THE LIVING STONES OF THE HOLY LAND TRUST

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'An ecumenical trust seeking to promote contacts between Christian Communities in Britain and those in the Holy Land and neighbouring countries.'

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Living Stones Yearbook 2023

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Christianity in the Middle East:
Theological, Ecclesial and Spiritual Encounters

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Living Stones Yearbook 2023
First published 2023 by
Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust
(Regd. Charity no. 1081204)
www.livingstones.ngo

ISBN 978 1 9168979 3 9

Produced by Melisende UK Ltd
Printed and bound in England by 4edge Ltd

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EDITORIAL

Today conflict rages in the Holy Land. Christianity in the Middle East stands confronted by multiple challenges and situations beyond its control or even ability to influence the direction of events or their impact. To reflect on the future of Christians in the Middle East, we cannot ignore the strategic, geopolitical, economic, and religious interests that encompass the entire area, both regionally and internationally. The course of history continues to accelerate in the Middle East. Bishop Antoine Audo some years ago, commenting on the 'Synod of Bishops special assembly for the Middle East: The Catholic Church in the Middle East: communion and witness',[1] stated '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.'[2] The synod urged for spiritual renewal, greater participation by the laity, ecumenical collaboration between the churches, dialogue and co-operation with Muslims and Jews. In particular, the synod emphasized the importance of religious freedom and freedom of conscience, engagement with public life, society and culture, based upon the concept of equal 'citizenship'

1 Dietmar W Winkler (ed.), *Middle Eastern Christians Facing Challenges: Reflections on the Special Synod for the Middle East* (Piscataway, NJ, USA: Gorgias Press, 2019); A O'Mahony and J Flannery (eds), *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East: Studies for the Synod for the Middle East* (London: Centre for Eastern Christianity, Heythrop College, University of London/Melisende, 2010).

2 Antoine Audo, `Between Christians and Muslims a Pathway of Communion' in: Oasis: 'The Restless Middle East. Between political Revolts and confessional Tensions', no. 13 (2011), <http://www.oasiscenter.eu/node/7149>.

for all, independent of religious or ethnic belonging.[3] The Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros al-Rahi hoped for a 'Christian Spring' to accompany the 'Arab Spring'. These desires and aspirations remain present across the region, continuing to be animated in Christian life, theological thought and ecclesial practice, particularly in ecumenical dialogue in the region. However, this spirit is confronted by the spectre of geopolitical conflict which apportions 'rights' to certain groups, forms of exclusive 'religious nationalism' and 'sectarianism', the feeling of insecurity engendered by mercurial violence, economic decline, and environmental degradation. That said, the contributions to the *Living Stones Yearbook* 2023 offer a wide range of engaged theological, ecclesial, and spiritual thought which represent a creative response to the challenges faced by peoples across the region.

Cardinal Michael Fitzgerald reflects upon 'Christianity and other religions in the light of *Nostra Aetate*', highlights the character and influence of this document of the Second Vatican Council, which has a special importance for Christians in dialogue and encounter with Jews and Muslims in the Middle East. Chair of Living Stones Robert Gibbons' contribution explores the life and times of Dom Godefroy Raguenet, whose monastic vocation and vision had been singularly encouraged by his reflexion on the martyrdom of the monks of Tibhirine, *Nostra Aetate,* interreligious dialogue between Christians and Muslims, and his years serving at the Cistercian foundation of Fons Pacis in Syria. Scott Thomas, a leading international scholar on religion and international relations, in his first contribution to the *Yearbook*, offers a timely, thought provoking and original piece on the '"Franciscan Models" of Peacemaking, Muslim-Christian relations, and Interreligious dialogue: Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis, and Louis Massignon'. David Derrick seeks to give account of the late bishop of the Church of England, Kenneth Cragg, who had been a leading scholar of Islam and Protestant ecclesial engagement with the Muslim world. Fadel

3 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', and Frans Bouwen, 'The Synod for the Middle East: First Results and Future Possibilities', in *Living Stones Yearbook* 2012.

Sidarouss, a well-known Coptic Catholic and Jesuit philosopher and religious thinker, adds to our understanding of the 'vocation' of Christian presence in Arab and Muslim society in the Middle East today. The *Yearbook* is privileged having this contribution by Fr Sidarouss which has been enabled by the translating and editorial skills of John Flannery, a member of the Theology Group and formerly of the Centre for Eastern Christianity, Heythrop College, University of London. Bianka Speidl, the University of Exeter, in a splendid contribution echoes many of the themes of dialogue and engagement with her exploration of the exchange between Matta el Meskin/Matthew the Poor and contemporary Muslim thinkers in Egypt. Fr Michael Nazir-Ali provides context and description to the character of Christian thought in the region, illuminated in culture, literature, political thought and poetry. Miles Elwell, in his first contribution to the *Yearbook*, describes his 'fieldwork' interviews with Georges Khodr, the Eastern Orthodox Metropolitan of Lebanon and the Greek Patriarchate of Antioch. These interviews or exchanges offer an intimate view of the working and evolution of Khodr's thought and the importance of direct personal dialogue and conversation. Bishop Antoine Audo, explores the interchange between the Syriac Fathers—Isaac of Nineveh and John of Dalyatha—and the western tradition, reflecting his own ecclesial culture of the Chaldean Church, its sister the Church of the East, and his personal experience and knowledge of the Carmelite and Jesuit spirituality. Grace al-Zoughbi demonstrates the openness of contemporary Christian thought in the Middle East. She describes and offers a discussion of the mutualities and common endeavours of Arab Protestant women theologians in encounter with the contributions by female mystics of Eastern Christian traditions. The *Yearbook* has always sought to explore the modern histories of the Eastern Christian churches. Sebastian Brock offers an overview of the scholarly Syriac Catholic Patriarch Ignatius Ephrem II Rahmani (1898–1929) whose work significantly added to our knowledge and understanding of the Syriac Christian tradition. The *Sayfo*, or Year of the Sword (1915), which brought about the destruction of swathes of Syriac Christian material culture and patrimony, found in Patriarch Rahmani, a dedicated scholar and true Church Father in his devotion to preserving manuscripts and spiritual writings of

'the "Third Lung" of the Church'.[4] Anna Hager, of the University of Vienna, explores the often difficult relations between the Syriac Catholics and Syriac Orthodox in the interwar period, noting the long-shadow that these cast over inter-communal and church relations, but we should note that these have changed slowly but dramatically with renewed ecumenical dialogue especially after Vatican II.[5] This is the first contribution by Anna to the *Yearbook*. Meanwhile, Fr Vrej Nersessian in his sixth contribution to the *Yearbook* offers a further exploration in the modern history of the Armenian Church and its scholarly and literary culture.

Editors
October 2023

4 Sebastian Brock ,'The Syriac Orient: a third «lung» for the Church?', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* (Rome), 2005, Vol. 71, no. 1, 5-20.

5 Sebastian Brock, 'The Syriac Churches in Ecumenical Dialogue on Christology', in *Eastern Christianity: Studies in Modern History, Religion and Politics*, London, 2004, pp. 44-65; Sebastian Brock, 'The Syriac Churches of the Middle East and Dialogue with the Catholic Church', in *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East*, London, 2010.

CONTRIBUTORS

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-Arsouzî 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 prospettive 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; 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 Giraudo (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; 'Christianity in the Middle East: Current Challenges and Opportunities for the Future, through the Experience of Syria', *Living Stones Yearbook* 2022.

Sebastian Brock, Oriental Institute, University of Oxford: a leading expert on Syriac Christianity, he has written a series of important publications on the subject including *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity*, 1984; *Studies in Syriac Christianity: History, Literature, Theology*, 1992; *From Ephrem to Romanos: Interactions between Syriac and Greek in Late Antiquity,* 1999; *The Luminous Eye: the Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem*, 1992; *The Wisdom of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, 1997; 'The Syriac Churches in Ecumenical Dialogue on Christology,' in *Eastern Christianity: Studies in Modern History, Religion and Politics*, Melisende, London, 2004; 'The Syriac Churches and Dialogue with the Catholic Church', *The Heythrop Journal*, Vol. 45, 2004; 'The Syrian orthodox Church in the twentieth Century', in *Christianity in the Middle East: Studies in Modern History, Theology, and Politics,* Melisende, London, 2008; 'The Syrian orthodox Church in the modern Middle East', in *Eastern Christianity in the Modern Middle East*, London, Routledge, 2010; 'The Syriac Churches of the Middle East and Dialogue with the Catholic Church', in *The Catholic Church in The Contemporary Middle East: Studies for the Synod for the Middle East*, Centre for Eastern Christianity, Heythrop College, University of London/Melisende, London, 2010. His previous contribution to the *Living Stones Yearbook* includes 'The Syrian Orthodox Church in the Twentieth Century' (2021).

David Derrick trained as a worker priest for the Church of England and has exercised his ministry in London's inner boroughs for the last fifty years. An article based on his MA dissertation (Heythrop College,

University of London), 'Can we re-image an Islam with purely a Meccan identity, as set out in the writings of Kenneth Cragg?' appeared in *Living Stones Yearbook* 2013. This was followed by 'Kenneth Cragg, Charles Malik and Dag Hammarskjöld—some thoughts on the question of mysticism and the "public square"' (*Living Stones Yearbook* 2016) and a further paper, 'Kenneth Cragg and the Wisdom of the Sufis', appeared in the *Living Stones Yearbook* 2020. He has recently completed his PhD studies at the School of Advanced Studies, University of London on 'Christian Spirituality and Muslim Mysticism in the theological thought and life of Bishop Kenneth Cragg (1913–2012) in dialogue with Dag Hammarskjöld' (2023).

Miles Elwell is an independent scholar with a special interest in Christian theological thought and Muslim-Christian encounters in the modern Middle East. Miles wrote his doctorate at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter entitled 'Existential Religiosity, Individuality, and Theosis in the Thought of Bishop Georges Khodr' (2018). Previously has had a long professional career in the United Kingdom and in the Lebanon.

Michael Louis Fitzgerald M.Af. (born 17 August 1937), ordained priest in the Society of Missionaries of Africa, 1961, Bishop 1992, made Archbishop 2002, created Cardinal 2019. He was Secretary of the Pontifical Council (now Dicastery) for Interreligious Dialogue from 1987-2002, and its President 2002-2006; 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 late in 2018, 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. He obtained a doctorate in theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome (1965) and a BA honours degree in Arabic from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London (1968). He lectured at the IPEA (Institut Pontifical d'Études Arabes), later renamed the Pontifical Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies (PISAI) [<https://en.pisai.it>], including two years of secondment to

Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. He was the Director of the PISAI from 1972-1978. 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. His publications include *Dieu rêve d'unité. Les catholiques et les religions: les leçons du dialogue*, with Annie Laurent (Bayard Presse, Paris, 2005) and (with John Borelli) *Interfaith Dialogue. A Catholic View* (SPCK, London & Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, 2006); *Praise the Name of the Lord. Meditations on the Most Beautiful Names of God* (PISAI, Rome 2015); (with Renata Bedendo) *Salvare insieme il Creato. Cristiani e Musulmani un dialogo in cammino* (Effata, Cantalupa-Turin 2020). 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 in', 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 [PISAI]. In 2021 Cardinal Fitzgerald gave the Michael Prior Memorial Lecture 'Christians in the Arab World and Interreligious dialogue' published in the *Living Stones Yearbook* 2022.

Fr Robin Gibbons a Greek-Catholic Melkite Church Chaplain; 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 Schmemann Professor of Eastern Christianity, Graduate Theological Foundation, Indiana; Ecumenical Canon, Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford. He has published numerous studies including *For The Life of the World: Eastern, Christian reflections on the environment*, Institute for Religion, Politics and Culture, Maryland, USA; 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). He has contributed on numerous occasions to *One in Christ: A Catholic Ecumenical Review* on Eastern Christian Theology and Ecclesiology; '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 other contributions to *The Living Stones Yearbook* include: '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). Fr Robin is currently Chair of Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust.

Anna Hager, Postdoctoral Research Associate at the University of Vienna. She has studied for her undergraduate degree in history at Université Paris-Sorbonne; Oriental Languages at Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales (Inalco); Master's in Islamic Studies at the University of Vienna; and doctorate also at the University of Vienna. Anna's publications include: '"Lebanon is more than a Nation, more than a Country. It is a Message." Lebanon as a Model of Christian-Muslim Relations', *Journal of Beliefs and Values* (2017); 'The Orthodox Issue in Jordan: The Struggle for an Arab and Orthodox Identity', *Studies in World Christianity* (2018); 'From "Polytheists" to "Partners in the Nation": Islamist Attitudes Towards Coptic Egyptians in Post-revolutionary Egypt (2011–2013)', *Journal of Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* (2018); 'Die Kopten und der Arabische Frühling: Zwischen politischer Emanzipation und Minderheitenstatus Asiatische Studien', *Études Asiatiques* (2018); 'The Emergence of a Syriac Orthodox Mayan Church in Guatemala', *International Journal of Latin American Religions* (2019); 'When Ephrem Meets the Maya: Defining and Adapting the Syriac Orthodox Tradition in Guatemala', *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* (2020). A monograph based upon her doctoral studies will be published by Edinburgh University Press in 2024 entitled 'Christian-Muslim relations in the aftermath of the Arab Spring'.

Michael James Nazir-Ali (1949) is a Pakistani-born British Roman Catholic priest and former Anglican bishop who served as the 106th Bishop of Rochester from 1994 to 2009. In 2005 he was awarded the Lambeth DD [Doctor of Divinity]. In 2021, he was received into the Catholic Church and was ordained as a priest for the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham on 30 October 2021. In 2022, he was made a monsignor by Pope Francis. Fr Michael studies at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. He has published numerous works on theology, philosophy, society and politics including *Conviction And Conflict: Islam, Christianity and World Order* (2005); *The Unique and Universal Christ* (2008); *Triple Jeopardy for the West* (2012); *Faith, Freedom and the Future* (2016). He is Honorary Fellow at St Edmund Hall, University of Oxford.

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* (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 previous contributions to *The Living Stones Yearbook* include: 'The Impact of the New Julfa-'New Geneva' School of Theologians against the Crisis of Proselytisation and Apostasy in Safavid Iran ' (2022); '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).

Fadel Siddarous SJ obtained from Saint Joseph Université Saint Joseph de Beyrouth, a BA in Arabic Literature, a Postgraduate Certificate in Philosophy, and a Doctorate in Theology and Ecclesiology 'Église copte et monde moderne' (Thèse de Doctorat en Sciences Religieuses, Faculté de Sciences Religieuses de l'Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth, 1978); a shorter version was published as 'Église copte et monde moderne', *Proche-Orient chrétien*, Vol. 30, 1980. He has published widely in the field of biblical studies, dogmatic theology, sacramental and pastoral, spiritual and monasticism. Sidarouss has in particular sought to bring Eastern Christianity into dialogue with the Jesuit Ignatius of Loyola Spiritual Exercises. Fr Fadel was Secretary-General of Catholic Schools in Egypt which he reflected upon in 'Catholic schools in Egypt: an educational mission in difficult conditions', *International Studies in Catholic Education*, Vol. 3 (2011), no. 1. His current intellectual interests include: philosophical and theological anthropology—the humanity of Jesus Christ—the characteristics of the Christian God in the Arab-Islamic environment—the role of the Church in the Arab-Islamic world, in particular his study 'L'Église d'Égypte, peuple de prophètes, de rois et de prêtres: lecture théologique de la Révolution de janvier 2011', *Proche-Orient chrétien*, 63 (2013), no. 1/2. Fr Fadel is a Jesuit priest from one of the oldest Coptic Catholic families in Egypt. The Coptic Catholic Church has been the ecclesial space within which he hones his theology; see 'The Renewal of the Coptic Catholic Church: Grappling

with Identity and Alterity', in *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East* (London, 2010).

Bianka Speidl is a senior lecturer and researcher at the Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Hungary. She gained her PhD from the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter, where she is also a Marie Curies Research Fellow. She is the recent author of *Islam as Power: Shi'i Revivalism in the Oeuvre of Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah*, London, Routledge, 2020. Bianka is a Greek Catholic from Hungary who has extensive relations and contacts with the Melkite patriarchate and Church in Syria and Lebanon. Her paper, 'Something has irreparably broken: Dispersed Christians in the Middle East', appeared in *Living Stones Yearbook* 2021.

Scott M Thomas, Senior Lecturer (Associate Professor) of International Relations at the University of Bath (UK); he is a Contributing Editor, *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*. Scott is a leading scholar on religion and international relations; see his *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations* (2005). He studied at the Department of International Relations at the London School of Economics for his MSc and PhD which was published as *The Diplomacy of Liberation: the Foreign Relations of the African National Congress since 1960* (1996), Recently Scott has turned his research attention to giving account of the 'Franciscan Paradigm' in relations between religions in the contemporary world today: 'A Trajectory Toward the Periphery: Francis of Assisi, Louis Massignon, Pope Francis, and Muslim-Christian Relations', *Review of Faith and International Affairs* (2018); 'St Francis and Islam: a critical appraisal for contemporary Muslim-Christian relations, Middle East politics, and international relations', *The Downside Review* (2018); 'The Encounter Between Francis of Assisi and al-Malik al-Kamil and its Relevance for Muslim-Christian Relations and Contemporary International Relations', *The Muslim World* (2019).

Grace Al-Zoughbi Arteen. Grace is an Arab Palestinian Christian, born and raised in Bethlehem. Grace holds a BA in Biblical Studies

from Bethlehem Bible College and an MA in Theology from the London School of Theology. Her thesis sought to explore the ways in which women can seek to defend and promote personal dignity, particularly within strongly patriarchal contexts. She served as a lecturer at Bethlehem Bible College 2011-2018 where she also led the BA Programme. Grace this year successfully completed studies for her doctoral thesis entitled 'Arab Protestant Women in Theological Education: a contribution to ecclesial understanding' (2023) at the London School of Theology, with special focus on the theological education of Arab women in the Middle East. In her day-to-day life, she participates in leading a variety of programmes through her church in Bethlehem and has been involved in various theological translation projects. Grace's paper, 'An Exploration of the role of Arab Protestant Women in Theological Education: a Contribution to Ecclesial Understanding of Christianity in the Middle East', appeared in *Living Stones Yearbook* 2021.

CHRISTIANITY AND OTHER RELIGIONS IN THE LIGHT OF *NOSTRA AETATE**

† Michael Cardinal Fitzgerald, M.Afr.

The Second Vatican Council was the first time the official teaching of the Church addressed the subject of its relations with non-Christians. The result was the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate (NA).* This document, the shortest of the 16 documents of Vatican II, was officially approved on 28 October 1965.[1]

I wish here to present some reflections on *Nostra Aetate* in the form of a meditation. Following the instructions given in the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius, I would like to indicate the preliminary preludes before proceeding to the meditation proper.

The first prelude, the composition of place, is suggested by the opening words of *Nostra Aetate*, 'In this age of ours'. You may object that this is a reference to time rather than to place, but in fact the Declaration is presenting us with a vision of the world in which people are drawing more closely together, and so people of different religions are bound to come into contact. It would seem to me that this vision is even more applicable today than sixty years ago. We belong to an age

* This paper was first delivered as an introduction to a Symposium held at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome on 25 September 2005 to mark the fortieth anniversary of the Vatican II Declaration *Nostra Aetate.* A modified version was presented to the Newman Society, Oxford, on 19 October 2023. It is this version that is reproduced here.

1 For the text see Austin Flannery, OP (ed.), *Vatican Council II The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents,* St Pauls 2004, Mumbai, pp. 653-656; Also in 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 and Media, Boston, 2006, pp. 43-46. On the genesis of the Declaration see John Borelli, 'Interreligious dialogue at Vatican II' in Catherine E Clifford and Massimo Faggioli (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Vatican II,* OUP, Oxford, 2023, 300–314.

of mobility of peoples and of globalisation. The former has seen the development of substantial communities of different religions in the traditionally Christian continent of Europe, but also large numbers of Christians in the heartlands of Islam. The latter affects not only commerce and communications, but applies also to terrorism, on the one hand, and solidarity among peoples on the other. Is it appropriate to suggest a scripture passage for this composition of place? It could well be the parable of the darnel or tares (Mt 13: 24-30), where these are seen to grow up alongside the good seed that has been sown. In explaining this parable Jesus says: 'The field is the world' (Mt 13:38). The vision is universal; the good seed is sown everywhere in the world. This will obviously be of prime importance for an understanding of the relations of the Church to the religions of the world.

This brings us to the second prelude, namely the grace to be sought, or what is desired. Here it is precisely this understanding of the role of the Church in today's world marked by religious plurality. This may lead to a better understanding of the Church itself as its own identity is discovered through the uncovering of both similarities and dissimilarities. Let it be noted that when *NA* was voted it was presented as a Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, just as the office which Paul VI set up for dialogue was called the Secretariat for Non-Christians. The change to the more inclusive term 'interreligious dialogue'[2] is an indication of greater sensitivity, based on the understanding that one feature of the relationship envisaged is respect for the identity of all engaged in the dialogue.

The first point of the meditation will be to consider the fundamental unity of humankind.

NA, referring in the first place to Acts 17, sees this unity in the common origin and the common destiny of all human beings. This is a belief that has been echoed by the teaching of the popes since Vatican II. John Paul II, reflecting on the Day of Prayer for Peace, held in Assisi on 27 October 1986, which brought together so many people from all different religious traditions, emphasised the unity of God's plan. He spoke about the common origin and common goal of humankind and stated that the differences are

2 The Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus* (1988) changed the title of this office to Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue; with the latest Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* (2022) it has become the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue.

of less importance when compared to the unity which is 'radical, fundamental and decisive'.[3]

Because it has been created in this way, the human heart puts to itself the fundamental questions about life and seeks in the religions the answers to these questions. The responses will be different, but the search is one. Even in our age, progress in science has not eliminated recourse to religions, though the increase in material well-being may well dull the spirit. There is also the influence of a post-modern mentality, seemingly holistic in approach yet wary of completely totalising syntheses. This may lead to eclecticism, with people drawing from different religious traditions at the same time. Yet the positive aspect of even this type of religiosity should not be underestimated.

The vision of a common origin and common goal calls attention to the time in between. Here the differences cannot be eliminated. There can be no absolute standardisation of the human search for fulfilment and happiness. Even in ecumenical efforts, in the search for the unity of all Christians, the riches of the diverse traditions are to be respected not rejected. Much more so among the religions, fundamental differences of belief cannot be eliminated in order to bring about one super religion. Indeed, those movements that have set out to bring all religions into one have ended up constituting new religions (one thinks immediately of the Baha'i Movement).

In meditating on this fundamental unity it may be necessary to go beyond what is said in *NA* and invoke the teaching of other documents of Vatican II. A seminal passage is §22 of *Gaudium et spes*, the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. The passage evokes the roles both of the Eternal Word of God and of the Holy Spirit. The Word, the Son of the Father, becoming flesh, has united himself to every member of the human race, so that human beings cannot be fully understood without reference to him. He is truly the Way, the Truth and the Life. He is the way to that final goal, a way characterised by the Passion, Death and Resurrection. At first sight this may seem to limit salvation to those who know Christ. Yet the Holy Spirit gives to every human being, irrespective of the time or place they live in, the possibility of entering into this Paschal Mystery. How this comes about, and what role the different religions may play

3 John Paul II, *Discourse to the Roman Curia,* 22.12.86, §3; see Francesco Gioia (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue,* p. 400.

in this one plan of salvation, is a topic which can be investigated. It may be good to conduct the investigation not in abstract terms, with regard to religions in general, but rather with reference to the concrete existence and experience of the individual followers of the religions.

Leaving such investigation to others, and returning to the meditation, it could be helpful to contemplate the Word made flesh, Jesus of Nazareth, in the mystery of his baptism at the hands of the Baptist (Mt 3:1-17). John is preaching a baptism of repentance, and the crowds respond. Jesus immerses himself in this stream of sinful humanity, just as he immerses himself in the waters of the Jordan. He, the sinless one, is expressing his solidarity with the sinners for whom he will give his life. At this moment there takes place a revelation of his identity as the Son of the Father. This deeper identity is never denied, although Jesus appears simply as a human amongst other humans. He is known as the carpenter's son. This is the reality of the Incarnation.

Now the Church, being the Body of Christ, is the prolongation of the Incarnation, so the law of the Incarnation applies to it also. The Church too is immersed in humanity, and its true identity may not always be evident. It may be seen as a religion among the religions and may indeed be called upon to act as such in today's pluralistic society. This is why it will be quite normal to find Christian leaders alongside Rabbis and Imams, Buddhist monks and Hindu swamis in interfaith councils. Since the Church is a pilgrim Church, its members are going forward, not alone, but in the company of many other pilgrims. In this fraternal journey, as John Paul II said at Assisi, 'either we learn to walk together in peace and harmony, or we drift apart and ruin ourselves and others.'[4]

The second point of the meditation is to consider all that is true and holy in the different religions, for this is the basis of the respect which *NA* encourages. What is called for here is an exercise in discernment. The Spirit of God has always been at work, in the hearts of individuals, but also in the history of peoples, in their cultures and in their religions.[5] This is not to deny the human element in the development of the different religions, for the Spirit comes to join the

4 John Paul II, *Discourse for the Conclusion of the World Day of Prayer for Peace,* Assisi, 27.10.86, §5. Cf. Francesco Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue,* p. 389.

5 Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) §5; cf. Francesco Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue,* p. 107.

human spirit, not to replace it. Now what is human is usually weak and even sinful, so the religions are not to be approached in a naïve way, as if they were absolutely perfect. Yet what is good, noble and beautiful in them can be attributed to the work of the Spirit.

When Christians relate to people of other religions, can they learn anything from what is true and holy in these religions? Is there discernible at the same time a shadow side, to which Christianity could bring some remedy? Perhaps a few summary suggestions can be made, following the order in which the different religions are presented in *NA*.

There is first of all the religion of those people who show 'a certain awareness of a hidden power, which lies behind the course of nature and the events of human life' (*NA* §2). This can include a belief in a supreme being, sometimes identified as Father. This is what is called Traditional Religion, according to the terminology used by the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue. This does not mean that Traditional Religions are static, unchangeable, but rather that they are situated in a localized matrix and conveyed from generation to generation by oral tradition. They give rise to a way of life which is 'imbued with a deep religious sense'. This religious sense may often include an attention to nature with which a certain harmony is felt. This is something which can often, or at least sometimes, be overlooked in Christianity. Traditional religion also includes a strong link with those who have gone before, and thus a reverence for and a feeling of solidarity with the ancestors, those who have handed down the tradition. There may be present, however, a spirit of fear, the idea that the spirits or certain ancestors might have to be placated by various sacrifices. Christianity offers the vision of the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which has taken place once and for all. It also teaches that love drives out fear, and thus creates a sense of freedom. As Paul says: 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom' (2 Co 3:17).

Next come those religions which have spread in different ethnic groups and people, influencing culture. The first to be mentioned by name in *NA* is Hinduism. It lays a strong emphasis on the divine in every person and the desire to come to the experience of a total union with the Absolute. This can be sought in different ways, through a life of asceticism, or profound meditation, or devotional practices. For Christians who are often tempted to emphasise only external

commitment, social action, this call for a realization of the divine in oneself can be very salutary. On the other hand, Hindus may learn from Christianity a sense of the importance of the individual person, since Christ has united himself to each one, and thus gain an appreciation for the dignity of each person independent of caste or social standing.

Like Hinduism, Buddhism teaches the way to liberation, but in doing so it makes a complete abstraction of the divine. The practical aspect of the eightfold way can be appreciated—what is important is to pull out the poisoned arrow, not to know where it came from—yet one could respond that to know the source of evil can help one to avoid it. The sense of interdependence could be a useful antidote to the individualism which often seems dominant among Christians. The constant effort to overcome or to eliminate the self may remind Christians of the need to enter into the *kenosis*, the self-emptying of Christ, and understand better the paradoxical words of Jesus: 'Anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it' (Mt 10:39). Buddhists can, and have, found inspiration in this teaching on the *kenosis* of Christ.

NA concludes the paragraph with a reference to 'other religions', without naming any. It would be too long to go through the list of all the religions in the world and to see what each could contribute in a spiritual exchange. I would like to mention only one, Sikhism, because its practice contains a feature that has always impressed me. It could be summed up in a principle: 'eat before you pray', though Sikhs themselves might not necessarily put it that way. Every Sikh temple or *gurdwara* contains a kitchen where *langar*, food, is prepared. This is available to all who ask for it. It is prepared by volunteers and served by volunteers, so that the person eating does not know whether the one who has prepared it or is serving it, or even the person sitting at their side, is of high caste or low caste. In receiving *langar* all are equal, and it is when one has this sense of equality that one can present oneself before God. Sikhs may find in the Gospels, in the way Jesus identifies himself with those who are in need, a confirmation of their own understanding of humanity.

What could be the contribution of Islam to this exchange of gifts? *NA*, taking its cue from the very name of the religion, *islām*, notes that Muslims 'strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God' (*NA* §3). This effort leads to an esteem

for upright conduct, in fact for a way of being where religion permeates all aspects of life. Christians could agree with this and be stimulated by it, though they may wish religion to penetrate life by living according to the spirit rather than through being subject to the law. The emphasis on divine transcendence can also be a reminder to Christians to show respect for God, though they would want to share with Muslims another dimension of God's might and love that is manifested in the Incarnation.

And Judaism? Among the many things that could be pointed to, let me suggest just one aspect of Jewish life which could be a lesson for Christians: the emphasis on the family. Is it not through the family in the first place, in the meals taken together, that religious tradition is handed down? Is there any way in which Christians could recover the role of the family in inculcating a religious spirit in the next generation? The family is often referred to as the 'domestic church', but it rarely seems to act as such. Greater contact with Jews could perhaps provide a renewed stimulus.

NA urges the members of the Church 'to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions' (*NA* §2). Part of the prudence required is care to see that one's essential identity is not impaired. In fact, experience has shown that this identity is often strengthened through the challenge of contact with people who have a very different understanding of religious truths. The charity or love needed could find a twofold expression, first in a contemplative spirit which is ready to recognize God's action in the followers of other religions and in the religions themselves, and then in a spirit of humility that excludes any attempt to gain an advantage over the other. In this light it can be understood how dialogue can reach a deep level, where the sharing of convictions can help each one to respond more generously to the call of God or to the attraction of the Absolute.

The third point of the meditation will be to consider why it is important to build up good interreligious relations. *NA* speaks of preserving and promoting peace, liberty, social justice and moral values (*NA* §3). This is said of Christian-Muslim relations, but it surely has a much wider application.

Experience has shown that much effort is needed to preserve peace. People of different religions may have been living together quite

harmoniously for many years, even for centuries, and then something happens to disturb the balance, tensions are created, and conflict breaks out. It then becomes difficult to recreate the trust which allows people to live together in peace. Knowledge of the other is needed as a basis for mutual understanding. Hence the importance in pluralistic societies of providing accurate information on the different religious traditions present, so that prejudices can be uncovered and overcome.

Relations will be strengthened if people of different religions can be brought to work together for the benefit of those in need and for the good of society as a whole. The tsunami in December of 2004 called forth such collaboration, between different religious humanitarian organisations, but also on the spot. Perhaps the challenge is to move from immediate emergency action into long-term projects. Such collaboration is not necessarily easy, for it can only flourish in a climate of trust. There is a need for an ongoing dialogue about the goals being pursued, the means being employed, and the way responsibility is shared.

The field of collaboration is extremely wide. One aspect is that of establishing justice on the earth as a pre-requisite for peace, and this can involve standing up for peoples' rights, lobbying for fair trade, and opposing discrimination (this is the burden of *NA*'s final section, §5, following on the strong condemnation of anti-Semitism in the previous section). It could take the form of working towards disarmament, promoting care for the environment, defending moral values so that human dignity is respected.[6]

Here, it seems to me, a weakness of *NA* becomes evident. By treating the religions in succession—it would have been difficult to do otherwise—the impression may be given that dialogue is always bilateral: Christian-Jewish relations, Christian-Muslim relations, Christian-Buddhist relations, and so on. Attention should be given to trilateral relations: Jews, Christians and Muslims which, though difficult, can make a contribution to peace in the world. More important, perhaps, are multilateral relations, particularly in societies where a multiplicity

6 The Document on Human Fraternity co-signed by Pope Francis and Dr Ahmad al-Tayyeb, the Grand Imam of al-Azhar in Abu Dhabi on 4 February 2019 suggests many areas in which co-operation could take place; the text can be found at <www.vatican,va/content/Francesco/en/event.dir.html/content/vaticanevents/en/2019/2/4/fratellanza-umana.html>.

of traditions exist side by side. In fact, where tensions exist between two communities, the presence of members of other communities can help to prevent conflicts from breaking out. In the period since the proclamation of *NA* a number of organizations, multi-religious in nature, have come into existence. As long as they respect the identity of each religion and do not attempt to unify all religions they can make a valid contribution to society.

In a similar way, a superficial reading of *NA* could lead one to think that only Catholics are involved in interreligious relations. In fact, the document, while speaking of the Catholic Church, and the members of the Church, also addresses its exhortations to Christians in general. This is another instance where *NA* cannot be taken in isolation from other documents of the Second Vatican Council. Just as reference needs to be made to *Dignitatis Humanae* for the fundamental question of religious liberty, and to *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et spes* and *Ad Gentes* for theological principles, so *NA* should be read in conjunction with the document on Christian unity, *Unitatis Redintegratio.* Not only is it necessary to recognize that other Churches and Ecclesial Communities are active in interreligious relations, but these relations have an impact on ecumenism. As the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms of Ecumenism* (1993) states:

> There are increasing contacts in today's world between Christians and persons of other religions. These contacts differ radically from the contacts between the Church and ecclesial communities, which have for their object the restoration of the unity Christ willed among all his disciples, and are properly called ecumenical. But in practice they are deeply influenced by, and in turn influence ecumenical relationships. Through them, Christians can deepen the level of communion existing among themselves, and so they are to be considered an important part of ecumenical cooperation (§36).

An Ignatian meditation ends with a colloquy, a dialogue. It would be possible to converse in the spirit with saintly persons who have given an example of relating to people of different religions, Francis of Assisi, Charles de Foucauld, John Paul II, and others. It could be helpful to

turn to Mary, in particular the Virgin of the Visitation, to learn how to rejoice in the wonderful things that God does, in others as well as in oneself. The colloquy would be above all with Jesus who showed such respect for people who did not belong to the Jewish tradition. Jesus reveals to us the Father's universal love, 'a pervasive love unlimited by space or time'.[7] Here I would like to end with a reflection on a parable that Jesus told about love that knows no boundaries.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) Jesus deliberately chooses as the main protagonist someone who is normally treated as a heretic, a person with whom one should not associate. Jesus, in his relations with the Samaritan woman, had already shown that he did not accept these restrictions. Here he gives the Samaritan as a model to be imitated. The Samaritan is on a journey, but he accepts to be put out by someone who is in need. He, like Jesus himself, was moved with compassion. He does what he can but, in taking the wounded man to an inn, he relies on the help of others. He is ready to pay, not only of his person but out of his pocket, yet he does not dominate the person he is assisting or try to bring him over to his own way of thinking or religious practice. In other words, the Samaritan shows disinterested love.[8] In this, it seems to me, he is a model for the person who engages in relations with people of other religions. These relations are to be positive, constructive, of service to humankind. By their very nature they cross over boundaries, yet always showing respect for the other person. They are altruistic, not serving one's own interest but attentive to the well-being of the other. They often spring from compassion, take the form of practical initiatives and give rise to co-operation. They are an expression of fraternal love. As *NA* says, returning to its initial reflection on the Father who is at the origin of all: 'We cannot truly pray to God the Father of all if we treat any people in other than brotherly fashion, for all are created in God's image' (*NA* §5).

7 Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, *Attitude of the Catholic Church towards the Followers of Other Religions. Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission* (1984) §22; cf. Francesco Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue*, p. 1123.

