleventh centuries found themselves living under Muslim rule.²¹

preliminary demographic figures', in D Winkler, *Syriac Christianity in the Middle East and India*, Gorgias Press, Piscataway, 2013, 107–125; Herman Teule, 'Christianity in West Asia', in Felix Wilfred (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2014, 17–29.

- 19 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, 231–260; 'Christianity in the wider Levant Region: modern History and contemporary Context', in Kail C Ellis OSA (ed), *Secular Nationalism and Citizenship in Muslim Countries: Arab Christians in the Levant*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2018, 61–88; 'Christianity in the Middle East: the challenge of coexistence', in Edward G Farrugia SJ and Gianpaolo Rigotti (eds), *A Common Mission: The Oriental Congregation and the Oriental Institute (1917–2017)*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta, Rome, 2020.
- 20 Frans Bouwen, 'The Churches in the Middle East', in Lawrence S Cunningham (ed.), *Ecumenism. Present Realities and Future Prospects*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1998, 25–36.
- 21 S H Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2008, p. 11.

Samir Khalil Samir SJ²² of the Pontifical Oriental Institute positions the significance of Middle Eastern Christianity due to its cultural richness, proud of its apostolic origins at the beginning of Christianity, a rejection of the term ‘minority’, an understanding of its vocation to be a unifying bridge between cultures, civilizations and religions East and West.²³ The idea that the Christians in the Middle East are representatives of a minority is very much contested as a reduction of the character of the region which is defined by its religious plurality not just by majority-minority markers. That said, Todd M Johnson, has noted that one of the most profound changes to have taken place in the global religious landscape has been ‘the unrelenting proportional decline of historic Christian communities in the Middle East’.²⁴ Contemporary challenges of Christian presence in the region might be liaised with a crisis in the imagination of global Christianity in understanding the implications of this reality, despite the fact that today we live in an extraordinary moment when it is estimated that Christians today account for close to over a third of humanity.²⁵ At no point in historical memory has one religious tradition, as Christianity is today, been so vast, so geographically spread. This crisis is not mirrored for Judaism of whom one third live in Israel or small clusters in Iran, Morocco and Turkey; or for Islam with approximately 20 percent of Muslims in the Middle East. The sacred spaces of Judaism in Jerusalem and for Islam in the holy places in the Arabian peninsula are assured of a living and strong co-religious presence; however, this cannot be said for Christian holy places and territory which are seeing their communities decline in number leading to a less secure future.

22 Samir Khalil Samir, has sought to develop a Christian theology in the context of the historic encounter with Islam from the perspective of contemporary times; see Zeljko Pasa SJ (ed.), *Between the Cross and Crescent: Studies in Honor of Samir Khalil Samir, SJ on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta, Rome, 2018; *Samir Khalil Samir, SJ on Islam and the West*, Interviews conducted by Giorgio Paolucci and Camille Eid, edited and revised by Wakif Nasry SJ, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2008.

23 Samir Khalil Samir, *Rôle culturel des chrétiens dans le monde arabe*, Cahiers de l’Orient chrétien, Beirut, 2003.

24 Todd M Johnson and Gina A Zurlo, ‘Ongoing Exodus: Tracking the Emigration of Christians from the Middle East’, *Harvard Journal of Middle Eastern Politics and Politics*, Vol. 3, 2013–2014, 39–45, p. 39.

25 See the overview provided by Sebastian Kim and Kirsteen Kim, *Christianity as a World Religion*, Bloomsbury, London, 2016.

In the historic religious landscape of the Middle East in 1910 Christians composed 13.6 percent of the population in the region; however, only 4.2 percent by 2010. Johnson considers that this proportion could decline to 3.6 percent by 2025—whilst noting that this figure could be much lower if the flight of Christians from Iraq and Syria continues. In fact, the Middle East is becoming more Muslim with the percentage increasing from 85 percent in 1900 to 92.3 percent in 2010—the de-pluralization of the region is one of the principal forces for change and destabilization.²⁶

Christianity in the Near and Middle East today in terms of numbers is a minority tradition.²⁷ In Egypt,²⁸ Lebanon²⁹ and among Palestinian Christians,³⁰ the departure of the educated and dynamic middle classes, especially for economic reasons, has long been a trend.³¹ We might add to these reasons the rapid spread of underlining sectarian conflicts, aggravated by the US-led Western invasion of Iraq in 2003. The Christians of Iraq have been one of the main communal casualties

26 Todd M Johnson and Gina A Zurlo, 'Ongoing Exodus', p. 44.

27 In a series of studies Bernard Heyberger describes the modern historical and scholarly context for the study of Christianity in the Middle East, 'Le christianisme oriental à l'époque ottomane: du postcolonial au global (1960-2020)', *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, Vol. 76, no. 2, 2021, 301-337; Bernard Heyberger and Nathalie Vergeron. 'Les Minorités chrétiennes d'Orient au cœur des tensions liées à la question nationale', *Diplomatie*, no. 93, 2018, 58-61; 'La France et la protection des chrétiens maronites. Généalogie d'une représentation', *Relations internationales*, 2018/1, no. 173, 13-30; Bernard Heyberger and Aurélien Girard, 'Chrétiens Au Proche-Orient', *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 171.3 (2015), 11-35, *Les chrétiens au Proche-Orient. De la compassion à la compréhension*, Payot, Paris, 2013.

28 Francine Costet-Tardieu, offers a portrait of Christianity in Egypt before the great transformation brought about by economic, social, cultural and demographic change in the middle of the twentieth century, *Les minorités chrétiennes dans la construction de l'Égypte modern 1922-1952*, Karthala, Paris, 2016.

29 Boutros Labaki, 'The Christian communities and the Economic and Social situation in Lebanon', in Andrea Pacini (ed.), *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East: the Challenge of the Future*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1998, 222-258; Boutros Labaki, 'Les chrétiens du Liban (1943-2008). Prépondérance, marginalisation et renouveau', *Confluences Méditerranée*, no. 66, 2008, 99-116.

30 Bernard Sabella, 'Palestinian Christian emigration from the Holy Land', *Proche-Orient Chrétien*, Vol. 41 (1991), 74-85; B Sabella, 'Socio-economic characteristics and challenges to Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land', in A O'Mahony (ed), *Palestinian Christians: Religion, Politics and Society in the Holy Land*, Melisende, London, 1999, 222-251.

31 B Sabella, 'L'émigration des arabes chrétiens: dimensions et causes de l'exode', *Proche-Orient Chrétien*, Vol. 47 (1997), 141-169.

of the breakdown in civil and political order in the country. Christians have found it difficult to hold a position as a minority community spread across the country with the carving-up of the regions between the various ethnic and religious groups—Sunni, Shi‘ite and Kurd.³² The Church in Iraq, comprising the Assyrian Church of the East,³³ the Ancient Church of the East,³⁴ and the Chaldean Church,³⁵ represented a historic Christian culture which had evolved beyond the confines of the Roman Empire in almost total isolation from the influences of Hellenistic culture. Their distinctive rite is considered the product of a fusion between Judeo-Christianity and Assyro-Babylonian and Iranian cultures. The rite uses Syriac, a language close to Aramaic, the language used by Christ and the disciples. These Churches were culturally embedded in the landscape of Mesopotamia.³⁶ The loss of Christians in Iraq profoundly alters not just the character of those lands but also their future.³⁷

The conflict in Syria has generated a justified concern that the fate of Christians in Iraq is one that they might also share as a consequence of religious and ethnic confrontation.³⁸ The Melkite

32 Herman G B Teule, ‘Christians in Iraq An Analysis of Some Recent Political Developments’, *Der Islam*, Vol. 88, no. 1 (2012), 179–98; ‘Christianity in Iraq and its contribution to society’, in Dietmar W Winkler (ed.), *Syriac Christianity in the Middle East and India: Contributions and Challenges*, Piscataway, 23–42.