8 For a fuller meditation on this parable see *Fratelli Tutti*, the encyclical letter of Pope Francis (2020), §§56-86.

A MONASTIC VISION: 'A LITTLE GRAIN OF PRAYER IN SUFFERING' AND 'TO LIVE IN DIALOGUE WITH ISLAM'

Robert Gibbons Obl OSB

In memory of
Dom Godefroy Raguenet-de-Saint-Albin,
Abbot of Acey, Jura, Franche-Comté
(18 September 1970–3 August 2023)

1. Preamble: The Question at the Heart of the Long Search!

In the biblical tale of Sodom in Genesis 18-19 there is the profound and deeply moving dialogue between Abraham and God about divine justice, found in Genesis 18:16. A question and answer of a particularly weighty kind, to which Abraham, one can suggest, responds with exceptional politeness in the face of a weightier and more loaded question. Examined in a study by C D Axelrod on Abraham's search for justice, in *The American Journal of Biblical Theology*, he translated in this direct manner a text from that passage:

> 'Heaven forbid that you should do such a thing,' Abraham said, 'to kill the righteous together with the wicked, so that it will be the same in this world for the righteous as it is for the wicked. Heaven forbid!'—(he repeats his astonishment)—'will the judge of all the earth not act justly?' (Gen 18:22-25)[1] This concept of true justice is one, which we will find within any dialogue between the human person and the Divine, it eats at the root of the

1 C D Axelrod, 'Abraham's Plea for Justice: A Commentary on Genesis Chapter 18 article', *The American Journal of Biblical Theology*, Vol. 21(25) 30 August 2020, p. 3.

> Christian concept of redemption and sin, but it is also at the heart of any dialogue between the three Abrahamic religions and their various interpretations of the Holy One, 'does the judge of the earth act justly?'

This is how Abraham tests the 'waters of the flood', in the sense that the covenant with Noah is somehow being challenged in this provocative exchange, for the righteous Abraham wants to spare the people of Sodom from consequences of their sinfulness, particularly the wide understanding of the duties of hospitality which they have violated, but also because of Abraham's connection with his nephew, the righteous Lot. The sequence and context of this exchange are troubling but also extraordinary in the directness of the intercessory power of Abraham's prayer, unnatural in the sense that Abraham is pleading for a people he does not even know, and apart from Lot, his nephew, has no kinship with them and his.

Abraham's pleading for mercy, his role of intercession in a context of worship, is not only for Sodom but for a wider universal justice of all peoples in the face of suffering. Yet more than this there is the underlying sense that it is not Abraham but the Holy One who is actually demanding from Abraham thoughtfulness and a truthfulness—with a self-answer about the ethical and religious heart of what is at issue. This type of discussion is not for this essay, but it does bring into play not only the themes of searching but intercession, and of a wrestling with God that comes into the lives of those who become seekers of God. For it would seem that one of the key understandings of the text is to investigate the role of Abraham as intercessor, and as I shall point out, this calling is one which I believe strongly we find in key spiritual guides and allows them, as with Abraham, to break the parameters of so called religious safety and probity in their dialogue with the Divine. Somehow the finality of the question, 'will you spare?', has to be answered in another way, connected in the understanding of God-as-Love for people, life and the place of the earth itself, all blessed, all sacred as God's creation.

2. The Vocation of *Monos* as Intercessor

In an essay in *The Hekima Review*, 'Abraham's Plea for Sodom and God's Justice', Setibo Batuzolele SJ points out the following:

> Genesis 18 is an eloquent illustration of a progression in Abraham's relationship with God: God revealed Himself to Abraham (v. 1); Abraham welcomed God's revelation (vv. 2-3); fellowship resulted, they ate together (vv. 4-8); this fellowship led to further revelation and greater understanding of God's will (vv. 9-22); having learned of God's purpose to judge the sinners, Abraham's response was to intercede for those under God's judgment (vv. 23-33). That is how Abraham experienced God's faithfulness, justice and righteousness. After experiencing God so deeply, Abraham holds the position of a teacher for his descendants, (and) for us today.[2]

In this explanation we connect with several things of value. Firstly, that a dimension of relationship is essential for the revelation of God, who is the protagonist, we are called to meet God, but secondly in our welcoming of this calling we then thirdly embrace a way of living which then develops into a communitarian form of life or an eremitical existence which is connected to community, always in a structured form of connectivity. Within these arenas there is a fourth dimension of fellowship and eating, sharing especially in the sense of encountering and eating the bread of life, the Word found in Scripture which leads to further revelations of God in silent prayer.

The Christian tradition of monastic life is essentially and structurally this engagement of Abraham, and it leads us towards a tentative understanding that there is a teaching role within this specific vocation of true intercessor. This is something we Christians often forget, because we are so used to fairly narrow definitions of spirituality and prayer in our institutional and denominational frameworks. Abraham's intercession blows this narrowness of vision apart, removes it from a simplicity we perhaps lazily desire, to thrust

2 Setibo Batuzolele SJ, 'Abraham's Plea for Sodom and God's Justice Essay', *Hekima Review*, No. 48, May 2013, pp. 103-104.

our spirit, mind and body into a greater encounter with the Divine One; and let us remember, one in which Abraham as father of nations is also ancestor of Judaism and Islam as well as Christianity. It is the long search of the monastic!

If we listen to the Lord's own dialogue in Genesis 18 concerning this, we can find a covenantal promise towards openness and truth which we can perceive in the terms 'prayer-as-right-dialogue'. It is this that needs to be underscored today, for it also stops intercession becoming a one-way process and instead a determined and blessed calling:

> The LORD reflected: 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, now that he is to become a great and populous nation, and all the nations of the earth are to find blessing in him?
> 'Indeed, I have singled him out that he may direct his sons and his posterity to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD may carry into effect for Abraham the promises he made about him.' (Gen 18:17-19).

3. The Calling of the '*Monos*' to a Deeper Dialogue

Throughout the world there have been and still are men and women who exercise this Abrahamic vocation of intercessor and, if you will, 'questioner' of God, perhaps not in an overt way but simply by living out their lives as truthfully as they are able. We can find them in all and every religion, but for the Christian there is a particular dimension of this way of life found in the complex and varied calling of the monastic. By this I do not simply mean the vowed permanent monks connected to particular orders of communities in east or west, but include as essential elements, the wider more fluid dimension of those persons grafted and rooted into their communities as oblates, affiliates, and friends, or significantly figures who move on from their initial coenobitic vocation to a place of tension outside the structures, yet not quite apart, all of whom we might gather under the term *monos*.[3]

3 By the term 'monk' I refer to men and women, but a better use, which includes all categories aforementioned, would be a *monos*!

As I have just noted, some of the most important figures that we come across in any spiritual or interreligious endeavour are those who having been trained and lived in monastic life, find themselves called out of it to enter a more profound and mysterious dialogue with God, and also to articulate this intercession and sight of the Holy One for others in a deeper and more ecumenical manner. In recent years this has begun to appear in a significant way, gently, almost unobtrusively, but inspirationally. Such were Charles de Foucauld, Henri Le Saux, Jules Monchanin, Bede Griffiths, Roger Schutz and, I suspect, Thomas Merton[4]—had he not died in an accident! There are also those who within the inner core of monastic coenobitic life exercise a prophetic role, such as the silent presence of Blessed Maria Gabriella Sagheddu OCSO (1914-1939), nun of Grottaferrata, now transferred to the monastery of Vitorchiano, where her body is honoured in a chapel dedicated to Christian Unity in the monastery grounds. As it was reported in her own words to her abbess, she felt impelled and called by God to give up her prayer and life as an offering for Christian Unity: 'I feel the Lord is calling me'—she confided to her abbess—'I feel urged, even when I don't want to think about it.'[5] Is this not what C D Axelrod suggests when he points out that the context of Abraham's relationship with God was dangerous, 'that the text of his worship involves precisely a trail through provocation?'[6]

Whilst we often look for more overt examples of holiness, and think of characters like Thomas Cranmer, Ignatius of Loyola, Catherine of Siena, Elizabeth Seton, Susanna Wesley, John Paul II or Desmond Tutu, we need to note that the inner teaching of the spiritual path of a deeper monastic tradition traditionally shies away from such open handed witness, because of a desire for that great virtue of humbleness of heart. True, within its communities and personalities, monasticism has had its extroverts, in that exterior sense of engagement with others,

4 On Merton's encounter with Sufism see the studies by Fr Sidney H Griffith of the Catholic University of America, 'Thomas Merton, Louis Massignon and the Challenge of Islam', *The Merton Annual: Studies in Thomas Merton, Religion, Culture, Literature and Social Concerns*, Vol. 3, 1990, 151–172; S H Griffith, 'Mystics and Sufi masters: Thomas Merton and dialogue between Christians and Muslims', *Islam & Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 15, 2004, no. 3, 299–316.

5 See OCSO website, <https://ocso.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/BLESSED-MARIA-GABRIELLA-SAGHEDDU-EN.pdf>.

6 Axelrod, 'Abraham's Plea', p. 11.

in figures such as Bernard of Clairvaux, John Climacus, Hildegard of Bingen, de Rance, Columba Marmion, Prosper Guéranger and many others; yet they are in a sense the dissonance of a polyphony built on the unison of chant; for the Desert Fathers and Mothers are recorded through the tales of their lives meant as wisdom shared with and for others. The character of the western monastic legislator, St Benedict, is only discerned through his word; the Dialogues of Gregory the Great wrote about him being hagiographical piety, whereas the real gift of the Benedictine tradition is not the personality of Benedict but a profound humility of the Word perceived in the wisdom tradition of a living abbot, through taught words, written down in a Rule. Apart from the knightly monastic Bernard, the early Cistercians were known by the strict way they interpreted the Rule of St Benedict and their retreat into the desert of the lands they colonised, this exemplified and found in the text of their *Carta Caritatis* and in the hagiographical lives of their founders briefly sketched together after their death in the *Exordium Parvum* and *Exordium Cistercii*.[7]

In more recent years, monastics have trod the road of Christ outside ecclesial boundaries, searching for God in the strange places of the earth. Amongst them the example of the Tibhirine Cistercian Monks of Atlas are a beacon of light, fuelled by their love for their Muslim brothers of the Algerian Atlas Mountains, seen through and in the story of their deaths and the testimony of the two brothers who survived.[8]

4. Dom Godefroy Raguenet de St Albin OCSO

In a very real and distinctive way, another contemporary monk has been added to this number of intercessors and teachers very recently in the person of the Cistercian abbot of Acey, a monastery in the Jura

7 For an English translation of the *Carta Caritatis*, see the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance website: <https://ocso.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/EN-Carta-Caritatis.pdf>. See also the texts of the Exordium Parvum and Exordium Cistercii: <https://ocso.org/resources/foundational-text/exordium-cistercii/>.

8 A personal note here. Having being formed and professed in Benedictine monasticism for many years, then moving into the Eastern Byzantine tradition (but still as an affiliate/oblate of a Benedictine monastery) I discovered a life in which monasticism forms a rich part of spirituality. I was moved and have been very drawn in devotion and inspiration to Fr Christian and these monks of Tibhirine, something I discovered in Dom Godefroy and which now links me to his presence.

Bourgogne Franche-Comté in eastern France. Dom Godefroy Raguenet de St Albin, who died in a tragic mountain fall on 3/4th August 2023, and was found on the eve of the great feast of Christ transfigured on another mountain. It was a feast for which he himself had a great love, as is illustrated by the words of Dom Marc de Pothuau OCist, friend and abbot of the nearby Cistercian Monastery of Hauterive, near Fribourg, Switzerland, who reflected in his tribute, the great love the abbot had for this great feast at Godefroy's funeral.

We need to know that before he became a monk, Dom Godefroy was a marine and spent some time in the USA where he visited the Trappist Mount St Joseph's Abbey, Spencer MA. It was there, as Dom Marc records, something of the inner light so sought, and so much loved by monks was found, part of that glimpse of *Theosis* (indwelling light) taught in the eastern monastic tradition by Dionysius the Areopagite and much loved today in the Eastern Byzantine tradition. Of this understanding Dom Marc spoke:

> The radiance of Christ on the mountain was a precious reminder of his first call to Spencer Abbey at the Transfiguration in 2000, when he was a liaison officer in the United States. This is why he was so attached to this celebration and wanted to write its icon, here with us two months later ... this first icon of his, exhibited here. This is how he spoke about this mystery: 'In every life there is a day of transfiguration, a day in which joy is born like a dawn. That day in which we suddenly understand that our existence is not a wandering tossed around by chance, nor an absurd network of determinisms, but that the train is going somewhere: it has a destination; we are expected, loved; and we are not alone along the way.'[9]

This is not simply the insight of a reflective man or even monk, it is also part of that deeper mystical tradition found in the Eastern

9 Dom Marc de Pothuau, Dom Godefroy Raguenet de Saint Albin (18 September 1970–3 August 2023). Tribute at the funeral of Dom Godefroy, Acey in Associazione Nuova Cisteaux, 14 September 2023, <https://www.vitanostra-nuovaciteaux.it/marc-de-pothuau-dom-godefroy-raguenet-de-saint-albin-18-09-1970-03-08-2023/> [accessed 19/09/23].

Byzantine tradition, exemplified by Dionysius, but also the Athonite School of mystical prayer as well as the teaching of St Seraphim of Sarov, found also within the Hasidic tradition and that of the Sufi mystics. That the Transfiguration was (and is) a reality as much as the vision of Moses on Mount Sinai or Abraham with the Lord at Mamre, is something that links Godefroy within this deep well of God's living water, for none of these persons was ever alone along the way.[10] His untimely and much mourned death has sparked clear and important interest in his work, not only his vision and teaching on the future direction of monasticism, but also his involvement through AIM (Alliance Inter-Monastères) particularly in a dialogue with Islam inspired by the martyred monks and others of Tibhirine in the Atlas Mountains. It is indicative that a parting gift of his legacy is now an article on the Tibhirine monks which was shared out after his death and before final publication, as well as his comprehension of the gift of friendship espoused by these monks and his own Cistercian tradition, found so distinctly in the outpouring of love for who he was and still remains through the example and witness of his own life and tragic death. A characteristic of the friends of God is a radiance, the light of St Seraphim of Sarov's joy, a joy that is not manufactured but comes from within and is seen by others. Several instances of that radiance in Godefroy's face have been mentioned, especially a dream he shared before his death.

It is worth telling the story as he told it to Mother Martha who was co-visitor with him on a Visitation of a Cistercian Community in the UK. On Thursday 27 July, at Mount Saint Bernard, Leicestershire, a week before his death, Dom Godefroy told Mother Martha Driscoll about a dream he had:

> I had a strange dream last night. We were in community, I don't know which community but in community. All at once it was clear that the end of the world had come. Everything was collapsing, falling apart, complete confusion. Everyone was trying to grab on to something,

10 See OCSO website: <https://ocso.org/2023/08/14/funeral-and-burial-of-dom-godefroy-raguenet-abbot-of-acey/> [accessed 19/09/23]; Alliance Inter-Monastères (AIM) website: <https://www.aimintl.org/en/153-en/ocso-news/7737-domgodefroy-acey> [accessed 19/09/23].

> grasping to get something in their hands of what was falling apart, to keep it for themselves, clinging to bits and pieces of what was dissolving. I suddenly realized: we who live in community, in communion, know how to live this moment: no need to grab at things in panic, but rather to let go of everything and stand straight, calmly welcoming what was happening, what was coming ... Then I woke up ... .' His face was radiant and happy as he spoke. He told the community about the dream after Lauds.[11]

Since his death, this dream has seemed to some, both prophetic of his own death and also a deeper message of consolation in a time of change and uncertainty.

5. The Fragility of being Friends of God

The relational element of deep mysticism rooted in the sense and sensibility of friendship brings me to reflect on that lovely Hasidic tradition of the 36+ Righteous People who exist at any one time in our world and whose lives, prayers and goodness sustain us and prevent the peoples of the world from destruction because of its evil ways. We can term them by that phrase 'friends of God' but remind ourselves that these righteous are not confined to any one religious tradition, and that their existence is precarious and fragile, for they bear an enormous burden. In an article from 2012 in *The Times of Israel* blog, Rabbi Allen S Maller explains it thus: **'**For the sake of these 36+ hidden saints, God preserves our world even if the rest of humanity degenerates to the level of total barbarism. This idea is based on the story of Sodom and Gomorra in the Bible, where God told Abraham that he would spare the town of Sodom if there were at least 10 righteous people in it. Since nobody knows who the 36+ *Lamedvavniks* are, not even themselves, every Jew should honour and respect all the simple, honest, unselfish, hard working and long suffering people around us, for one of them may be one of the 36+.'[12]

11 OCSO Website. Texts at the Obsequies of Dom Godfrey, 14 August 2023. Rêve de Dom Godefroy, <https://ocso.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/EN-Dream-of-Dom-Godefroy.pdf>.

12 Allen S Maller, *Times of Israel*, '36+ unknown righteous people', 9 August 2012,

Yet Maller also reminds his readers that it is not only the Jews who are righteous, this gift is given to the gentiles as well, but it also depends on several other factors. There is precarious fragility to their existence, perhaps that fragility born out of closeness with the divine, the righteous may not disclose that they are one of these people. Even if they think they are one of the friends of God (and the inference is that they have the true humility of not knowing), they cannot utilise this knowledge. They are truly like a *'monos'*, known only to God, carrying the fragility of a weight they cannot fully know as yet, but through goodness and righteousness interceding for us all.

6. Monasticism as a Crucible of Encounter

It is into this spiritual and ethical melting pot of spiritual tradition of 'friend', 'righteous' and 'intercessor' that I consider the deepest role of the *monos* to belong. Humility is their supposed guide, intercession in a pure short format part of their prayer, 'eating' the Word of God in *lectio* and meditation and the community life, led in whatever way they have available to them, their connection with Christ the *Verbum caro factum est*, and hiddenness their cloak. I have a personal interest and journey in the story of Tibhirine and Dom Godefroy, for being trained and rooted in the monastic tradition according to Benedict's wisdom for 25 years, I still remain still an eastern priest, affiliate of a Benedictine monastery, so there is nearly 50 years of mistake, fragility but also guidance within me, and there is also that bond of friendship found in God and neighbour, in solitude and communal life. This essay was inspired by the death of a monk I did not know personally, but wanted to meet and hoped to do so on my stays with my French family in the Jura, had not his untimely death this August prevented an earthly connection. But I believe that in some way he will be very much a friend of the Kingdom, for friendship was one of his great gifts, and death does not ever end that connection.

Dom Marc de Pothuau made much of this connectivity between the living and the 'great cloud of witnesses' at the end of his eulogy:

12:25 PM, <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/36-unknown-righteous-people/ Blog> [accessed 19/09/23].

> ... if suffering did not stop him, if he was so moved by the fragility of others, then I dare to suggest that you do not hesitate to ask him for a hand in your difficulties. Dom Godefroy didn't run away because it was easy. I would not be surprised if he dared to take a few more detours through our misery before climbing the mountain blazing with light. In fact, he doesn't want to go up without us.[13]

There is also a deeper and more personal search, which enlarges the horizon of my intellectual and spiritual search especially for the deeper bonds that draw seekers of the Holy One together across the ecumenical divide. The monastery where Dom Godefroy became abbot is that of Acey founded in 1136; it is in the Jura Bourgogne Franche-Comté, a region with deep monastic roots, for ancient monastics lived as fathers and mothers of the desert in its limestone reculées, and later the great Benedictine monastery of Baume-Les-Messieurs with Gigny were the two foundational monasteries of the great Cluny. In that region a Cluniac monk, Robert of Molesme, went out to found Cîteaux in the Dijon marshes. It is saturated with ancient monasticism, but another background issue gives a link to this strange connectivity with Islam, for in the 10th century this whole area, including Swiss territories, was under Saracen, i.e. Muslim, control.[14] Islam and dialogue of a kind are hidden in the deeper cultural history of this region. For me personally, it is actually in the DNA I possess, for this area is where my direct maternal line belongs, and into my own mix I can see this ancient melange, Iberican, Caucasian, Gaul and influences from the Moors!

There is always something in the *terroir* of an ancestral place that allows one to feel close to the past in an alive way, very much in the sense of that lovely description from the *Exordium Parvum* of the early Cistercians as lovers of the brethren and of the place: 'He (Stephen Harding, third abbot after St Robert and St Alberic), English by birth; he too had come there from Molesme with the others, and was a lover

13 Dom Marc de Pothuau OCist, Tribute, art. cit. Associazione Nuova Citeaux, 14 September 2023.

14 See Kees Versteegh, 'The Arab Presence in France and Switzerland in the 10th Century', *Arabica,* Vol. 37, 1990, 359-388. Versteegh points out that large groups of Arabs controlled this area in the 10th century, but are not referred to as Arabs but rather Saracens or Moors (p. 359).

of the Rule and of the place.'[15] This is a mark of monastic life, to be not only lovers of community, brethren, in friendship, but also lovers of the place. This is evidenced by the beautiful names of their early Cistercian monasteries, many of whom had the theme of water source or native beauty, such as Cîteaux, Clairvaux, Bonlieu, Senaque, Sept Fons, Melleray in France and Rievaulx, Fountains, Jervaulx, Beaulieu amongst others in the UK. Into this Cluniac and Cistercian area, we must also note that Peter the Venerable, Abbot of Cluny, and those who followed him as abbots had a distinct and cultural approach to Islam, rather different from that of the more polemical Bernard of Clairvaux. In a review of Scott G Bruce, *Cluny and the Muslims of la Garde-Freinet. Hagiography and the problem of Islam in medieval Europe*, Matthias M Tischler, points out the inferences of what the author does not include:

> Bruce does not describe the steps from Maiolus to Peter the Venerable as a real way of learning to deal with the Muslims' faith, in other words as a path for Cluny's conversion from developing traditional means of creating its own identity to innovative modes of transforming others identities.
>
> For example, he does not mention Cluny's liturgical prayers for northern Spanish kings in the eleventh century as another means of religious intervention nor does he consider the wider biographical reception and perception of material on Muḥammad in Benedictine and Cluniac historical writing during the eleventh and twelfth century, a Europe wide work that prepared Peter the Venerable's own project on the religion of Islam.[16]

15 Chapter 17, Exordium Parvum. English Text <https://ocso.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/EN-Exordium-Parvum.pdf>.

16 *The Times of Israel*, 9 August 2012, <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/36-unknown-righteous-people/>; Scott G Bruce, *Cluny and the Muslims of la Garde-Freinet, Hagiography and the problem of Islam in medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), XII, 160 pp. Reviewed by Matthias M Tischler, ICREA/Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Bellaterra, Spain, E-mail: <matthias.tischler@icrea.cathttps://doi.org/10.1515/jtms-2017-0010> [accessed 19/09/23], p. 281; see <https://www.academia.edu/34972545/S_G_BRUCE_Cluny_and_the_Muslims_of_la_Garde_Freinet_Hagiography_and_the_Problem_of_Islam_in_Medieval_Europe_Ithaca_NY_London_2015> [accessed 19/09/23].

This is of great insight and extremely valuable of for our own research into the connections between early Islam and Christianity, particularly in terms of monasticism. For over four centuries the main (principal) source of Christian European knowledge of Islam came from a project sponsored by Peter the Venerable, ninth abbot of Cluny, in 1142.

> This was formed of Latin translations of five Arabic works, including the first western language translation of the Quran ... . We know it as the Toledan Collection, eventually printed in 1543 with an introduction by Martin Luther. Peter also completed a handbook of Islamic belief together with a more contentious work, *Liber contra sectam Saracenorum*.[17]

Dom Godefroy Raguenet de St Albin was the abbot of Acey in the Jura, a Cistercian monastery founded in 1136 by Cherlieu Abbey, a daughter house of Clairvaux. Closed in 1790 by the Revolution it was refounded by the Cistercian Monks of Aiguebelle in 1873.[18] Dom Godefroy, a monk of Aiguebelle, was elected abbot of this community in 2021. His story is one of those that will, I believe, be an inspiration to those of us who look for answers about our dialogue with God and other ways of faith understandings. A large part of his monastic vocation was connected to the story and witness of the Cistercian monastery of Tibhirine in Algeria, and the martyrdom of most of the community in 1996, and also the persistent dialogue with Islam, very much in the spirit of the Tibhirine prior, Dom Christian de Chergé and other members of the community, especially Br Christophe's clear and developing spiritual theology of friendship fixed within the context of dialogue and prayer. As Fr Godefroy wrote, in a paper on friendship and the community at Tibhirine, 'to be a friend of God implies becoming a friend and brother of all, responsible for his humanity, even if the price be one's life.'[19]

17 Matthias M Tischler, op. cit.

18 Website of Acey Abbey: <https://acey.eglisejura.com/> [accessed 19/09/23].

19 Godefroy Raguenet de St Albin, 'Friendship in Tibhirine: Monastic/Muslim Dialogue in Algeria', paper at the seminar organized by the University of Fribourg (Switzerland) in the semester of spring 2023, 'Tibhirine. Paths of fraternity', which

It is very indicative that it is from this wider tradition of monasticism the ecumenism between Christians and other religious traditions is being kept alive at a time when the heart seems to have gone out of the ecumenical movement and a more reactionary spirit of defensiveness swirls around the church. This is not meant to be a negative comment, the Christian witness to Christ's desire that 'all may be one' (Jn 17:21) can never depart nor be separated from the commitment of discipleship, nor can we hide in a fortress church, when the God of Abraham and Sarah is questioning us about our engagement and understanding of the wider context of God's design and love for all peoples. The risk is in taking that step of trusting faith and reaching out, perhaps without any baggage, and trying to become a friend of those not in our faith community, maybe well outside perhaps of our perception and comfort zone. It is clear that this is what the Word is calling out for us to try and achieve. Jesus says: 'I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd.'(Jn 10:16)

My own understanding is that the vocations of Charles, Christian and Godefroy is rooted in the call of the Divine One for us all to become a simple disciple-pilgrim, and explore and engage with those, who though not of this fold, know truth and who occupy other mansions in the Father's House, and come into our lives in the hospitality of friendship. 'In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know.' (Jn 6:2-4) It is not our work, but the preparation and coming call of the All Merciful One, found in the Christ of friendship.

I hope that what we are witnessing in the Living Stones Theology Group with our own particular work on eastern Christianity, and especially the place it holds in the Middle East, the Nile and eastern Africa, is the emergence of a wisdom tradition from these righteous

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will appear in the fall at Academic Press Fribourg (<https://academicpressfribourg.info/>), p. 19. He had sent the ultimate corrections made to this text the very morning of his departure for his rest stay in Switzerland where he died accidentally, during a hike, at the beginning of August 2023. Pending its publication, we distribute this text with the kind permission of the publisher, Marie-Dominique Minassian, University of Fribourg.

friends of God, bearing fruit in a new form of *monos*, and our own theological, spiritual and faith-based engagement with it so that we may help others understand.

7. Monasticism a Fertile Ground for being Friends of God!

Personally I would shy away from any attempt to claim a defined and specific charism of friendship with God, the hallmark of the 36+ Righteous is a 'not knowing' that apophatic mode of being. As I have pointed out earlier, humility, true humbleness of heart, is a prerequisite of the monk/*monos*, but also of any Christian. We are to lose our life, we bear one another's burdens, we are to act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with our God, as Jesus and Micah put it, but at the heart of this journey is that ascetic discipline of not pushing one's selfish agenda, giving up in order to receive. The Rule of Benedict tells us that the twelve steps of humility lead to a freedom of love and a friendship, where it is God who first connects: 'Now, therefore, after ascending all these steps of humility, the monk will quickly arrive at that perfect love of God which casts out fear.' (I John 4:18) 'Through this love, all that he once performed with dread, he will now begin to observe without effort, as though naturally, from habit, no longer out of fear of hell, but out of love for Christ, good habit and delight in virtue. All this the Lord will by the Holy Spirit graciously manifest in his workman now cleansed of vice and sins.' (*RSB* Humility C4: 67-70)

It is in this sense of exploration we discover a wider ecumenism that cuts across religious divides, calling us back to essentials (those basics), focussing us on the heart of what it means to be a Christian and follower of Christ but also of the wonder of the many mansions in the 'Father's House'. Monastic life is one of those gifts that keep on giving, not necessarily in the sense of useful product or great vision, but rather in those parabolic symbols of Jesus, the grain of wheat that dies to produce a hundredfold, or mustard seed that becomes a tree, or in that seeker who leaves everything, sells up all, to buy the pearl of great price—which starts out as an annoying piece of grit in the oyster's shell. This form of life has a surprising resilience as history shows, perhaps the Benedictine Abbey of Monte Cassino's motto sums it up, *Succisa virescit*, 'cut down we spring back' (or 'rise up again'). A

short but eloquent report from *Time Magazine* entitled *Succisa Virescit*, written on 8 September 1948 mentioned the rebuilding of the abbey, totally destroyed by allied bombardment, a small parable of the tenacity of monks with their friends, the living creatures. 'Look About You.' Monte Cassino's abbot, white-haired Ildefonso Rea, recently recalled that the abbey's motto is *succisa virescit* (cut down, it grows again). He said quietly:

> This monastery was founded in the 6th century. Four times it has been destroyed, and every time, no matter how long it took, Monte Cassino has risen again. Nature shows us the urgent will to live. Look about you. Half-burned tree trunks are sprouting fresh and vigorous shoots.
> ...
> Earlier in the year, when the birds were nesting, the monks discovered a nest of swallows above the altar in the newly patched crypt of Saint Benedict. Some of them proposed to tear it down. But Dom Oderisco Graziosi good-humoredly intervened. 'Let them stay,' he urged. 'After all, they too are rebuilding.' [20]

So too are we!

In essence monastic life is not religious life, that terminology and traditions of founders and spiritualties, clericalism, charisms and modes of pastoral-missionary work belongs to later formularies in the western church. Its roots are anti-institutional, as early monastics fled to the desert, departing from the rapidly legalised, institutionalised form of Christianity to flee into a way of life well away from normalised contact with society. It belongs to, and is firmly planted in, the soil of the undivided church of old, as well as the greater interreligious dialogue with other holy seekers after truth. More than that, it sits at the frontier customs points of religion, those thin border places, or to use a desert analogy, oases, where one tradition has to meet another in the experience of living with and alongside each other, sharing what they have from the well of God together.

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20 <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,779955,00.html> [accessed 19/09/23].

8. The Wellspring of the Friends of God

The call of Vatican II in *Perfectae Caritatis* was for all those who lead vowed lives to return to their sources: 'The adaptation and renewal of the religious life includes both the constant return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original spirit of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time. This renewal, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of the church, must be advanced according to the following principle: "Since the ultimate norm of the religious life is the following of Christ set forth in the Gospels, let this be held by all institutes as the highest rule."'(*PC 2*, a)[21]

The story of Dom Godefroy is one that we can situate within this 'long renewal' and 'return to the sources', and in this long search, the image of monasteries and water as source and wellspring, goes together on all kinds of symbolic levels, particularly in the basics of agriculture, medicine, and the industrial revolution of the earliest Cistercians, who harnessed water in a particular manner to completely transform their work and its environment. The importance of water is not only practical, it has an aesthetical and mystical role as well in a monastic world full of scripture. It was (and is) for the *monos* a resource of deep allegory and spiritual truth, a hint of paradise regained. Water is used by Jesus to denote a greater mystery, of himself as essential to all life, therefore its source is a crucial symbol, and a wellspring, the *fons et origo* of life.

A recent research article in the journal, *Frontiers of Architectural Research*, 'Water as a common reference for monastic lives and spaces in Cistercian and Han Buddhist monasteries'[22] by Weiqiao Wang and Jiang Feng, points out that the architectural and spatial elements of monastic design are also areas of wider interreligious significance; the Cistercians were often called the 'sons of water' as we can see by the nomenclature already mentioned of the monastic sites, but it also broadens the parameters for dialogue. It takes us to what Christian de Chergé referred to as the 'basics' of dialogue.

Besides the scriptural imagery and the architectural planning of buildings that reflect the divine and human realm in an intermixture

21 Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*, Pope Paul VI, 28 October 1965, Vatican, Rome. See Chapter 2, a.

22 Weiqiao Wang and Jiang Feng, 'Water as a common reference for monastic lives and spaces in Cistercian and Han Buddhist monasteries', research article, *Frontiers of Architectural Research*, Vol. 12, no.1, 2023, 85–103.

of refracted sacredness, there is also another deep link with the Muslim world. The Qur'an calls water the basis of creation, and it plays a central role in Islamic gardens which, like the monastic cloister garden or the areas set aside for herbs and medicinal plants, reflected the image of paradise as a place of healing and reconciliation.[23]

It is within this experience, that we are enabled to discover a synchronicity of 'ecumenical basics' which we need to rediscover across religious divides and find in such arenas as common attitudes to water and its space. 'During the evolution and development of the monastic space for thousands of years, water has become a part of the practice space. In Cistercian monasteries, as a symbol of purity, water is not only the core of life but also the geometric centre of the architectural layout. Water is generally located at the centre of the cloister in the form of a fountain.'[24] It is through exploration and dialogues such as this, that new intellectual and religious spaces can be found for a different vocabulary about the Holy One and our place on this earth.

9. Seeking New Models of Encounter and Renewed Vision

If one reads the signs of the times correctly, there is a need for communities of monastics or groups of *monos,* to shift their horizon of engagement, and in particular ignore the vagaries of church and interreligious politics. They need to remain where they belong in a rooted contextual sense, such as belonging 'in' the Catholic Church, or within a particular tradition, but remain faithful to a constant forwardness of a vision, such as is found in the decree *Perfectae Caritatis* of Vatican II, to seek the 'transfigured Christ' monastics discern in the encounter of Abraham, and thereby renew our concentration on the consistent call to search, seek and dialogue. This is firstly with God,

23 The link between the planning of monastic and Islamic gardens needs further examination, but there are many symbolic and practical connections. The Alhambra in Granada provides us with an example of what an Islamic garden was in the time of the Cluniac and Cistercian monastic origins. See the architectural blog, 'Lions in the Piazza: History of The Alhambra's Paradisal Gardens and Courtyards 29 January 2023', <https://lionsinthepiazza.com/history-gardens-courtyards-alhambra> [accessed 19/09/23].

24 See Weiqiao Wang and Jiang Feng, 'Water as a common reference for monastic lives and spaces in Cistercian and Han Buddhist monasteries', p. 96.

in the Word-who-is-Christ, then with the living community both in its inner and outer circles!

Every so often the Spirit either pushes, pulls, or cajoles monastics towards renewal, often doing so by force of happenstance, perhaps in order to throw off the chains of a particular re-founder who has imposed a model and vision of pieties and spiritualities alien to the radical inner call of the dialogue between Abraham and God. It takes courage and effort to turn away from any model of later and more institutional ecclesiology, which has the tendency to reduce friendship with the Holy to rules about contact or purity. Avery Dulles and others have shown in their works on ecclesiological models that one form cannot answer every need and that the institutional model cannot be the primary model, but must work in tandem and alongside others.[25] Any version that does not take into account other models at work, needs to be changed and challenged. The *monos* needs once again to take his or her place as a model of one who fits 'uneasily' into the institutional church, and whose company should include not only those who make formal vows but others, such as the idiorhythmic monastics, or such as the ascetical wanderers like the Starets, or those so-called holy fools for God, all independent in particular ways, but always guided and rooted seekers after God, found in the traditions of the east, and which in the western tradition we are beginning to discern again. We now find these *monos* who push boundaries in the groups of associates, friends and oblates attached to a particular community, who often make promises to support and share as much as they can in the Rule but whose experience opens out a treasury for others in what I have referred to as De Chergé's basic banalities of life.[26]

One key to monasticism is the *abba*, or abbot as we know the word, which we can also translate as a wise spiritual guide, an elder who draws to him or herself disciples, and by word, example, and the gospel life, teaches them the way of the *monos*. These characters will often be misunderstood, that is the nature of the spiritual journey, the closer one walks with God, the more the attacks of those inimical

25 See Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church: A Critical Assessment of the Church in All Its Aspects* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan Ltd, 1988).