33 Dietmar Winkler with W Baum, *The Church of the East. A concise history*, London, 2003.

34 Dahlia Khay Azeez, ‘The Schism of the Eastern Syriac Church (the “Nestorian Church”) in the Twentieth Century’, *Orientalia christiana periodica*, Vol. 87 (2021), 2, 453–493.

35 Kristian Girling, *The Chaldean Catholic Church: Modern History, Ecclesiology and Church-State Relations*, Routledge, London, 2017; ‘Engaging “the Martyred Church”—The Chaldean Catholic Church, Assyrian Church of the East and the Holy See in Ecumenical Dialogue 1994–2012 and the Influence of the Second Vatican Council’, *Living Stones Yearbook*, 2012, <<https://www.livingstonesonline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/LSYBws2012.pdf>>; ‘To Live within Islam: The Chaldean Catholic Church in modern Iraq, 1958–2003’, *Studies in Church History* Vol. 51, 2015, 366–384; ‘Patriarch Louis Raphael I Sako and Ecumenical Engagements between the Church of the East and the Chaldean Catholic Church’, *One in Christ*, Vol. 50, 2016, 100–121.

36 Mar Awa Royel, ‘The Pearl of Great Price: The Anaphora of the Apostles Mar Addai and Mar Mari as an Ecclesial and Cultural Identifier of the Assyrian Church of the East’, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, Vol. 80 (2014), 5–22.

37 Joseph Yacoub, *Babylone chrétienne. Géopolitique de l’Église de Mésopotamie*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1996.

38 See the study by Antoine Audo in this issue of *The Yearbook*. Andrew Ashdown reflects on Christian thought in Syria in a wider context, ‘Eastern Christian Mystical

Greek Catholic Archbishop of Aleppo, Jeanbart, stated in January 2012: ‘We are very worried about the consequences of an overthrow of the regime which will drive many of our faithful to emigrate, just as in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein. Christians have no confidence in an extremist Sunni power. We fear the domination of the dogmatic Muslim Brotherhood.’³⁹ The Syrian crisis began in March 2011 since which approximately half the Christian population has left Syria; some 600,000 out of a total of 1.2 million have migrated or have been displaced within the country or fled to Lebanon. As in Iraq, significant damage has been done to the infrastructure of the Christian communities—destruction of churches, schools, communal property has encouraged many to consider that they have no future.⁴⁰ In the zones held by the opposition or by radical Islamists groups, the Christian population has almost completely disappeared, relocating into the government-held areas.⁴¹ Syrian government zones, due to the movement of populations since 2011, have seen a rise in the percentage of minority communities present—Alawites, Shi‘ites, Druze, Christians and others. In previous crises many Christians from across the region took refuge in Lebanon to settle and rebuild communal and religious life;⁴² however, for many Christians who are leaving Iraq and Syria,

Traditions and the Development of Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue: Louis Massignon, Olivier Clement, Georges Khodr and Paolo Dall'Oglio, with a Protestant Contribution’, *Living Stones Yearbook* 2020, <<https://www.livingstonesonline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/LSYBws2020.pdf>>.

- 39 Fabrice Balanche, ‘Un scénario à l’irakienne pour les chrétiens de Syrie’, in Robert and M Younès (eds), *La vocation des chrétiens d’Orient. Défis actuels et enjeux d’avenir dans leurs rapports à l’islam*, Karthala, Paris, 2015, 27–44, p. 27. For an overview account see Andrew W H Ashdown, *Christian–Muslim Relations in Syria: Historic and Contemporary Religious Dynamics in a Changing Context*, Routledge, London, 2020.
- 40 Religious discourses of the Syrian conflict are increasingly generalized as they seek refuge elsewhere. Andreas Schmoller, ‘“Now My Life in Syria Is Finished”: Case Studies on Religious Identity and Sectarianism in Narratives of Syrian Christian Refugees in Austria’, *Islam And Christian–Muslim Relations*, Vol. 27, no. 4, 2016, 419–437; Andreas Schmoller, ‘Anti-Islamic Narratives of Middle Eastern Diaspora Christians: An Interdisciplinary Analytical Framework’, in Herman Teule and Joseph Verheyden (eds), *Eastern and Oriental Christianity in the Diaspora*, Peeters, 2020, Leuven, 189–214. For an account on the eve of internal conflict in Syria see Annika Rabo, ‘“We are Christians, and we are equal citizens”: perspectives on particularity and pluralism in contemporary Syria’, *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations*, Vol. 23, 2012, no. 1, 79–93.
- 41 Balanche, ‘Un scénario à l’irakienne pour les chrétiens de Syrie’, p. 28
- 42 This is well described for the Armenian community by Nicola Migliorino and Ara Sanjian, ‘Les communautés arméniennes du Proche-Orient arabe’, *Confluences*

they regard their stay as a stepping to exile, emigration and diaspora.⁴³ Lebanese Christians are now concerned as they consider that they could be the next victims of this historical process of the elimination of Christians from the Middle East which began with the Armenian and Syriac Christian massacres of the end of the 19th century.

The challenge for Christians in the region has been how to position themselves in relation to a host of regional actors, in particular Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran and the Gulf Arab states, which has developed around sectarian associations. In the current regional confrontation between Shi'a and Sunnis, concerns for the future of multi-confessional states such as Iraq, Lebanon and Syria have increased. In Egypt, the rise of a 'Coptic question' and the exercise of power by the Muslim Brotherhood (2011–2013) have altered the traditional image of peaceful coexistence.⁴⁴ The 'oasis' of Jordan looks fragile due to on-going tensions between society, government, on-going environmental and economic stresses and a growing Islamist current also accompanied by large numbers of mainly Sunni Muslims displaced in the border areas with Syria.⁴⁵ That said, the monarchy in Jordan considers that it has a unique role in relation to the question of the Muslim Holy Places in Jerusalem, including seeking to represent the interests and

Méditerranée, No. 66, 2008, 73–82; Ara Sanjian, 'The Armenian Minority Experience in the Modern Arab World', *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* (Amman, Jordan), Volume 3, Number 1 (2001), 149–179; Ara Sanjian, 'The Armenian Church and Community in Jerusalem and the Holy Land (From their origins until the modern era)', in A O'Mahony (ed.), *The Christian Communities in the Holy Land: Studies in History, Religion, and Politics*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2003.

43 Tens of thousands of Iraqi Christians since 1991 have also transited through Turkey via church and familial networks; Didem Danish, 'Attendre au Purgatoire: les réseaux religieux de migrants chrétiens d'Irak en transit à Istanbul', *Revue européenne des migrations internationales*, Vol. 22, no. 3, 2006, 109–134; Didem Danish, 'A Faith That Binds: Iraqi Christian Women on the Domestic Service Ladder of Istanbul: Solidarity or Exploitation', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 33, no. 4, 2007, 601–615.

44 Laure Guirgis, *Les coptes d'Égypte. Violences communautaires et transformations politiques (2005–2012)*, Karthala, Paris, 2012.

45 Paolo Maggolini, 'Christian Churches and Arab Christians in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan', *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, no. 171, 2015, 37–58; Géraldine Chatelard, *Briser la mosaïque. Les tribus chrétiennes de Madaba, Jordanie (sixième siècle)*, CNRS-Éditions, Paris, 2004; 'Les chrétiens en Jordanie, dynamiques identitaires et gestion du pluralisme', *Les Cahiers de l'Orient*, Vol. 93, no. 1, 2009, 41–56; 'The Constitution of Christian Communal Boundaries and Spheres in Jordan', *Journal of Church and State*, Vol. 52, 2010, no. 3, 476–502.

protection of Christian Holy Places and presence in Jerusalem.⁴⁶ Palestinian Christians have long suffered from the political impasse, the economic crisis, and in general from the violence in the occupied Palestinian territories.⁴⁷ Today, with the rise of political Islam and jihadism, Christians can be threatened or killed in the Middle East just because they are Christians.⁴⁸ It is increasingly asserted that this recent upsurge in violence on Middle Eastern Christians is the inescapable continuation of the 1915 genocide, proof of the deadly threat which 'the crisis' in Islam and the temptation towards 'religious nationalism' represents for Christians and other religions in the region.⁴⁹

Eastern Christianity was born in 395, with the division of the Roman Empire between the two sons of Theodosius. If this did not immediately lead to the formation of two separate Churches, it created conditions for a divergent development between the Christian communities of West and East. In effect, the destruction of political unity deepened the existing cultural divisions between the Greek and Latin territories of the empire. The political context, despite its importance, for the divide in Christianity is often left in parenthesis in modern theological and ecclesiological studies. The encounter between Middle Eastern Christianity with Western Christianity,⁵⁰ set against contemporary geopolitics, continues to give force to the relevance of this question.⁵¹ John Paul II who was deeply aware of

46 Victor Kattan writes on Jordan Monarchy and the Muslim Holy sites in Jerusalem: 'The Special Role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in the Muslim Holy Shrines in Jerusalem', *Arab Law Quarterly*, Vol. 35 (2021), 503-548.

47 B Sabella, 'Palestinian Christians: Realities and Hopes', *Studies in Church History: The Holy Land, Holy Lands, and Christian History*, Vol. 36 (2000), 373-397.

48 Mayeur-Jaouen, 'Les chrétiens au Moyen-Orient à l'heure de Daesh', p. 682.

49 Reflections on the contemporary context: Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, 'Sociopolitical Developments in West Asia and Their Impact on Christian Minorities in the Region', in Felix Wilfred (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2014, 231-256.

50 J Maïla, 'De la question d'Orient à le récente géopolitique des minorités', *Proche-Orient Chrétien*, Vol. 47, 1997, 35-58; J Maïla, 'Réflexions sur les chrétiens d'Orient', *Confluences Méditerranée*, no. 66, 2008, 191-204.

51 The reality of Eastern Christianity is often over-looked by Western, and in particular, US policy especially in its relations with Islamic political movements, Israel and various Muslim dominant states in the Middle East. This is also noted in evaluating Russian Orthodox Church concern for the Eastern Christian churches in the Middle East, which is seen as state-political concern, rather than a new aspect of the post-communist European context. See Alicja Curanovic, *The Religious Factor in Russia's Foreign Policy*, Routledge, London, 2012. The importance of this lacuna,

the political consequences of the divide between Eastern and Western Christianity in modern European history posited the central idea that today the universal Church needed to learn to breathe with two lungs.⁵² Still today, beyond the divisions and reconstitution of the Christian world which history has brought through ecumenical dialogue,⁵³ two profoundly different sensibilities separate Western Christianity, with its Latin tradition, from its Eastern equivalent which is itself deeply indebted to Greek and Semitic culture.⁵⁴

The political-theological context for Christianity in the Middle East is one of much complexity, which is different from state to state, but also by the particular ecclesial character of the Eastern Christian culture in question. In the context of the modern 'nation-state' some Churches might be understood as the 'national-church'—the Maronite Church for Lebanon, the Church of the East/Chaldean Church for Iraq and the Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt. That said, there is increasingly a desire among the Christian Churches to work in common, contributing from their distinct experiences and ecclesial cultures and contexts to the religious political question.⁵⁵ This is

the lack of understanding of Eastern Christianity, is gaining a wide purchase in political circles especially regarding the present situation in Syria and future of Christianity in the Middle East. Elizabeth H Prodromou, 'The Politics of Human Rights: Orthodox Christianity Gets the Short End, Washington, DC., 5/8/2013, <<http://www.archons.org/news/detail.asp?id=638>> [accessed 12/10/22]

52 John Paul II, had the religious division in Europe primarily in his mind: Michael Sutton, 'John Paul II's Idea of Europe', *Religion, State and Society*, Vol. 25, no. 1, 1997, 17-29; A O'Mahony, 'The Vatican and Europe: Political Theology and Ecclesiology in Papal Statements from Pius XII to Benedict XVI', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, Vol. 9, no. 3, 2009, 177-194.

53 Frans Bouwen, 'Unity and Christian Presence in the Middle East', in *The Catholic Church in the contemporary Middle East: Studies for The Synod of the Middle East*, 87-105, who quotes the second pastoral letter of the Catholic patriarchs of the Middle East who state 'In the East, we Christians will be together or we will not be,' p. 87.

54 Joseph Yacoub, 'Étude de cas: la contribution de la Mésopotamie ancienne et syriaque au dialogue des cultures', *L'Humanisme réinventé*, Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2012, 165-205.

55 Stefanie Hugh-Dovonan, 'Olivier Clement: A Reflection on the "Antiochian Paradigm" of Relations between Eastern Catholics and Eastern Orthodox in the Middle East for Today's Europe', 241-260; John Whooley, 'In the Shadow of Balamand: Recent Relations between the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Armenian Catholic Church', 261-280; Herman G B Teule (Nijmegen-Leuven), 'The Assyrian Church of the East, the Chaldean Church and the Roman Catholic Church: An Attempt at Understanding Their Interrelation', 281-294, in De Mey, Skira, Teule (eds), *The Catholic Church and Its Orthodox Sister Churches twenty-five Years*

particularly important in creating political and religious space for Christianity in Middle Eastern societies thus enabling an impact on a wider cultural milieu.⁵⁶ The question of religious freedom is especially important⁵⁷ and has at least for the Catholic Church in the Middle East been promoted in diplomacy and the negotiation of concordats.⁵⁸ Sebastian Brock has reminded us that, for the Syriac tradition, ‘Several of these Churches have existed, throughout the entire span of their history, as minority religious communities, living under governments that were often hostile. This experience has ensured that they have been free from the sort of triumphalism that has at times disfigured the Latin West and the Greek East.’⁵⁹ The political-theological question is a significant issue for Eastern Christianity today especially in the Middle East⁶⁰ where this issue is marked by Christian relations with political traditions influenced by Judaism and Islam. However, the relationship between Eastern Christianity, and in particular the Eastern Orthodox Churches, especially in modern history, has not been a straightforward historical trajectory.⁶¹ Elizabeth Prodromou has suggested Orthodoxy’s

after Balamand, *Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium*, 326, Leuven, 2022.