26 See Johann Christoph Arnold, 'A Story of Forgiveness', *Plough Quarterly*, 'As he (Christian de Chergé) explained it, "the only way for us to give witness is ... to be what we are *in the midst of banal, everyday realities.*"' <https://www.plough.com/en/topics/life/grieving/christian-de-cherge-a-story-of-> [accessed 10/01/2015].

to the Holy seem to occur, and that of course is what the monastic tradition of spiritual warfare is all about, and we desperately need the elders to guide us. The guiding role of the elder/*abba* is the way a wider tradition of the spiritual journey opens up, for spiritual teachers, *abbas/ammas*, gurus/teachers whatever term you will, are there beyond Christianity in the ascetic traditions of *monos*, in Buddhism, Sufism, Judaism, Hinduism, etc. They break the mould and stretch the boundaries of partiality to an inclusivity of the sacred world which has no known boundaries, except that which pushes against and prevents evil overcoming us.

Dom Godefroy, like Charles de Foucauld, Christian de Chergé and others, is one of those *abbas*, elders or guides, who can also be called by us one of the humble friends of God, gifts to us of the Holy One. Godefroy's journey (with similarities to De Foucauld and De Chergé) is somehow connected to a military life. A short news item of him in *Day Fr Euro*, an online journal, summed him up gently: 'A former naval commando, Brother Godefroy Raguenet de Saint Albin had discovered his monastic vocation thanks to Tibhirine's message.' In a long interview with *The Cross* in May 2021, he returned to this vocation which had been working on him since, as a teenager, he had stayed on the island of Lérins, off the coast of Cannes (Alpes-Maritimes), where he had discovered monastic life and the psalm prayer.

> Assigned an exchange officer to the United States, I left with the trap door address of Spencer, Massachusetts, where the Lord awaited me, he said. A monk put in my hands the book of the Abbot General Dom Bernardo *How far to follow?* ..., which featured the martyr brothers of Tibhirine. I discovered the paradoxical fruitfulness of this community life buried, which attracted me when I rubbed shoulders with it for 24 or 48 hours in an abbey.[27]

After leaving the army, Fr Godefroy made several stays in the monastery of Notre Dame de l'Atlas at Midelt, in Morocco, which since 2000 has housed a small international community of monks from the Cistercian Order of strict observance (Trappists), from Tibhirine

27 <https://euro.dayfr.com/>, news item, 6 August 2023.

in Algeria and initially founded in Fez in 1988. The monastery was where the two survivors lived, Brother Amédée and Brother Jean-Pierre (who have both since died). From 2014, Fr Godefroy became chaplain for more than three years of the Trappistines of Azeir, Syria, on the border with Lebanon. Back in Europe, he spent several months at the Abbey of Hauterive (Switzerland), from where he was asked to become the superior of Acey in 2021 and where he lived as abbot until his death in August 2023.

I feel certain his wisdom will flourish well beyond his untimely human death, for in his search he has touched base with the saints, sought the truth of God-in-life and, as is suggested in a comment about a dream before his death, saw, met and walked, maybe unknowingly, with his God. I feel certain this story about De Chergé and his friend Mohammed talking about the water of life is very much Godefroy's! The story goes like this (it all began in 1959, when De Chergé was sent to Algeria with the French army's 'pacification' forces). There he befriended Mohammed, a Muslim policeman, and together they took weekly walks to discuss politics, culture, and theology. De Chergé tells the following story about their friendship:

> Since the day when he had asked me, quite unexpectedly, to teach him to pray, Mohammed made a habit of coming to talk with me regularly. He is a neighbour, and we have a long history of sharing. ... One day, he found the perfect formula for calling me to order and demanding a meeting: 'It's been a long time since we've dug our well!' ... Once, to tease him, I asked the question: 'And at the bottom of our well, what will we find? Muslim water or Christian water?' He gave me a look, half-amused and half-rueful: 'Come on now, we've spent all this time walking together, and you're still asking me this question! You know very well that at the bottom of that well, what we'll find is God's water!'

It is a pity that so many of us do not drink fully from the ecumenical water of the All Merciful, All Compassionate God!

Conclusion
The Suffering and Fragility of Friendship

Johan Christophe Arnold in his article, 'A Story of Forgiveness', reminds us that it is people like Christian de Chergé who are the reminders of a work to be done by any who seek justice and righteousness worldwide. In a time when so many people are willing to die in ongoing armed conflicts between the 'Christian' west and the 'menace' of Islam—whether in Iraq, Afghanistan, Algeria, or anywhere else—where are the men and women who are willing to die for the sake of peace? Certainly de Chergé was one of these. To quote from his remarkable farewell letter:

> I know the caricatures which a certain Islamic ideology encourages and which make it easy for some to dismiss the religion as hateful ... But such people should know that at last I will be able to see the children of Islam as He sees them—He whose secret joy is to bring forth our common humanity amid our differences.[28]

This was echoed in a circular letter by the community of Tibhirine which took into account the leadership and encouragement of the then Abbot General Dom Bernardo Olivera for the community. What was written still stands as a testament to a route of dialogue we too can follow:

> Your mission? A silent but living presence; a welcome from the heart for the Muslim brother, in order to be oneself authentic and a better Christian, to learn from him how to be even better; learn something about Islam and the Muslim world; awaken and motivate the dimension contemplative which lies in the heart of every Muslim, as of every man. In relation to the Order? Among other things, making the religious values of Islam present so that the Cistercian monasticism can be enriched by what has been

28 'Last Testament. A LETTER FROM THE MONKS OF THE TIBHIRINE by Christian de Chergé', August 1996, translated by the Monks of Mount St Bernard Abbey, Leicestershire, in *First Things*, August 1996, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/1996/08/last-testament> [accessed 19/09/23].

> thus gleaned from local culture. And then this gratuity of a hidden life which has no influence on the next day.[29]

Godefroy wrote about this fragility in his last work, a fragility borne out of a fragile, precarious community in a situation of hostility and danger but which, as he pointed out, favoured an emergence of a new practice of dialogue which had been refined over the decades, and strengthened with Dom Christian's leadership as prior. But as he makes careful note, there must be consent from all the community to accept this fragility, in order to allow oneself to be 'disarmed', to understand the 'Gift' always at work and which calls for giving in response to gift, even in the heart of the ordeal that is present. Godefroy's love and acceptance of this bore fruit in his own ministry as abbot, but also his vocation as *monos* in the Cistercian tradition.

There is much more to reflect and research, but I shall leave the last words of this reflection to Dom Godefroy, and in a sense it is very much his last testament, for it comes from an article written just before his death and picks up this theme of friendship as a way of ecumenical life and engagement. Part of this comes from his deep understanding and admiration for Dom Christian and the other brothers of Tibhirine, partly his own work of ecumenism, and partly in his role as *abba* and *monos*, it is a signpost for the future!

> We can hear in the rereading of this friendship what could be the ideal conditions for discernment and easily transpose it into a community framework. If this type of deep friendship, which is elective by definition, is rare, monastic fraternity, which is the 'prophecy of its broadening out' and its pedagogy (cf. the treatise on Spiritual Friendship by Aelred de Rielvaux), also has the vocation to be peaceful and confident. After development the will of God is indeed the horizon of all discernment.[30]

29 Translation by Fr Robert Gibbons: 'Lettre circulaire de la communauté de Tibhirine du 22.12.1991, dans MOINES DE TIBHIRINE, Heureux ceux qui espèrent', *Autobiographies spirituelles* (Paris: Éd. du Cerf, Bayard, Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 2018), p. 723.

30 Translation from the French by Fr Robert Gibbons.

'FRANCISCAN MODELS' OF PEACEMAKING, MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS, AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE: FRANCIS OF ASSISI, POPE FRANCIS, AND LOUIS MASSIGNON

Scott M Thomas

> The real world begins here .... What we think about these events and possibilities, and what we think we can *do* about them, depends in a fundamental sense on *how* we think about them [e.g. the war in Bosnia, Syria, and genocide in Rwanda, war in the Ukraine, great power rivalries, global warming, etc.]. In short, our thinking about the 'real' world, and hence our *practices*, is directly related to our *theories*, so as people interested in and concerned about the real world, we must be interested in and concerned about theory: What are the *legacies* of *past* theories [past theologies, and political theologies]? *Whose facts* have been most important in shaping our ideas [our theologies]? *Whose voices* are overlooked [i.e. the concept of ontology]? Can we know and how can we know it [i.e. the concept of epistemology]? Where is theory going [how do different concepts of theory indicate different purposes for what theory is, what it is for, for whom it is for, and who benefits from different concepts of theory]? Who are *we* [i.e. the concept of identity]? The real world is constituted by the *dominant answers* to these and other theoretical questions (emphasis added).[1]
>
> *Steve Smith, Ken Booth, and Marysia Zalewski*

1 Steve Smith, Ken Booth, and Marysia Zalewski, 'Introduction', in Steve Smith, Ken Booth, Marysia Zalewski (eds), *International theory: positivism and beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1–10.

This paper sets out the basic elements of what it calls 'Franciscan models' of peacemaking, Muslim-Christian relations, and interreligious dialogue—i.e. models consciously guided and inspired by Francis of Assisi, and it indicates some initial trajectories for further investigation. It does so from the perspective of the study of international relations, which is a discipline—or cross-roads of disciplines—founded after the First World War. Since the 1990s there has been a 'religious turn' in the discipline, recognizing the importance of religion in contemporary international events. There has also been what R Scott Appleby has called, the 'ambivalence of the sacred', i.e. negatively, the role of religion in hatred, war, and violence, and positively, its increasingly recognized role in peace, peacemaking, and reconciliation (Section 3).[2] Building on this analysis, in the aftermath of the US debacle in Iraq, a relatively new area, called 'religious engagement' in foreign policy (a term Appleby also coined), has gained prominence in foreign ministries around the world.[3]

However, a surprising 'theological turn' in the discipline is also taking place. There is a growing recognition of the theology, or political theology underlying many of the allegedly 'secular' events in international relations, and in the history of international relations. Moreover, there is a growing recognition of the theology, or political theology underlying the allegedly 'secular' European philosophers whose ideas have influenced over the centuries the theory of international relations.[4]

The concept of 'the postsecular', indebted to Jürgen Habermas, has also influenced the study of international relations since the 2000s.

2 R Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*, Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000); Scott M Thomas (ed.) 'Symposium: Essays in Honor of R. Scott Appleby, *Review of Faith and International Affairs*, 18, 2 (2020).

3 Fabio Petito and Scott M Thomas, 'Encounter, Dialogue, and Knowledge: Italy as a Special Case of Religious Engagement in Foreign Policy', *Review of Faith and International Affairs*, 13, 2 (2015), 40–51. This article is a public version of a briefing paper for the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Fabio Petito, 'From Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) advocacy to interreligious engagement in foreign policy,' *Global Affairs*, 6, 3 (2020), 269–286.

4 Seán Patrick Molloy, *Kant's International Relations: The Political Theology of Perpetual Peace* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State Press, 2017), Vassilios Paipais (ed.), *Theology and World Politics: Metaphysics, Genealogies, Political Theologies* (New York: Palgrave, 2020), William Bain, *The Political Theology of International Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

Firstly, descriptively, this is the unexpected resiliency of religion in modern life. This is the view of those scholars who have recognized the global religious resurgence and are engaged in the 'religious turn' in the study of international relations. It has challenged the bias of secularism, and religion's marginalization, and investigates the key role of religion in war, peace, reconciliation, and conflict resolution.[5] Secondly, analytically, and this is the strongest, and most radical connection to Louis Massignon (Section 3), the 'postsecular' is a form of radical critique and theorizing on new models of politics, which recognize a positive role of religion, theology, and spirituality in peace, democracy, freedom, justice, and social and political inclusion.[6] These changes in the discipline form the background to this paper, and are mentioned throughout it.

Section 1 begins with the source—the founder, Francis of Assisi, and his early companions. It sets out how he 'performed the gospel life' in a way that establishes the basic elements of a 'Franciscan model' of peacemaking, Muslim-Christian relations, and interreligious dialogue, followed in the rest of the paper—encounter, conversion, knowledge, and transformation. Reference also will be made to Pope Francis throughout the paper, and how he was guided and inspired by this model—encounter, the culture of encounter, which inspired his social practices—universal fraternity, inclusive citizenship, and social peace.

Section 2 briefly relates this model, and aspects of its theology and spirituality, to key aspects of international relations theory and begins to draw out its contemporary relevance and implications—initially pointing in this section mainly to Pope Francis.

Section 3 offers a case study and examines in greater detail Louis Massignon (1883–1962), as an early 20th century exemplar of this 'Franciscan model' of peacemaking, Muslim-Christian relations, and interreligious dialogue, and the way it can be connected to Pope Francis' model, and to aspects of international relations theory. Massignon was one of the most important European scholars of Islam in the

5 Scott M Thomas and Anthony O'Mahony, 'Postsecularity and the Contending Visions of the European Political Imagination in International Relations', in Luca Mavelli and Fabio Petito (eds), *Towards a Postsecular International Politics: New Forms of Community, Identity, and Power* (London: Palgrave, 2014), 105–128.

6 Luca Mavelli and Fabio Petito, 'The postsecular in International Relations,' *Review of International Studies,* 38, 5 (2012), 931–942.

20th century.[7] He held the chair in Muslim sociology of Islam at the Collège de France and was pre-eminent in the field of Islamic mysticism, and published widely in all the areas of Islamic studies.[8] He has been described by a leading scholar of Shi'ite Islam as 'perhaps the greatest academic scholar of Islam that the [western] world has ever produced,'[9] and he was also the most important Catholic scholar of Islam in the 20th century.[10]

What is so compelling for a scholar of international relations is that Massignon's Christian conversion in Baghdad—back to the Catholicism of his youth—was so intimately caught up with the story of the emergence of the modern Middle East. It took place in Baghdad, in Arabic, in a predominantly Muslim region (Iraq was then part of the Ottoman Empire). It was also caught up—he was arrested by Turkish soldiers as a French spy—with the events of the Ottoman Empire's constitutional ('Young Turks') revolution. He gained first-hand experience of the duplicity of great power politics, as a political advisor to the French government, and as a member of the Sykes-Picot commission, which (secretly) drew up the treaty, now so reviled, which divided up the Ottoman Empire among the great powers and drew up the map of the modern Middle East.[11] Moreover, Massignon's views prefigured Appleby's concept of the 'ambivalence of the sacred', believing that religion can contribute to war or to peace, and that it can be a crucial part of the solution—and not only a part of the problems of war, poverty, and justice in North Africa, the Middle

7 Albert Hourani, 'Islam in European Thought', in Albert Hourani (ed.), *Islam and European Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 43-49; Derek Hopwood, 'Albert Hourani: Islam, Christianity, and Orientalism', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 30, 2 (2003), 127-136.

8 Christian S Krokus, *The Theology of Louis Massignon: Islam, Christ, and the Church* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2017).

9 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World* (London: Kegan Paul, 1987), p. 254; James A Bill and John Alden Williams, *Roman Catholics and Shi'i Muslims: Prayer, Passion, and Politics* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), p. 88.

10 Anthony O'Mahony, 'The Influence of the Life and Thought of Louis Massignon on the Catholic Church's Relations with Islam', *The Downside Review*, 126, 444 (2008), 169-192.

11 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: Fordham University Press, 2015), 230-251.

East, and even in international relations. This view was criticized, even ridiculed at the time by political 'realists' and practical politicians—of all stripes. Massignon's views, as the paper makes clear, also anticipated the 'religious turn' since the 1990s, and the 'postsecular sensitivity' in the study of international relations since the 2000s.

However, these aspects of Massignon's background—Islamic scholar, political advisor, devout Catholic, and politically engaged French Catholic intellectual—come together in another aspect of his background. He was also deeply influenced by the life of Francis of Assisi, and his encounter with al-Malik al-Kamil, the Sultan of Egypt, during the Fifth Crusade (1217–1221). He consequently became a member of the Third Order Franciscans or the Secular Franciscan Order. Massignon was in good company. He is following Ramón Lull, the most famous scholar of Islam in the Middle Ages, who also became a Franciscan tertiary for the same reason.[12] This section explains how Massignon adapted Section 1's basic elements of the 'Franciscan model'—as compassion, hospitality, and substitution.

(1)
A 'Franciscan Model' of Peacemaking, Muslim-Christian Relations and Interreligious Dialogue— Encounter, Conversion, Knowledge and Transformation.

This section sets out how Francis of Assisi 'performed the gospel life' in a way that establishes the basic elements of a 'Franciscan model' of peacemaking, Muslim-Christian relations, and interreligious dialogue, followed in the rest of the paper—encounter, conversion, knowledge, and transformation.[13] What is most surprising, and significant from the viewpoint of a scholar of international relations is that Francis of Assisi's transformative life story begins with a war, the main type of event that led to the founding of this scholarly area after the First World War.

12 Annemarie C Mayer, 'Charting the Attributes of God: The Common Ground of Three Religions according to Ramón Lull', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 9, 2 (2009), 95–117.

13 Fabio Petito and Scott M Thomas, 'Encounter, Dialogue, and Knowledge: Italy as a Special Case of Religious Engagement in Foreign Policy', 40–51.

Francis, before he was a saint, was a soldier, and then a prisoner of war (1202) in Assisi's war against Perugia (1202–1209) as part of the rise in northern and central Italy of the independent *communes*, or city-states in the central Middle Ages (1000–1300). This eventually became the Italian Renaissance city-state type of international system. Francis was not the only soldier who through injury and trauma renounced war and became a saint (e.g. Martin of Tours was one of Francis's mimetic models).

What is far more significant—is that what took place is contrary to the simple, popular version of his conversion story (Francis went off to war, Assisi lost the war, he was imprisoned by Perugia, he was released after a year, and these traumatic events contributed to a profound conversion experience). What is significant is the *prolonged* period (1202–1209) of what scholars are now willing to call not only a war, but a civil war, *internally* between factions, and *externally* between Assisi and Perugia, taking place within the over-arching struggle between the papacy and the (German) Holy Roman Empire, and those *communes* who backed the papacy, and those who backed the empire (the Rocca Maggiore, the citadel towering above the city of Assisi remains even today as a reminder of this 'foreign power' over the *commune*). In spite of the peace treaty (1203), there was *still* ongoing, horrific, bloody, and violent period of raids, looting, and armed combat for many years (1202–1209). For scholars of international relations this situation is reminiscent of the 'external' or 'international' dimensions of civil wars, so common in many ancient and contemporary wars.[14]

14 Pietro di Bernardone (St Francis, 1182/83–1226) was a teenager (age 15–16) during the time of the rise of *communes* or city-states in northern and central Italy (1000–1300). It is not known if he participated in any of these heady political activities or the insurrection and the fall of the Rocca Maggiore that led to the creation of the *commune* of Assisi (1198). His family was part of the emerging bourgeoisie (middle class) and represented the new elite. These times were also characterized by the rise of early capitalism, a money economy, growing trade (e.g. Francis and his father often attended trade fairs, especially in Provence), and growing wealth, poverty, and inequality. The war between Assisi and Perugia began as an 'internal war' or 'civil war' between Assisi's popular class (the middle class) that revolted against Assisi's noble class, which sought refuge in Perugia (including the family of the future St Clare of Assisi). During the insurrection against the troops of the Holy Roman Empire in the Rocca Maggiore (an 'external' or 'international' dimension of the civil war since they backed Assisi's nobles), the citadel was destroyed, and the (independent) *commune* of Assisi was created. However, Assisi's nobles gained 'external' assistance from the nobles in Perugia, which ultimately led to the 'external' or 'international' war between Assisi and Perugia (from the

Historians who focus on the peace treaty underplay the persistence of the anarchy and violence. This 'minimizes the importance of Assisi's internal and external war on the origins of the new Franciscan movement. The war accompanied Francis' spiritual crisis, as well as that of his first companions, and 'it continued until the approbation of the rule [i.e. the *Earlier Rule*, 1209/10 between Francis and Innocent III (the *Rule* without the papal seal)], and may well have been the factor that determined its existence.'[15] This year is the 800th anniversary of the *Later Rule*, which had its final editing in 1221, and received the papal seal by Pope Honorius III in 1223.

So, for Francis and his early companions, something was profoundly wrong with the way they were living. It all begins with *encounter*—it was these military events—being a soldier, and a prisoner of war, and the *encounter* with Christ, speaking to him from the cross in the dilapidated Church of San Damiano outside Assisi's city walls ('San Damiano Cross') that sparked Francis's conversion journey. His desire still to be a chivalrous knight after his convalescence (the 'cultural model' of success for young men of his status and generation) led him to head for Apulia in southern Italy to join the papal forces against the Holy Roman Empire. He stopped in route in Spoleto where that night he had the famous 'Dream of Spoleto', i.e. another *encounter* with Christ, which led him to finally give up his military ambitions (the question in the dream was does he want to follow the heavenly Lord or only the earthly prince, who is really only the servant). He returns to face Assisi's disgrace, dejection, and humiliation, waiting for the new vocation God would show him. In other words, Francis's 'conversion' was more than a single 'event' (e.g. the San Damiano Cross), but a series of events, responding to the persistence of anarchy and violence, his more extensive *encounters*, even deeper *conversions*, new *knowledge*, and deeper *transformations* (e.g. the 'Dream of Spoleto'), which became central to his concept of peace, and the origins of the new Franciscan movement (e.g. Francis' 'peace greeting' and the message of his preaching, 'penance, peace,

perspective of a city-state type of international system), and this period of anarchy and violence lasted intermittently (1202–1209). Assisi lost the war, and Francis was captured in battle (1202), prisoners were freed (1203), and a fragile peace was finally reached (August 1205).

15 Arnoldo Fortini, *Francis of Assisi,* trans. Helen Moak of *Nova Vita di San Francesco* by (New York: Crossroad, 1981), p. 166.

and mercy') given the anarchy, violence, and instability of the times (see Section 2).

Indeed, scholars now emphasize Francis' *conversions*.[16] Francis' unexpected *encounter* with the leper, a *riskier* encounter, was another event, which was pivotal in his conversion journey, and influenced his theology and spirituality.[17] He speaks dramatically about it, which occurred *after* the 'Dream of Spoleto', in his *Testament* (1-3), written shortly before he died. Francis did not forget it was through living 'among the lepers' that he had understood what the Lord wanted to reveal to him *(new knowledge)*, and so it is not surprising he would admonish the brothers later on to 'live spiritually' among Muslims *(deeper knowledge)*.[18] This is why some scholars connect the *encounter* with the leper, and his *encounter* with Christ in the event of the *Stigmata* (the wounds of Christ) on Mount La Verna in the Tuscan Apennines, to his *later* encounter with the sultan of Egypt.[19] 'Francis extended his experience of reconciliation beyond the Christian world to the Muslim world. Just as he went among lepers, he later went among Muslims, and in both cases, he went among them in a spirit of peace and compassion.'[20] Louis Massignon's faith, life, vocation, and social activism have been described in a similar way (Section 3).

(2)
'Back to the Future'?
Towards a 'Franciscan Model' of Peacemaking, Muslim-Christian Relations and Interreligious Dialogue.

The modern quest for the 'historical Francis of Assisi' began with Paul Sabatier, the Swiss Protestant pastor, and his path-breaking *Life of Saint Francis of Assisi* (1894). Sabatier raised the main question: how

16 Pierre Brunette, OFM, *Francis and His Conversions* (Ouincy, Il: Franciscan Press, 1997).
17 Steven J McMichael, 'Francis and the encounter with the sultan (1219)', in Michael J P Robson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Francis of Assisi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 127-142.
18 Laurent Gallant, 'Francis of Assisi Forerunner of Interreligious Dialogue: Chapter 16 of the Earlier Rule Revisited', *Franciscan Studies* 64, 1 (2006), 58-82.
19 Jacques Dalarun, Michael F Cusato, Carla Salvati, *The Stigmata of Francis of Assisi: New Studies, New Perspectives* (St Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2006).
20 McMichael, op. cit., 2012, p. 130.

best to read, interpret, and relate the early Franciscan documents, with their *multiple perspectives* on the various *events* in the life of Francis of Assisi.[21] 'Theory', argue critical theorists in international relations (i.e. influenced by the Frankfurt School), 'is always for someone or for some purpose,' and so the *images* of international relations constitute the values, interests, and perspectives scholars use to interpret the world.[22] In other words, the use of literary, historical, and other forms of criticism used to *interpret* Francis' encounter with the sultan, or to interpret *any* event in Franciscan history, with the problems of its variety of images, interests, and perspectives (the Franciscan Question), is similar to the difficulties of the *images*, theories, or paradigms, through which *any* event is interpreted in international relations.[23] What are called 'events' do not simply exist in the past, or in the present, they are *always* socially, politically, and theologically—or even, also economically, constructed (historically these have often not been separate categories), and they are really *narratively* constructed—by some actors, with some interest, and for some purpose to indicate the event's meaning and significance for *their* time. This was true in the past—it was true of accounts of St Francis' encounter with the sultan of Egypt, and it is true in the present regarding any event in contemporary international relations.[24]

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21 Jacques Dalarun, *The Misadventure of Francis of Assisi* (St Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2002).

22 Robert W Cox, 'Social forces, States, and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory' *Millennium: journal of international studies* (LSE), 10, 2 (1981), 126–155. On critical theory, theology, and international relations, see Scott M Thomas, '"Living Critically" and "Living Faithfully" in a Global Age: Justice, Emancipation, and the Political Theology of International Relations', *Millennium: journal of international studies* (LSE) 39, 2 (2010), 505–524.

23 Scott M Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations*, Foreword by Desmond Tutu (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 72–96. A variety of my articles on the Franciscans and the theory of international relations relate to this section. Scott M Thomas, 'The Way of St Francis? Catholic Approaches to Christian-Muslim Relations and Interreligious Dialogue', *The Downside Review*, 444 (2008), 157–168; Scott M Thomas, 'St Francis and Islam: A Critical Appraisal for Contemporary Muslim-Christian Relations, Middle East Politics and International Relations', *The Downside Review*, 136, 1 (2018), 3–28; Scott M Thomas, 'The Encounter Between Francis of Assisi and al-Malik al-Kamil and its Relevance for Muslim-Christian Relations and Contemporary International Relations,' *Muslim World*, 1/2, 109 (2019), 144–168.

24 'Fake news' and the media go back a long way. Perhaps, the earliest account of St Francis during the Fifth Crusade is by Jacques de Vitry, the bishop of Acre (1220),

Epistemology is about how we gain knowledge about the world—the usual answer is empiricism, empirical observation, and this is what influenced positivism, the separation of 'facts' from 'values', the separation of the 'objective' from the 'subjective' in the study of history and international relations. Ontology is about the nature of being and existence, and in international relations this means what kinds of actors, agents and objects are conceived to exist and influence international relations. 'Realism' argues states, and state power determine international relations—liberalism, Marxism, and other ideologies have a variety of different answers. The way critical theory has influenced international relations is by arguing that questions about epistemology and ontology cannot be separated from questions about power, authority, and legitimacy (see epigraph). In this way critical theory meets contextual theology. For this paper going 'back to the future' means asking the questions, 'How did Francis and his companions gain knowledge of their world, and how do we gain knowledge of ours?' (social epistemology), and 'Who did Francis and his companions include or exclude in their world, and who do we include or exclude in our world?' (social ontology).

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who was in the crusader camp when Francis arrived (1219). Written when the crusaders expected victory, it depicts the encounter as a minor 'event', but in his second account, written after the crusaders' defeat (1223–1225), Vitry constructs the encounter as a 'major event' to show St Francis as a model of Church renewal. Now, with the rise of Islam, Francis is portrayed often as a peacemaker, or precursor of interreligious dialogue. Similarly, the gifts the sultan offered Francis (an empirical, objective, observable event): were they a genuine demonstration of Arab 'hospitality', as a type of Arab *social practice*, which so influenced Louis Massignon, rooted in the Islamic *tradition* (Section 3), or did this show the devious sultan trying to undermine the Franciscan social practices of poverty and simplicity (the view of St Bonaventure and other Franciscan writers)? In other words, empirical observation cannot answer these kinds of questions regarding social action, and the answers have to be *interpreted* in view of a variety of other factors. In fact, the different accounts reflect various interests—the 'bureaucratic politics' within the Franciscan order and within the Church. Scott M Thomas, 'The Encounter Between Francis of Assisi and al-Malik al-Kamil and its Relevance for Muslim-Christian Relations and Contemporary International Relations,' *Muslim World*, 1/2, 109 (2019), 144–168. The way Francis's encounter with the sultan is depicted in paintings through the centuries offers a barometer of Muslim-Christian relations, and Europe's changing perceptions of Islam and international security. John Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan: The Curious History of a Christian-Muslim Encounter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

The mainstream approach to epistemology or constructing knowledge in history (the quest for the historical Jesus, historical Francis, historical Socrates), or in the social sciences is based: firstly, on naturalism, i.e. the idea the same methods to investigate the physical or natural sciences can be applied to the study of social action by human beings; and, secondly, it is based on positivism, i.e. the idea that 'facts,' objects, things, even in the social world, easily can be separated from 'values'.[25] These assumptions indicate there is (allegedly) some objective view of what is *really* going on in the world, a world separate from our minds, and separate from our theories, our theologies, or political theologies. It is based on a 'correspondence theory' of language, a correspondence theory of truth, so the 'truth' of a theory or a concept is determined by testing how well it matches or corresponds to events which take place in the world.[26]

This positivist approach to the social sciences is now contested by critical theory and social constructivists, and was once also reflected in similar approaches to history as the discovery of 'what actually happened'? There is now a wider recognition that in some sense all history is '*social history'*, people in the past and in the present live in a 'social world' (motivated by ideas, theologies, values, dreams, and emotions), as much as a material world (minerals, resources, economics, technology, industrialisation). All history is also in some sense 'contemporary history', since even if the sources are now broadly stable (but not always),[27] and known, the *interpretations* of them change since the kinds of questions and perspectives historians bring to them, bring to the past, is always changing in terms of the needs of the present and future generations.[28]

These scholars, indebted to the 'linguistic turn' in philosophy, interrogate the connection between facts and values, words and things, and symbols and what they symbolize in international relations. They

25 Scott M Thomas, '"Living Critically" and "Living Faithfully" ...', 505–524.

26 Ken Booth, *Theory of World Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

27 Jacques Dalarun, the renowned French historian of the Franciscans, recently discovered another life of St Francis by Thomas of Celano, his first official biographer. Jacques Dalarun and Timothy Johnson, *The Rediscovered Life of St Francis of Assisi* (St Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2016).

28 This is the justification Michael F Cosatu, OFM, gives for his own book, *Francis and His Companions* (London: Reaktion Books, 2023); Richard Evans, *In Defense of History* (London: Granta Books, 2000), pp. 8, 16–28.

argue the 'truth' about the social world cannot be gained through an (alleged) 'correspondence' between our theories, concepts, and some (objective) conception of events in the world. The main reason, which Massignon would appreciate, is that language is bound up with what 'constitutes' the world, how people see, and interpret the world, rather than merely reflecting or mirroring it with their language.[29]

Critical theorists, social constructivists, do *not* doubt the world exists, nor do they doubt it exists 'independent' of our minds, but they *do* doubt we can get behind the ideas, words, concepts, or even doctrines (i.e. language) of *statements* about the world in order to compare them to see if they 'mirror' or 'correspond' to some objective conception of the world, according to the correspondence theory of truth. The reason is that the social world is a 'world of our making', and some of the most important concepts, or social practices in the social sciences are 'constitutive', i.e. they make, or construct the social world,[30] and they do this in one way—and not some other way. This is the problem of explaining or understanding agency, choice, decision, and contingency in social action.[31]

29 George A Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press; Thomas, 1984), 86–91.

30 The set of ideas in Section 2 are reflected in the 'linguistic turn' in philosophy, John L Austin's idea of 'how to do things with words', and how they have influenced social constructivism in international relations. However, this is *not* the same as postmodernism, or 'deconstruction' (Jacques Derrida) with its denying truth or preaching relativism. Friedrich Kratochwil, 'Constructivism: what it is (not) and how it matters', in Donatella Della Porta and Michael Keating (eds), *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 80–98; Friedrich Kratochwil, 'Constructing a New Orthodoxy? Wendt's "Social Theory of International Relations" and the Constructivist Challenge', *Millennium* (LSE) 29, 1 (2000), 73–101; Friedrich Kratochwil, 'History, Action and Identity: Revisiting the "Second" Great Debate and Assessing its Importance for Social Theory', *European Journal of International Relations* 12, 1 (2006), 5–29; Nicholas Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (University of South Carolina Press, 1989; reissued, Abingdon: Routledge, 2012).

31 This point alludes to John Duns Scotus, the Franciscan philosopher, on agency, choice, and contingency in relation to peacemaking, conflict resolution, and the theory of international relations. Jean-Nicolas Bitter, Senior Advisor on Religion, Politics, and Conflict in the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, used Scotus' concept of contingency for his PhD dissertation at the University of Lausanne. *Les dieux embusqués: Une approche pragamatique de la dimension religieuse des conflits* (Genève-Paris: Librairie Droz, 2003) is based on his PhD dissertation, and his external examiner was George A Lindbeck, the founder of 'post-liberal' theology, and the author of *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*.

This was true in history, in historic state-systems, and it is true in contemporary international relations. So, what for St Francis constituted his 'social world'? It was constructed by the concepts, social practices, he and his companions used every day—crusading ('bearing the cross'), martyrdom, pilgrimage, missions, saints, holy wars, holy sites, holy places (see Section 3 on Massignon's 'Franciscan model'), and Muslims as fanatics, demons, heretics, idolaters. They *constituted* social reality, and relations with the Islamic world in one way through ideas, theologies, and social practices—chivalry, courtesy, courtly love, indulgences, religious vows, rites of penance, and *not* in some other way.[32] In fact, we also construct our social world with the concepts we use every day—the state, sovereignty, 'swarms' of refugees, or migrants (David Cameron's language comparing them to swarms of locusts, like a biblical plague), 'religious violence' (as something more divisive and difficult to resolve than 'secular violence'), a 'clash of civilizations' (or a 'dialogue' between them), and 'radical' Islamism, and Muslims as 'moderates', 'radicals, or 'extremists' (forgetting these adjectives can also describe St Francis, who in the violent times in which he lived, the watchwords of his early preaching were 'penance, peace, and mercy').[33]

The concept of a social epistemology, rooted in insights, which are fearful, painful, gained from Francis's own dramatic *encounters* (Section 1), also clarifies the full impact of the 'Franciscan model' set out in this paper regarding the new knowledge (social epistemology) religious actors can bring to seeing, analyzing, or interpreting the world. Francis discovered deeper, more challenging, *knowledge* about how the world really works, comes from 'the Other'—those on the margins,

32 Rodney Bruce Hall and Friedrich Kratochwil, 'Medieval Tales: neorealist "science" and the abuse of history', *International Organization* 47, 3 (1993), 479–491; Tal Dingot Alkopher, 'The Social (and Religious) Meanings that Constitute War: The Crusades as Realpolitik vs. Socialpolitik', *International Studies Quarterly*, 49 (4 (2005), 715–737.

33 This paper cannot discuss St Francis' 'peacemaking' among the *communes* in Italy (e.g. Arezzo, immortalized in Giotto's fresco in the Upper Basilica in Assisi, Bologna, Perugia, Gubbio), but it was a part of his holistic and integrative gospel message—penance, peace, and mercy. Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *Peace and Penance in Late Medieval Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017). The journal *Medieval Encounters: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Culture in Confluence and Dialogue* (Brill) is a push-back (covering 4th-16th centuries) against the simplistic view that the Middle Ages were only about knights, jousting, holy wars and crusades, and is a paradigm of the 'clash of civilisations' (even though it sells books, and contributes to research grants, and is perhaps still a key part of the European political imagination).

the periphery, and not the top of society. The emphasis on Francis' *conversions* rather than as a single event (Section 1) points to a continual process, which can be described by this concept of social epistemology. Perhaps, Rowan Williams' evocative phrase 'the wound of knowledge' expresses these relationships—how fear, pain, suffering, rejection, and humiliation are all parts of genuine encounter and conversion.[34] Any such encounters lead to what can only be called a 'conversion' for what is radically rejected is the separation of facts and values, the observer and the observed (naturalism and positivism), 'all the way down' to a person's identity and inner being. This kind of knowledge is gained initially by *encounters*, like those Francis experienced, that lead to 'falling upward', i.e. only those who have 'gone down', and experience in some way, at some time—fear, pain, suffering, rejection, failure, and humiliation (Section 1)—can 'come up' again, and be open to new knowledge, understandings, and broader horizons.[35] Thus, it is not surprising the title of Pope Francis' first collection of homilies at Santa Marta, 'truth is an encounter', recognizes St Francis' original model—encounter, conversion, knowledge, and transformation.[36] This is also a recovery of a central message of the Second Vatican Council.[37] The idea knowledge comes from the margins is also increasingly recognized in the theory of international relations.[38]

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34 Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St John of the Cross* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1979).

35 Richard Rohr, OFM, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011); Paul Rout, OFM, 'St Francis of Assisi and Islam: A Theological Perspective on a Christian-Muslim Encounter', *Al-Masaq: Islam and the Medieval Mediterranean* 23, 3 (2011), 205–215.

36 Jorge Mario Bergoglio/Papa Francesco, *La verità è un incontro. Omelie da Santa Marta* (Roma: Rizzoli, 2014). For Bergoglio's activities in Argentina, and how they relate to his activities as pope to the Middle East, see Scott M Thomas, 'Pope Francis' Strategic Vision of Human Fraternity: A Culture of Encounter at Multiple Levels from Argentina to Abu Dhabi and Iraq', in Fabio Petito, Fadi Daou, Michael D Driessen (eds), *Human Fraternity and Inclusive Citizenship: Interreligious Engagement in the Mediterranean* (Rome: Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2021). The book is freely available online: <https://med.ispionline.it/publication/human-fraternity-and-inclusive-citizenship-interreligious-engagement-in-the-mediterranean>. This book is also an example of the new concept of 'religious engagement' in foreign policy (Introduction).

37 Massimo Faggioli, 'Vatican II and the Church of the Margins, *Theological Studies*, 74,1 (2013), 808–818.

38 Cynthia Enloe, 'Margins, silences, and bottom rungs: how to overcome the underestimation of power in the study of international relations', in Steve

The concept of social ontology helps clarify why the radicalism of Franciscan metaphysics is relevant to international relations. For Francis and his companions, God is both Creator and Father, and so all people, all creatures, and all creation are ontological siblings. This is the core reality of the world, the deep ontological principle underlying it. Francis's famous poem, 'Brother Sun, Sister Moon', is not only charming poetry, but a profound statement of Franciscan metaphysics, and is the *interpretive* principle for his views on universal fraternity, war, peace, and poverty.[39] It was also the source of Massignon's Franciscan metaphysics, and social and political action (Section 3).

The concept of a social epistemology, the discovery that knowledge comes from the margins, the periphery, helps clarify why the optic of social ontology is relevant for the past, in different historic state-systems (Section 1), and in the present, in contemporary international relations: what kinds of *actors*, doing which *activities*, are socially and politically *constructed by whom*, and in whose *interests*, and were excluded, or included in domestic politics or international affairs? (see epigraph) Indeed, one way of answering these questions is directly related to how Pope Francis has adapted the 'Franciscan model' set out in Section 1—encounter, culture of encounter, human fraternity, inclusive citizenship, and social peace. On this reading, Francis fits into *whose* history of the Middle Ages—the vivid history of popes, kings, ladies, knights, and crusaders; or does he fit into the history of the lowly, those on the margins, the periphery—lepers, the poor, the peasants, the workers, the monks, the friars, hermits, third orders, and lay confraternities?[40]

Smith, Ken Booth, Marysia Zalewski (eds), *International theory: positivism and beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 186–202; David L Blainey and Naeem Inayatullah. 'International Relations from Below', in Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 663–674.

39 Illia Delio, OSF, *A Franciscan View of Creation* (St Bonaventure: NY: Franciscan Institute, 2003); Mary Beth Ingham, *The Harmony of Goodness—Mutuality and Moral Living According to John Duns Scotus* (St Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, second edition, 2012).

40 Norman F Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages: The Lives, Works, and Ideas of the Great Medievalists of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Quill/William Morrow, 1991).

The concept of social ontology helps us to better understand Francis's social agency, the way he performed the gospel in his day, and challenged some of Christendom's main social, and cultural practices—martyrdom, crusades, and missions. This paper's critical theory and social constructivist interpretation of the Middle Ages—as in any age, in any historic state-system, and in contemporary international relations, ideas, theories, concepts, theologies, and social practices—do not simply mirror the social world (the correspondence theory of truth), but socially and politically construct it. They *make social reality what it is*. What did Francis do? Francis and his companions, by the way they performed the gospel, rather than *reject* some of these medieval social practices, *transformed* their meaning and significance: he served not an earthly king, but the 'Most-High King' ('the Dream of Spoleto'), and he extended 'courtesy' (literally courtly behaviour for nobility) to *every* leper, beggar, or lowly person who crossed his path. Regarding chivalry and the crusades, he compared his band of brothers to the Knights of the Round Table, and their itinerant preaching to their quests for adventure. He transformed (violent) crusading, to (non-violent) peaceful conversion—part of the existing criticism of social violence by the poverty and peace movements. This was the reason for going to visit the sultan unarmed, and without any crusader protection. In his mind he remained a crusader ('cross-bearer'), but he had transformed its meaning, for it was 'surely a crusader against the standard type familiar in the world of Francis'.[41]

(3)
Louis Massignon—The secular Franciscan Order, and the 'Franciscan Model': Compassion, Hospitality and Substitution

Louis Massignon's conversion back to Christianity—the Catholicism of his youth—is an example of the 'Franciscan model' set out in this paper. Massignon's conversion, like Francis', began with an *encounter* in the context of war, insecurity, uncertainty, and political and economic

41 Lawrence S Cunningham, 'Francis Naked and Clothed: A Theological Meditation', in Jay M Hammond (ed.), *Francis of Assisi: History, Hagiography, and Hermeneutics in the Early Documents* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2004), 165–178, esp. p. 169.

instability. The concept of social epistemology articulates this 'Franciscan way' of seeing the world, and interpreting what is happening in it: 'the wound of knowledge' (Williams), and 'falling upward' (Rohr) reflect the suffering, rejection, and humiliation necessary for 'coming up' again (conversion) to new knowledge, understanding, and this almost *inevitably* is knowledge from the periphery (Section 2). Massignon, like Francis, had his own dramatic, military, and political, encounters—his arrest as a French spy by jumpy Ottoman soldiers, the threat of execution before morning, suicide attempts, illness, malarial fever, all in the run-up to the Ottoman Empire's constitutional revolution (his closest friends were a part of it), and he also had in this context a spiritual encounter, and returned to the Catholicism of his youth.[42] Amidst it all, the Arab, the Muslim, *hospitality* shown to him, to the extreme point of providing for his dramatic escape from capture, allowed him to return to France.[43] This is why the Arab social practice of hospitality played such a central role in *his* thought and practice. Massignon's was the kind of conversion, that radically rejects the separation of facts and values (naturalism and positivism), 'all the way down' to a person's inner being (Section 2), what he came to call the *point vierge* ('virginal point'), the central point of existence: Massignon (age 27) being a dissolute, morally lax, sexual libertine, and a young man enthralled with adventure, the Maghreb, the desert, Arabic, and Sufi mysticism. Years later, he described his time in the Middle East before his conversion as a self-styled European researcher, whose main tie to the region—an implicit criticism of T E Lawrence (i.e. Lawrence of Arabia)—was his thirst for adventure, exploration, 'the secular rage to understand'.[44]

It was the poet Paul Claudel, a close friend of Massignon's, who played a key role in the French Catholic intellectual revival, who

42 Mary Louise Gude, *Louis Massignon: The Crucible of Compassion* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame.1996), 27–56; Ian Latham, 'The Conversion of Louis Massignon in Mesopotamia in 1908', *Aram Periodical* (Oriental Institute, University of Oxford, Society for Syro-Mesopotamian Studies), 20, 1 (2008), 245–267.

43 Ibid.,1996, 28–31; Krokus, 2017, op. cit., 46–82.

44 T E Lawrence, in one of his conversations with Massignon, apparently said to him, 'you love the Arabs more than I do,' and with this comment Massignon knew there could be no attempt at sharing his life with Lawrence. Albert Hourani, 'T.E. Lawrence and Louis Massignon', in Albert Hourani (ed.), *Islam in European Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 116–128; Louis Massignon, 'My Entry into Jerusalem with Lawrence in 1917', Herbert Mason (ed.), *Testimonies and Reflections* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press), 32–38.

challenged him to consider becoming a lay member of the Franciscans.[45] Only after studying and meditating on the link between Islam and St Francis did Massignon finally become a member of the Secular Franciscan Order (November 1931). He and Mary Kahil, a close, Egyptian, Melkite Catholic friend from his youth,[46] went to Egypt two years later (9 February 1934), and prayed at the abandoned Franciscan church in Damietta, Egypt where Francis had met the sultan. They took a vow of *al-Badaliya* (the Arabic word signifying '*substitution'* or 'to be in the place of'), to ritualize their shared commitment to Islam, and offer their lives in prayer and fasting for Muslims, 'not so they would be converted, but so that the will of God might be accomplished in them and through them.' Massignon met Pope Pius XI later that year in private audience, and he blessed their offering at Damietta.[47]

Principles of Muslim-Christian Relations

Massignon adopted the name 'Abraham' ('Ibrahim') as part of his vows to join the Secular Franciscan Order. It is often argued he did this in recognition of the patriarch's central role in the history of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.[48] Much of his scholarly activity, even *before* his conversion, was engaged in his 'correspondence theory', i.e. finding similarities, convergences between these monotheistic religions. So this view is partly correct, but his conception of the 'Abrahamic faiths' was also based on the way Abraham was central to how he interpreted his conversion.[49] Massignon was seeking to demonstrate what Francis

45 For another perspective on Massignon in relation to Edward Said, Orientalism, and international relations theory, see Fabio Petito, 'In Defence of Dialogue of Civilizations: With a Brief Illustration of the Diverging Agreement between Edward Said and Louis Massignon', *Millennium: journal of international studies* (LSE), 39, 3 (2011), 759–779.

46 Gude, op. cit., 1996, p. 78.

47 This led to the formal foundation of the Badaliya Prayer Association in 1947. Cardinal Montini (later Paul VI) joined the Badaliya Prayer Association, and John-Paul II was also inspired by it to formulate his own 'spirit of Assisi' meetings in the 1980s. Ibid., pp. 133–135.

48 Ibid., p. 124; Sidney H Griffith, 'Sharing the faith of Abraham: The "Credo" of Louis Massignon', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 8 (2) (1997), 193–210.

49 Herbert Mason, *Memoir of a Friend: Louis Massignon* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press. Mason 1988), p. 26; Griffith, ibid., 1997.

arguably learned in his *encounter* with the sultan, and what he had encountered through Muslim friends in Iraq: how God can work in the lives of people of other faiths, and what God expects of them. What does it mean to be faithful *within* another religious tradition, one different from your own?

The 'Franciscan model' Massignon developed was based on the link between Abraham and a radical Franciscan social ontology (Section 2). First, the concept of the 'Abrahamic faiths'—Jews, Christians, and Muslims are all children, descendants of the patriarch, so he believed in the *ontological unity* of the Semitic peoples. This unity is based on the fact God's revelation came through *each of these Semitic languages*.[50] Perhaps, with the way the 'linguistic turn' in philosophy has influenced the theories of politics and international relations (see Section 2), Massignon's contention takes on greater significance for how language shapes meaning, understanding, and how people see, and interpret the world—and, can this add greater depth to 'cultural diplomacy' and 'faith-based' diplomacy, with the religious turn in the discipline (Introduction)?

Second, this unity of the Semitic peoples *pre-dates* the existing (and artificial) states in the Middle East, and the (artificial) modern international system. This meant for him any rivalry between them in the Maghreb, in his mind French North Africa, and in the Middle East, was a type of 'sibling rivalry', i.e. within the family, rather than a rivalry between enemies.[51] 'If the Jews arriving in Palestine and the Arabs already there were to live in peace, it was essential that they come to understand their *shared* history as children of Abraham and respect each other's cultures.'[52] The key to the 'Abrahamic Model'—almost like St Francis, transforming medieval social practices (Section 2)—was not rejecting, but *transforming* the model, as the 'Abrahamic religions', with the unity of Semitic peoples, reinforced by their languages of revelation—what *they* share in the region, and what *they* have in common—and, *not* what they share in their relations with the Western powers (which then, and now, are only interested in geopolitics, and

50 Krokus, op. cit., 2017, p. 31.

51 Anthony O'Mahony, 'The Influence of the Life and Thought of Louis Massignon on the Catholic Church's Relations with Islam', *The Downside Review*, 126, 444 (2008), 169–192.

52 Gude, op. cit., 1996, 168–169.

the region's resources, and not the peoples, cultures, and religions of the region). This understanding of the 'Abrahamic faiths' was always associated for Massignon in a personal way to his conversion. However, his idea of a 'Abrahamic' connection was rejected by the Church fathers at the Second Vatican Council *(Nostra Aetate).* The concept of the 'Abrahamic faiths'*,* as an affirmation, was considered by the Church to be based on a profoundly weak grasp of the ecclesial reality of revelation. Massignon, still throughout his life, sought a wider recognition by the papacy and the Catholic Church, regarding his idea of a 'genealogical' relationship between the Abrahamic religions.[53]

In spite of this setback, the concept of the 'Abrahamic faiths' provided Massignon with the basis for a set of religious, or really theological, and spiritual social practices, which combined his deep spirituality, scholarly study of Islam and Christianity, and social and political activism: (i) venerating key figures, (ii) common religious practices, and (iii) sacred sites, sacred spaces, for pilgrimage, especially Jerusalem, and the Holy Land.

Key Figures

Firstly, for Massignon the veneration of key figures—as suffering intercessors, common religious practices—prayers, fasting, pilgrimages, was an important link between Islam and Christianity (in the theology and in religious practice among believers in the region), and was reinforced by his scholarly 'theory of correspondences'. He recognized quite prophetically, with great prescience, what scholars of international relations now call the 'soft power' of religion, i.e. the way moral, religious, or spiritual example and spiritual authority can generate the kind of mimetic desire, which can change or even transform outlooks and behaviour.[54] Massignon also recognized what R Scott Appleby has called 'the ambivalence of the sacred', i.e. the powerful role of sacred actors, intercessors, martyrdom, and redemptive suffering in

53 Anthony O'Mahony, 'The Vatican, the Catholic Church, Islam and Muslim-Christian relations since Vatican II', in Anthony O'Mahony and John Flannery (eds), *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East: Studies for the Synod for the Middle East* (London: Melisende, 2010), 291–315.

54 Jeffrey Haynes, *Religious Transnational Actors and Soft Power* (London: Routledge, 2016).

religion, politics, and spirituality—*for* peace or for violence. A key 'correspondence' for him was between the Virgin Mary (Catholicism) and Fatima (Islam), the daughter of Muhammad. They are now *global* models, sources of pilgrimage, and an inspiration for all women suffering trials, tribulations, and oppression.[55] Massignon's religious approach also *anticipates* the 'spirit of Assisi', the interreligious prayer meetings for peace started by Pope John-Paul II in 1986, the year *after* he went to Morocco, and amazingly addressed 80,000 young Muslims as part of the UN's International Youth Year.[56] Massignon's approach, the positive role of religion in peacemaking, and on key global issues, also *anticipates* the annual meetings of religious leaders at the Davos World Economic Summit, and now before the annual opening session of the UN General Assembly.

Sacred Sites

Secondly, for Massignon the legend of the 'Seven Sleepers of Ephesus', i.e. common sacred sites, for pilgrimage—during times of war, violence, and terrorism—was a key example of common religious practices, and correspondences between religions.[57] It is found in the Qur'an (Surah

55 Bill and Williams, op. cit., 2002, 47–74.

56 Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II, *Witness to Hope: John Paul II to the Friars Minor* (Rome: Curia generalis OFM, 2005).

57 Andrea Camilleri, the popular Sicilian crime fiction writer, says the idea for his novel, *The Terracotta Dog* (2014), which is based on the 'Seven Sleepers of Ephesus', is indebted to some of his Egyptian student stage directors who studied with him in class, Taufiq al-Hakim's novel, *The People of the Cave*. Al-Hakim (1898–1987) was one of the pioneers of the Arabic novel and drama. In Camilleri's books Inspector Montalbano—always has an eye for the outcast, those on the periphery, and this relates to Montalbano's own life story in the novels. Perhaps, this is an example of Pope Francis' concepts of *encounter*, and even a *culture of encounter*, someone who has 'gone outside themselves, beyond themselves', in the case of Montalbano, to protect the powerless who need protection (and the novels demonstrate him doing this at each of the multiple levels of analysis he happens to be engaged with—individual, society, state, and sometimes international levels). However, this only highlights the 'emptiness' or 'thinness' of ethical appeals based on a 'common Mediterranean culture and history' (Pezzotti). Such appeals, unlike those by Massignon, or to 'virtue ethics' in the social theory of Alasdair MacIntyre, ignore anything having to do with the lived religious traditions of the peoples of the region (see below the discussion of MacIntyre in relation to Massignon's social practice of hospitality). It is an awareness of this modern dilemma that contributed to Habermas' concept

18), and in ancient eastern Christian sources (the greater visibility of Christian persecution in the Middle East is only now making Westerners, and Western Christians more aware of what Massignon always knew—the deep spiritual resources of eastern Christianity in the Middle East).[58] Coincidentally, a church commemorating them, the Church of Notre Dame, was built in Vieux-Marché, Brittany, a village not far from Massignon's summer home. Massignon, in conjunction with the Badaliya Prayer Association, founded after visiting Damietta, Egypt, organized the first pilgrimage of Muslims and Christians to Vieux-Marché in 1954, to pray for reconciliation and mutual understanding in response to the growing violent conflict in French Algeria. It became an annual event for him until he died, but it still exists in different countries.[59] Pope Francis has argued that creativity is the active dimension of hope. The legend, and its strength *between* religions, was a key part of Massignon's *creative* use of religious 'soft power', i.e. its role in Muslim-Christian reconciliation during the worst violence in North Africa. These saints were venerated in both traditions and pointed towards a powerful eschatological hope for justice especially articulated among Shi'ite Muslims, and Christians for all the poor and oppressed.[60] Massignon always considered Sunni Islam as the 'orthodox' expression of Islam, however, it was Shi'ism which gave expression to his mystical and political concerns for justice across the region.[61]

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of the 'postsecular' as important for human rights, democracy, and democratic consolidation (Introduction). Barbara Pezzotti, 'Transculturality in Sicilian Crime Fiction', *Scritture Migranti* (Bologna), 15 (2021), 64–80.

58 Anthony O'Mahony, 'Louis Massignon, the Seven Sisters of Ephesus and the Christian-Muslim Pilgrimage at Vieux-Marché, Brittany', in Craig Bartholomew and Fred Hughs (eds), *Explorations in the Christian Theology of Pilgrimage* (London: Ashgate, 2004), 126–148; Anthony O'Mahony (ed.), *Eastern Christianity in the modern Middle East* (London: Routledge, 2011); Anthony O'Mahony, 'Christianity in the Middle East: Modern History and Contemporary Theology and Ecclesiology: An Introduction and Overview', *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, 63, 3–4 (2013), 231–260.

59 Massignon's annual *Badaliya Christmas newsletter* (December 8, 1954) mentions the beginning of the FLN's national liberation struggle (Gude 1996, pp. 190–191, 218–219). Dorothy C Buck, 'Louis Massignon's Badaliya Prayer Movement: Yesterday and Today', *Fondazione OASIS*, latest update, April 4, 2022; <https://www.oasiscenter.eu/en/muslim-christian-dialogue-louis-massignon-egypt>.

60 O'Mahony, op. cit., 2004.

61 Anthony O'Mahony, 'The Image of Jesus and Christianity in Shi'a Islam and Modern Iranian Thought', in David Thomas with Claire Amos (eds), *A Faithful*

Thirdly, sacred sites and sacred spaces were another aspect of Massignon's 'Abrahamic' approach to peacemaking, Muslim-Christian relations, and interreligious dialogue. He argued Jerusalem and the Holy Places figured prominently in any solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.[62] Massignon, given the way St Francis *transform* medieval social practices, was committed to what can only be described in terms of international relations theory, as a radical, alternative form of 'religious transnationalism'—the idea religion that transcends state boundaries is *transformed* from being considered a threat, to being a source of peace and reconciliation in the international order.[63] Massignon's 'Abrahamic' approach for promoting piety, peace, and reconciliation, almost seems like a modern, or postmodern restatement of the early, initial message of Franciscan preaching—'penance, peace, and mercy', and St Francis' forays into peacemaking among the *communes* in central Italy (Section 1). The Holy Land for him was just that —a 'holy land', and this meant it was not 'an object for the privileged (great powers) to carve up (recall he was an advisor of the Sykes-Picot Commission that did just that!), but the seamless garment of worldwide reconciliation, a place of intimate sharing among all'—all the people of Abraham should 'have renounced the cult of idols'—rather than be seduced by them, the cult of narrow ethnic nationalisms, and modernization, as if power, wealth, and technology can solve complex problems of political and economic justice and inequality.[64] Therefore, all the peoples of Abraham should work together to share the Holy Land 'as their joint home, and protect its integrity as the *religious space sacred* to Jews, Christians, and Muslims' (emphasis added).[65] This meant 'the practice of *sacred hospitality* was incumbent upon them in *every* area of their lives' (emphasis added), and that Muslim-Christian understanding only would be achieved through *compassion* and costly sacrificial *substitution*.[66]

Presence: Essays for Kenneth Cragg (London: Melisende, 2003, 256–273.

62 Gude, op. cit., 1996, p. 188.

63 Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and James Piscatori (eds), *Transnational Religion and Fading States* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997).

64 Gude, op. cit., 1996, p. 169.

65 Ibid., pp. 164–165.

66 Ibid., pp. 214–217.

Perhaps, these activities for peace, reconciliation, and interreligious dialogue—often ridiculed, dismissed during France's war with Algeria, terrorism, and violent decolonization—now appear more perceptive, forward-looking, even 'prophetic', given the religious turn, the theological turn, and the postsecular sensitivity international relations. Since Massignon's time, the role of sacred sites, sacred places in peacemaking and conflict resolution, are becoming better-understood.[67] Massignon was at times a bitter critic of Zionism and the State of Israel for its desire to hold possession of the Holy Land for only *one* of the Abrahamic faiths; he recognized the importance of Jerusalem as the first *Qibla* or orientation for prayer for Muslims was the Holy City and not the Arabian Holy Places.[68]

However, Massignon would have distanced himself from foreign policy professionals, and theorists of international relations, and perhaps even some of those who are part of the 'religious turn', who espouse an idea of religion primarily as a utilitarian *instrument*, even if it is used for peaceful political purposes. His entire faith, life, and vocation indicate the *real* basis, and only basis, for peace was the struggle to live faithfully in the world. He only met Gandhi once, but was introduced to *satyagraha*, and his ideas on peace through Muslims.[69] The way Francis of Assisi preached the gospel message of 'penance, peace, and mercy', and performed the gospel, demonstrated another way of living in the world, given the anarchy and violence during the rise of the *communes* in the central Middle Ages (Section 1). Similarly, Massignon developed his key 'Franciscan' concepts, influenced by St Francis and his meeting with the sultan—compassion, hospitality, and substitution, as a way of responding to the evils, to the violence of *his* world—the carnage of the Second World War, the occupation of France, great power politics, western greed for oil, and the violence of decolonization in North Africa and the Middle East. However, these abstract concepts are only the beginning—what mattered to Massignon

67 Ron Hassner, *War on Sacred Grounds* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2009); Antón M Pazos (ed.), *Pilgrims and Pilgrimages as Peacemakers in Christianity, Judaism and Islam* (London: Routledge, 2013).

68 Anthony O'Mahony, '*Le pélérin de Jérusalem:* Louis Massignon, Palestinian Christians, Islam and the State of Israel', in Anthony O'Mahony (ed.), *Palestinian Christians: Religion, Politics and Society* (London: Melisende, 1999), 166–189.

69 Louis Massignon, 'Gandhian Outlook and Techniques', in Herbert Mason (ed.), *Testimonies and Reflections*, 139–154.

is how they could be embedded, really lived or 'embodied', as types of *religious* social practices in the contemporary Abrahamic religious traditions and practices in the Middle East.

Compassion

Massignon believed compassion was the reaching out to 'the Other'—a result of *encounter* and participating in their suffering.[70] This dramatic meaning of compassion clearly emerged from the international politics in which it was embedded—his identity with the Muslims in France, given the war in Algeria, decolonization in the rest of North Africa, and France's political instability. What is the *status* of this concept or social practice today, how can it be relevant? There are other global crises, which may require acts of sacrificial compassion, but less dramatically, but as profoundly, this understanding of compassion is also rooted in a radical 'Franciscan' social ontology on the relatedness and connectedness of all creatures—the human social and natural worlds (Section 2).[71]

Did Massignon have a simple faith like Francis of Assisi? A 'simple' faith need not be a 'simplistic' one (even Francis commended to his brothers the theology and preaching of Anthony of Padua), and a simple faith can even be a 'courageous' faith. Shockingly, for Massignon, like St Francis, it was to hear the gospel, and to do it. So, compassion was faithfulness to this experience. Massignon adopted Charles de Foucault's stance, which he called *l'hospitalité sacrée* ('sacred hospitality'), 'the acceptance, the transfer to ourselves of the suffering of others', and 'fidelity,' faithfulness to such an experience calls people 'to go out from themselves towards the other (the "Exodus Motif" of Abraham) to love fraternally beyond their *milieu* and relationships in time and space here below, within a community directed towards

70 Louis Massignon, 'The Transfer of Suffering through Compassion', in Herbert Mason (ed.), *Testimonies and Reflections*, 155–164.

71 Ilia Delio, *Compassion: Living in the Spirit of St Francis* (Cincinnati, OH: St Anthony Messenger Press, 2011). Pope Francis discusses 'compassion' in the encyclical letters, *Evangelii Gaudium: the Joy of the Gospel*, 2013 (§§ 4, 54, 155, 169, 171, 172, 179); *Laudato Si: on Care of Our Common Hope*, 2015 (§§ 91, 209); and, *Fratelli Tutti: on Fraternity and Social Friendship*, 2020 (§§ 59, 62, 67, 277).

the universal.'[72] This is also Massignon's recognition of a radical 'Franciscan' social ontology. However, perhaps, connecting this concept of compassion to the 'Exodus motif' is also a bit too dramatic—not everyone is called to leave their home, their country, for another land. What is being described here is similar to Pope Francis' concept of *encounter*, or the developing of a *culture of encounter* (going outside oneself, beyond oneself), and is *not* necessarily dramatic action, witness, substitution, or identification, but can, and should happen, in ordinary life, at each of the multiple levels of analysis we find ourselves—individual, community, society, state, and even perhaps, the international level. Creativity is the active dimension of hope, as part of creative activity, co-operating, working together with others in our society and community on common projects for the common good, since 'dreams are built together.'[73]

However, compassion was also based on a radical, 'Franciscan' social epistemology, actively gaining through *encounter*, new knowledge, knowledge from the periphery, to interpret more effectively what is going on in the world. Massignon, in ways now made clear by critical theorists, social constructivists, and the linguistic turn in their study of international relations, was quite aware of how language and speech acts relate to suffering and compassion.[74] 'When called to be alongside the suffering of others, the word he enacted was compassion. The turning of an indifferent ear by one not deaf was to him an act of falsehood. Cultivation of falsehood in defence of *national security* was an act of dishonour.

72 Gude, op. cit., 1996, p. 86; Pope Francis, at the end of *Fratelli Tutti*, links encounter, hospitality, and universal fraternity—especially through the inspiration of St Francis and Charles de Foucauld, although he adds Martin Luther King, Desmond Tutu, and Mahatma Gandhi (*Fratelli Tutti*, §§ 286–287). The language of the 'Exodus Motif' of Charles de Foucault and Massignon is how Pope Francis defines 'encounter'. Diego Fares, SJ, *The Heart of Pope Francis: How the New Culture of Encounter is Changing the Church and the World* (New York: Crossroad/Herder and Herder, 2015, 2014, Italian), Chapter 1 ('We must go out of ourselves'), 15–19.

73 Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, p. 8; Pope Francis and Austin Ivereigh, *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2020).

74 'Mere' speech has powerful consequences. Politicians' words, in particular, change the world, *The Economist*, November 12, 2016; <https://www.economist.com/books-and-arts/2016/11/12/mere-speech-has-powerful-consequences>. Massignon's general views on language, and on his 'Franciscan' social practices of compassion, hospitality, and substitution, are more powerful, almost prophetic, with John L Austin's notion of 'doing things with words', and the linguistic turn in philosophy.

Draining the *resources* of another community to enhance one's own was an act of injustice. And the use of any *language* to deceive was a betrayal of the essence of human intercourse. Language itself—the speech acts we use (Matt. 15:18), "reveals what is in the heart."'[75]

Hospitality

The Muslim social practice, the code of *hospitality*, saved Massignon's life. This is what led to the rediscovery of his Christian faith. He came to call it *l'hospitalité sacrée*, and defined it as 'the acceptance, the *transfer* to ourselves of the sufferings of others',[76] the admission of 'the Other' to oneself.[77] Hospitality came to prefigure for him God's stance towards human beings. For Massignon to exercise the same hospitality and compassion he had been shown, now was a way for him to show God's compassion for others. Moreover, compassion, hospitality, for him were not abstract, free-floating, moral concepts (following Alasdair MacIntyre), emerging from (Western) Enlightenment rationality.[78] What these concepts meant was first shown to him in a *specific* religious tradition, i.e. specific social practices embedded *within* Islam, in Arabic, and in an Arab country (Iraq as part of the Ottoman Empire). Moreover, it was through the *faith* of Muslim friends, and their hospitality, his Christian faith had been restored. He discovered, to use Pope Francis' concept, through *his encounters*—a modern type of St Francis' radical social ontology, 'all other human beings' are to be his 'brothers' (and 'sisters') especially 'the most abandoned'.[79]

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75 Herbert Mason, *Memoir of a Friend: Louis Massignon* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 18.

76 Gude op. cit., 1996, p. 86; Massignon, 'An Entire Life with a Brother Who Set Out on the Desert: Charles de Foucauld', in Herbert Mason, *Testimonies and Reflections: Essays of Louis Massignon*, 21–31, esp. p. 23. Pope Francis mentions 'hospitality' twice in *Fratelli Tutti* as part of a discussion of *encounter* and 'moving beyond ourselves' (pp. 87–90), and refers to Charles de Foucauld and 'universal fraternity' at the end of it (pp. 286–287).

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

78 Thomas, op. cit., 2005, 85–96, pp. 118–119.

79 Gude, op. cit., 1996, pp. 85–86.

Therefore, compassion, hospitality—and, with it, the sacredness of the guest, the stranger, the foreigner, and the right to asylum (highly contested political issues back then, and now), came to guide Massignon's *less visible, less dramatic* social activity, as a university professor during the war in Algeria, and the violence of France's decolonization: teaching the Qur'an to North African migrant workers on the steps at the mosque in Paris (as a non-Muslim, at least in those days, he was not allowed inside), or voluntarily teaching them basic math and French (he did these things for over 30 years), visiting Algerian nationalists held as prisoners as a consequence of a violent struggle which put Frenchmen and Muslims on opposite sides, which Massignon felt deeply as a personal wound, or helping to found social service organizations for migrants.[80] These same principles 'fearlessly' empowered—this is what people at the time acknowledged, his *more visible* social activism, interviews, public speaking—what secular liberal activists could understand up to a point, but also radical religious practices, perhaps, less puzzling, and more relevant in our age of postmodernism and postsecularism—fasting, prayers, and religious pilgrimages to promote Muslim-Christian unity over the war in Algeria, and violent French reprisals elsewhere in North Africa. Massignon, now seen in terms of René Girard's mimetic theory, was using religious, spiritual practices to overcome the mimetic rivalry and animosity between antagonists. In other words, compassion and hospitality were not concepts, abstractions, but contributed to a radical 'Franciscan' social ontology, 'experiential knowledge of the sacred', and this is what 'led him to bind himself to the most abandoned of people.'[81] Encounter, conversion, and—*new* knowledge, for St Francis, for Pope Francis, and for Massignon, really did come from the margins, or the periphery, leading to even *deeper* conversions, and transformations; and, given the French wars in North Africa, even *riskier* forms of social and political action (Section 1).

Substitution

During the 800th anniversary of St Francis' encounter with Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil (1210–2019) there were many interpretations of 'what

80 Gude 1996, p. 221; Mason 1988, p. 83.
81 Ibid., p. 86.

really happened,' and the meaning and significance of the event became part of the 'culture-wars' in the United States—did St Francis go to convert the sultan, or seek martyrdom (Catholic conservatives), or for interreligious dialogue? (Catholic liberals). Massignon's view was far more radical than either of these options. He saw substitution as the ultimate expression of the hospitality he had found in Islam before his conversion, and this became the paradigm for his Christian life—to the end of his life.[82] Massignon lived what Pope Francis has called a 'culture of encounter'—we should not be put off by Massignon's dramatic actions, given his status as a leading Catholic intellectual in France. It is the *ordinariness* of the things he did, the examples given in this paper, which truly reflect the culture of encounter.[83] Francis' encounter with the sultan was interpreted by Massignon as a Christian example of the concept of *abdal* in Islam, or 'substitution' (Arabic *badal*, pl. *abdal*, 'substitute'). This is when another person's suffering ultimately saves humanity.[84] God calls certain heroic persons, *witnesses* in each generation.[85] These witnesses—religious, or even secular— freely acquiesce to a vocation of suffering, and become *substitutes,* intercessors, 'for those whose evil lives wreak havoc on the world. Jesus was the first in a long line of chosen substitutes who accept personal suffering in atonement for human sin.'[86] Such witnesses were linked for Massignon by their thirst for justice, the reparative value of suffering, and the vindication of the oppressed—ultimately, at the last judgement.[87]

Massignon's struggle was how to express concretely the vow of substitution he took at Damietta, given the shifting events of

82 Ibid., p. 160.

83 Diego Fares, SJ, *The Heart of Pope Francis: How the New Culture of Encounter is Changing the Church and the World* (New York: Herder and Herder, 2015, 2014, Italian); Pope Francis, 'For a culture of encounter', Morning Meditation in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae, 13 September 2016; <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2016/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20160913_for-a-culture-of-encounter.html>; Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 2020, §§ 215–221.

84 The concept of *badal* immersed Massignon in his study of the Sufi mystic and martyr, Mansur al-Hallaj, to whom Massignon devoted his PhD dissertation, *La Passion d'al-Hallaj* (1922 edition), and studied for the rest of his life. Tolan examines these Islamic sources, but *omits* the Catholic sources for this concept, which goes back to some of Massignon's friends in the French Catholic intellectual revival (e.g. Huysmans and Charles de Foucauld). Tolan, op. cit., 2009.

85 Gude, op. cit., 1996, pp. 162, 163, 164; Krokus, 2017, op. cit., pp. 100–106, 177–83.

86 Ibid., pp. 59, 109.

87 Ibid., pp. 159, 160.

French foreign policy and world politics around him. The concept of substitution, and the heroic persons he identified, were an increasing source of inspiration for him, as he became absorbed with the suffering of Muslims in France's violent, and torturous decolonization of North Africa and the Middle East.[88] The religious value of 'substitution' was personal—meeting another person in what Catholics would call 'the communion of saints', carrying one another's burdens, putting oneself in another's place, even accepting another person's help.[89] When the French government opened negotiations with the FLN at Evian in 1961, Massignon argued for prayer, meditation, substitution, and nonviolent witness. The 'unity of the human race', he said, could not be achieved by 'racial hatred' and practices of 'bestial torture'.[90]

Conclusion

The 'Franciscan models' in this paper show, in the past, in different historic state-systems, and in contemporary international relations, how one's faith—for St Francis and Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil, and in the present, for Pope Francis and Massignon, at an individual level, for Muslims and Christians in the West, there is a way 'to practise an *inner* journey,' and at the international level, 'practise an *outer* journey', with social and foreign policy implications, which is 'neither assimilating nor appropriating'—it is a way to understand *their* faith can be discovered, encouraged, and enhanced *through* the faith of another.[91] At the end of his life, St Francis is said to have said, 'I have done what is mine to do; may Christ teach you what is yours!'[92] Therefore, with

88 Ibid., pp. 123, 124, 158–160.

89 Griffith, op. cit., 1997.

90 Gude, op. cit., p. 238.

91 Anthony O'Mahony, 'The Influence of the Life and Thought of Louis Massignon on the Catholic Church's Relations with Islam', *The Downside Review*, 126, 444 (2008), 169–192; Stephen Saxby, 'Francis and the Sultan: A model for contemporary Christian engagement with Islam', in Anthony O'Mahony and Peter Bowe, OSB (eds), *Catholics in Interreligious Dialogue: Studies in Monasticism, Theology, and Spiritualty* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2006), 120–150.