- 56 Joseph Yacoub, ‘Les régimes politiques arabes et l’islam politique’, in *Fièvre démocratique et ferveur fondamentaliste Dominantes du XXIe siècle*, Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2008, 121–140.
- 57 See the various studies in Kail Ellis (ed), *Secular Nationalism and Citizenship in Muslim Countries: Arab Christians in the Levant*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2018; Nael Georges, ‘La Liberté religieuse dans les états de culture islamique’, *Diplomatie*, no. 75 (2015), 44–47. The model of the so-called Constitution of Medina used in both liberal–moderate and radical Islamic thought to promote notions regarding the possibility of Jews and Christians living within Dar al-Islam continues to influence Islamic political thought see, Harald Suermann, ‘Die Konstitution von Medina. Erinnerung an ein anderes Modell des Zusammenlebens’, *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia*, Vol. 2, 2005, 225–244.
- 58 Rafael Palomino, ‘The Role of Concordants Promoting Religious Freedom with Special Reference to Agreements in the Middle East’, in *Congregazione per le Chiese Orientali, Inus Ecclesiarum vehiculum caritatis*, Rome, 2004, 893–900.
- 59 Sebastian Brock, ‘The Syriac Orient: a third “lung” for the church?’, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, Vol. 71, No. 1, 2005, 5–20, p. 15.
- 60 Frans Bouwen reflects upon many of these issues, including religious freedom, in his contribution on the Synod for the Middle East held in Rome October 2010 by the Eastern Catholic bishops of the region: ‘The Synod for the Middle East: First results and Future Possibilities’, *Living Stones Yearbook 2012: Christianity in the Middle East: Studies in modern History, Politics, Theology and Dialogue*, Vol. 1, 2012, 18–37, <<https://www.livingstonesonline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/LSYBws2012.pdf>>.
- 61 On Eastern Orthodox and aspects of the politics church-state relations in the

engagement with pluralism is one of ‘discernible ambivalence’.⁶² In fact Eastern Christianity’s relationship to the state needs to take into consideration several historical experiences: (i) the Byzantine theocratic legacy, (ii) the Ottoman legacy, (iii) the colonial-mandate regimes, (iv) the legacy of Arab, Turkish, Israeli and Iranian nationalism in relation to the identity of the ‘nation-state, and (iv) political Islamism. The experience of the Oriental Orthodox Churches might be expressed within other frameworks; for example, it might be noted that during the 19th century the Armenian Church existed under the Orthodox Christian Tsars in the Russian Empire, in the Sunni Muslim dominated Ottoman Empire and in Shi’ite Iran.⁶³ In the most recent phase the hoped for transformation of political governance in state and society associated with the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ has encouraged Christian leaders, such as Cardinal Raï, Patriarch of the Maronite Church, to call for a ‘Christian Spring’, that would pave the way for an ‘Arab spring for the Arab peoples to benefit from a climate of peace, justice and brotherhood’. Raï continued that he hoped that the Arab regimes ‘are transformed into democratic regimes and should separate religion from the state, strengthening civil liberties and human rights, the right to respect difference, and embrace diversity in unity.’⁶⁴

Jerusalem, Sotiris Roussos, ‘The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and Community of Jerusalem: Church, State and Identity’, in A O’Mahony (ed.), *The Christian Communities of Jerusalem and the Holy Land: Studies in History, Religion and Politics*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2003, 38–56; Greece and the Middle East: *The Greek Orthodox Communities in Egypt, Syria and Palestine, 1914–1940*, PhD diss., University of London, 1994, ‘Patriarchs, Notables and Diplomats: The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem in the Modern Period’, in *Eastern Christianity: Studies in Modern History, Religion and Politics*, 372–87.

62 Elizabeth Prodromou, ‘Orthodox Christianity and pluralism: Moving beyond Ambivalent?’, in E Clapsis (ed.), *The Orthodox Churches in a Pluralistic World: an Ecumenical Conversation*, World Council of Churches Publications, Geneva/Holy Cross Press, Brookline, 2004, 22–46, p. 24. Quoted in Ina Merdjanova, ‘Orthodox Christianity in a Pluralistic World’, *Concilium*, no. 1, 2011, 39–50, p. 39.

63 See the various studies by Vrej Nerses Nersessian in *The Living Stones Yearbook*, ‘The Armenian Church under The Sceptre of The Tsars, 1828–1905’ (2020), ‘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), and ‘The Impact of the Genocide of 1915 on the Armenian orthodox apostolic Church’ (2015). For an ecclesial overview of Armenian Church Hratch Tchilingirian, ‘The Catholicos and the Hierarchical Sees of the Armenian Church’, in *Eastern Christianity: Studies in Modern History, Religion and Politics*, 140–159.

64 <www.Leorientlejour.com> [accessed 21 January 2013]. The Maronite patriarchate is an important religious actor in Lebanon, see Sami E Baroudi and Paul Tabar, ‘Spiritual

Even if it cannot be summed up easily, the reality of Christianity in the modern Middle East is first of all one of numbers. The number of Christians, unfortunately, is very difficult to discern. For some decades, there have no longer been confessional censuses in the countries of the Middle East, where governments are concerned with often veiling the multi-confessional nature of their societies. The political consequences of this policy have been highlighted in the so-called 'Arab Spring' where religious and ethnic minorities—Kurds, Shi'ites, Christians, Druze—in the Middle Eastern region have challenged the emergence of an Islamist trend which has sought to dominate political society. However, the Middle Eastern Church families represent approximately 30 million Christians of which approximately 15 million reside in the Middle East.⁶⁵

The Middle Eastern Christian diaspora in North and South America, Australia and Europe is an important and dynamic reality for all the Churches.⁶⁶ This diaspora reality contributes to making Christian identity in the Middle East often a contested one—caught between an 'Arab' Christian identity and an 'Eastern' Christian identity.⁶⁷ The jurisdiction of each Church normally corresponds to a

Authority versus Secular Authority: relations between the Maronite Church and the State in Postwar Lebanon: 1990–2005', *Middle East Critique*, Vol. 18, 2009, 195–230.

65 Statistics are very difficult to obtain in relation to the numbers of Christians in the Middle East, however, see Philippe Fargues, 'The Arab Christians of the Middle East: A Demographic Perspective', in Andrea Acini (ed.), *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East: The Challenge of the Future* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1998, 48–66.

66 Ch. Cannuyer, 'Les diasporas chrétiennes proche-orientales en Occident', in H Legrand and G M Croce (eds), *L'Œuvre d'Orient: Solidarités anciennes et nouveaux défis*, Paris, 2010, 319–344. The politics of Middle Eastern Christian diasporas in emerging and important reality of migration and displacement from the Middle East: Bosmat Yefet, 'The Coptic Diaspora and the Status of the Coptic Minority in Egypt', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 43 (2017), 1205–1221; Yvonne Haddad and Joshua Donovan, 'Good Copt, Bad Copt: Competing Narratives on Coptic Identity in Egypt and the United States', *Studies in World Christianity*, Vol. 19, no. 3 (2013), 208–32.

67 The dynamic of an increasingly global reality faced by Middle Eastern churches due to emigration and a significant growth in a diaspora community, strongly encourages these ecclesial cultures to redefine their identity in such a way as to make it compatible with an ethnic and cultural pluralisation of its congregation. This has been particularly noticeable for the Maronite Church. According to the *Annuario Pontificio* 2012 declared Maronites who relate to the Church number 3,261,797. Latin America has been a significant destination for Middle Eastern Christians, especially for those from Lebanon and Syria, with some 700,00 in Argentina; 481,000 in Brazil and 153,000 in Mexico. Paul Tabor, 'The Maronite Church in Lebanon:

definite territory, but emigration of numerous faithful has also given it a personal character.⁶⁸ The Churches have responded by creating numerous ecclesial structures in the West to help retain the link between the land of origin and these new Middle Eastern Christian spaces. This renewed ecclesiological link overcomes geography in this case, and the Eastern Churches, with regard to their respective diasporas, behave as though they were independent structures, constituting distinct episcopacies on the same territory.⁶⁹ The pastoral and ecclesiology issues confronted by Middle Eastern Christians are those encountered by Eastern Catholic communities from the Carpathian regions of the Hapsburg Empire in North America during the 19th century.⁷⁰ Middle

From Nation-building to a Diasporan/Transnational Institution', in Françoise de Bel-Air (ed.), *Migration et politique au moyen-orient*, Institut français du Proche-Orient, Damascus, 2006, 185–201.