92 Thomas of Celano, 'The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul', in Regis J Armstrong, OFM Cap., J A Wayne Hellmann, OFM Conv., William J Short, OFM (eds), *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol II (New York: New City Press, 2000), The Second Book, CLXII, p. 386.

the religious turn, the theological turn, and the postsecular sensitivity in the study of international relations, the adaptations to the basic elements of the 'Franciscan model' set out in this paper, Pope Francis and Massignon, have constructed *their* 'Franciscan models'—what was theirs to do, for peacemaking, interreligious dialogue, and Muslim-Christian relations, in quite different times in international relations. Massignon, up against the high tide of secularity and secularism, now appears more perceptive, and forward-looking. His approach continues to challenge and inform Christian engagement with the Muslim world and Islam since his death in 1962.[93] The more detailed case study of Massignon, and the similarities with Pope Francis—and both of them in relation to St Francis, from the optic of international relations theory, offers a radical way forward in the 21st century for all people of faith, and all people of goodwill to engage with each other on today's global issues, and it offers a radical way forward for the study and practice of international relations.

93 Anthony O'Mahony, 'Eastern Christianity and Jesuit Scholarship on Arabic and Islam: Modern History and Contemporary Theological Reflections', in Anna Abram, Michael Kirwan, Peter Gallagher (eds), *Philosophy, Theology, and the Jesuit Tradition: 'The Eye of Love'* (London: Bloomsbury/T&T Clark, 2017), 159–186.

KENNETH CRAGG: THE LOUIS MASSIGNON OF THE PROTESTANT TRADITION?

David Derrick

Background

The 20th century marked a great change in Christian-Muslim Relations. A study paper prepared in 2003 by the 'Islam in Europe' Committee for the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) and Conference of European Churches (CEC) noted in particular that this was through:

> the engagement and writings of such Christian Islamists as Fr Charles de Foucauld (1858–1916), who inspired the institutes of the Little Brothers and Little Sisters of Jesus, the Reformed church pastor Samuel Zwemer (1867–1952), a missionary in Egypt and the founder of the journal *The Muslim World*, the Catholic spiritual writer and researcher Louis Massignon, and the Anglican Bishop Kenneth Cragg.[1]

Paolo Dall'Oglio observes that Foucauld was a significant influence on Massignon,[2] while Sidney Griffith's article 'Sharing the faith of Abraham: The "Credo" of Louis Massignon', notes that Massignon's first published article (1915) on the relationship of the church to Islam particularly referred to Foucauld.[3]

1 Hans Vöcking (ed.), *Meeting Muslims?* (Geneva: St Gallen, 'Islam in Europe' Committee, 2003), p. 15.

2 Paolo Dall'Oglio, 'Massignon and jihaād in the light of de Foucauld, al-Hallāj and Gandhi', in *Faith, power, and violence: Muslims and Christians in a plural society, past and present* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1998).

3 Sidney Griffith, 'Sharing the faith of Abraham: The "Credo" of Louis Massignon', *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 8, 1997, pp. 194–95.

Cragg remembers when he 'was fifteen being in an audience addressed by Dr Samuel Zwemer.' Cragg records that this was probably his earliest 'alerting' to Islam.[4] Also, the historian Kenneth Scott Latourette thought that:

> No one through all the centuries of Christian missions to the Muslims has deserved better than Dr. Zwemer the designation of Apostle to Islam.[5]

Kenneth Cragg likened to Louis Massignon

Cardinal Michael L Fitzgerald[6] in his 1986 review of Cragg's book *Jesus and the Muslim,* states that Cragg:

> has done for Protestants what Louis Massignon ... did for countless Roman Catholics, involved with Muslims, that is, he makes them aware of the relevance of Islam for Christian theology (not only missiology).

He adds:

> Cragg also published in Roman-Catholic periodicals and was often invited to address Roman Catholic audiences. I notice that his works are read by Muslim scholars.[7]

4 Kenneth Cragg, 'The Tents of Kedar', in Christian W Troll and C T R Hewer (eds), *Christian lives given to the study of Islam* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), p. 5.

5 J Christy Wilson, *Apostle to Islam: A biography of Samuel M. Zwemer* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1952), introduction.

6 Cardinal Michael L Fitzgerald is a member of the Society of Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers). He studied in Rome and London and taught in Uganda and at the Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Rome. After a period on the General Council of the Missionaries of Africa, he was appointed as secretary to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and in 2002 became its president and an archbishop. From 2006 to 2012 he was the Apostolic Nuncio in Egypt and delegate to the League of Arab States. Retired Cardinal Fitzgerald now lives in a White Fathers parish in Liverpool (UK)

7 Michael Fitzgerald, 'Review of *Jesus and the Muslim*: An Exploration by Kenneth Cragg', *Islamochristiana* 12, 1986, p. 239.

One of the earliest suggestions that Kenneth Cragg is the 'Louis Massignon of Anglicanism' was made by The Revd Christopher Brown in 2008.[8] The Revd Dr Richard Sudworth writing in 2014, demonstrates that Brown's designation has been taken further by Fr. Emmanuel Pisani OP who refers to Cragg as the 'Massignon of the Anglo-Saxon world'.[9] (Pisani is a Dominican of the Province of Toulouse, who studied Arabic and Islam in Rome and Cairo. He teaches Theology of Religion at the Catholic Institute in Montpellier and since 2020 Director of the l'Institut dominicain d'études orientales au Caire [IDEO]) Pisani writes:

> Depuis Louis Massignon, plusieurs théologiens ont cherché à élaborer des critères de discernement ou des catégories théologiques pour rendre compte de la religion musulmane. Massimo Rizzi expose la pensée de trois de ces auteurs: Kenneth Cragg, « le Massignon du monde anglo-saxon ... »[10]

Pisani is citing Massimo Rizzi, a priest of the diocese of Bergamo, North Italy, who teaches at the Pontifical Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, Rome. Rizzi refers to Cragg as 'il Masssignon del mondo anglosassone.'[11] Perhaps a better translation of both the French and the Italian phrase would be 'the Massignon of the English-speaking world'. So, in the same year (2008) that Brown, writing in England, suggested that Cragg was 'the Massignon of Anglicanism', Rizzi, in Italy, stated that Cragg is 'the Massignon of the English-speaking world.' My point here is to demonstrate that the Cragg-Massignon conflation is now internationally recognized.

8 Christopher Brown, 'Kenneth Cragg on Shi'a Islam and Iran: an Anglican theological response to political Islam', *Aram* 20, 2008, p. 378.

9 Richard J Sudworth, 'Hospitality and Embassy: The Persistent Influence of Kenneth Cragg on Anglican Theologies of Interfaith Relations', *Anglican Theological Review* 96, 2014, p. 75.

10 Emmanuel Pisani, 'Bulletin d'islamologie (IV): À la mémoire du Père Jacques Jomier, o.p. (1914–2008)', *Revue Thomiste* 109, 2009, p. 492.

11 Massimo Rizzi, *Per un discernimento cristiano dell'islam* (Genoa: Marietti, 2008), p. 65.

Differing Perceptions

Our knowledge of Massignon and Cragg comes from two distinct sources. While both wrote extensively and published academic work which has been appraised by their peers, Massignon wrote far more that was autobiographical than had Cragg. Furthermore, several biographies have been written on Massignon including Julian Baldick (1987), 'Massignon: Man of Opposites', in *Religious Studies*, Vol. 23, pp. 29-39, and Herbert Mason (1988), *Memoir of a Friend Louis Massignon*. Herbert Mason's Foreword to the English translation of Massignon's *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*, sums this up as follows:

> Several attempts at capturing his life and thought have appeared in recent years, some in the form of doctoral theses, some as heavily documented biographies, some as impressionistic novels, some as brief evocative homages, ... More are announced as forthcoming and eventually a provisional portrait of merit will appear—this of a man who did not like to have his photograph taken but who also never concealed anything about his life from anyone.[12]

Consequently, Massignon entered the realm of popular culture with the release in 2010 of the film *Des hommes et des dieux* ('Of Gods and Men'). Set in Algeria in 1996, a group of Trappist monks living alongside an impoverished Algerian community, become threatened by fundamentalist terrorists, and must decide whether to leave or stay. Françoise Jacquin, reviewing the film for *L'Association des Amis de Louis Massignon*, notes:

> Le succès du film **Des hommes et des dieux**, véritable phénomène de société, interpelle les Amis de Louis Massignon , tant s'en dégage la convergence entre le projet de Christian de Chergé et les objectifs de la **Badaliya** tels que Louis Massignon les expose dans ses innombrables

12 Louis Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*, trans H Mason (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), p. xvi.

> *Lettres et convocations* (à paraître en janvier 2011, Ed. du Cerf, collection Patrimoine).[13]

Jacquin writes that the forceful words of Massignon are echoed by the images of the film. She overlays several scenes from the film with texts from Massignon's writings.

Since 2006, the French internet television company BAGLIS TV has aired conferences, interviews, and roundtables, addressing different religious traditions and various spiritual movements. In 2012 it first showed *Louis Massignon et Henry Corbin* directed by Christian Jambert.[14] This 52-minute programme considered the spirituality of the two men and their passion for Islam, while looking at the relationship between mysticism, philosophy and religion. However, the French attitude to film, particularly the 'Art Cinema', is vastly different to that of the UK or USA where films tend to be made for profit. It is perhaps a sad reflection that in this atmosphere Massignon's colourful life is more likely to get Hollywood attention than Cragg's perceived dryness.

Cragg, being a more private person, has published little autobiographical material nor has he been the subject of much biography, let alone anything that might be considered 'popularist'. His chapter *Tents of Kedar* in W Troll and C T R Hewer (eds) 2012, *Christian lives given to the study of Islam*, and his semi-autobiographical book *Faith and Life Negotiate: A Christian Story-study* (1994), are two tantalizing glimpses that he gives into his private life. He gives his reason for this anonymity:

> my instinct was that authorship should avoid the personal pronoun. What belongs with scholarship is not well served by seeming, or sounding personally pontifical.[15]

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13 The unquestionable success of the film *Of Gods and Men*, has made us aware of *The Friends of Louis Massignon*, and the convergence of the aims of Christian de Chergé and the objectives of the Badaliya as depicted by Louis Massignon in his many *Badaliya: au nom de l'autre (1947–1962)*, Fr Maurice Borrmans (ed.) (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2011).

14 Christian Jambet, 'Le Soufisme entre Louis Massignon et Henry Corbin', in *Louis Massignon et l'Iran*, E Pierunek and R Yann (eds) (Leuven: Institut d'études iraniennes, 2000), pp. 31–42.

15 Kenneth Cragg, *Faith and Life Negotiate: A Christian Story-study* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1994), p. 3.

Christopher Lamb has comprehensively studied Cragg and his work. Lamb's doctoral thesis (1987),[16] formed the basis of his book, *The Call to Retrieval, Kenneth Cragg's Christian Vocation to Islam,* published in 1997 by Grey Seal, London. In 2014 he updated and republished it as *A Policy of Hope: Kenneth Cragg and Islam* (published by Melisende, London). Fitzgerald notes that Lamb gives 'biographical details ... [which] are not irrelevant.'[17] As relevant as Lamb's biographical details may be, Cragg still eludes any real insight into his private life and personal views.

Frederick Quinn, Adjunct Professor of History at Utah State University, an Episcopal Priest and a retired senior Foreign Service officer, fared little better. In 2003 while on sabbatical at Oxford University, he had 'several long conversations with Bishop Kenneth Cragg.'[18] He observed that:

> Cragg is often presented as a traditional Evangelical, but his stated positions about other religions are more complex than is usually assumed. While being solidly biblically grounded, he is also a herald of the 'generous Christianity' centrists emerging today.[19]

It is notable that when Quinn tried to draw Cragg into declaring himself as either a conservative or a liberal, 'he deftly avoided the attempt.'[20]

Many observations of Cragg have come to us via a third party. The recently deceased Baptist minister Edward Williams who worked in India and Bangladesh gives us this insight:

> I was once present in a conference of Muslims and Christians. Among the Christian speakers were Prof.

16 Christopher Lamb, 'The Call to Retrieval: Kenneth Cragg's Christian vocation to Islam', PhD, University of Birmingham, 1987.

17 Michael L Fitzgerald, 'Anglicans Appreciated: Reflections of Anglican Interfaith Engagement in a Catholic Journal', *Current Dialogue* 54, 2013, p. 10.

18 Frederick Quinn, *The Sum of All Heresies: The Image of Islam in Western Thought* (New York: OUP, 2008), p. vii.

19 Frederick Quinn, 'Toward "Generous Love": Recent Anglican Approaches to World Religions', *Journal of Anglican Studies* 10, 2012, p. 165.

20 Quinn, 'Toward "Generous Love"', p. 166.

> Montgomery Watt, a very distinguished scholar of Islam, and Kenneth Cragg, formerly Bishop of Cairo. Both 'knew their stuff'; both were fair. Both held profoundly to Christian tenets that Islam denies. Yet there was no mistaking the perception among the Muslims: 'Cragg *understands* us, Watt doesn't.'[21]

(The emphasis on 'understands' is William's).

While Cragg and Massignon may appear as equals in the world of Christian-Muslim relations, I would suggest that this is not the case in the arena of mysticism. Cragg has not undertaken the extent of scholarship as has Massignon and Massignon's relationship to and personal involvement with Sufism is very different to that of Cragg.

Mysticism

Massignon's engagement with Sufism has been both well researched and documented. Cragg, reviewing Massignon's work on al-Hallaj, observes that the 'grim episode in the 10th century Islamic story embodies the very heart of the Sufi/"orthodox" encounter.' He finds it:

> fascinating that it played so vital a part in the personal, spiritual biography of Louis Massignon, ... the distinguished French orientalist and editor of *Tawasin of Al-Hallaj*.[22]

There are two words here which suggest to me that there is a sting in the tail of this apparently approving statement: 'fascinating' and 'orientalist', both words can have a negative connotation.

21 Edward Williams, 'Review of *The Unfinished Story: A Study-Guide History of the BMS* by Basil Amey and *Encountering Other Faiths* by Alan Woodfield', *Baptist Ministers' Journal*, January 1993, p. 22.

22 Kenneth Cragg, 'Sainthood and spirituality in Islam', *Studia Missionalia* 36, 1986, pp. 190–191.

Massignon and Sufism

To assess Massignon's and Cragg's engagement with Sufism a brief outline of the salient aspects of Massignon's approach is needed. Prof Sidney Griffith, of the Institute of Christian Oriental Research, at The Catholic University of America in Washington, notes that Massignon explained his approach to the study of early Muslim mystics in his classic work *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulman* ('Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism'). Griffith states that Massignon 'was after "experiential knowledge" ... by an "introspective method that seeks to examine each conscience by transparency".'[23] However, the translator's Introduction to Massignon's *Essay* suggests that a better translation of 'experiential' would be 'experimental':

> Expérimental becomes 'experimental' rather than 'experiential', which would connote too much passivity. The experience of the mystics, as Massignon describes it, was passive only at its highest point, after many difficult, voluntary preparations. 'Mystical experimentation' was an active trial upon the self, preceding ministry to others. Massignon's vocabulary is intentionally medical and scientific, in accord with many of the Arabic authors.[24]

Griffith continues that through this method, Massignon was to search:

> beneath outward behaviour of the person for a grace which is wholly divine. Massignon had achieved his own 'experiential knowledge' of Islam by a shattering encounter with 'the Stranger', as he called the God of Abraham whom he met at a crisis moment of his life, in Iraq in 1908. It was the moment of his conversion from a wayward life back to the practice of the Catholicism into which he had been born and baptized. What was

23 Sidney H Griffith, 'Mystics and Sufi masters: Thomas Merton and dialogue between Christians and Muslims', *Islam & Christian-Muslim Relations* 15, 2004, pp. 299–300.
24 Louis Massignon, *Essay*, p. xxv.

> striking about this conversion was the fact that Massignon was convinced that it had come about through the intercession of a Muslim mystic ... al-Hallaj. ... Massignon had so conformed his own thinking to that of al-Hallaj that it could be said, *mutatis mutandis*, the two were of one mind. It is an instance of the 'introspective method' of Massignon, according to which one is in search of 'experiential [experimental] knowledge'; he is looking for the 'grace which is wholly divine.'[25]

Massignon in his *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane*[26] under the sub-heading *Specialized Appropriation of technical terms* defends his use of technical language, noting that:

> In mystical thought, these terms are not simply images stripped of their sense objects, or schematized frames for rational concepts. Above all, they are allusions pointing to the spiritual realities, the sanctifying virtues, that only the persistent practice of a concerted rule for living can allow the mystic to discover and savor, as he gradually acquires them. He must put the words into practice before he can understand them.

Apposite to this paper, Massignon adds:

> The ability, which poets possess, to engrave the characteristic mark of personal experience of the universe onto common words, is even greater in mystics.[27]

Dr Samah Selim writes on the poetry of al-Hallaj. She has previously taught at Columbia University, Princeton University and the University of Aix-en-Provence. She also directs the literature module of the Berlin-based postdoctoral research program, Europe in the Middle East; the

25 Griffith, 2004, 'Mystics and Sufi masters', p. 300.

26 *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane*, preface by Roger Arnaldez, introduction by Daniel Massignon (Paris: Coll. Patrimoines, Cerf, 1999. First edition Paris: P Geuthner, 1922).

27 Massignon, *Essay,* pp. 81–82.

Middle East in Europe. In her article 'Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj and the Poetry of Ecstasy', she examines al-Hallaj's poetry and poetic utterances. She notes that central to the approach of poets and mystics is how the inexpressible can be expressed and the unspeakable can be spoken. She concludes that al-Hallaj's poetry was misunderstood and severely criticized by his contemporaries. According to some scholarly opinion was not until European modernism deliberately used language to break the boundaries of its own foundation that his poetry achieved a greater understanding.[28]

The main characteristics of Massignon's approach, for the purpose of this paper, can accordingly be summarized and then compared with Cragg's approach:

1. The importance of poetry
2. The importance of technical language
3. The importance of experiencing for oneself, 'experimental' knowledge
4. The experience of conversion for Massignon
5. The mystical relationship of Massignon with al-Hallaj

Cragg and Sufism

Cragg's doctoral thesis 'Islam in the 20th Century: The Relevance of Christian Theology and the Relation of the Christian Mission to its Problems', which he defended in 1950, makes numerous positive references to Sufism. He states that:

> The tendency has been to discredit Sufism as superstitious and heterodox and yet it remains a fact that it represents some of the most religiously vigorous parts of Islam.[29]

28 Samah Selim, 'Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj and the Poetry of Ecstasy', *Journal of Arabic Literature* 21, 1990, p. 41.

29 Kenneth Cragg, 'Islam in the 20th Century: The Relevance of Christian Theology and the Relation of the Christian Mission to its Problems', PhD Thesis, Oxford, 1950, p. 91.

Cragg was struck by the moral role that Sufism played in the lives of such eminent Muslims as Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) the Egyptian religious scholar and liberal reformer who led a late 19th-century movement in Egypt and other Muslim countries to 'modernize' Muslim institutions. Abduh's views were opposed by the established political and religious order, but were later embraced by Arab nationalism after the First World War. Cragg tells us that:

> The most formative influence in Abduh's life prior to his early twenties ... had been the Sufi sect of Shadhali, to which he had been introduced by an uncle of his father ... It was from this Sufi source that Abduh derived that intense moral sensitivity which some have regarded as the mainspring of all his activities.[30]

Osman Amin, writing in *The Moslem World* confirms Cragg's view concerning the importance Abduh's moral development:

> Muhammad 'Abduh was, in fact, a born moralist, and he wanted more to act directly on the conscience than to isolate himself in order to build a theological system more or less coherent. Like Plato, 'Abduh, it seems, believed that only direct contact would permit the transmission of ideas among others. 'Abduh was above all a creative force. His personal actions and his teachings have had a profound moral influence.[31]

Interestingly, Abduh's first main work was a treatise on mysticism (*Risalat al-Waridah*, Cairo, 1874, reprinted in *Tarikh*, Vol I, p. 1-25.) Cragg also cites Sayyid Amir Ali (1849-1928), whose Shi'ite family moved from Persia to India in the early 18th century. He favoured British rule in India rather than the possibility of Hindu domination should India become independent. His ideas are illustrated in his work *The Spirit of Islam*. Concerning this Cragg observes that:

30 Cragg, 'Islam in the 20th Century', p. 138.
31 Osman Amin, 'Muhammad 'Abduh the Reformer', *The Muslim World* 36, 1946, p. 153.

> Writing as a Shi'ite, Amir Ali calls upon the whole of Sunni Islam to shake off its trammels and renew the free, essential rationalism of Islam. The concluding chapter deals with mysticism in Islam and far from denouncing it, traces its origins to the Prophet himself.[32]

Cragg, trying to be even-handed, notes that Ali's work was 'castigated' by W C Smith in his book *Modern Islam in India: a social analysis*.[33]

Thus, Cragg's thesis places Sufism in a very positive light. He sees no place for political power in religion, particularly in Islam which he sees as having become a political force. Cragg often refers to Islam's belligerence, for example: 'There is a dimension of harsh belligerence in the Qur'an, a strong pugnacity of faith.'[34]

Yet we can see that Cragg shows us one way out of this dilemma; that is through the moral quality that Sufism can bestow on Islam and especially on its Muslim leaders. This is echoed in Cragg's attitude to Dag Hammarskjöld, the former Secretary-General of the United Nations (further referred to below). Cragg's ideas relating to Sufism are further developed in his article 'Sainthood and spirituality in Islam':

> What matters is a measure of Sufism as both achieving and rebuking Islam, and yet doing both from within its own native capacity and character.[35]
>
> In this sense Sufism may be interpreted as Islam's own counterpart to the instincts and bent of its own theology, the corrective of what might, otherwise, have been only doctrinaire or even intransigent.[36]

In keeping with the Anglican clergy's fascination with railway locomotives, Cragg might be said to view Sufism as the 'governor' on the Islamic steam-engine.

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32 Cragg, 'Islam in the 20th Century', p. 363.
33 W C Smith, *Modern Islam in India: a social analysis* (London: V Gollancz, 1946), p. 55.
34 Kenneth Cragg, *The Event of the Qur'ān: Islam in Its Scripture* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1994), pp. 9–10.
35 Cragg, 'Sainthood and spirituality in Islam', pp. 179–80.
36 Cragg, 'Sainthood and spirituality in Islam', p. 191.

Cragg's first book, *The Call of the Minaret* published in 1956, was described by Edward Jurji (Professor of Islamics and Comparative Religion at the Princeton Theological Seminary) as having:

> A mystical brooding mood [that] generally pervades the volume; this may offend some sensibilities, but the present reviewer believes it enhances the treatment.[37]

This is an early acknowledgement of a mystical quality in Cragg's work.

Mysticism as Morality

Paul L Heck, Professor of Islamic Studies in Georgetown University, in his article 'Mysticism as morality: the case of Sufism', convincingly argues that Sufism has played an integral role in the moral formation of Muslim society.[38] To show the urgency and aptness of this approach, he refers to Anita Allen's book, *The New Ethics: a guided tour of the twenty-first century Moral Landscape*, which examines our failure to act morally despite our moral knowledge. In 2010 Dr Allen was appointed by President Obama to the Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues. She suggests that ethics is 'a lifelong quest to respond to others with a willingness to forego brazen self-interest.'[39] Following on from this, Heck sees that:

> Mysticism, then has something to say to the apparent failure of human reason to establish a framework of common values out of diverse social and legal traditions of morality (whether secular or religious in orientation); after all, is there anyone who would challenge the virtue of selfless action? At the same time, at stake in this question is insight into the nature of Islam -a particularly urgent

37 Edward J Jurji, 'Review of The Call of the Minaret', *Middle East Journal* 11, 1957, p. 207.

38 Paul L Heck, 'Mysticism as Morality: The Case of Sufism', *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 34, 2006, 253-86.

39 Anita L Allen, *The New Ethics: A Guided Tour of the Twenty-First Century Moral Landscape* (New York: Miramax-books, 2004), p. 7.

> task these days—as a way to supplement and even correct both popular and scholarly perception.[40]

In his conclusion Heck demonstrates how Sufi groups participating in the public square, (civil society) have been a limiting factor to the excesses of 'authoritarian states with secularizing ideologies and fundamentalism movements that wish to reduce the moral vision of the nation to scriptural and legal formulae.'[41]

Cragg, Sufism and Mysticism

Compared with Massignon, Cragg has written on some aspects of Sufism. In his book *Troubled by truth: biographies in the presence of mystery*, Cragg writes: 'Mystics when it comes to dialogue are a law to themselves.'[42] Yet, in his article 'How not Islam?' Cragg strongly favours Sufism and mysticism. He is critical of the British academic Robert Charles Zaehner (1913-1974) who 'roundly dismisses from Islam the whole measure of Sufism.' Cragg feels that:

> the capacity of Islam, or any other theism, to generate mystical patterns of belief and devotion ought to be allowed its relevance to the particular argument. Such relevance, and it is deep and wide, is altogether missed, if Sufism is roundly excluded with the comment: 'Islam turned upside down'.[43]

Cragg is also critical of Prof Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988), who is arguably one of the most important thinkers on 20th century Islam. In his article 'Sainthood and spirituality in Islam', Cragg,

40 Heck, 'Mysticism as Morality', pp. 253-54.

41 Heck, 'Mysticism as Morality', p. 280.

42 Kenneth Cragg, *Troubled by truth: biographies in the presence of mystery* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1994), p. 5.

43 Kenneth Cragg, 'How not Islam?', *Religious Studies* 13, 1977, p. 389. Cragg is quoting Zaehner: 'The young are not interested in switching from one dogmatic monotheistic faith to another: hence they are little interested in Islam except when Islam itself is turned upside down and becomes Sufism, which in its developed form is barely distinguishable from Vedanta.' R C Zaehner, 'Why Not Islam?', *Religious Studies*, 11, 1975, p. 167.

pressing for a less absolutist and literal interpretation of the Qur'an, notes that:

> While a recent writer Fazlur Rahman, in *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (1980) insists strongly that the role of the Qur'an is strictly 'functional' and 'prescriptive' in contrast to what he calls 'the liquidity of Christianity', medieval thinkers like Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240) and modern ones like Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) were able, and free to draw highly esoteric meanings from Quranic vocabulary ...[44]

Cragg has taken this even further:

> The Qur'an itself could be seen as possessing a hidden mystique of language below its surface text, while its prophet might be claimed as the supreme Sufi, having his message by an ecstasy of experience, as light in which his Sufi disciples might bask.[45]

Cragg's slim volume *The Wisdom of the Sufis* is his only book dedicated to the subject, which I shall be coming to shortly.

Cragg and Poetry

Cragg's approach to poetry is not dissimilar to that of Massignon. It is Cragg's frequent use of quotations from literature, particularly poetry, which in many cases, I believe, are purposefully chosen to impart a 'mystical spirituality' to the point or observation he is making. Most writers do not mention this aspect of his work, or they see the quotations as an irritation. Lamb observes that:

> Virtuoso catena of quotation like this may irritate some readers, but they illustrate the capacity of a mind searching the ranges of literature for clues about how to

44 Cragg, 'Sainthood and spirituality in Islam', p. 195.
45 Kenneth Cragg, *The Wisdom of the Sufis* (London: Sheldon Press, 1976), p. 11.

> begin communicating with the bewildering variety of human experience.[46]

However, Lamb, in *A Policy of Hope*, in the Chapter 'The Love of Literature, subheading 1. The Cragg Literary Style' (this sub-heading does not exist in *Call to Retrieval*) notes that Cragg sees a unity between the poet and the natural world, the latter of which Cragg likens to the work of a poet. 'If Kepler described his scientific work as "thinking God's thoughts for him", perhaps the poet can say the same.'[47] Lamb's other sub-headings are: 'Cragg as a Poet'; 'Poetry and Theology'; and 'Shakespeare and Religion'.[48] It would be interesting to compare this with *Shakespeare in the Light of Sacred Art*, written by Martin Lings, the author, scholar and convert to Islam.[49]

The Wisdom of the Sufis

Cragg's book, *The Wisdom of the Sufis*, consists of just 95 pages. He does not claim authorship, merely an acknowledgement that it was 'compiled by Kenneth Cragg'. There is a one-page Preface, one page of Acknowledgements and a 27-page introduction, *The Wisdom of the Sufis*, all written by him. In the Acknowledgements, he states that:

> Anthologies of Sufism are many and have a lengthening history. Some translations were published before the end of the last century [i.e. the 19th century].[50]

Cragg's intention is that the book is:

> 'A friend to know the sign' which neatly phrases the intention of this short annotated anthology of Islamic

46 Christopher Lamb, *The Call to Retrieval: Kenneth Cragg's Christian Vocation to Islam* (London: Grey Seal, 1997), p. 6.
47 Christopher Lamb, *A Policy of Hope: Kenneth Cragg and Islam* (London: Melisende, 2014), p. 26.
48 Lamb, *A Policy of Hope*, p 29–37.
49 M Lings, *Shakespeare in the Light of Sacred Art* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1966).
50 Cragg, *The Wisdom of the Sufis*, p. vi.

> Sufism ... The selection that follows has been determined by a desire to relate Islamic mysticism fairly to the total context of Muslim faith and life.[51]

Many of the translations from the Qur'an and from the original Arabic manuals of Sufi devotion are by Cragg.[52] It ought however, to be possible to identify which parts of the book are Cragg's own translations. Cragg's idiosyncratic referencing unfortunately makes this task difficult.

In the *Preface*, Cragg admits that anthologies will have their biases, but adds that his bias is unconcealed, namely:

> A preference for the intelligible, a love for the lyrical and the expressive, and an ambition for relationship across frontiers of allegiance within the current time.

He ends with this caution:

> Sufism often attracts admirers from outside. But the first duty of the Way is to disconcert admiration.[53]

Cragg does not use a Sufi poem to open his section the *Wisdom of the Sufis*, but begins with the last verse from Emily Dickinson's poem 'I never hear that one is dead'.

> I do not know the man so bold
> He dare in lonely place
> That awful stranger—consciousness
> Deliberately face.

Cragg first came across Dickinson, on his voyage to the United States of America 'on *The Queen Elizabeth* (No 1) on the way to discoveries of Moby Dick and Emily Dickinson.'[54] Cragg not only fails to give the name of the author, but slightly misquotes the

51 Cragg, *The Wisdom of the Sufis*, p. 6.
52 Cragg, *The Wisdom of the Sufis*, p. vi.
53 Cragg, *The Wisdom of the Sufis*, p. vii.
54 Cragg, *Faith and Life Negotiate*, p. 115.

poem. The term 'consciousness' in the original poem has a capital C, 'Consciousness'.[55] (There has been some debate concerning early editors normalizing the poet's capitalization and punctuation, which might account for this apparent error.) Such a seemingly casual use of the quotation may leave the reader feeling that these words were of little significance. Yet Dickinson's poetry is a quest for answers to the questions concerning life and death, although there were several factors which contributed to her own preoccupation with death.

While numerous writers have referred to Dickinson as a mystical poet, Sister Mary Humiliata in her article 'Emily Dickinson—Mystic Poet?' questions this and concludes that 'Mystical poetry—in the traditional sense, at least—is not Miss Dickinson's poetic gift.'[56]

However, what is significant is that Cragg has chosen the words of a woman to open his introduction, thus reminding us that Sufism is not entirely a man's world.[57] Therefore, although this is an appropriate beginning for Cragg's investigation, it is for the reader to decide what to make of it. Cragg appears to justify this approach by declaring that the Sufis have 'achieved and interpreted a unity of meaning deeper, if more elusive, than the assurances of doctrine.'[58]

Cragg next uses a very short line from the 13th-century poet Ibn al-Farid:

> Verily Thou art the desire of my heart, the end of my search, the goal of my aim, my choice and my chosen.[59]

55 E Dickinson, M D Bianchi, and A L Hampson, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Boston: Little Brown, 1937), No. 1323.

56 Mary Humiliata, 'Emily Dickinson-Mystic Poet?', *College English* 12, 1950, p. 149.

57 See for example: Codou Bop, 'Roles and the Position of Women in Sufi Brotherhoods in Senegal', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73, 2005, pp. 1099–119; Amila Buturovic, 'Spiritual Empowerment Through Spiritual Submission: Sufi Women and Their Quest for God', *Canadian Woman Studies* 1st ser. 17, 1997, 53–56; Meriem El Haitami, 'Women and Sufism: Religious Expression and the Political Sphere in Contemporary Morocco', *Mediterranean Studies* 22, 2014, pp. 190-212; Nancy V Workman, 'Sufi Mysticism in Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale', *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études en littérature canadienne, [S.l.]*, June 1989.

58 Cragg, *The Wisdom of the Sufis*, p. 3.

59 Cragg, *The Wisdom of the Sufis*, p. 4.

Noting that, 'Such lyrical love may be no more than self love in disguise', Cragg surprising quotes from James Joyce's *Ulysses*: 'Love loves to love love.' (Again Cragg gives no reference.) Noting that 'this type of love may be the most selfish of the self's deceits, a sheer lust for possession. There is a path of purging to be taken if authentic love is to dwell in a self.' Cragg's use of Joyce at this point is intriguing. At first glance it appears surreal, set as it is, in a book on Sufi wisdom. Cragg states that Joyce is being cynical. However, a reading of the whole quotation—

> Love loves to love love. Nurse loves the new chemist. Constable 14A loves Mary Kelly. Gerty MacDowell loves the boy that has the bicycle. M. B. loves a fair gentleman. Li Han lovey up kissy Cha Pu chow. Jumbo, the elephant, loves Alice, the elephant. Old Mr Verschoyle with the ear trumpet loves old Mrs Verschoyle with the turned in eye. The man in the brown macintosh loves a lady who is dead. His Majesty the King loves Her Majesty the Queen. Mrs Norman W. Tupper loves officer Taylor. You love a certain person. And this person loves that other person because every body loves somebody but God loves everybody.[60]

—shows fun is being made of Bloom's preaching on love by imitating childish love talk and sentimentality and asks: how can we talk about love without falling into such sentimentality? Ian Almond gives the following insight into Joyce's book:

> Insofar as the myth of Odysseus concerns a journey in the East—a man who travels to the East and returns, ten years later, to find everything changed, including himself—the basic metaphor of Joyce's book is of some relevance. For the attentive reader, Joyce's book is itself one such encounter with the East: from the oriental brothel Bloom visits to the 'handsome Moors' Molly recollects in her final monologue, Ulysses is peppered with Eastern names,

60 J Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Penguin Adult, 2000), p. 433.

> places and allusions which baffle the reader not simply because of their frequency, but also for their incongruity with the rest of the text.[61]

So, these few words that Cragg quotes, 'Love loves to love love', open a vast landscape for the modern reader, yet strangely relate it to the world of the Sufi (and that of Massignon). This approach appears to follow the methodology set out in Selim's work referred to above.

Incidentally, Julian Baldick in his article, 'Massignon: Man of Opposites', records that:

> Massignon's fury reached its height in the Moroccan crisis of 1953, when he publicly denounced the French Government's chief indigenous supporter as a brothel-keeper.[62]

An example perhaps of life imitating art? Although, if Ibn Warraq's narratives relating to Massignon in his book *Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said's Orientalism*[63] or the more salacious entries in Mircea Eliade's (1907-86) journals are to be believed,[64] Massignon's fury might appear both hypercritical and hypocritical.