68 Georges Labaki, 'La juridiction territoriale du patriarche maronite d'Antioche: de l'orient à l'occident', in Charles Chartouni (ed.), *Christianisme oriental: Kérygme et Histoire*, Geuthner, Paris, 2007, 143–158. This is an extremely important question, according to Jobe Abbass, after the promulgation of the New Eastern Code for the Eastern Catholic churches the subject regarding the extension of patriarchal jurisdiction to the diaspora apparently remained an open and recurring issue. In March 2001, the six Catholic patriarchs of the Middle East wrote to John Paul II requesting that their jurisdiction be extended to throughout the world. In November again according to Jobe Abbass, Cardinal Angelo Sodano responded to the letter of March 2001 and the persistent question it posed. He quotes Sodano: 'It is appropriate here to recall the so-called "principle of territoriality", firmly maintained by all the ecumenical councils, including Vatican Council II, in light of which the Holy Father wishes the *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* to be elaborated. The members of the Commission that prepared the Code, among whom figured prominently the six Eastern patriarchs, showed to have understood this perfectly when, during the plenary assembly in November 1988, they withdrew, after the Holy Father's reminder, a motion signed by fifteen members, in which they aimed at obtaining the extension of patriarchal jurisdiction to the whole world,' quoted by Abbass from Cardinal Angelo Sodano, 'Discorso di S.Em. Angelo Sodano ai partecipanti al Simposio', in *Ius Ecclesiarum vehiculum caritatis*, p. 590, note 9; see Jobe Abbass, 'Updating the Particular Law of the Maronite Church', *Il codice delle chiese orientali. La storia le legislazioni particolari le prospettive ecumeniche. Atti del convegno di studi tenutosi nel XX anniversario della promulgazione del codice dei canoni delle chiese orientali, sala San Pio X, Roma, 8–9, 2010*, Liberia Editrice Vaticana, Rome, 2013, 172–193, p. 190.

69 A O'Mahony considers the fate of an earlier migration of a significant number of Eastern Christians from Ottoman lands into Europe in 'Between Rome and Constantinople: the Italian-Albanian Church: a study in Eastern Catholic history and ecclesiology', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, Vol. 8, no. 3 (2008), pp. 232–251.

70 Constantine Simon, 'In Europe and America: the Ruthenians between Catholicism

Eastern Christians who went to South America have often assimilated in the wider Catholic Church adopting the Latin rite.

We might add that Middle Eastern Christianity is distinctly plural in ecclesial identity, liturgical and linguistic cultures and its orientation towards religion, politics and church-state relations in their respective societies.⁷¹ Paolo Dall'Oglio, an Italian Jesuit who founded the new monastic community of Dayr Mar Musa al-Habashi (St Moses the Ethiopian) in Syria which is dedicated to ecumenism and relations between Christians and Muslims, considers this ecclesial plurality as an essential aspect of maintaining a religious and political plurality in the Middle East region today.⁷²

The Jesuit theologian, from the Coptic Catholic tradition, Fadel Sidarouss, echoed the importance of this observation:

The roots of Christianity are decidedly Eastern. Consequently, when the West adopted Christianity, it in fact adopted an 'other', something different; this Eastern alterity became constitutive of its Western identity, which enabled it to be more easily open to difference throughout its long history: we may think, for example, of what we have said about reason, but also its dialogue with

and Orthodoxy', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 59 (1993), 169-210.

71 Fiona McCallum, 'Christian political participation in the Arab world', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 23/1 (2012), 3-18; F McCallum, 'Religious Institutions and Authoritarian States: Church-State Relations in the Middle East', *Third World Quarterly*, 33 (2012), 109-124.

72 Paolo Dall'Oglio, 'Eglises plurielles pour un Moyen-Orient pluriel', *Mélanges de sciences religieuses*, 68/3 (2011), 31-46. Dall'Oglio is the principal founder of the contemporary monastic community Dayr Mar Musa al-Habashi in Syria, which is dedicated to ecumenism and relations between Christian and Muslims. The monastery, whilst it has its own modern rule, is in an ecclesial expression of the Syrian Catholic Church. The community should be considered as an aspect of monastic revival which has taken place across the region, but also a novel expression of Syriac Christianity, from within the Eastern Catholic tradition based upon the life and eremitical endeavour Charles de Foucauld and the religious ideas of Louis Massignon for Christian relations with Muslims and Islam. P Dall'Oglio, 'Massignon and jihad, through De Foucauld, al-Hallaj and Gandhi', in J J Donahue and C W Troll (eds), *Faith, Power and Violence*, [= *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 258 (1998)], 103-114; P Dall'Oglio, 'La refondation du monastère syriaque de saint Moïse l'Abyssin à Nebek, Syrie, et la Badaliya massignonienne', in M Borrmans and F Jacquin (eds), *Badaliya au nom de l'autre (1947-1962)—Louis Massignon*, Paris, 2011, 372-374.

modernity, admittedly difficult and onerous. There is thus a qualitative difference between the Church of the West and the Churches of the East, in the sense that they have not, throughout the centuries, experienced a different ‘other’, which has inevitably led them to remain within the domain of an identity without formative contacts with a constitutive alterity; and 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. Clearly, the Eastern Churches were plural from the time of their origins, and benefited from the support of Graeco-Roman culture for the first seven centuries; but with the arrival of Islam they withdrew into a ‘golden age’ which imperceptibly became their ‘mythical origin’ on which they dwelt without further innovation, thus privileging the ‘pole of identity’.⁷³

Today it is a challenging task to undertake Christian theology in the Middle East responding to the numerous religious, political and cultural questions currently engaging the region.⁷⁴ Harald Suermann, a German scholar of Middle Eastern Christianity, underlining the close links between Eastern theology and liturgy, writes:

Speaking of John Damascene and Ephrem the Syrian they wrote in order to contemplate the eternal mysteries, and their theology is considered as outside time. However, studying the hymns of Saint Ephrem leads to the conclusion that he battled against the various heresies of his region. He was aware of the currents of thought of his era and built his theology on that thought. As to John Damascene, his theology is also a dialogue with his times: should Islam be considered a religion or a heresy? What is the place of icons in churches? Should we serve the new masters? In short, ‘the great Eastern theological texts were

73 Fadel Sidarouss, quoted in Thom Sicking, ‘Théologie orientale ou théologie en orient?’, *Proche-Orient Chrétien*, Vol. 55, 2005, 309–333, p. 320.

74 A Fleyfel, *La théologie contextuelle arabe, modèle libanais*, Paris, 2011.

written in a precise context, responding to the pressing questions of the time.' This dialogue was continued later. Following the Muslim conquest, theologians began to express themselves in Arabic, thus also enabling dialogue between Christian theology and Muslim thought. Later, Muslims gained an awareness of Greek knowledge through Christian intermediaries. With the arrival of Western theologians, those in the East sought to assimilate their theologies. Finally, there was a period characterised by 'the pure reception of theology and less by adaptation to the demands of time and place.' However, the renewal of the Coptic Church and theological thought in the context of Palestine and Israel are striving once again to respond to the burning questions of our time.⁷⁵

It is therefore clear for Suermann that theology must be closely connected to the questions which concern the Christians in our own time. In this connection, he enumerates a series of problems with which Eastern theology should have to consider itself today: the exodus of Christians. Many leave their countries for economic and social reasons. Should the Church not speak prophetically, as did the ancient prophets? Alongside renewal, there is also a form of 'conservatism' which marginalizes the Churches and renders them passive and of no consequence on the political and social scene.⁷⁶ This phenomenon requires reflection on the relationship between Church and society. Many Christian thinkers today urge a new 'political-theology' which takes seriously the re-ordering of religious culture across the region. The former Melkite Archbishop of Beirut, Grégoire Haddad, is often cited as an example of this type of engagement especially in arguing for an open *laïcité*.⁷⁷ Indeed the crisis in the relationship between religion and politics in the region was taken up by the Special Assembly of Bishops for the Middle East

75 Harald Suermann, quoted in Thom Sicking, 'Théologie orientale ou théologie en orient?', p. 313.

76 Harald Suermann, quoted in Thom Sicking, 'Théologie orientale ou théologie en orient?', p. 315-316.

77 A Fleyfel, *La théologie contextuelle arabe, modèle libanais*, 147-175.

which was held in Rome in October 2010.⁷⁸ Mouchir Basile Aoun sees Haddad's emphasis on liberation as the key idea:

The word liberation does not figure prominently in the lexicon of Christian communities in today's world. Rather, the key word is survival. This is because Christian faith is seen as inflicting a heavy burden, a requirement for confinement to defending the physical existence of individuals and groups which, in Lebanon and in other countries of the Arab world, continue to depend on the message of Jesus Christ. However, there is a dividing line between liberation and survival which betrays the state of paralysis into which Christian witness delivered within societies existing in the Arab world runs the risk of falling. The theological originality of Grégoire Haddad has been to recentre this witness on the demands of a liberation which modern Arab man desires with all his heart. Since for him liberation remains the best guarantee of survival. In effect, to physically survive without engaging in the liberation of Arab man resembles more of a spiritual death, since true Christian survival in the Arab world belongs more in the register of evangelical boldness. The Christian thus finds himself invited to expend his energies in order to defend the life of others.⁷⁹

A significant challenge for Christianity in the Middle East has been that ecclesial division requires a theological and ecclesiological response, one which proclaims unity in diversity, according to Antoine

78 Samir Khalil Samir, 'Le synode des évêques pour le Proche-Orient', *Nouvelle revue théologique*, 133/2 (2011), 191-206.

79 M Aoun, 'Pour une théologie arabe de la libération: contribution à l'étude de la pensée de Grégoire Haddad', *Proche-Orient Chrétien*, 59/1-2 (2009), 52-76, pp. 52-53. Liberation has been a key theme in Palestinian Christian thought, Samuel J Kuruvilla, *Radical Christianity in Palestine and Israel: Liberation and Theology in the Middle East*, I. B. Tauris, London, 2013; Laura Robson, 'Palestinian Liberation Theology, Muslim-Christian Relations and the Arab-Israeli Conflict', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 21 (2010), 39-50; Leonard Marsh, 'Palestinian Christian Theology as a new and contemporary expression of Eastern Christian Thought', *Living Stones Yearbook 2012: Christianity in the Middle East: Studies in modern History, Politics, Theology and Dialogue*, 2012, 106-119.

Fleyfel, an ecumenical theology concerned to change attitudes.⁸⁰ The challenges of diversity are especially creative for an exploration of ecclesiology. Jean Corbon, the well-known Catholic ecumenist, wrote: 'The Christian Middle East appears as the microcosm of the universal ecumenism: there where the greatest diversity had abounded in division, the grace of Communion in unity has over-abounded.'⁸¹

The following examples demonstrate that difference is now to be seen as enriching rather than dividing: the Balamand Declaration and its rejection of 'uniatism' which was considered a major obstacle in relations between Eastern Catholics and Eastern Orthodox. A renewal in the ecclesiological awareness of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church has been central to creating the environment for the Balamand declaration.⁸² The ecclesiological notion of a 'return to the Catholic Church' was declared obsolete. Catholic 'mission' at the expense of the Orthodox is excluded—replaced by a desire for collaboration in evangelization.⁸³ Vittorio Peri has reminded us that the ecclesiological teaching and canonical praxis of both Catholic and Orthodox Churches expressed this conviction. This, however, has changed on the whole if the realization that their relation of communion was better described by the theology of Sister Churches rather than by the theology of 'returning' to one Mother Church, which each identified exclusively with themselves.⁸⁴ Despite the importance of this document in the history of relations between the Catholic and the Orthodox churches the Balamand process has met with a mixed reception across Eastern Catholic and Eastern Orthodox

80 A Fleyfel, 'La centralité de l'œcuménisme pour l'élaboration d'une théologie arabe moderne et contextuelle', *Théologiques* 2 (2010), 213–238.

81 J Corbon, 'Ecumenism in the Middle East', in Habib Badr (ed.), *Christianity: A History in the Middle East*, Middle East Council of Churches, Beirut, 2005, 871–883, p. 882.

82 Grégorios III Laham, 'The Ecumenical Commitment of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church', *The Downside Review*, 135 (1), 2017, 3–20. Melkite ecumenical outreach has by necessity been accompanied by an ecclesial renewal in the Eastern Orthodox Church of Antioch. N Mrad, 'The witness of the Church in a pluralistic world: Theological renaissance in the Church of Antioch', in E Theokritoff and M Cunningham (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, Cambridge, 2008, 246–260.

83 Étienne Fouilloux, 'De l'unianisme à l'œcuménisme', in *Comité mixte catholique-orthodoxe en France (ed), Catholiques et orthodoxes. Les enjeux de l'unianisme dans le sillage de Balamand*, Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2004, 201–220.

84 V Peri, 'Uniatism and its origins', *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, Vol. 49, no. 1–2, 1997, 23–46.

theological communities.⁸⁵ While Balamand sought to formulate the road to reconciliation in the best way possible—and put forward a coherent programme for catholicity—the question of the relationship between the entire Church, diocesan Churches and regional Churches (patriarchates) has not been satisfactorily solved. Hervé Legrand considers one side clings to autocephaly, the other papal primacy—convincing neither their dialogue partner nor in fact themselves, aware that a better response is needed and possible. This must be achieved not in opposition but in collaboration.⁸⁶ A further example is the Melkite project for union with the Eastern Orthodox Church which demonstrates the scale of the change of attitude. Unique in the region, it nevertheless demonstrates an growing awareness by the Churches of the Middle East of sharing in the destiny of the Arab Muslim world.⁸⁷ Since the Second Vatican Council, relations between the two Melkite Churches of Antioch have become increasingly fraternal, giving rise to a deeper reflection about the reunification of the Antiochian Patriarchate. The project of ecclesial communion, presented in a statement following the meeting of the Melkite Catholic Synod of July 1996, is the fruit of a series of efforts undertaken to bring these two Melkite branches of the Antiochian Patriarchate closer. This was a very bold undertaking about which, however, Rome and Constantinople called for prudence, uncertain how a local agreement might impact upon their relations in a wider setting.⁸⁸

The Christological agreements between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches have developed with much success. The origins of this are not just with the meeting of Paul VI with heads of the Oriental Orthodox Churches after the Second Vatican Council but had been prepared by the encyclical *Sempiternus Rex* of Pius XII which declared that the so-called, but wrongly described, ‘monophysitism’ of the non-Chalcedonian Christians was purely verbal.⁸⁹ Frans Bouwen, a Catholic member of the Official Dialogue

85 R G Roberson, ‘Catholic Reactions to the Balamand Document’, *Eastern Churches Journal*, 4/1 (1997), 54–73. See also R Taft, ‘The Problem of “Uniatism” and the “Healing of Memories”: Anamnesis, not Amnesia’, *Logos*, 41–42 (2000–2001), 155–196.