Cragg and the Importance of Technical Language

In a single short paragraph in *The Wisdom of the Sufis*, Cragg sweeps aside Massignon's years of labour in his *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism* and other work associated with the technical language of Islamic mysticism:

61 Ian Almond, 'Tales of Buddha, Dreams of Arabia: Joyce and Images of the East', *Orbis Litterarum* 57, 2002, p. 23.

62 Julian Baldick, 'Massignon: Man of Opposites', *Religious Studies* 23, 1987, p. 38.

63 I Warraq, *Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said's Orientalism* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2007), p. 40.

64 Mircea Eliade, *Journal 1, 1945-1955*, trans. Mac Linscott Ricketts (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

> There are other connoisseurs who tend to lose themselves in intricate theosophy, presenting Sufism as an elaborate, esoteric system of abstract ideas, the form of which almost fatally overstrains the Islamic moorings to which it is tied. The range of Quranic vocabulary and idiom, although wide and flexible, is then unduly taxed with the meanings given to it. With such interpreters, the very confession of the divine transcendence is liable to be read in a sense which, in any recognizable Islamic terms, comes close to its denial. An intolerable tension is then set up between Islam and the more wayward mystics.[65]

Again, Cragg's choice of language is deliberate: 'connoisseur' (suggestive of an aficionado or a dilettante); 'wayward mystics',[66] etc. This is no mere sting in the tail but a coup de grâce. However, Cragg makes no further mention of the matter.

Cragg and 'Experimental' Knowledge

In *Faith and Life Negotiate,* Cragg reminisces over the preceding forty years and relates that:

> I am intrigued to find that I wondered whether 'the most useful beginning was not to make the very existence of the problem (of communication) a means of Christian grace through the very quality of self-expression it might evoke.' I even found a strange analogy between the pains demanded of Christian thinking in being drawn through Islamic reckoning and what John Donne saw the exigencies of verse doing

65 Cragg, *The Wisdom of the Sufis*, p. 9.

66 This suggests a quotation by Evelyn Underhill relating to William Blake: 'An impassioned Christian of a deeply mystical type, Blake, like Eckartshausen and Saint-Martin, was at the same time a determined and outspoken foe of conventional Christianity. He seems at first sight the Ishmael of the mystics, wayward and individual, hardly touched by tradition.' Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (New York: E P Dutton, 1912), p. 562.

> to his interior experience when there he tried to give it voice. He wrote:
>
> '... as the earth's inward narrow, crooked lanes,
> Do purge sea water's fretful salt away
> I thought if I could draw my pains
> Through rime's vexation, I should them allay ...'

Accepting exigencies as an enabling discipline rather than as a weary obstacle might be a way of refining traditional Christian frustration about a theology alongside Islam, drawing all that was inimical (or seemed so) through a different idiom and finding the poetry that might replace the prose of old controversy.[67]

Cragg then reflects that, in retrospect, he did not at the time fully develop the positive areas of theology concerning the concept of creation, 'sacramental earth' and the divine involvement in prophethood. He was left with many unresolved questions as to how a genuine inter-theology between Christianity and Islam could be constructed. Here Cragg's introspection seems to meet the requirements of Massignon's 'experimental' knowledge. While this did not lead Cragg to the same 'conversion' as experienced by Massignon, over the course of his life he has nevertheless undergone what he calls 'siftings', purging the mind of that which lacks truth and sincerity. He notes that,

> It was for such soul-sifting and shepherding that the great Sufi Orders came into being with their prayer rites and liturgies and the authority of their spiritual founders, some of whom attained an almost legendary reputation for piety and wisdom.[68]

Dag Hammarskjöld: a very brief biography

Dag Hammarskjöld was born in 1905 in Jönköping, Sweden into an aristocratic family; in 1914 his father became Prime Minister of Sweden. In 1941 Dag Hammarskjöld became Secretary of the Swedish

67 Cragg, *Faith and Life Negotiate*, p. 112.
68 Cragg, *The Wisdom of the Sufis*, pp. 16–17.

Central Bank. In 1945 he became State Secretary to the Ministry of Finance and in 1951 Cabinet Minister without Portfolio. He was elected Secretary-General to the United Nations in 1954. Tragically in 1961, while on a UN mission, he was killed in a plane crash near Ndola, in today's Zambia, in circumstances that are still being investigated. After his death, his private journal recording his spiritual journey was published; it was translated into English with the title *Markings*. It is through this book we have an insight into his inner life and he has come to be regarded as a modern-day mystic.

Jodok Troy's article, 'Dag Hammarskjöld: "An International Civil Servant Uniting Mystics and Realistic Diplomatic Engagement"', demonstrates that:

> While in office, Hammarskjöld was able to unite personal belief and political rationale. This is the main reason he became a respected and true international civil servant.[69]

Troy concludes that Hammarskjöld by devoting of his private life to God, could devote his political life to the UN.

Cragg and Hammarskjöld

Cragg refers to Hammarskjöld in fourteen out of the fifty or so books that he published. These book references fall into two categories. Those referring to Hammarskjöld in a general illustrative manner, 'examples'; or those using Hammarskjöld as a specific mystic 'exemplar', i.e. that of a practical mystic.

In 1999, Cragg published *Common Prayer: A Muslim-Christian Spiritual Anthology*. In his 'Postscript: A part in common prayer discussed', while acknowledging that there are disparities between Christian and Muslim prayer, Cragg looks to similarities, where others might not look. He believed that there is an affinity symbolizing 'a certain kinship in praise, penitence and petition' within the sources which he has quoted. He asks:

69 Jodok Troy, 'Dag Hammarskjöld: An International Civil Servant Uniting Mystics and Realistic Diplomatic Engagement', *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 21, 2010, p. 434.

> Has the searching self-reproach of a Hamid al-Ghazali altogether no kinship with the mental turmoil of a Francis Thompson, or the public conscience of the cordwainer[70] al-Hallaj no converse with the private self of a Dag Hammarskjöld?[71]

Cragg mentioning both al-Hallaj and Hammarskjöld in the same sentence, suggests there should be some affinity between them. However, they appear to sit on opposite poles (or *quth,* in the sense of a spiritual symbol). Al-Hallaj was a very public mystic both in life and death. Hammarskjöld shared little of his inner life, and then only with a chosen few.

Anthony O'Mahony describes the relationship between Massignon and al-Hallaj as follows:

> Massignon saw the relationship between Christianity and Islam through the lens of the tragic figure of the mystic al-Hallaj (857-922). Al-Hallaj, who was 'martyred' in Baghdad for heresy, represented for Massignon a direct parallel to the suffering of Jesus on the cross. As Christianity had suffering and compassion as its foundation, so too, according to Massignon, did Islam.[72]

It has been posited that Hammarskjöld was to Cragg, what al-Hallaj as a Muslim martyr-mystic was to Louis Massignon. It is clear that Cragg's relationship with Sufism (and mysticism) is very different from that of Massignon. Thus, the lens through which Cragg views Hammarskjöld focuses the relationship between power and religion.

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70 It is intriguing why Cragg has chosen this archaic word 'cordwainer'. Al-Hallaj is often described as being a cobbler or shoe-maker. J B Trend in Thomas Arnold and Alfred Guillaume (eds), *The Legacy of Islam* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931), p. 15, notes: 'Cordoba became famous for its leather, known as "Cordovan" or "Cordwain", so that the Cordwainers' Company, or at least the name, might be considered part of the legacy of Arabia'; Arberry translates: 'He uttered his forgiveness of them as they were preparing to cut out his tongue. An old woman shouted, "What right has this little woolcarder (al-hallaj) to speak of God?"' Arberry, *Muslim Saints*, pp. 268–71.

71 Kenneth Cragg, *Common Prayer: A Muslim-Christian Spiritual Anthology* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1999), p. 120.

72 Anthony O'Mahony, 'Louis Massignon as priest: Eastern Christianity and Islam', *Sobornost incorporating Eastern Churches Review* 29, 2007, p. 11.

Postscript: *A Room of Quiet,* The Meditation Room, United Nations Headquarters

In the original plan for the new UN Headquarters in New York, a tiny room had been provided as a place dedicated to silence, where people could withdraw into themselves, regardless of their faith, creed or religion. However, Hammarskjöld wanted something more dignified. His proposals were supported by a group composed of Christians, Jews, and Muslims—*The Friends of the UN Meditation Room*—who combined their determinations and provided the money for a room worthy of a world organization. Hammarskjöld personally planned and supervised the creation of the Meditation Room. He replaced chairs with benches and in the centre of the room, placed a six-and-half-ton rectangular block of iron ore, polished on the top and illuminated from above by a single spotlight. This block, which was a gift of the King of Sweden and a Swedish mining company, was the only symbol in the Room.[73]

Cragg comments on this symbol as follows:

> And, thanks to Dag Hammarskjöld, a block of iron ore is the sole symbol within the Chapel of Meditation of the United Nations where such 'soul' as an international forum of political realism—and cynicism—can muster may find a parable of its deepest tasks in war and peace, the choice between swords and ploughshares, bombs and bridges, guns and girders. The ore was from Hammarskjold's native Sweden and thus signified not only the choices required of humanity in dominion over the natural order but also the 'local' genius which every culture must bring to the tasks of society and peace.[74]

Hammarskjöld recognized and articulated the need for spirituality to be at the centre of the United Nations and is often quoted as saying

73 David Crumm, 2013, 'Dag Hammarskjöld designs United Nations Meditation Room', in *Read The Spirit*, <http://www.readthespirit.com/explore/dag-hammarskjolds-introduction-to-the-united-nations-meditaiton-room/> [accessed 19/09/2023]

74 Kenneth Cragg, 'The iron in the soul: in memoriam [Sāyigh, Fa'iz]', *The Muslim World* 76, 1986, p. 67.

that world peace would not occur without a spiritual renaissance on our planet.

There is no doubt that in the field of Christian-Muslim relations, in their respective spheres, Cragg and Hammarskjöld stand shoulder to shoulder. However, in the arena of Sufism, their attitudes to Sufism are quite different. The volume of Massignon's research and published work places him head and shoulders above that of Cragg. In conclusion, Massignon, fully immersed in the language, practice and spirituality of Sufism stands on the inside looking out; Cragg, more detached, stands on the outside looking in.

THE ROLE OF CHRISTIANS IN CONTEMPORARY EGYPTIAN ARAB-MUSLIM CULTURE[1]

Fadel Sidarouss

Introduction

My approach is twofold: both a philosophical-theological consideration of the meaning of man, and a socio-political consideration of a project of society, not a purely communitarian[2] or pastoral perspective.[3] This approach is set within a monolithic Arab-Muslim culture and presents an approach to a cultural pluralism[4] in the regions of the Near and Middle East, different to the ambient culture, a contextual contribution that seeks to present a Christian-inspired discourse in a Muslim world, in the belief that it has something to bring to this cultural environment, particularly a sign of hope.[5]

I propose therefore to indicate what might be the cultural vocation of Christians in the Near and Middle East generally, but in a particular way in Egypt. This perspective is set within the prolongation of the *Nahḍa* movement of the Arab renaissance of the 19th and 20th centuries promoted by Christians, especially those of Syria-Lebanon, but also present in Egypt and in the countries of emigration across the Atlantic,

1 Fadel Sidarouss SJ, 'Le rôle des chrétiens dans la culture arabo-musulmane de l'Égypte contemporaine', *Proche-Orient chrétien*, Vol. 64 (2014), no.3/4, 272-290.

2 Fadel Sidarouss SJ, `The Renewal of the Coptic Catholic Church: Grappling with Identity and Alterity', in *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East*, A O'Mahony and John Flannery (eds), Centre for Eastern Christianity, Heythrop College, University of London/Melisende 2010, pp. 139-152; Fadel Sidarouss SJ, 'Le renouveau de l'Église Copte Catholique aux prises avec son identité et son alterité', *Proche-Orient chrétien*, Vol. 60 (2010), no. 3/4, 298-313.

3 Patriarches Catholiques d'Orient: La présence chrétienne en Orient, Mission et témoignage [2 ème lettre pastorale des PCO] (1992). (Hereafter: *PCO*)

4 *PCO*, 10-11, 30.

5 Fadel Sidarouss SJ, *L'homme, ce grand mystère*, Coll: 'Etudes theologiques' (Beirut: Dar el Machreq, 2004). F Sidarouss SJ, 'Éléments d'anthropologie copte', *Proche-Orient chrétien*, Vol. 61 (2011), no. 1/2, pp. 45-59.

in order to prove that it is possible to be Arab in culture without being Muslim. So it was that Christians brought their own cultural contribution, complementary to the surrounding Arab-Muslim culture.

Another motivation which positions my discourse is a conviction that what orients the world, helps it to free itself and leads it forward, is not only politics, economics, or even religion—we need to step back to a certain extent from these elements, important as they are—but also, and especially, human thought, thanks to the critical judgement it possesses. Did not Anaxagoras say, 'Thought must lead reality', which represents, according to Hegel, 'a marvellous sun which rises' over humanity? And as Olivier Clément reminds us in his book *Notre Père*: '"True revolutions are those of the spirit", said Berdiaev. The "revolutions of consciences", Bishop Irenaeus of Crete says today.'[6] It is precisely with this in mind that we seek to consider and provide context to the two recent revolutions of 25 January 2011 and 30 June 2013 in Egypt. The nonagenarian Egyptian philosopher Mourad Wahba, in a televised speech, clearly drew attention to the lack of thought at the basis of these revolutions. The same reproach was likewise levelled at the presidency of Mubarak, pragmatic, with no thinking orienting or sustaining it, while the policies of Nasser were based on socialist thinking, and those of Sadat on liberal ideas, since these options gave rise to opposition, with reason therefore functioning dialectally, one way or another.

I would like to add a Christian characteristic peculiar to Egypt following its evangelisation in the first centuries of the Christian era, making my own analysis of an Egyptian Muslim researcher, Ala Ed-dine Hilal, who became youth minister in one of Mubarak's governments. He affirmed that the revolution brought about in Egypt by Christians was greater than that brought about by Islam, in the precise sense that Christian monotheism had been a real victory in Egypt over polytheism, creating a welcoming terrain for Islam when it was introduced in the 7th century. That is to say, the basic culture of

6 Olivier Clément, *Trois prières: le Notre-Père, la prière au Saint-Esprit, la prière de saint Ephrem* (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1993), p. 38. [Olivier Clément (1921–2009) was a French Eastern Orthodox theologian who taught at St Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris, France. He had a close friendship with Pope John Paul II due to Clément's commitment to ecumenical dialogue and unity between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church. Clément was an open and engaged Christian thinker in modern thought, culture and society.]

Egypt is profoundly marked by this monotheism which the pharaoh Akhenaten had already sensed.

My approach is the fruit of long and mature personal reflection in my quality as a Coptic Catholic, Jesuit, and theologian with philosophical tendencies. This therefore is where I locate myself and from where I speak.

1. The meaning of Man

A number of elements underpin my philosophical-theological thinking on the meaning of man. I will draw attention to three of them that seem most important for the prevailing culture: the human person, time and history, and rationality.[7]

The value of the human person

Firstly, I will willingly situate this fundamental conviction, influenced by my 'personalist' tendency, by agreeing with the diagnosis of the Eastern Catholic patriarchs, affirming that 'The criterion is man.'[8]

But also, what reinforces my deep conviction is our lived experience in Egypt of a prevailing 'sectarian' culture. On one hand is *al-umma al-islamiyya* (the Islamic community), or even the reaction of *al-umma al-qibṭiyya* (the Coptic community), on the other, a traditional type of society, in which the individual, inheriting his faith sociologically, tends to merge into society, in his own group, thus risking the sacrifice of his individuality. In contrast, with regard to the human person and the advent of the subject, I affirm his 'subjectivity', his 'unicity' and 'singularity', his 'irreducibility', or to put it in more theological language, his 'inviolability' (dear to modern Russian Christian thinkers), his 'sacred history' (dear to contemporary Western Christian thinkers). Not all these terms are always taken into account, nor given

7 Fadel Sidarouss SJ, 'Pour une Théologie Contextuelle dans l'Orient Arabe Contemporain', *Quo Vadis, Theologia Orientalis?*, Actes du Colloque «Théologie Orientale : contenu et importance» (TOTT), Ain Traz, Avril 2005, Textes et Etudes sur l'Orient Chrétien N° 6, CEDRAC (Beirut: Université Saint Joseph, 2008), 215–237.

8 *PCO*, 36, 47.

their true value. We must therefore loudly proclaim them and work towards advocating respect for women, children, the embryo, the handicapped person ...

The approach to time and the meaning of history[9]

All human thinking situates itself through its representation of time, and particularly through its representation of the three moments of time: past, present and future.

According to the Egyptian existentialist philosopher Abdel Rahman Badawi, Arab thought is 'magical thought'. 'It eliminates the present in favour of the past and the future' (the final ends of man). In this perspective, the past enjoys total dominance, seeking security, inviting total fidelity to the Ancients. A number of indications prove this. The 'Golden Age' is always in the past, consequently 'the Arab advances looking backwards' (as an Orientalist humorously put it). Progress *(taqaddum)* and ancient *(qadīm)* have the same root in Arabic, and thus there is no progress without a return to the Ancients. Genealogy is not 'from father to son', oriented towards the future, but *aban ilā jadd* ('from father to grandfather'), and also *khalafan al-salaf* ('from successor to predecessor'), that is to say, going back in time towards the past, which is always the reference and the norm.[10] As to tradition, it is called *taqlīd* ('imitation'), while the Latin *traditio* signifies 'transmission' from the past to the future and orientation towards the future, with innovatory factors from time to time. And when remembering God's workings, St Augustine tells us that this 'memory is for the action of graces.' The past is then in no way the point to which to keep returning, but a springboard towards something other than itself.

If, in Christianity, the past and tradition represent a basis for faith, and if memory and identity interact, without the latter being lost without the former, God invites us to free ourselves from it in order not to be enslaved to it: 'Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive

9 Fadel Sidarouss SJ, 'Etudes théologiques', *Théologie de l'histoire humaine* (Beirut: Dar el Machreq, 2013) [in Arabic]; see also Fadel Sidarouss SJ, 'Pour une Théologie Contextuelle dans l'Orient Arabe Contemporain'.

10 Sidarouss, 'Le rôle des chrétiens ...', p. 275.

it?' (Isaiah 43:18-19). But the prevailing culture of identity does not, as we shall see, easily accept what is 'new', distrusting its foreign origins. Furthermore 'we know that the upholders of "tradition" habitually lay claim to a *philosophia perennis*, a perfect historical continuity, which is, however, often nothing more than an extrapolation into the past of relatively recent practices.'[11]

In fact, faith is oriented towards the hope of an open future, also an essential foundation of faith that motivates man's striving for the Second Coming of Christ and the Reign of the Father, which God entrusts to man's charge: 'To hope is to be engaged,' declared John Paul II. This perspective of openness completely frees Man from imprisonment in the past and tradition, as well as from being stuck in the present, in order for him to project himself forward, working for change and creating new things, for God himself makes 'all things new' (*AP* 21:5). And Jesus Christ promised, 'When the Spirit of truth comes, he will introduce you to all truth' (John 16:13). From this perspective, truth is ahead, on the side of the future, not imprisoned in the past.

I would like to take the opportunity to point out that a revolution is always oriented towards the future; it seeks to create a new, different future. This was certainly the spirit of the two recent revolutions in Egypt. As for the model of the Salafists for these revolutions, their reference is the Ancients. The norm is therefore the past, what is already done and known, imitation and repetition.

As for the present, the biblical *kairos*, it is, in Christianity, a true 'theological locus',[12] a place to meet God, a place to discover his will and tend to freely realise it in one's personal history, a place par excellence to live *agape*, since 'God is Love' (I John 4:8) and man is called to live in love and spread love around him.

To sum up, any representation of time is called to respect and take into consideration its three components, a sign of human, spiritual, religious and theological maturity.

11 Pierre Gibert SJ, 'Point de commencement', *Études* (Paris), no. 1, 2014, 75–82.

12 Fadel Sidarouss SJ, 'L'Église d'Égypte, peuple de prophètes, de rois et de prêtres: lecture théologique de la Révolution de janvier 2011', *Proche-Orient chrétien*, 63 (2013), no. 1/2, pp. 64–84.

Rationality[13]

The prevailing culture, both Christian and Muslim, is characterised by evidence of *fideism*, a distrust of reason tempted by human pride. Fideism, on the contrary, keeps man in a state of humility. Faced with this minimalist perspective, the status of reason is an imperative, since it is God's gift to man, a locus of God's word to man, and man's means of access to God. I always like to recall that the first person to have used philosophy in a dogmatic conciliar text, in the 4th century, was an Alexandrian, Athanasius, following the overtures of Clement and Origen of the School of Alexandria. At the Council of Nicaea in 325, the biblical monogenesis (Jesus Christ is 'Only Son of the Father') was translated, for the first time, by a philosophical term: *homousios* ('consubstantial' with the Father). As for the Latin tradition, it would advocate understanding the faith: *Credo ut intellegam* ('I believe in order to understand': Augustine) and *Fides quarens intellectum* ('faith seeking understanding': Anselm). It is this trust in reason, God's gift to man, which leads me to say that it is reason which leads the world and the history of humanity forward.[14]

As for intellectual Islam, it experienced a 'Golden Age' in the 'Abbasid period of the 9th century, having translated Greek philosophy, thanks to the Christians of the period, and having created a Mu'tazilite philosophy based on reason. But the final word went to an Ash'arite philosophy based on faith, thereby creating a division between reason *('aql)* and faith *(naql)*. The same phenomenon occurred in the Middle Ages with its high point of rational thought with Ibn Rushd (Averroes) and Ibn Khaldūn. However, this was not assimilated and it was then that the 'age of decline' *('aṣr al-inḥiṭāṭ)* began. A similar phenomenon reappeared in the 19th and 20th centuries, with the *Nahḍa* ([Arab] Renaissance), but Saudi Wahhabism and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood of Hassan el Banna were not slow to react and to dominate most of the Arab world, promoting the Islamisation of society and its

13 Fadel Sidarouss SJ, 'Etudes théologiques', *Révélation divine et foi humaine* (Beirut: Dar el Machreq, 2016), Chapter Six, 'Expériences de foi et raison' [in Arabic]; see also Fadel Sidarouss, `Pour une Théologie Contextuelle dans l'Orient Arabe Contemporain'.

14 Sidarouss, 'Le rôle des chrétiens ...', p. 277, note 13.

workings. As to the present liberal current—Taha Hussein, Tewfik el Hakim, Naguib Mahfouz ...—it has declared its existence with great difficulty.

Confronting this distrust of or even opposition to reason, rational thinking is essential. But it is not sufficient to declare peremptorily that Christianity or Islam is not against reason, it must be practised in a concrete way, especially in the two areas which currently dominate public culture: fundamentalism and integralism.[15]

Fideism encourages a fundamentalist approach, especially in the reading, understanding and analysis of Holy Scripture: an ancient, literal meaning.[16] There is an analogous phenomenon with regard to Islamic reading, taking refuge in fidelity to the letter of the Qur'an.[17] It is here that an approach drawn from modern western methods—exegesis, historical critical reading, hermeneutics, narrative theology, use of new understandings in investigating text and context ...—would enable an opening that responds to the aspirations of modernity, which affirms the indispensable status of reason.

Finally, fideism engenders integralism, with its socio-political and confessional violence, the supreme expression of irrationality, being both ideological and practical. In response, the 'ruse of reason', to employ a Kantian expression, would allow the rationalisation of human relationships, overcoming ancient and modern influences which weigh them down, by valuing reason, the locus of unity between men.

The project of society

What project of society might promote a culture inspired by Christianity in Arab-Muslim culture? I readily situate my approach within a socio-political framework, while bearing in mind certain aspects of the current Egyptian context, that of the Revolution of 25 January 2011, relaunched on 30 June 2013. My basic analysis is located in the reality of an Egypt divided between a Muslim majority and a

15 Sidarouss, 'Le rôle des chrétiens ...', p. 278, note 14.
16 Sidarouss, 'Le rôle des chrétiens ...', p. 278, note 15.
17 Sidarouss, 'Le rôle des chrétiens ...', p. 278, note 16.

Christian minority,[18] which leads me to suggest, as a second step, a number of values inspired by Christianity.[19]

Muslim majority and Christian minority

—From the side of the majority

We know that the Islamic regime gave rise to the system of *dhimmitude* (actually abolished in principle by Khedive Ismail in the middle of the 19th century). This involves the recognition by the religious state of minorities who do not want to adopt Islam as a religion, and to both guarantee and protect these minorities. It is in fact a regime of protectionism and of toleration *(tasāmuḥ)*, which is largely rejected in moral philosophy today, and which must be abolished on account of suggestions of paternalism on the part of the majority and inferiority by the minority.[20] The end result of this regime has been, depending on the period, persecution, discrimination, or domination by the majority,[21] demanding subjection and allegiance from the minority, thus making it hostage at three different levels: that of the state which governs, the nation to which it belongs, and the dominant religion to which it does not belong.[22]

Therefore, the majority often tries to exercise a policy of integration of the minority into the majority. But inevitably, this comes to favour a loss of identity by the minority, or even its absorption into the majority. A critical examination of this policy of integration—as regards its principle and in practice—reveals the lack of reason for the state to truly respect the difference and significance of the minority.

Another approach by the majority, faced with the continued failure of its preceding policy, is a policy of minimising, relativising, overlooking or forcefully reconciling incidents, violence, accidental or structural injustices. Among the most emblematic: the kidnapping of

18 Sidarouss, 'Le rôle des chrétiens ...', p. 279, note 17.

19 Fadel Sidarouss SJ, 'L'Église d'Égypte, peuple de prophètes, de rois et de prêtres: lecture théologique de la Révolution de janvier 2011', *Proche-Orient chrétien*, 63 (2013), no. 1/2, 64–84.

20 Gaston Pietri, SJ, ' La Tolérance et le droit à la liberté' , *Études*, no. 2, 2012, 209–219, See also Sidarouss, 'Le rôle des chrétiens ...', p. 280, note 19.

21 Sidarouss, 'Le rôle des chrétiens ...', p. 280, note 20.

22 Sidarouss, 'Le rôle des chrétiens ...', p. 280, note 21.

Christian women to marry them to Muslims, setting fire to Christian places of worship, profanation of Christian cemeteries, conversion of Christians (most often to find work or to enable the marriage of a Christian to a Muslim or her divorce) and sometimes their return to Christianity, the apostasy of a Muslim … .

Finally, the instrumentalisation of religion can be seen everywhere, the politicisation of the phenomenon of minorities on the part of state or religion, which can only exacerbate it, reinforce it, and finally result in an entirely foreseeable counter-reaction, since 'the logic of identity only allows equality to be accorded to the same'. Identity excludes plurality.'[23]

—From the side of the minority[24]

The reactions of the minority are varied. They can range from 'victimisation' to 'sectarian isolationism', with the 'ecclesial space' becoming 'a place of refuge', which can only strengthen 'the process of minoritisation'. Other possible escapes are 'conservatism', and 'traditionalism', with a view to affirming the identity which is threatened or even under attack. As for the discourse describing the state of this minority, it becomes a 'hegemonic discourse', based on a totalisation of meaning, which results in 'a fundamentalist project', true 'radicalisation' which makes living together problematic.[25]

Another attempt to safeguard internal identity and ensure representation in relation to the government authorities, particularly in the reign of Pope Shenouda III (1972–2012), has been the clericalisation of church life, of the official representatives of the Coptic Orthodox community. But this was also to ensure internal cohesion, since clerics are more docile than the laity in respect of the directives of church leaders.

The final response is that of emigration, which not only provides an assurance of a better economic life but also, and especially, safeguards the future of children in the face of fanaticism and fundamentalism.

23 Sidarouss, 'Le rôle des chrétiens …', p. 280.

24 See doctoral thesis, Fidel Sidarouss SJ, 'Église copte et monde moderne', Thesé de Doctorat en Sciences Religieuses. Faculté de Sciences Religieuses de l'Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth, 1978, 2 vols. A résumé was published as 'Église copte et monde moderne', *Proche-Orient chrétien* (Jerusalem), Vol. 30, 1980, 211–265.

25 Sidarouss, 'Le rôle des chrétiens …', p. 280, note 23.

In the context of confrontation between a threatening majority and a minority that is threatened and often attacked in terms of its identity and existence, we see a double phenomenon promoted by the state at one and the same time: confessional unrest and an appeal for national unity.

The state itself becomes the principal agent of *fitna ṭa'ifiyya* (discord or confessional unrest), by exercising violence camouflaged by the institutions of the state: identity cards mentioning religion, despite wise voices having called for it not to appear on the new identity card, school literature textbooks containing more and more quranic texts which Christians and not just Muslims must learn, school history books which do not respect the Christian history of Egypt, and, instead favour a quasi-exclusivity for Islamic civilisation, 'forbidden identities' (*Human Rights Watch*, Cairo: 2007) prohibiting the apostasy *(ridda)* of Muslims and the return of Christians to their religion of origin, etc. These practices, together with many others, marginalise the minority still further and gives rise to a constant atmosphere of confessional unrest, whether it arises from one or another.

Confronted with this atmosphere of unrest, the state, in order to maintain cohesion in the country, appeals to national unity *(al-waḥda al-waṭaniyya)*, the slogan trumpeted especially during crises or on the occasion of sectarian incidents. Paradoxically, the state does not really promote this unity. It is true that in order to clear the polluted atmosphere it calls for 'reconciliation' when confessional incidents arise. Public displays of reconciliation then take place, with men of religion embracing each other and proclaiming national unity forever at the top of their voices. Another positive sign is that under Mubarak's regime Christmas has become a national holiday. But these indications do not constitute a real policy of unity and do not express any concrete realisation in support of it. It is this failure which gives full significance to the fact that the Catholic and Protestant Churches have laboured concretely, for more than two centuries, in support of national unity in a threefold manner: education, development and health, in the service of all confessions without any distinction whatever.[26]

26 Fadel Sidarouss SJ, 'Le renouveau de l'Église Copte Catholique aux prises avec son identité et son alterité', *Proche-Orient chrétien*, Vol. 60 (2010), 3/4, 298–313.

In view of this socio-political given of a Christian minority confronted by a Muslim majority, what might the cultural role of Christians be?

Social values inspired by Christianity

Having addressed other matters elsewhere, I will content myself here with indicating three values directly relating to our topic: alterity, interreligious dialogue, and the secular.

—Intersubjective relationships based on alterity

Contemporary thinking on intersubjectivity—where subjects meet and form alliances, come face to face and confront each other, react and interact—seems a decidedly useful tool for reform of a sectarian culture, essentially based on group uniformity, internal cohesion, external appearance of agreement, to the detriment of freedom of expression and genuine personal convictions (including as regards religion and the possibility of change within it), to the detriment also of their critical thinking, their distancing from the group.

Still more fundamentally, I appeal to a sense of alterity,[27] in a prevailing culture of identity which advocates 'forbidden identities' (to leave the religion of Islam is considered as apostasy and therefore punishable by death), as well as 'murderous identities' (which kill the other, the different).

Faced with these flagrant injustices against human freedom and the dignity and respect of the person, a thought from the Gospel may have something to say. At the very beginning, it invites victims—whose collective memories in the minority community are traumatised by glaring discrimination—to 'the purification of memory', to use the felicitous expression of John Paul II on the eve of the third millennium. Purification of memory, knowing how to forgive, a human act that is eminently divine, embodying the appeal to love one's enemies and to bless and pray for them, as exemplified by Christ asking his Father to forgive those who killed him without knowing what they were doing

27 See Sidarouss, 'Pour une Théologie Contextuelle dans l'Orient Arabe Contemporain', 215-237, in which I develop the philosophical and psychological of alterity, in its uniquely socio-political aspect.

(Luke 6:27-28, 11:4, 23, 34). This culture of pardon is entirely foreign to the prevailing culture. It was, in fact, striking to hear and read—during the bloody events following the revolution of 25 January 2011, and particularly during the incidents of 30 June 2013—calls for 'revenge' *(al-intiqām)*, 'punishment' *(al-qiṣāṣ)*, not only on the part of man, but also on that of God, while a simple call for human 'justice' through the application of law would have been the most appropriate response in such circumstances.

I readily quote here the conduct of the Christian minority called for by Cardinal Martini:

> To be a member of a minority is to have a strong sense of witness, a better understanding of differences within the Church and round about it: to be open to ecumenical, interreligious and social dialogue. This is not the freedom of the Church which is at stake, but human freedom. It is not the future of the Church, but that of democracy which is at stake. 'An ethics of anthropological mediation' for Christians involved in politics.[28]

This links to Paul VI's words: 'In the heart of the Church, no-one is a stranger or an enemy, we must also dialogue, seek to understand, communicate with them.'[29]

Alterity positively signifies a full acceptance of the other, the different, their recognition and respect, otherwise we end up creating and exacerbating 'murderous identities'.[30] Alterity is fully realised in a culture of the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3-12), particularly that of gentleness, faced with a culture of violence[31] which has become generalised in the region in these last years, that of peace between people, in a culture of suspicion, discord and dissension.

Alterity is also an appeal to universality: an openness to the vast horizons stretching beyond the narrow confines of a monolithic culture of the totalisation of meaning, excluding the other, the different,

28 [Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini (1927–2012).] Fadel Sidarouss, 'Le rôle des chrétiens ...', p. 284.

29 (*Ecclesiam suam*, §§97–98.) <https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_06081964_ecclesiam.html> [accessed 12/10/23]

30 See the classic text by Amin Maalouf, *Les Identités meurtrières* (Paris: Grasset, 1998).

31 On the question of violence see *PCO*, 37.

eliminating all differences. This is the culture which characterises the prevailing cultural, political and religious discourse, and if there are some overtures within the intellectual and artistic world, it must be said that they are nervous about any innovation ... . Universality allows us to bring a breath of fresh air from distant horizons, not restricted to the stifling same, the like, the identical.