86 H Legrand, ‘Unité et diversité de l’Orient chrétien contemporain: un regard de théologien’, 65–87.

87 G Hachem, ‘Between Antioch and Rome: Melkite Hierarchs on Papal Primacy and Ecumenism’, *Studi Sull’Orient Cristiano*, 5/2 (2001), 119–153.

88 G Hachem, ‘Un projet de communion ecclésiale dans le patriarcat d’Antioche entre les Eglises grec-orthodoxe et melkite-catholique’, *Irénikon*, 72 (1999), 453–478.

89 See also A Olmi, *Il consenso cristologica tra la chiese calcedonesi e non calcedonesi (1964–1996)*

Commission between the Oriental Orthodox and Catholic Church has written: 'One of the most significant events in the history of the present-day ecumenical movement and one of the richest promises for the future is, beyond any doubt, the Christological consensus that has emerged, in the course of the last decades, between the churches that recognized the Council of Chalcedon and those that did not, since it was held in the year 451.'⁹⁰

The third example is the agreement for Eucharistic hospitality between the Chaldean Church and the Assyrian Church which with the acceptance of the anaphora of Mar and Addai is also remarkable.⁹¹ Relations between Protestant Christianity and the Eastern Churches in the Middle East have not been without difficulties; especially as in recent times evangelical groups have been very successful in the East.⁹² The question of relations between Protestant missions and Middle Eastern Christians became an urgent question especially in Iraq in the aftermath of the end of Baathist regime after 2003.

Middle Eastern/Eastern Christian theology, political thought and ecclesiological culture is rich, complex and creative, however, it is clear that Christianity in the Middle East faces great challenges today. Mouchir Aoun, has helpfully articulated the challenge for Christian religious thought in the Middle East:

Today, the term Eastern or Middle Eastern theology comprises a number of concepts. [...] it designates, above all, a triple task, the classic one of reviving the Patristic tradition dear to those in the East, one with a modern resonance, the inculturation of the Christ event, and finally, one of contextual significance, the updating of the kerygmatic content.⁹³

(= *Analecta Gregoriana*, 290), Rome, 2003 ('Il consenso cristologico tra le chiese di tradizione siriana', 601-31) ('Il consenso cristologico tra la chiesa cattolica e la chiesa assira d'oriente', 633-51).

90 F Bouwen, 'Consensus contemporains en christologie', *Proche-Orient Chrétien*, Vol. 49, 1999, 323-336.

91 R Taft, 'Mass Without the Consecration? The Historic Agreement on the Eucharist between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East Promulgated 26 October 2001', *Worship*, 77 (2003), 482-509.

92 M Marten, 'Anglican and Presbyterian Presence and Theology in the Holy Land', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 5 (2005), 182-199.

93 H Hirvonen, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Perspectives of Four Lebanese Thinkers*,

To deepen our contextual understanding for theological reflection in the Middle East today, the French Jesuit and long-term resident of Lebanon, Thom Sicking, has insisted that theology in the East must confront a number of challenges:

1. A great diversity of Churches with differences and divergences, each having its own history and identity.
2. An environment marked by Islam and by Judaism and Hebrew culture in Israel.
3. The Churches of the region most often find themselves in a minority position: a situation which influences their behaviour and reflection both in their relations between themselves and in those which they have with non-Christian communities.
4. Close ties with the West and with Western Christianity in particular, considered both as an asset and a threat.
5. Significant emigration of their faithful, resulting in local Churches (the patriarchate of Antioch, Alexandria, or Jerusalem) becoming 'universal' Churches.

Recently we have witnessed the emergence of distinct theological thought among Middle Eastern Christians, for example Palestinian Liberation Theology,⁹⁴ the revival of the eremitical tradition in the Maronite Church,⁹⁵ monastic renewal in Syria⁹⁶ and Egypt.⁹⁷ The Latin

Leiden, 2013.

94 H Suermann, 'Palestinian Contextual Theology', *Al-Liqa* 5 (1995), 7-26; Samuel J Kuruvilla, 'Theologies of Liberation in Latin America and Palestine-Israel in Comparative Perspective: Contextual Differences and Practical Similarities', *Holy Land Studies: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 9, 2010, 51-69.

95 G Hourani and A B Habachi, 'The eremitical tradition in the Maronite Church', in *Christianity in the Middle East: Studies in Modern History, Theology and Politics*, 500-538.

96 Anna Poujeau, 'Renouveau monastique et historiographie chrétienne en Syrie', *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 151 (2010), 129-147; Anna Poujeau, 'A National Monasticism? Monastic Politics of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Syria', *Sociology and Monasticism. Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion*, Leiden, 2014, 169-184; Anna Poujeau, 'Monasteries, Politics, and Social Memory The Revival of the Greek Orthodox Church in Syria during the Twentieth Century', in Chris Hann and Hermann Goltz (eds), *Eastern Christians in Anthropological Perspective*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2010, 171-192.

97 A O'Mahony, 'Tradition at the heart of Renewal: the Coptic Orthodox Church and monasticism in Modern Egypt', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian*

Patriarch of Jerusalem, Michel Sabbah, developed a unique exegetical language for reading the Bible in the Holy Land.⁹⁸

We should also note that Eastern Christianity, through the Church of the East, opened up an engagement with Muslims which still shapes the 'canon' of Catholic thought on Islam.⁹⁹ The singular figure of Timothy I of the Church of the East in his exploration of encounter with Islam is increasingly seen as an archetype in world Christianity.¹⁰⁰ At the Asian Synod some years ago which discussed the important relations between Christians and Muslims, the Chaldean Bishop of Aleppo, Syria, and leading Eastern Catholic theologian, Antoine Audo, set out his vision: 'To survive and develop as living churches in the Arab and Muslim world of the Middle East, Christian Arabs or Asians need a spiritual vision of their relation with Islam, seeing themselves as sent by Christ to be witnesses of love,' and that evangelization in those lands requires Christians to live 'within Islam, that is, to form an integral part of society, of the Arab and Muslim culture without complexes, but at the same time to be witnesses of the evangelical liberty in ways that go beyond this culture, seeking to read the language of the Qur'an as a language of human relations.'¹⁰¹

The role of the patriarch as a representative of the Christian Church in the public sphere in the Middle East has grown in significance,

Church 7/3 (2007), 164–178.

98 L Marsh, 'The Theological Thought of Michel Sabbah in the Context of the Challenges to the Christian Presence in the Holy Land', in *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East*, 253–262. Apart from the important pastoral letters of the Patriarch, Michel Sabbah, see his 'Reading the Bible Today in the Land of the Bible' (November 1993) which is an important text in the context of scripture articulated in support of political theologies of exclusive claim to the land. See Alain Marchadour and David Neuhaus, *The Land, the Bible and History*, Fordham University Press, New York, 2007.

99 S H Griffith, 'Arabic Christian Relations with Islam: Retrieving from History, Expanding the Canon', in *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East: Studies for the Synod for the Middle East*, 263–290.

100 Frederick W Norris, 'Timothy I of Baghdad, Catholicos of the East Syrian Church, 780–823: Still a Valuable Model', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 30, no. 3, 2006, 133–136.

101 Declaration at the Asian Synod, February 2003 quoted in A O'Mahony, 'The Chaldean Catholic Church: The Politics of Church-State Relations in Modern Iraq', *The Heythrop Journal*, Vol. XLV (2004), 435–450, p. 450. See also the studies of A Audo as background to the encounter between Eastern Christian thought and Catholic *ressourcement* in the Middle East today: 'Eastern Christian Identity: A Catholic Perspective', in *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East*, 19–38.

especially in the context of religious leadership in the Middle East. The patriarch has often acted as an intermediary between the Christian community and the state; however, this role has not been universally welcomed among Christians.¹⁰² That said, between 2011 and early 2013 patriarchal leadership in the Middle East has been renewed, with the head of the Maronite Church Patriarch Boutros Raï, Tawadros II of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, John X, and Patriarch Louis Sako I Raphael of the Chaldean Church, being newly elected.¹⁰³

There are other shared characteristics among the Christians in the Middle East: anxieties in the face of the re-awakening of a militant Islamism; a deep awareness that in Islam the marker is between Muslim and non-Muslim, not between different types of Christian; growing marginalization of erratic identities in modern states; especially in the context where religious identity reinforces nationalist ideology, for example in Turkey between Sunni Islam and Turkish nationalism;¹⁰⁴ Shi'ite Islam and Iranian nationalism;¹⁰⁵ Judaism and Israeli identity; growing exodus to destinations outside of the region. For example, it is now estimated up to seventy percent of Iraqi Christians have left since 2003.¹⁰⁶

On the other hand, one can point to the significant renewal of the Coptic Church despite many challenging societal, political and religious challenges;¹⁰⁷ the increasing participation of the laity;

102 F McCallum, *Christian Religious Leadership in the Middle East: The Political Role of the Patriarch*, Mellen, London, 2010; F McCallum, 'The Political Role of the Patriarch in the Contemporary Middle East', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 43 (2007), 923-940; F McCallum, 'Walking the Tightrope: Patriarchal Politics in Lebanon', in S Mervin and F Mermier (eds), *Leaders et partisans au Liban*, Paris, 2012, 315-337.

103 Elizabeth Monier, 'The Chaldean Patriarch and the Discourse of "inclusive Citizenship": Restructuring the Political Representation of Christians in Iraq since 2003', *Religion, State and Society*, Vol. 48, no. 5 (2020), 361-77.

104 E Prodromou, 'Turkey between Secularism and Fundamentalism? The "Muslimhood Model" and the Greek Orthodox Minority', *The Review of Faith and International Affairs*, 3/1 (2005), 11-22.

105 A O'Mahony, 'The Christian Churches, Shi'a Islam and Muslim-Christian Relations in Modern Iran', in A O'Mahony and E Loosely (eds), *Christian Responses to Islam*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2008, 175-188.

106 H Teule, 'La situation des chrétiens d'Irak à la lumière des résolutions du Synode romain pour le Moyen-Orient', *Mélanges de Science Religieuse*, 68/3 (2011), 47-60.

107 F McCallum, 'Desert Roots and Global Branches: the Journey of the Coptic Orthodox Church', *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies*, 7 (2005), 69-97.

new ecumenical perspectives; monastic renewal; and fervent piety. For Christians in the East, the 20th century, which began with the Armenian genocide, ended with the rapid losses due to the migrations by Christians from the East to the West. The prophets of the 'death' of the Christians of the East had no lack of arguments to condemn the millions of Eastern faithful who remained behind to an end which was nigh. Paul Rowe has however reminded us that, the 'widespread concern today that Christians are in declining numbers in the Middle East easily falls prey to the enervating assertion that they are victims of persecution or mere relics of a fading past and runs the risk of once again robbing Christians of agency as powerful actors in their own societies.'¹⁰⁸

Catherine Jaoun-Mayeur reflects: 'The meaning of the presence of native Christians in the Middle East and the question of their remaining or not raises that of a real citizenship (*munwatanana*), based in a state under the rule of law, still wishful thinking in the Middle East: an identity which would not, for all that, reject communities and confessions—which would lead to a further weakening of the Christians—but would refuse to employ protected (*dhimmi*) status under the umbrella of a protector state, whether or not such a status might appear favourable. Vital for the Christian communities of the region, this question is also one for the Muslims of the region, harshly confronted by events with the need for an *aggiornamento*. A state under the rule of law (or civil state: *dawla madaniyya*) or sectarian conflict, pluralism or forced homogenisation: these are challenges common to all, and on which depends the fate of the Christians of the East.'¹⁰⁹

The Catholic Patriarchs of the East have issued a series of important letters on the religious, political, economic and cultural situation and challenges of the region. In the third part of the letter, 'Together for an egalitarian society', written in 1992, they state: 'No one can remove religion from public life or limit it to the liturgies and devotions; because religion is dogma and life that has to do with the whole of human existence, private and public, individual and social ... To link

108 P Rowe, 'The Middle East Christian as agent', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 42/3 (2010), 472–474, p. 473.

109 Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen, 'Les chrétiens au Moyen-Orient à l'heure de Daesh', *Annuaire français des relations internationales*, Vol. XVII, 2016, 681–695, p. 695.

citizenship to religious values is not an evil. On the contrary, religious values give a soul to citizenship. But in this case, it is necessary that religion should orient the person totally to God, to the perfect respect of the creature of God and of every religious conviction, especially when we have to do with the religion of a minority in a given society or nation. The laws of the state must guarantee the rights of the minority religion with the same rigour as it guarantees those of the majority or of the religion of the state.¹¹⁰

Antoine Audo made an explicit connection between the conclusion of the final declaration of the Synod for the Middle East (September 2012), Benedict XVI's papal visit to Lebanon and the so-called Arab Spring. Audo quotes the declaration, summing up the profound desire for a reordering and reorientation of religious thought towards a new understanding of the political in the context of religious freedom as a key theme to understanding conversion and mission:

Religious tolerance exists in a number of countries, but it does not have much effect since it remains limited in its field of action. There is a need to move beyond tolerance to religious freedom. Taking this step does not open the door to relativism, as some would maintain. It does not compromise belief, but rather calls for a reconsideration of the relationship between man, religion and God. It is not an attack on the "foundational truths" of belief, since, despite human and religious divergences, a ray of truth shines on all men and women. We know very well that truth, apart from God, does not exist as an autonomous reality. If it did, it would be an idol. The truth cannot unfold except in an otherness open to God, who wishes to reveal his own otherness in and through my human brothers and sisters. Hence it is not fitting to state in an exclusive way: 'I possess the truth.' The truth is not possessed by anyone; it is always a gift which calls us to undertake a journey of ever closer assimilation to truth. Truth

110 Quoted in Christian Troll SJ, 'Changing Catholic Views on Islam,' in Jacques Waardenburg (ed.), *Islam and Christianity: Mutual Perceptions Since the Mid-Twentieth Century*, Peeters, Leuven, 1998, 19-77.

can only be known and experienced in freedom; for this reason we cannot impose truth on others; truth is disclosed only in an encounter of love.¹¹¹

To sum up, Christianity originated in the Middle East. The Christian presence there today bears witness to the global Church of the unity of its origins and the diversity of its expression. Christians also help maintain and sustain the diversity in the Middle East. However, there has been large-scale flight from the Middle East. Christianity in the Middle East has a witness beyond itself. Let us hope that the Churches of East and West rise rapidly to this challenge for the key to the future of this important region may lie with the few.

111 Antoine Audo, 'The Synod of Bishops: The Catholic Church in the Middle East', *One in Christ: A Catholic Ecumenical Review* 44, 20.2 (2010), 196–200; Antoine Audo, 'Between Christians and Muslims a Pathway of Communion', *The Restless Middle East. Between Political Revolts and Confessional Tensions*, 'Oasis' 13 (2011), <<http://www.oasiscenter.eu/node/7149>> [accessed 11/10/22], in which he states: 'When listening to the demands of the people one cannot fail to notice a mysterious link between the final appeal of the Synod of the Catholic Church of the Middle East and everything that these societies ask for today: justice and freedom. Evidence of a historic opportunity.'