—Interreligious dialogue

In a cultural environment intensified by suspicion, distrust, denial, denunciation or condemnation, a culture of dialogue is essential. We can envisage five forms of interreligious dialogue which have become common practice, together with a sixth, less frequent because it is newer, as I have previously described:[32]

a. *The dialogue of life*: Egypt has no real Christian ghetto, whether geographical, sociological or cultural. On the contrary, a common fabric of life connects the two sections of Egyptian society, a genuine participation in the everyday and in the festivals of the entire country. The fundamental value of coexistence has been the norm for centuries, in spite of periods of discrimination or even persecution.

b. *Spiritual dialogue*: this is not very frequent. In the middle of the last century, a movement called the *Badaliyya* ('Substitution') arose within the circle of Louis Massignon, including a number of leading Egyptian Christians, lay (including the well-known Mary Kahil) and religious (including the famous Father Christophe de Bonneville SJ and the no less famous Father Georges Anawati OP).[33] Its goal was prayer 'in place of' and 'in the name of' Muslims. Towards the end of the last century there was *al-ikh'a al-dīnī* (religious fraternity) [established Christians and Muslims in Cairo, Egypt], bringing together notables from both communities, with a number of priests and sheikhs, but that has not been followed up. Most recently, with a Jesuit colleague and a layperson, I have given spiritual retreats bringing Christians and Muslims together, inviting them to pray with texts from the scripture,

32 Sidarouss, *Théologie des religions*, 'Etudes théologiques', Chapter 3.3 and Chapter 8.I. See also *PCO* 45–49.

33 [Jean-Jacques Pérennès, *Georges Anawati (1905–1994). Un chrétien égyptien devant le mystère de l'Islam*. (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2008).]

and from spiritual guides and Sufis of both confessions, reflecting on them individually and in groups, with respect for the different faith, the other. This holds some promise.

c. *Intellectual dialogue* which reflects anthropologically, philosophically and socio-politically can be fruitful, since it has no religious overtones, but can bring together believers of different denominations drawn to joint reflection on the problems of society, with a view to an intellectual contribution, each bringing the perspective of his particular faith, while respecting the views of the other. This is how the Catholic Justice and Peace Group has worked for decades. The Dominican tradition in Egypt has an important place in Islamo-Christian intellectual dialogue, through an institute, library and journal. As a result of the Revolution of January 2011, Al-Azhar founded the *Bayt al-'ā'ila* (house of the family), bringing together believers from both religions in order to clear the political atmosphere of the country and give citizens hope that religious, social and political coexistence is possible.

d. *The dialogue of shared action*. Two triads strike me as important here: one involving 'civil society', social, economic and political, where Muslims and Christians can work together in these secular spheres, as happened in an exemplary manner during the first half of the 20th century. The second triad is that of Catholic and Protestant missionaries from the 19th century until today, in the three fields of education, social development and health, working for the entire country, without any confessional discrimination: history will decide its real impact in favour of the national unity I have referred to above.

e. *Religious dialogue*, as such. We must recognise that the current atmosphere in the country and the region are far from being ready for such dialogue, despite the Arab Middle Ages which saw remarkable religious discussions and debates, even around dogmas.

f. *Comparative theology*. Appearing around the end of the last century, this approach, within the setting of cultural, intellectual and religious pluralism, proposes two different strategies. One is the study of points of convergence and difference in comparing the two religions, for example, revelation, the status of scripture, creation, anthropology,

prayer, rites and practices ... . And on the other, a return to one's own religion in order to be enriched by knowledge of the other without former prejudices, in order to benefit in one's own religious practice, adopting what can be adopted, by purifying what one believes essential and which now appears different or rejecting what needs to be rejected. In this process it is important to avoid two opposing pitfalls: insistence on identity, which can lead to including or excluding the other, the different; or insistence on religious and cultural alterity, which can lead to religious relativism, with all religions being considered equal, or to syncretism. Unlike dialogue, this theological approach does not require the presence of the other, the different, since it is based essentially on religious practice, as well as on sacred texts where, in the words of Paul Ricoeur, 'One can understand oneself in confronting the text.'[34]

—The meaning of the secular[35]

Egyptian society is profoundly confessional, religious and clerical. Herodotus already declared that the Egyptians were the most religious of people. This is a positive trait, but has negative consequences, since this predominance is the basis of ordinary life and therefore divides the two sections of the nation into a majority and a minority. It is also urgent to find a common area which transcends this difference, and this is precisely the area of the secular: a secular society which, while respecting religious difference, is not based on its different levels, forms and embodies this reality: I draw attention to three of them which are particularly important in this time of crisis for society: citizenship, secularity, and laicity.

Citizenship:[36] It is necessary that religion is not the point of reference for the country and its constitution, which inevitably creates values and understandings which are those of a single confessional community, to the detriment of the other, but that the 'nation', 'civil society', the citizenship of its inhabitants be the sovereign foundation, with fellow citizens having a common desire for unity as the first principle of

34 Jacques Scheuer, SJ, 'Vingt ans de "Théologie comparative". Visée, méthode et enjeux d'une jeune discipline', *Nouvelle revue théologique*, vol. 133, no. 2, 2011, 207–227. Paul Ricœur, *Du texte à l'action* (Paris: 1986), p. 115.

35 See Sidarouss, 'Le renouveau de l'Église Copte Catholique aux prises avec son identité et son alterité', 298–313.

36 *PCO*, 32–36.

coexistence. The nation then becomes guarantor of cohesion, unity, shared living, political and state authority, of equal opportunity. Otherwise discord, discrimination and injustice will rule, as is happening now. Nation, civil society and citizenship, especially through NGOs, ensure a free and democratic society. If not, the political, confessional, state and military authoritarianism of the majority will govern things, and the minority, as well as other sections of the nation, will become its victims. It is to be noted that the Revolution of January 2011 had this intuition, and worked towards it.

Secularity[37] is a second aspect of secular understanding. In effect, it aims for a clear distinction between the political and the religious, between culture and religion, especially in response to an Islam which seeks to create a sovereign global society at once religious, political, legal, economic and cultural. We can see, then, that a distinction between the different spheres is well-founded. I say distinction and not division, which becomes secularism, as known in the west, but that we can avoid without falling into it fatally, which is exactly what the protagonists of a society based on religion fear and reject.

Laicity is the third aspect of secular understanding. It involves relativising the role of Muslim and Christian religious figures, in view of a society governed not by them but by an enlightened laity, believers but not fanatics, as can easily become the case with religious figures in power. Here too, there is no need whatever to arrive at the laicism of the west, but rather avoiding men of religion or religious institutions like Al-Azhar or the patriarchs governing the country, whether by law or in practice.

However, the current crisis in Egyptian society consists in the predominance of the religious factor which forms the basis of the constitution itself, voted on in 2012 (by the Muslim Brotherhood) and in 2014 (by a popular majority, which resulted, during its elaboration by all factions of the nation, in interminable debate, endless arguments, and finally, in compromise: 'Islam is the state religion, Arabic is its official language, and Islamic *sharī'a* the main source of legislation' (art. 2).[38]

37 See F Sidarouss SJ, 'Le christanisme oriental entre la sécularite et la laïcité et leur dépassement', *Al Machreq* (Beirut), Vol. 86, no. 1, 2012, 79–91 [in Arabic].

38 Sidarouss, 'Le rôle des chrétiens ...', p. 289, note 33.

Conclusion: actors and agent

It seems to me that three actors and one agent work in concert in the sense presented by my approach:

1. *The local Church*, especially through the role of lay people (guarantors of laicity), young people (the actors of modernity), business people (promoters of secularity), thinkers (a critical voice).[39]
2. However, something which a 'national church' (which the Coptic Church, and the majority of the Eastern Churches are) cannot bring about, can be realised by churches with a universal character and transnational dimension. This is the case for the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Eastern Protestant Churches; because of their intimate connection to the *universal church* they are able to bring a breath of openness and universality to the nation.
3. *The diaspora*, for its part, can provide a valuable assistance to the entire nation, especially thanks to contacts with emigrants returning to their country of origin and bringing their help. They too can bring about a fresh air of openness and cultural pluralism.
4. Nevertheless, the basic problem I seek to raise is that of *communication*. How can we raise awareness and spread this understanding of man and this type of society? With difficulty by means of the state itself through official public channels. Through their own channels (press and TV), the Christians of Egypt must become competent to shoulder this task. It must be admitted that thinkers[40] and artists[41] are not currently among the means used for this. Will the future offer better horizons?

39 Sidarouss, 'Le rôle des chrétiens ...', p. 289, note 34.
40 Sidarouss, 'Le rôle des chrétiens ...', p. 289, note 35.
41 Sidarouss, 'Le rôle des chrétiens ...', p. 289, note 36.

MATTA AL-MESKEEN'S ENCOUNTER WITH EGYPTIAN MUSLIM INTELLECTUALS

Bianka Speidl

> 'The other should not be looked at as only the other, which means I make them different from myself. I suppose the other should be perceived as the mirror through which the self can see itself in another light.'
>
> *Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd*[1]

To the memory of Fr Dr István Cselényi[2]

The publication of Matta al-Meskeen's commentary on the Gospel of John served as the impetus for a conversation that included the distinguished scholar and hegumen, Matta al-Meskeen (1919–2006), three eminent Egyptian Muslim intellectuals, the late Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Huda Wasfi, and the late Jaber Asfour. The discussion took place in the St Macarius Monastery in 1991. The discourse is a rather unique and sincere attempt to comprehend Father Matta's approach to exegesis—as expounded in the Introduction to the two-volume commentary[3]—and, as a result, to deepen their understanding of Christian doctrine and theological concepts.

1 Interview with Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd 'Nasr Abu Zayd The other as mirror of self-understanding',<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5lfuHCUN63E> [last accessed 28/08/23].

2 The author is indebted to the late Fr Prof István Cselényi, a Hungarian Greek Catholic priest, a distinguished expert on eastern Catholic liturgy and theology.

3 Matta al-Meskeen, *Introduction to the Commentary on the Gospel of St John,* Deir al-Qaddīs Anbā Maqār, 2005 (in Arabic), downloadable at <https://www.stmacariusmonastery.org/old/books/0004.pdf> [last accessed 28/08/23].

The excerpt, which was first published in 1991 in a special issue of the literary magazine, *Alef*,[4] has since been frequently cited in various works on the intellectual legacy of Matta al-Meskeen. It was translated into Italian and published in the volume *Matta el Meskin: un padre del deserto contemporaneo*[5] with no additional commentary.[6] With a focus on his Muslim conational intellectuals, this conversation helps us grasp how Matta al-Meskeen is viewed and rated in Egyptian academic discourse. A symposium entitled 'The Spiritual Father Matta al-Meskeen',[7] held a few months after his death under the auspices of Farouk Hosni, then Minister of Culture, organised by Professors Jaber Asfour and Mahmoud Emin al-Alam, indicated sincere interest in his philosophical œuvre. There were about one thousand attendees in the seminar, chaired and moderated by Atef al-Iraqi (a prolific scholar and professor of philosophy), who had by then written a chapter about Matta al-Meskeen in his book *Searching for the Reasonable in Arab Culture—A critical approach*.[8]

In her memorial speech, Zainab Mahmoud al-Khudairi (Head of the Philosophy Department at the Faculty of Arts, Cairo University) covered some key aspects of Egyptian Muslim intellectual interest in Father Matta's work, including both favourable assessments and frequent misunderstandings. She said as follows:

> 'Religion is the solution.' Father Matta al-Meskeen came to this realisation with his keen insight, extensive encyclopaedic knowledge, and the transparency of his soul … . 'Religion is the solution', because the divine truth is

4 The dialogue was published under the title of 'God, Christ and the Symbol', 1991, ed. Jaber Asfour (in Arabic). It is available in pdf format at <https://mktbtypdf.com/book/الله-المسيح-والرمز/> [last accessed 28/08/23].

5 'Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Gabir 'Asfur, Huda Wasfi, "Sul senso figurato spirituale: in dialogo con Matta el Meskeen"', in *Matta el Meskeen: un padre del deserto contemporaneo,* Dotti and El Makari (eds) (Magnano: Edizioni Qiqajon, 2017), 22–41.

6 The dialogue has not been translated into English as of 2023. The present chapter contains excerpts of my translation which is based on text edited by Jaber Asfour and available at <https://mktbtypdf.com/book/الله-المسيح-والرمز/>. In the present chapter it is referred to as 'God, Christ and the Symbol'.

7 A detailed description of the event 'Seminar The Spiritual Father Matta al-Meskeen' can be read in Arabic at the website of the St Macarius Monastery <https://www.stmacariusmonastery.org/old/st_mark/sm120615.htm> [last accessed 28/08/23].

8 Atef al-Iraqi, *al-Baḥth 'an al-ma'qūl fi'l-thaqāfa al-'arabīya—ru'ya naqdīya* ('Searching for the Reasonable in Arab Culture—A critical approach') (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīnīya, 1998).

> absolute and eternal ... Religious renewal for him—which is the solution—is nothing but a deepening of the original spiritual experience—the actuality of the incarnation, the Cross, and the resurrection .... In his book *The Church and the State* ... he [discussed] the relationship of faith with power. He explains: 'The nature of the world, its systems, and its methods are fundamentally different from the nature of the Church, its systems, and its means. The world's systems are based on science, numbers, authority, wealth, politics, and natural resources, whereas the systems of the Church are founded on its spiritual and religious reality. As a result, the Church is independent of the world, and the world is independent of the Church' .... According to him, every society has its own appropriate reform project. The Christian religious reform project is to preserve traditional folk spirituality. Therefore, he warns against the development and renewal of the Church, religion, belief, or behaviour as a modern social, educational, intellectual, or an abstract philosophical project. Development and renewal in the Church must bear only one, theological and evangelical meaning, which is that man moves from a life according to the flesh to a life according to the spirit, and this is the divine development .... Reform, then, is by returning to the principles he has, just as Muhammad Abduh envisioned it before and adapted it appropriately to a historical plan. And the foundations for Father Matta al-Meskeen are based on the eastern spiritual tradition, on condition that it is not static, but rather it is a dynamic that can be expanded, even if it is not possible to deviate from it or build on another basis. It is not static or dead ...[9]

In addition to highlighting some of the reasons why Father Matta's ideas were important for Muslim intellectuals, the professor's address additionally demonstrates the dangers of misinterpretation, especially with regards to the exclusively spiritual mission and scope

9 See: 'Seminar The Spiritual Father Matta al-Meskeen' <https://www.stmacariusmonastery.org/old/st_mark/sm120615.htm> [last accessed 28/08/23].

of authority of the church. In his work, *The Church and the State. Sectarianism and intolerance* (1963),[10] Father Matta depicted a Christian mindset that retreats into spirituality while still accepting full accountability as individuals and as a community for the society in which they live. It is an ideal that is well suited to a political and legal system framed by Islam, while it upholds spiritual autonomy, avoids conflict and renounces political advocacy. This is the resilience of early Christianity, inspired by the spirituality of the desert fathers. The debate over his ideas inside the Coptic Orthodox Church is still ongoing and made Matta's situation and evaluation in his own community more challenging.

Another cornerstone in the assessment of Father Matta's legacy is the harmonisation of philosophy and theology, formulated according to the requirements of modernity, to which his books bear witness. The recognition of modernist Muslim literary scholars, critics and philosophers is probably rooted in their understanding of the urgent need to free religion from the dominating constraints of legal argumentation and to develop a harmonious system of theology, philosophy, and spirituality within the Islamic horizon—which is not, however, a merely scholastic adventure of privileged intellectuals. This assumption could be the motivation behind the comparisons that at times place Father Matta's ideas alongside those of Muhammad Abduh[11] and at other times with those of Ibn 'Arabi.[12]

Moreover, Father Matta's character embodied the ideal of a hermit who, in addition to prayer and scholarship, created a thriving livestock industry on the monastery's land, established a school for the children of the neighbourhood and fund for helping the most needy regardless of their religion.[13] Matta's credibility was not to be denied by his

10 Matta al-Meskeen, *The Church and the State*, Deir al-Qaddīs Anbā Maqār, 1963 (in Arabic), downloadable at <https://www.stmacariusmonastery.org/old/books/0042.pdf> [last accessed 28/08/23].

11 For instance Zainab Mahmoud al-Khudairi's talk at 'Seminar The Spiritual Father Matta al- Meskeen'.

12 Antar Abdul Latif, 'Tales of searching for God. The journey of Sufism between Matta Al-Meskeen and Ibn Arabi', 2018 (in Arabic), <https://www.soutalomma.com/Article/833993/حكايات-البحث-عن-الله-رحلة-التصوف-بين-متى-المسكين-وابن>[last accessed 28/08/23].

13 Walyam Nagi, 'Father Matta al-Meskeen, God's wealth for the Church. Swinging relationship with Pope Shenouda', *al-Arabi*, 7/12/2003 (in Arabic), <https://web.archive.org/web/20060808032403/http://www.al-araby.com/articles/887/03120--87-spc02.htm> [last accessed 28/08/23].

opponents either. His distinguished vocation was firmly grounded in Egyptian social realities and the respect and confidence he had earned as a pharmacist before his monastic call among the entire Damanhur community, Christians and Muslims alike.[14]

In addition to a number of articles focusing on his role in the political crisis between President Sadat and Pope Shenouda III,[15] there have been notable attempts to break the taboos surrounding Father Matta's personality and present him as an outstanding contemporary Egyptian spiritual and intellectual figure, including the documentary film *The Monk and the Pope* (2010)[16] and a two-part coverage shown at the 10th anniversary of his death on the popular television channel *al-Nahar al-Youm*.[17]

Father Matta's integrity, along with his great intellectual accomplishments in uniting tradition and modernity in a singular link, won respect and generated genuine interest in him. As Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd writes in his foreword to the published dialogue:

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14 'Father Matta Al-Meskeen's love saved him from the Muslim Brotherhood's assault on him.'
Fayez Farah narrates the incident of the protesters of Muslim Brotherhood attempting to loot *al-Ajzkhana* the pharmacy of Dr Youssef Iskandar (Father Matta al-Meskeen), but the head of the Muslim Brotherhood himself protected him. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=auJLVlHu4aE> [last accessed 28/08/23]. The incident is mentioned in the book: *The Autobiography of Father Matta al-Meskeen*, 3rd ed. (Cairo: Dār Majallat Marqus, 2011), p. 14 (in Arabic).

15 Mohammed Tawfik, 'Father Matta Al-Meskeen and Pope Shenouda: Differentiations of Egyptian Theology', 2018 (in Arabic), <https://www.ida2at.com/matta-el-Meskeen-and-pope-shenouda-iii-egyptian-theology/amp/> [last accessed 28/08/23].
Sara C Medina, 'Religion: Egypt's Copts in Crisis', *Time,* Monday, Sept. 28, 1981, <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,953135,00.html> [last accessed 28/08/23].
Carlos Anees, 'A homeland story, Adel Hammouda and Father Matta al-Meskeen', 2016 (in Arabic), <https://www.copts-united.com/Article.php?I=2562&A=246763> [last accessed 28/08/23].
Emad Eddin Hussein, 'Matta and Shenouda left ... but the struggle continued', 2018 (in Arabic), <https://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=08082018&id=c14e353-28-78b-9b4e-108f300c3702> [last accessed 28/08/23].

16 'Film Father Matta al-Meskeen: The Monk and the Pope', 2010 (in Arabic), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-egRnFp0Kg> [last accessed 28/08/23].

17 'A Homeland Story—Matta al-Meskeen's years in monasticism' (in Arabic), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p9sw6h8cr6Q > [last accessed 28/08/23]; A Homeland Story—What is the story of Matta al-Meskeen who amazed religious scholars? (in Arabic), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PbrdNDnu05s&t=3s > [last accessed 28/08/23].

> The man graciously and lovingly guided us on a journey inside his consciousness that began with his religious awareness and ended with his awareness of the problems facing the modern world, which have Egypt and the Arab world at their core. We travelled through the procedures used in order to explain and interpret religious symbols found in the Holy Books. The man is entitled to our attestation that he is a first-rate interlocutor, adept at both listening and paying attention as well as expressing himself with composure, assurance, and humility at the same time. It is the humility of the scholars, the confidence of those who have arrived, and the calmness of the people of certainty. He showed patience and understanding of what we, the people of the apparent, the partial, and the relative, said, and he listened to us and interacted with us, aspiring to bring us to his world, and to raise our souls to the heights of his certainty. ... Our quest for dialogue with the man stemmed from a deep respect for this person and an awareness of the importance of his intellectual achievements, which culminated in his interpretation of the Gospel of John in two large volumes. Our return after the dialogue was the return of the victorious with a harvest that we had not dreamed of. The man's stature as a person, his accomplishments, and his humility has surpassed all our imaginations.[18]

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (1943–2010) was an Egyptian scholar trained in literary studies, rhetoric and Islamic studies at Cairo University. He received his PhD in 1981 with a work on Ibn Arabi. In 1987, Abu Zayd became associate professor at Cairo University and later on, for two years he was a visiting professor at the University of Osaka. He published *Naqd al-kitāb al-dīnī* ('Critique of Religious Discourse') in 1995.[19] In this he read the Islamic scripture with the aid of modern discourse analysis methods from a literary-critical perspective. He began by reading the Qur'an as a 'text' and maintained that texts cannot be

18 'God, Christ and the Symbol', p. 3.

19 Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Naqd al-khitāb al-dīnī* ('Critique of Religious Discourse') (Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 1995).

produced in isolation from the linguistic and socio-political contexts that shape them. His ideas led to the rejection of his application for a tenured professorship at Cairo University. Moreover, a Sharia court labelled him as an apostate, based on the allegation that his ideas challenged the divine character of the Qur'an. Between 2002 and 2004, Abu Zayd shifted to consider the Qur'an as a 'discourse' that has horizontal, rather than just vertical, dimensions in society; that is, it ceases to be a text exclusively from God, rather involves additional agents and intermediaries.[20] Becoming horizontal means a relation encompassing God, the society, and the individual.[21]

For Abu Zayd, the Qur'an is a discourse that debates, makes arguments, accepts, and rejects ideas. Hence, discourse analysis of the Qur'an has immediate effects on society. He agreed in his interpretation with the Mu'tazila: 'I believe that in order to make sense of the Qur'an, we need to understand the text metaphorically rather than literally. I also believe that it is essential to interpret the text by taking into account the social-cultural context in which it was received.'[22]

The nullification of his marriage by the Sharia Court and the various death threats against him and his wife forced them to emigrate to The Netherlands where he held the Cleveringa Honorary Chair in Law, Responsibility, Freedom of Religion and Conscience and was guest professor at the University of Leiden. He met an untimely death in 2010 at the age of 66.

Another participant of the conversation was Huda Wasfi a distinguished figure of comparative literature and academic criticism, and a university professor of French literature. She was the only Egyptian and Arab member of UNESCO, from 1982 until recently. She oversaw a number of Egyptian theatres, most notably the Egyptian National Theatre, as the head of the Supreme Council's Theatre Committee. She has published more than seventy-five works of literature and philosophy in Arabic and French. She was awarded with the Silver Medal of The International Theatre Institute.[23]

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20 Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Reformation of Islamic Thought: A Critical Historical Analysis* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2006), pp. 9–8.

21 Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Al-tafkir fi zaman al-takfir* ('Thinking in the Time of Excommunication') (Cairo: Dār Sīnā li'l-Nashr, 1995), p. 6.

22 Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, and Ester R Nelson, *Voice of an Exile: Reflections on Islam* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publ., 2004), p. 4.

23 'Professor Hoda Wasfi receives congratulations from Ain Shams University for

Jaber Asfour (1943–2022) was an Egyptian writer, literary critic, chairman of the National Council for Translation, and secretary general of the Supreme Council of Culture. He was appointed as Minister of Culture in February 2011, resigned after a short while, then was reappointed in 2014 and stayed in office for a year.[24]

The conversation was published under the title of 'God, Jesus, and the Symbol' that refers to the major themes discussed in the 18-page long excerpt of the more extended conversation which was not made public in its entirety. In his exegesis of St John's Gospel Matta al-Meskeen offers a comprehensive, in-depth, and coherent theological account of God's interaction with creation. Of the four Gospels, John's is the closest to Father Matta, because—as the exegete explains—St John knew Christ before he had started his public ministry, stayed with him until his death on the Cross, which made him able to move away from a direct description of events and arrive at the 'eagle's perspective'.[25]

Father Matta in his exegesis aims to describe and explain the semiotic world of biblical, Christian existence, speech, and action. In this regard, George Lindbeck's concept of the 'semiotic universe' of religion as 'intratextuality' can assist us in comprehending the challenges Matta's Muslim interlocutors encountered in comprehending the complexities of Christian concepts. Lindbeck suggests that religious texts and their meanings are located within a semiotic system therefore they cannot be comprehended outside their religious context.[26] The fact that Father Matta's Muslim conversation partners sought to comprehend not only the conceptual underpinnings but also the inner workings of this religious realm, whilst acknowledging the self-contained nature of religious doctrines, lends the discourse a special value.

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receiving the State Appreciation Award in the field of arts' (in Arabic), <https://www.asu.edu.eg/ar/1178/news > [last accessed 28/08/23].

24 Dr Jaber Asfour, former Minister of Culture, dies at the age of 77 (in Arabic), <https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/5884117> [last accessed 28/08/23].

25 Matta writes: 'Except for a brief moment, none of these three gospels diverged from our attention being on earthly issues, that is, on the tasks that Christ accomplished on earth. They spoke as people who were accompanying him on earth, as for theology they hardly included any. As for the latter, this 'eagle', John the messenger of greater truths, he is the one who is right in his view, confirming him in the direction of the deep and eternal light.' *Introduction to the Commentary on the Gospel of St John*, p. 22.

26 George A Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religions and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville & London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984), p. 40.

Matta al-Meskeen's Process of Exegesis

The first half of the dialogue is mainly dedicated to Father Matta's method of interpretation. The opening question concerns his new interpretative translation of the original texts. In his answer, Matta al-Meskeen details the exegetical process: re-translation was the first step, as the available translations are of poor quality. This was followed by getting to know the author in the fullest sense possible to be able to distinguish whether it was Christ or John speaking in any particular section. He adds that he knows that this approach is not relevant in the Qur'anic exegesis, but in the Gospel we have to consider what prompts the author to write what he writes. It is the author who first illuminates and explains the words of Christ, so we need to know the author before understanding the text. Interpretation *(tafsīr)* is the third stage, examining conceptual vocabulary and syntax and internal logic. Commentary *(sharḥ)* without departing from the script is the last phase.[27]

For the first layer of textual analysis, Father Matta uses the term *tafsīr*—which in the Islamic context denotes exegesis. The culmination of the process is *sharḥ*, which is used in titles of books that do not explain or comment on the Qur'an. It literally means to reveal, discover or uncover; however, in Father Matta's parlance it means something deeper than *tafsīr*. To Jaber Asfour's question whether this method corresponds *ta'wīl*, which explains the speaker's hidden meaning or ultimate intention, Father Matta's answer is that he does not do *ta'wīl*, but takes it from the author of the text. Asfour raises the problem of duality, which Matta resolves by distinguishing between two layers of consciousness. 'One of them I may call complete absolute thought or complete consciousness *(al-wa'ī al-rūḥī al-kullī)* which percolates into the non-absolute consciousness of the mind *(al-wa'ī al-maḥdūd al-murtabaṭ bi'l-'aql)* and is formed into words. But before speech there is a consciousness beyond speech, which is stronger and greater than speech, but not divergent from it.'[28]

With regards to the author's insight, Abu Zayd asks about the importance of the reasons for revelation *(asbāb al-nuzūl)*,[29] which refers to

27 'God, Christ and the Symbol', p. 5.
28 'God, Christ and the Symbol', p. 7.
29 'God, Christ and the Symbol', p. 5

the actual historical context of the revealed verses in the interpretation of the Qur'an. It is worth noting here that later on, Abu Zayd took the view that Muhammad had to *translate* the revelations he received into human language and concepts that his contemporary audience understood.[30] In this sense, Abu Zayd makes Muhammad not only the first translator of the Qur'anic revelation, but also the first interpreter. This was the essence of the idea that led to his excommunication by the religious establishment.

Father Matta explains the text can be understood through the author: 'The most important thing in the Gospel of John is Christ's dialogue with the Pharisees, ... John records the dialogue in depth, and with each attack Christ brings new teachings, this is what constitutes John's Gospel. The approach of the New Testament is all in John's Gospel. John does not show himself, he does not attach his own opinions, but reveals a free dialogue, free of heavy ideology.'[31] For Muslim interlocutors, this means human intervention in the process of revelation. In Father Matta's view, John's intervention is no more than a brief and focused tailoring of the text to the listener.

To Abu Zayd's question on the importance of historical context, Father Matta begins his reply with a critical remark, 'How do I see this? Muhammad Abduh and al-Afghani departed from the text and explained it *(sharḥ)*, and their explanations were well received and their impact on Muslims was strong. However, this came to an end when the gate of *ijtihād* was closed. This is rebuked by Muslims. For how can the gate of *ijtihād* be closed, if it has to do with God, not just the Qur'an? The *ijtihād* is a gift from God to man. So can I say to a gifted man: "Do not make any hermeneutical effort", once he received an edict from God to practice *ijtihād* and explain *(sharḥ)* the Qur'an. The gate of *ijtihād* closes when God closes the door of inspiration *(ilhām)*.'[32]

For Father Matta, the capacity for a higher consciousness is a common human heritage. He suggests that with this concept also the Qur'an can be explained. Matta addresses Abu Zayd saying that in the case of the Qur'an there is text, there is literal interpretation *(tafsīr)*, there is search for underlying meaning *(ta'wīl)* but commentary in

30 Katharina Völker, 'Two Accounts of Qur'anic Revelation', *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations*, 26:3 (2015), 27–86, p. 283.
31 'God, Christ and the Symbol', p. 11.
32 'God, Christ and the Symbol', p. 6.

the sense of *sharḥ* is missing. According to Abu Zayd, *sharḥ* is found in the transition between the four levels of Sufi interpretation, the unfolding of the initial literal and transcendental meanings, *maṭla'*.[33] For Abu Zayd, *maṭla'* indicates a higher consciousness where the mystic views the intended meaning of revelation as an understanding from God. In his response, Matta states that anything that claims to go beyond the second level, that seeks to achieve more than inner understanding *(bāṭin)*, is beyond human ability, so he does not aspire to go beyond that.[34]

To Abu Zayd's straightforward question as to whether he is a Sufi, Father Matta answers in the negative. He does, however, accept Asfour's observation that he represents a middle ground between Sufism and rationalism, and admits that he relies on inner consideration *('aqlī al-bāṭin)* both in the acquisition of knowledge and in the process of writing. What Islam regards as inner understanding *(bāṭin)* and classifies mainly as Sufi or Shiite spirituality, Father Matta sees as the fruit of *ijtihād*, in the sense of divinely inspired intellectual effort aimed at connecting with the spirit behind the scriptures.[35] Thus, for Father Matta, intellectual effort and spiritual growth must walk hand in hand and this can invoke and actualise the potential of absolute consciousness as God's gift to humanity.

Matta al-Meskeen's method therefore strives to achieve complete harmony between 'letter and spirit', and the spirit reaches us through the text. In order to provide an explanation and interpretation of the scripture, the human spirit unites with the universal, divine consciousness.[36] This goes much further than the literal interpretation and it is in line with the patristic tradition, especially the approach of symbolic interpretation, and the exegetical principles of the school of Alexandria in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. Father Matta's position resonates with Thomas Aquinas in that the literal sense displays a

33 A number of hadiths indicate that there are the four levels of interpreting the Qur'an such as an outward *(ẓāhir)* and an inward *(bāṭin)* sense, a limit *(ḥadd)* and a point of transcendence *(maṭla'/muṭṭala')*. The point of transcendence is the heart's 'place' of elevation *(ishrāf)* where the heart perceives the intended meaning as an insight from God, enabling the interpreter to view the divine scripture from a wide variety of angles.

34 'God, Christ and the Symbol', p. 8.

35 'God, Christ and the Symbol', p. 5.

36 'God, Christ and the Symbol', p. 6–7.

spirit of its own—a spirit that lies in effect beneath or beyond the surface of the text. According to this approach, the 'literal sense' of Christian scripture is the intention *(intentio)* of the author.[37] The term *intentio* in medieval Latin covered not only the notion of purpose or aim, but also the notion of conceptual design.[38] As the interpretation of Christian scripture becomes increasingly historicized in the 18th and 19th centuries, the 'intention' of the author gradually became aligned with the archaic mentalities of the ancient Near Eastern writers of the text. And the 'spirit' of that text came to be located in the spirit of the age from which the text emerged.[39] By paying due attention to the historical context, as well as viewing language as a conduit for spiritual message valid at all times, waiting to be discovered under the guidance of the divine, full consciousness, Father Matta strived to avoid this pitfall.

Thus, for Matta al-Meskeen, there are two authors of the revelation: the Holy Spirit and the man who opens himself to the Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives the writer the freedom to convey the truth as he understands it. Therefore, the author is there before the text. For the commentator, the contemplation of the author precedes the exegesis. It is actually a departure from the text, but it is always done within the parameters that the author has established. The author of the text—whether it be Christ or John—must be understood, and we must make every effort to get to know him completely. Knowing the author provides the key to the formulation of the text, but in order to understand the deeper meaning, the commentator must be in the state of spiritual consciousness *(al-waʿī al-rūḥī al-kullī)*.[40]

On Symbols

The second part is dedicated to the concept of symbols. Jaber Asfour investigates why only the symbols—not other forms of figurative

37 See Jon Whitman, 'The literal sense of Christian scripture: redefinition and revolution' in *Interpreting Scriptures in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: Overlapping Inquiries,* Mordechai Z Cohen and Adele Berlin (eds) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 13–58, p. 14–41.

38 Whitman, p. 140.

39 Whitman, p. 155.

40 'God, Christ and the Symbol', p. 6.

expression such as metaphor—are acknowledged in Father Matta's exegesis.[41] His response goes as follows:

> This is a creative question. You are right. In fact, all that is known about Christ in the Old Testament is symbols. ... For example, it is said: Moses raised the serpent on his rod in the wilderness so that every person could see it. The Gospel of John came, saying: As the serpent was lifted up in the wilderness, as Moses lifted it up on the rod, so the Son of Man will be lifted up on the Cross, in order to heal everyone who saw him.
> ... I am trapped between two symbols. I must explain the first and the second. In the first, sin was depicted in a snake ... This is what troubled theologians so much, why did John say that Christ was lifted up? They missed that the serpent is a symbol of sin, and the brass serpent is dead, for Christ will die. The first symbol of the serpent is dead. The symbol here was realized by a serpent—that is sin—dead in Christ. Sin died in Christ. Christ put sin to death ...
> **Hoda Wasfi:** If I may, I think Jaber Asfour's question was more about rhetorical figures.
> **Matta al-Meskeen:** ... I am obliged to talk about symbols here because they are closer to what I want, as symbols are linked to truth and spirit. Christ said: I am the gate for the sheep, whoever enters through me will be saved. I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.
> **Jaber Asfour:** What is the criterion that defines a symbol, 'why is wine a symbol? Is vineyard a symbol? Is fire a symbol? Is light a symbol?'
> **Matta al-Meskeen**: The symbol is known to carry the strongest characteristic ... otherwise it becomes a shaky image, so when you see the images that Christ took and resolved them into symbols, you find that their sum constitutes the attributes of Christ.

41 'God, Christ and the Symbol', p. 11.

Hoda Wasfi: ... You say there must be a partial realization in order to be a symbol.

Matta al-Meskeen: When Christ says: 'I am the shepherd of the sheep' (John 10:11), it is not a symbol but a truth, based on the fact that we are rational sheep. If we consider ourselves ordinary sheep, then it is a symbol. But if we understand from the context that we are talking about rational sheep, that we are all God's sheep, and that when these sheep are very faithful they become sacrifices to God, then we offer ourselves as sacrifices to God. Many people have missed out on reaching from the formal symbol to the divine truth, as they are not symbols but facts.

Nasr Abu Zaid: The symbol here is related to the partial world.

Matta al-Meskeen: In the concept of the partial world, it is a symbol, but in the concept of the absolute, it is not a symbol.

Jaber Asfour: This means that the symbol is not a metaphor because the metaphor has two meanings, the first of which is not reasonable, and the second is the reasonable and the intended. But for you the symbol is all reasonable.

Matta al-Meskeen: It is part of religious literature that we do not assign symbols to God unless they are from the reality of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. I cannot invent words, I am not allowed to coin symbols for Christ that do not spring from the depths of one of his natural qualities.

Hoda Wasfi: But how is it achieved in the absolute world? If we say that God is water, how can this be realised in the absolute world? It is not realised, because God will not be in the form of a river in the Absolute World.

Matta al-Meskeen: Here the mind is incapacitated and confines the symbol in its literal form. But when I raise it to the Absolute I cannot restrict God to it, and say God is a river or not. Here I have confined God and this is

> blasphemy. I cannot limit God to a river or water. Rather, I can say that God *was* water.[42]
>
> **Hoda Wasfi:** This is—in the Arabic language—an analogy.
>
> **Jaber Asfour:** There is a verse: 'On that Day some faces will be bright, looking at their Lord.' (75:22–23) There is a difference in its interpretation. Some Zahirite exegetes (literalists) say it is the conventional way of perceiving something. And of course they are accused of anthropomorphism. Some commentators claim that it refers to seeing with the heart, while other commentators from the Mu'tazila claim that the term 'vision' in this context has a metaphorical meaning that relates to turning to God. However, you make a different statement here.
>
> **Matta al-Meskeen:** The vision of God cannot ever be limited by logic, and neither can language adequately express it or give it meaning. Was it realised, though? Yeah. How? It is indescribable. And today, we strive to represent God in pictures as we worship him.[43]

Father Matta's justification is consistent with Coleridge's description of the symbol as tautegorical—having 'the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal'[44]—or always stating something identical with itself. Here with reference to Clifford Geertz we can add that its relevance is therefore aesthetic, moral, and ontological.[45] The purpose of Father Matta's argument is to show how intricate and interconnected biblical symbolism is across the old and new testaments. The interrelatedness of redemption history, the Bible, tradition, and sanctified life is developed through his explanation of symbolism. The Eucharist, water, fish, and sheep are merely symbols herein, but from a higher, broader perspective he considers them as components of the ultimate reality.

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42 Here the use of past tense may refer to the ever-evolving incomprehensible reality of God.

43 'God, Christ and the Symbol', p. 1–5.

44 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Statesman's Manual* (London: Gale and Fenner, 1816), p. 37.

45 Clifford Geertz, 'Ethos, World-View and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols', *The Antioch Review*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Winter, 1957), 42–37, p. 423.

With regards to religious symbolism, Wilfred Cantwell Smith contends that it is what is decoded based on conventions that specifies what a word signifies or should mean. Adherents of a particular religion carry these standards in their minds or hearts and uphold them.[46] According to Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic viewpoint, the meaning is immanent, it is constructed by the ways in which language is used.[47] He writes, religion 'comprises a vocabulary of discursive and nondiscursive symbols together with a distinctive logic or grammar in terms of which this vocabulary can be meaningfully deployed ... Intratextual theology redescribes reality within the scriptural framework rather than translating Scripture into extrascriptural categories. It is the text, so to speak, which absorbs the world, rather than the world the text.'[48] Thus the explanation of symbols highlight how language operates within a religion and thereby shapes reality and experience for the believer.

For Matta, the shepherd and the sheep are not to be viewed merely as a figurative representations of providential care for the created world and human beings in it, and the ultimate sacrifice of salvation, rather, since these symbols are formulated by Christ, human existence is to be perceived as in need of guidance, sacrifice and redemption—notions that fundamentally differ from the Islamic perception of human-divine relation.[49]

Hoda Wasfi's interruption and request to stick to the explanation of symbolism from a rhetorical perspective reflects the centrality of eloquence in the communication between the divine and human realms. While figurative language *(majāz)* in the Qur'an for centuries has been a major argument against its translatability, biblical symbolism is not constrained to a particular stylistic expression and its undertones. Similarly, when Abu Zayd asks Matta how he conveys his message to the less refined readers, he responds that he has no particular set of tools, and intentionally displays

46 Wilfred Cantwell Smith, 'The True Meaning of Scripture: An Empirical Historian's Nonreductionist Interpretation of the Qur'an', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (July 1980), 487–505, p. 493.

47 As Lindbeck contends 'The datum that all religions recommend something which can be called "love" toward that which is taken to be most important ("God") is a banality as uninteresting as the fact that all languages are (or were) spoken. The significant things are the distinctive patterns of story, belief, ritual, and behavior that give "love" and "God" their specific and sometimes contradictory meanings.' *The Nature of Doctrine,* p. 77.

48 Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine,* p. 161.

49 'God, Christ and the Symbol', p. 13.

a redundancy in his expression, saying 'My language has no value; it is limited. But it is the spirit that makes it brilliant.'[50]

Christology

The third main pillar of the conversation is the Incarnation of God in Christ. Nasr Abu Zayd asks whether in the incarnate Christ as the icon and the Word of God the partial symbol unites with a metaphysical absolute reality. He says 'Christ became a symbol that points to its origin ... If we replace the word "Christ" with the word "symbol", we understand that Christ is the icon of God because he came to save humanity and, from the divine icon, we understand that the universal Spirit who became incarnate in human form, this humanity *(nāsūt)* is God and Christ at the same time. We have two things, but in reality they are the same thing. Reason perceives them as two, but they are one: a partial symbol in a reality that symbolises a [metaphysical] absolute beyond reality *(wa lakinnahumā wāḥid, ramz juz'ī fi waqi'a yarmuz ila kullī fimā warā' al-wāqi'a)*.'[51] The dialogues proceeds with the following exchange:

> **Matta al-Meskeen:** When Christ descended into humanity *(nāsūt)*, the Whole came to dwell in the part but the part stopped to be part. The Whole extended over the part and the part opened to the Whole. The finite thus became infinite and the unlimited appeared in the form of the limited.
> (...)
> **Hoda Wasfi:** How can we explain his prayers when there is separation from everyone and his request to relieve his suffering.
> **Matta al-Meskeen:** Because he represents humanity, he represents man.
> **Hoda Wasfi:** So there is a moment when duality is apparent.
> **Matta al-Meskeen:** No. This is a very difficult question. ... when we take the communion we take a small piece of

50 'God, Christ and the Symbol', p. 9.
51 'God, Christ and the Symbol', p. 15.

bread and say we have Christ. The body here is an obvious symbol and is broken into small pieces. Nevertheless, who takes the small piece of bread in the communion is as if he has taken Christ into himself. Here there is an obvious distancing from matter, from matter as form. But the part has extended itself and become the Whole so that Christ is in me. We believe in the inhabitation [of God]. Here the partial has become the Whole so much so that when I pray over the Eucharistic bread and say, 'This is the body of Christ,' according to [Christ's] words, and then we eat the little piece of bread, we have taken on Christ within us and we feel him. It is not a question here of imagination but of power. Perhaps I am speaking in a different language. Here there is a transition to something divine, so I say that man is the only creature who has been granted the ability to transform time into eternity, and the thing into the Absolute.

Jaber Asfour: But this is a different concept from what we know about the symbol. You made me imagine that the symbol is an icon of God just as Christ is an icon of God, and this is not our concept of the symbol. Here he is the image that carries the divine meaning so that we can understand it.

Matta al-Meskeen: Neither vision nor incarnation leads to anything, so whoever saw him considered him an ordinary man. This is where discernment or open spiritual awareness *(al-istishfāf aw al-waʿī al-rūḥī al-munfatiḥ)* comes in so he sees the invisible and perceives the incomprehensible. Herein lies the greatness of man.[52]

The Muslim interlocutors understand that Matta's theory of symbolism can be applied to Christ. The basis of this is that Jesus is referred to in the Qur'an as *kalimatun min Allāh*, translated as 'a Word from God' (3:39). In response to Abu Zayd's question whether in the incarnate Christ, who is understood as a symbol of God in partial perception, there is synthesis with the ultimate reality, Matta gives a Christological

52 'God, Christ and the Symbol', p. 16.

explanation. His view reflects the position of the monophysite Orthodox churches (Coptic, Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Eastern Syriac), which confess that there is only one, divine nature in Christ that includes the human nature, in contrast to the Christological dogma of the Council of Chalcedon of 451.

In response to Wasfi's remark on how the deity of Christ might be reconciled with a feeling of loneliness and abandonment, Father Matta argues that the divine nature of Christ does not preclude him from representing humanity and taking upon himself the suffering for sin.[53] In Wasfi's opinion this points at Christ's dual nature. In response, Father Matta claims that the human nature in Christ is completely imbued, saturated, and absorbed by the divine nature. A comparable infusion takes place when we receive Holy Communion. A material symbol is transfigured because man is given the power to transform the finite into the infinite. For Asfour, this notion indicates that God desires to reveal himself to man through the incarnation.

Father Matta argues that the incarnation and God's nearness to man in Christ does not in itself guarantee that he will be recognised as Messiah. This requires the actualisation of human potentials such as discernment or open spiritual awareness. However, cognition presupposes faith, and the perception of reality happens in the light of the experience of faith.[54] *Theosis*, or deification that occurs through the help of the Holy Spirit, completes this process. Generally the term *theosis* denotes the common patristic understanding of salvation as participation in the divine nature. This is an integral part of the overall message of eastern Christianity. The use of the term representation[55]—Christ in his abandonment on the Cross represented humanity—suggests that the reason for the Incarnation for Meskeen was not so much the atonement, but because in Christ the Father wanted to embrace mankind.

The discussion's conclusion provides a synthesis of Father Matta's theological anthropology and epistemology. In view of the potentials that human being have according to Matta al-Meskeen, Nasr Abu Zayd wonders that once we agree that God is capable and intelligent, which of the two statements should be taken literally and which figuratively.[56]

53 'God, Christ and the Symbol', p. 16.
54 'God, Christ and the Symbol', p. 16.
55 'God, Christ and the Symbol', p. 16.
56 Abu Zayd was known as a neo-Mu'tazilite thinker in his later years. In his *Mafhūm*

> **Nasr Abu Zayd:** This is my question about literal and figurative meaning. We use language and say: God is capable and knowledgeable, and we use the same attributes about man. Where is the literal and where is the figurative sense?
> **Matta al-Meskeen:** I answer with a mystical nuance. Man is neither capable nor knowledgeable. You would not be able if God had not given you the ability. The power attributed to man is metaphorical and is taken from the one who is capable of everything!
> **Hoda Wasfi:** Even if he doesn't understand it and won't admit it?
> **Matta al-Meskeen:** If an arrogant person were to say, 'I am powerful without God,' we say to him, 'Go ahead and lift this chair.' He would try but fail. Here God intervenes. Does he have faith or not? God has done it many times. Man has nothing, this is why he becomes arrogant and boastful. This is authorised theft, for God allowed us to steal his qualities that are his and to boast arrogantly with them. But there is no human being who is wise in his own right or powerful in his own right.[57]

In his response, Father Matta asserts that the reality we experience and the abilities we attribute to man should be seen metaphorically or rather as potentials that God makes actual in them. The divine is the only genuine existence. What people mistake for abilities are illusions that God has granted permission for, but 'no human being knows by himself and is capable in himself.'[58] This assertion, which is in line with the Mu'tazilite belief that all divine attributes—including knowledge, power, and others—are equal to God's essence and eternal, while man's existence and power originate from God, concludes the conversation.

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al-Naṣṣ he contends that the Qur'an is a cultural product and claims that the idea of its primordial preexistence renders the dialectical relationship between text and context invalid. *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ. Dirāsa fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-'Arabī, 1996), p. 42.

57 'God, Christ and the Symbol', pp. 1–7.

58 'God, Christ and the Symbol', p. 17.

Conclusion

In the presented encounter Father Matta's Muslim partners were committed to comprehend the relation between Christian belief and its Scripture, the context and the logic in which its doctrines are rooted. The discussed issues all belong to the *idem* aspects[59] of Christian identity—to use Marianne Moyaert's term, which are constitutive of the faith commitment. Father Matta's tone was neither polemical nor defensive, he did not seek a common starting point or interpretative horizon on doctrinal issues. When his Muslim interlocutors attempt to interpret his views within the framework of Islam, he shifts the perspective to maintain the Christian frame of reference. His attitude sustains the claim that religious truths are self-contained systems of meaning which can only be measured by their internal coherence.

However, in this encounter we can observe what Ricoeur describes as a self-reflective *ipseity* or *ipse-identity*.[60] This develops as a result of the believers' creative participation in co-fashioning their identity within their own religious community on the one hand, and as a result of their experiences in life and interactions with others on the other hand. In this approach, loyalty to God as viewed through a particular tradition does not stop at the *idem-identity* but extends beyond it to seek God where God can be found. Respect for one another throughout this dialogue provided a 'space-between' where new ideas might emerge without compromising the distinctiveness and specificity of the viewpoints and conceptions that are particular to the Christian and Islamic religious traditions, respectively.

59 Marianne Moyaert, *Fragile Identities. Towards a Theology of Interreligious Hospitality* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), pp. 25–55.

60 Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 11–21.

THE RENEWAL OF CHRISTIAN THOUGHT IN THE MODERN MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA

Michael Nazir-Ali

From almost the beginning of Islam in history, Christians have been writing to explain their faith, to answer objections to it by Muslims or simply to comment on contemporary affairs. Thus St John of Damascus, who served as a high official under the Umayyad Caliphs, was equipping Christians to give an account of their faith already in the first half of the 8th century AD. John wrote in Greek but, at about the same time, an anonymous Palestinian treatise *Fi Tathlith Allah al-Wahid* was written in Arabic, thus initiating a long history of Christians writing in Arabic to explain their faith, to contribute to literature or to address social and political concerns.[1]

Kenneth Bailey, for example, has drawn our attention to the importance of biblical exegesis in Arabic in the Middle Ages by figures such as Ibn al-Tayyib al-Mashriqi from Iraq and Hibat Allah al-'Assal from Egypt. The prolific Bar Hebraeus, writing in both Syriac and Arabic, comments, in his *Chronicon*, on both secular and ecclesiastical events as does Thomas Maraga in his Syriac Book of Governors.[2]

During the early modern period, the extensive historical, geographical and apologetic writings of the Jesuits largely in the court Persian of Mughal India are only matched by the Christian art they promoted at the time.[3] We are reminded of their apologetic style in

1 See further J-M Gaudeul, *Encounters and Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History*, 2 Vols, PISAI, Rome, 1984, Mark Beaumont, *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims*, Regnum, Oxford, 2005 and D J Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam*, Brill, Leiden, 1972.

2 See Kenneth Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, SPCK, London, 2008, pp. 12ff, Hidemi Takahashi, *Barhebraeus: A Bio-Bibliography*, Gorgias Press, Piscataway, NJ, 2005 and E A Wallis Budge, *The Book of Governors: The Historia Monastica of Thomas Bishop of Maraga AD840*, Gorgias, Piscataway, 2003.

3 John Rooney, *The Hesitant Dawn*, Rawalpindi, Christian Study Centre, 1984, pp. 71ff, and Khalid Anis Ahmed (ed.), *Intercultural Encounter in Mughal Miniatures*, National College of the Arts, Lahore, 1995.

the writings of eminent converts in nineteenth and early 20th-century British India.[4] Thus we can see that there has been Christian writing in an Islamic context from the beginnings of Muslim-Christian encounter and, at one time or another, the major languages of the Muslim world, Arabic, Persian and Urdu, have been used to give an account of the Christian faith to Muslims, to understand Muslim beliefs and practices and to describe the historical and social milieu of the writers.

This brings us to the period under our consideration which may be said to have begun with the wide ranging reforms, collectively known as the *Tanzimat*, in the Ottoman Empire which, on the one hand, sought to modernise Ottoman law in the direction of western legal codes and, on the other, modified Shari'a by largely limiting its influence to personal and family law, although the famous *Mejelle* also modified and codified contract law and civil procedure from Shari'a sources. The trigger for such root and branch reform, however, was the pressure from western powers on the Ottomans to improve the civil and political situation of their non-Muslim, mainly Christian and Jewish, subjects. Thus from as early as 1839, there were edicts *(firmans)* like the *Gülhane Khatt-i Sharif* and the *Khatt-i Humayun* of 1856 which progressively abolished all discrimination in law against non-Muslims. Such abolition was firmly opposed in conservative circles and even in some non-Muslim communities, which were looking for greater autonomy and eventual independence rather than integration into the Ottoman Empire.[5] The reforms did, however, create a new atmosphere where non-Muslims could participate in political discussion about the future. There were certainly some Arab Christians who remained loyal to Ottomanism but the entry of the empire on the side of the Germans in the First World War, and the Arab Revolt, aided by the Allies for their own purposes, engendered the *Nahda*, or the renewal of Arab nationalist consciousness. This had cultural, political and

4 Avril Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India*, RoutledgeCurzon, London, 2003, M Kamil, 'The Unfinished Agenda: The Great Munazara of 1854 and 'Imaduddin's Contribution to the Muslim-Christian Debates in Nineteenth Century India', Unpublished PhD thesis, Middlesex University, 2019 and Barakatullah, *Sahat-i Kutb-i Muqadassa*, Punjab Religious Book Society, Lahore, 1968.

5 Michael Nazir-Ali, *Conviction and Conflict: Islam, Christianity and World Order*, Continuum, London, 2006, pp. 85ff, P M Holt, Ann Lambton and Bernard Lewis (eds), *The Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol. 1A, CUP, Cambridge, 2000, pp. 362ff, and Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian: A History in the Middle East*, Mowbrays, London, 1992, pp. 141ff.

social dimensions in all of which Christians played a notable part. The Middle Eastern Jewish communities concerned, for the most part, if they thought politically at all, were attracted to the Zionist project of European Jewry, even if they could not openly express their sympathies for a return to the Land and were prevented from entering it. They seem not to have played an active role in the *Nahda* (except, perhaps, in literary circles).[6]

Declarations of Arab nationalism often put national consciousness and unity at the forefront, with religion becoming a personal affair. This was quite contrary, of course, to classic theories about the relation of Islam to the body politic but this, and asseverations of equal citizenship for non-Muslims, found a ready response in some Christian circles, tired of *dhimmitude* and the *millet* system of denominationalism it encouraged.

Thus the Syrian Constantine Zureiq (1909–2000), of Chalcedonian Orthodox heritage, an educator and historian from the American University in Beirut, claimed that the ties of Arabness surpassed every other kind of belonging. Arab consciousness, moreover, had to do with Islam and its Prophet and thus it was the duty of every Arab, regardless of their faith, to take this into account. In spite of this qualification, he was in favour of a secular polity which did not oppose true religion. Religious affiliation, however, especially to the communal *millet* system of the Ottomans, should not override the task of nation building. He believed that this system should be abolished and nationalism itself should be recognised as an authentically spiritual movement, leading to a renaissance of culture and of civil society. As with other secularising nationalists, he does not address the question of the beliefs and values which are needed for the development of legislation and policy and how religions can contribute to national formation. Certainly, where certain understandings of Islam are concerned, his prescriptions seem weak and ineffectual.[7]

Najib ʻAzuri, from an Eastern Catholic background, advocated a pan-Arab empire which stretched from the Mediterranean to the

6 Bat Ye'or, *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians under Islam*, Associated University Presses, Cranbury, NJ, 1985, pp. 147ff.

7 See Aziz Azmeh, 'Review of *Constantine Zureiq: An Arab for the Twentieth Century* (Beirut, 2001)', in *JPS* 56 (2003), Institute for Palestinian Studies; Cragg, *The Arab Christian*, pp. 154 and 158, Nazir-Ali, *Conviction and Conflict*, p. 89.

Indian Ocean, with a spiritual caliphate located in Mecca. Within such a polity, the diverse Christian communities should be united into a single Arab church, genuinely Arab in worship and leadership. Continuing foreign leadership of churches in Arab lands, he regarded as unacceptable. He seems not to have addressed the long history of the *dhimma* and the shadow it cast over future arrangements for non-Muslims in an Islamic dispensation. Like some other nationalists, he seemed to have assumed too easily that the differences between Muslims and non-Muslims would be transcended in a resurgent Arabism.[8]

A quite different voice was that of Farah Antun (d. 1922), a Syrian living in Egypt, he tried to distinguish Syrians (and by implication Egyptians) from the true Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula. He was, therefore, opposed to the revival of an Arab caliphate, preferring Ottoman 'protection' of non-Muslims to an unknown future. He did, however, look for a secularised Ottoman dispensation and in his secularising agenda he came into conflict with some of his eminent Muslim friends, such as Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida who wished to reform and retain the primacy of an Islamic polity. He emphasised both a kind of Enlightenment rationality separated from any kind of tradition and a personal faith for Muslims and Christians, not beholden to clericalism of any kind.

Khalil Sakakini (d. 1953) shared Antun's desire for personal faith and for the erasure of the *millet* mentality among Christians along with the communalism it bred. As with so many of the Arabs belonging to the Greek Orthodox Church, he was very critical of Greek clerical dominance and the inferior state of the Arab clergy. In the end, he seems to have abandoned that church. He died a disillusioned man because Islam seemed not to reciprocate his call for religion to be confined to personal belief. As Cragg points out, these secularising Christians did not reckon with how Islam sees itself in relation to power and the strictly limited role that non-Muslims are allowed in Islamic polity.[9]

There should not be much surprise that this growing sense of nationalism should find inspiration in contemporary European movements of a similar kind. It fell to Michel Aflak of Damascus to

8 Cragg, *The Arab Christian*, p. 155.

9 Cragg, *The Arab Christian*, pp. 156ff; D M Reid, *The Odyssey of Farah Antun: A Syrian Christian's Quest for Secularism*, Bibliotheca Islamica, Minneapolis, 1975.

articulate a fully fledged creed of Arab nationalism which resulted in the formation of the Ba'ath party (or the party of the resurrection) in the 1930s and 40s. Aflaq was able to work with Muslim colleagues, such as Salahuddin Al-Bitar, in energising the educated young to struggle for a national resurrection. Aflaq also recognised the place of Islam in the formation of Arab identity and urged his fellow Christians to do so as well. It seems fair to say, however, that, as with other nationalisms, religion becomes an instrument of the state rather than having a role in forming its moral and spiritual basis. It is an expression of a people's genius rather than deriving from divine revelation and the nation-state articulates and implements whatever longings there might be for justice and equity in religious traditions. The supreme bond among a people is that of national consciousness which everything else must serve. Political activism, in effect, became the religion of the cadres of the party.

As long as the Ba'ath party is a minority, it must act as if for the whole, until the whole can grasp their own political destiny. This idea of a vanguard, also to be found in other ideologies like Marxism, justified the numerous coups d'état and revolutions with which the history of the party is littered. In the event, Aflaq was outflanked by the army in both Syria and Iraq and died a powerless, if still revered, figure among the many touched by the vigour and ardour of his campaigning.

The abiding question which remains not only for Arab but other nationalisms as well is the extent to which non-Muslim populations can own such nationalism and whether there can be a kind of civic plurality which welcomes the contribution not just of Islam but of other religious traditions as well? Some thinking along these lines has been done in Indonesia, by thinkers like Nurcholish Madjid, but it may be relevant in other contexts as well.[10]

George Antonius has vigorously set out the contribution of Christian Arabs to the revival of Arab culture in terms of literature, journalism and social and political awareness. Newspapers, like the famous *Al-Ahram,* were founded and there was lively debate about

10 Cragg, *The Arab Christian*, p. 161ff; Nazir-Ali, *Conviction and Conflict*, pp. 89ff, Sylvia Haim(ed.), *Arab Nationalism: An Anthology,* University of California Press, Berkeley, 1974. On the Indonesian experience, see Kyle Wisdom, 'State, Religion and the Public Good: An Examination of Nurcholish Madjid in Constructing Civil Religious Pluralism as Political Philosophy', PhD thesis, Middlesex University, 2022.

ideas and identity, authority and interpretation, faith and secularity etc. There was openness to western thinking but also reminders to the west and to Muslims about the contribution of Eastern Christians to that revival of learning which is the foundation of modernity.[11]

Kenneth Cragg, similarly, tells us of eminent figures like the essayist and novelist, Jurji Zaydan (d. 1914), whose writing revived a sense of pride in the Arab past. There was also the father and son team of Nasif and Ibrahim al-Yaziji, whose poetry and hymnody heightened the quality of Arabic within Christian communities. Also worthy of mention is the famous Lebanese lexicographer Butrus al-Bustani, a Maronite Christian, who worked closely with Presbyterian missionaries. His dictionary *Al-Muhit* did much to modernise Arabic vocabulary. This was taken further in his encyclopaedia *Da'irat al-Ma'arif*. After the mob attacks on Christians in Damascus and elsewhere, during the middle of the 19th century, he tried to reassure fearful Christians and to instil *hubb al-watan* or patriotism in them.

Cragg also calls our attention to the importance of mission schools which engendered a love of Arabic and of patriotism among their pupils. He is trenchant in his criticism of those critics of 'orientalism' who had themselves been educated in such schools![12]

Many Muslims and Christians, from different parts of the world, found themselves in Egypt where there was a long standing, and still continuing, debate about the extent to which Egypt was 'Arab'. On the one hand, notable Muslims, like Taha Hussein, regarded the Arab conquest as assimilated by the ancient culture of Egypt. Others, like the playwright Tawfiq al-Hakim, saw Islam itself as well contextualised within Egyptian culture. On the other, there was a strong restatement of Egyptian 'Arabness' which led eventually to Gamal Abdel Nasser's vision of an Egyptian-led pan-Arabism. Earlier on, however, the Copt, Marqus Simaika, could say to Muslims and Christians alike: you are all Copts, some are Muslim Copts and others are Christian Copts! Akhnukh Fanus, another Copt, called a Coptic Congress, following the assassination of Egypt's only Coptic prime minister, Butrus Ghali. This Congress reaffirmed Coptic identity and demanded an end to discrimination in employment and a recognition of religious needs

11 George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening*, Capricorn Books, New York, 1965, Cragg, *The Arab Christian*, p. 155 and 168, Nazir-Ali, *Conviction and Conflict*, pp. 89ff.

12 Cragg, *The Arab Christian*, pp. 166ff.

at the workplace and in schools.[13] A prominent Copt in the world of letters was Salamah Musa. He pleaded for a common citizenship, between Muslim and Copt, grounded in a shared commitment to 'Egyptianism'. He contextualised his Coptic identity within a somewhat idealised picture of Pharaonic Egypt. There is undoubtedly an element in Egyptian society that sees its identity in this way. Salamah even tried to Egyptianise the Arabic language. He had Christian followers, such as Ibrahim al-Misri, who saw the *Fallahin* as the bedrock of what it means to be Egyptian. He was also significantly influential with the Muslim intelligentsia through his magazine *Al-Majalla al-Jadida*. It was here that the young Naguib Mahfouz first cut his teeth, though the disciple outgrew his mentor in his response to life's complexities and his perception that there was no miraculous cure for social ills.[14]

Turning to the unique situation of Lebanon, created as a haven for the Christians of Greater Syria, its early promise of multi-faith co-existence has turned into a tragedy of communal conflict and endemic corruption. One distinguished example of the promise was Charles Malik who, as ambassador to the United States and to the United Nations, was significantly influential in the framing of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As his son, Habib Malik, himself a well known human rights activist, told me, his father was committed to Lebanon's Christian heritage as a witness to freedom of thought and speech throughout the Middle East. He also saw, with many other Lebanese, his country as a link between east and west-interpreting the obscurities and ambiguities of the one to the other. As another writer, Sa'id 'Aql, has said, it stands on the doorstep of Asia and yet, we know from its history, also faces west. Malik was in favour of Muslim-Christian dialogue and unity in the Lebanon and beyond but, at the same time, he wanted Lebanon's uniqueness guaranteed.[15]

Much of the turmoil in Lebanon has been caused by the displacement of Palestinians from their towns, villages and land immediately after the conflict that followed the establishment of the State of Israel and the subsequent Arab-Israeli wars. Naim Ateek is an Israeli Palestinian who is also a priest in the Anglican diocese of

13 Cragg, *The Arab Christian*, pp. 171ff.

14 Salamah Musa, *The Education of Salama Musa* (tr. L O Schuman), Brill, Leiden, 1961, Cragg, *The Arab Christian*, pp. 192ff, Nazir-Ali, *Conviction and Conflict*, p. 90.

15 Cragg, *The Arab Christian*, pp. 219ff.

Jerusalem. In his book *Justice and Only Justice* he has reflected on the meaning of justice in the Bible and how this applies to the situation in the Holy Land today. The title is, of course, taken from Deuteronomy 16: 20: 'Justice, and only justice shall you follow, that you may live and inherit the land which the Lord your God gives you.' Here the term for justice that is used is *sedeq*, with its connotations of rightness, integrity, honest dealing etc. rather than *mishpat*, with its perhaps more legal implications, though it can also be used about personal righteousness, as in Micah 6:8.

Ateek's hermeneutic is to read the Hebrew Bible in the light of the revelation in Jesus Christ and to uphold in it whatever leads to an authentic humanism. He recounts numerous passages which speak of the justice of God, as well as his requirement of justice among the people. Without denying the special vocation of Israel in bearing witness to God's purpose, he emphasises the growing awareness of the universality of God's purposes, especially among the writing prophets. Justice leads to reconciliation and that to peace. Reconciliation would involve a Palestinian recognition of the suffering of the Jewish people throughout history and their search for a land which they could call their own and feel safe. It would also involve Israeli Jews recognising that they have inflicted suffering and dispossession on the Palestinian people, who, by and large, were not their oppressors. The way forward, for Ateek, is to share the land in a way that is just. This involves a two state solution and a negotiated solution to the status of Jerusalem. The solution he proposes of its 'federalisation' is no longer realistic but the principle of some kind of negotiated shared sovereignty remains a way out of the dilemma that both peoples face.[16]

A Christian who was not himself an Arab but had a profound influence on the reform and development of legal systems in Muslim majority lands, from North Africa to South East Asia, is the English evangelical Anglican, Sir Norman Anderson. Anderson had been a missionary in Egypt, a British Army officer during the Second War in the Middle East and North Africa. After the war, he became one of foremost legal experts on Islamic Law and its development in varying contexts. He also continued writing and speaking on Islam as a faith, in a way that was both sympathetic and distinctively Christian. Anderson

16 Naim Stifan Ateek, *Justice And Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*, Orbis, New York, 1989.

believed that the pressures of modernity in the 20th century would bring about change in the legal situation of the emerging nation states of the Muslim world, just as the opening up of the Ottoman Empire had done in the nineteenth.[17]

His belief that God had not left himself without witness anywhere and that there were fragmentary, but real elements, of both general revelation in creation and conscience and of an original revelation among adherents of different faiths, allowed him not only to value spiritual searching, wherever he found it, but also to work for legal reform that brought positive law more into line with what he saw as God's purpose for ordered societies, even in a fallen world.[18]

Where spiritual search is concerned, he was able to see in the radical repentance of the Sufi woman mystic, Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, and in the example of the early Sufi, Ibrahim Ibn Adham, such pleas for forgiveness and submission to the divine will, the working of God's prevenient grace and the inward work of the Holy Spirit. He came to believe that such people would find mercy and acceptance either in this life or, beyond the grave, they would recognise the Saviour in whom they had found the mercy they were seeking![19]

Exposure to the thought of Muhammad 'Abduh and of writers like Taha Hussein had shown Anderson that 'modernist' thought was not just a passing phenomenon but had taken roots in the Egyptian intelligentsia. He was well acquainted with Al-Azhar, the premier place of Sunni learning, located in Cairo but host to numerous students from all over the world of Islam. He identified three stages in the development of law in Muslim majority countries: the distinguishing of Shari'a courts, which dealt mainly with personal and family law, from civil jurisdictions which dealt with commercial and criminal matters and which were usually based on western models. He also saw as important the reform of family law itself, such as restrictions on polygamy, minimum age for marriage, provisions for divorce etc. He told me once that he was aware of the practice of *talfiq,* the practice of

17 See further, Todd M Thompson, *Norman Anderson And The Christian Mission To Modernise Islam*, Hurst, London, 2017.

18 Ibid., p. 256.

19 J N D Anderson, *God's Law and God's Love: An Essay in Comparative Religion*, Collins, London, 1980, p. 32f, 128 etc., *Christianity and Comparative Religion*, Tyndale, London, 1970, p. 104. See also Kenneth Cracknell, *Towards a New Relationship: Christians and People of Other Faith*, Epworth, London, 1986, pp. 63ff.

identifying different elements in the various schools of law and making a patchwork of law to suit modern conditions. He thought this had been beneficial in creating movement in Islamic legal systems. He favoured, however, a greater integration of Islamic law with modern codes of law. In this he admired the Pakistani attempt to get behind the traditional schools to the 'original spirit of the Qur'an and Sunnah' in the formulation of positive law for the state. He did, however, foresee a conflict between the traditional 'Ulema and the progressives and thought that the results of such conflict could not be predicted. The return to literal readings of Shari'a under Zia Ul Haq and the failure of successive governments to recover the attempt to go back to 'original' meanings, shows that Anderson's caution was well merited.

The appeal, in Egypt and elsewhere, to the *Maqasid al-Shari'a,* or 'The Objectives of Law', in promoting *maslaha*, or general welfare, was also an attempt to get behind the literal meaning of the text to its underlying principles. Once again, Anderson saw promise in these developments but worried about the reaction from fundamentalists and extremists of different kinds. As in Pakistan, developments in Egypt have shown his worries were fully justified.[20]

Another Christian who has had a profound influence in the development of law in Muslim majority countries is Chief Justice A R Cornelius of Pakistan. It is almost beyond belief that a devout Catholic could be not only the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in that country but the main drafter of two of its constitutions, those of 1962 and of 1971. The second of these was accepted even by the Islamic parties but was rejected by the supposedly secular socialist, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, as a draft by a *dhimmi* and so unfit for an Islamic nation.[21] Cornelius was very well versed in English and European Law and cites these in his work but his greatest emphasis was on the Qur'an, the Sunnah of the Prophet of Islam and the Shari'a as the ground norm for the development of law in Pakistan. It was in this sense that he described himself as a 'constitutional Muslim' and was the reason why his judicial colleagues thought of him as 'more Muslim than the

20 T M Thompson, *Norman Anderson*, pp. 137ff and 189ff.

21 On Cornelius see the definitive biography by Ralph Braibanti, *Chief Justice Cornelius of Pakistan*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1999; on the date of the 1971 draft Constitution, see George Felix, *Christians in Pakistan: The Battle for Justice*, Agape Press, Salford, 2001, p. 28.

Muslims'. His understanding of Islamic Law was that its source is to be seen as transcendental and its values are constant but the details of its implementation can vary from time to time and place to place. In this, like some Muslim reformers, he seems to be relying on Shah Waliullah of Delhi. He identified equality and compassion as two of the leading constants and regarded Islamic Law as an interplay between '*adl* (justice), *ihsan* (compassion) and the redistribution of wealth as foreshadowed in the institution of *Zakat*.[22]

In a speech on the concept of Islamic justice, he shows awareness of the Turkish reform of law as codified in the *Mejelle-i Ahkam-i Adliya* which he regards as bringing into harmony Hanafi *Fiqh* with the demands of modern life and commerce. In fact, the reforms were more far reaching than that with the replacing of Shari'a, except for personal law, with a civil code and providing *Qanun* or legislation for commercial and criminal cases.[23]

Cornelius was an advocate of using customary tribal and local custom in the administration of justice, particularly in Pakistan's restive frontier areas. He pleaded for the retention and modification of the *Jirga* system, for example, among the Pathans. The modifications he proposed were, however, quite modest and, along with the judiciary of the time, he seems to have thought that so-called 'honour' crimes might merit a lesser punishment. His advocacy of physical mutilation(even if medically reversible), in line with some punishments in the *Hudud* laws of Shari'a, caused considerable controversy, even though he was also an advocate of compassion and leniency in sentencing criminals which he understood as being in accordance with the Sunnah.[24]

The question, of course, that keeps arising in the mind, and in discussion, is why Cornelius did not bring his enormous knowledge of comparative law and of his own Catholic tradition to bear more on his understanding of Shari'a and the well thought out proposals of Muslim lawyers for a root and branch reform of traditional *Fiqh*? Was he aware of his own vulnerability as a non-Muslim at the top of his profession in a nation that was rapidly Islamicising? Is he a good example of the tendency, which we have noticed already, of a '*dhimmi* mentality' among

22 Cornelius, *The Concept of Islamic Justice in Braibanti*, op. cit., pp. 297ff, and Cragg, *The Arab Christian*, pp. 145ff.

23 Braibanti, *Chief Justice Cornelius of Pakistan*, pp. 57ff.

24 Braibanti, *Chief Justice Cornelius of Pakistan*, pp. 249ff and 297ff.

non-Muslims in Muslim majority lands to justify their existence in terms of Islamic norms rather than of globally recognised personal and communal rights? Was it in this sense that Mr Bhutto was referring to him as a 'dhimmi', i.e as one who understood his place in terms of theocratic rather than secular law? Whatever conclusion we come to on these matters, Cornelius remains an enigma but his mastery of his subject cannot be denied.

One more example of Christian thought from the non-Arab Muslim world is that of Hassan Dehqani-Tafti, Anglican bishop in Iran from 1960–1990, with the last ten years or so in exile after an attempted assassination of him and his wife and the murder of his only son. Much attention has rightly been given to his time as the first ethnically Persian bishop in Iran in modern times (though there are, of course, Assyrian, Armenian and Chaldean bishops) during a tumultuous period in his nation's history. The same attention, however, has not been given to his status as a student and scholar of Persian language, literature and history, especially as it relates to different aspects of Christianity. He was also a poet in Farsi of no mean stature. He is best known for his autobiographical works *Design of My World* and *Mushkil 'Ishq* ('Hard Love', translated from the English *The Hard Awakening*).[25] The first is an account of his early life and ministry in Iran and the second is about the Islamic Revolution and the catastrophic effect it had not only on the nation but, particularly, on the Anglican Church of which he was bishop, with the murder, imprisonment and exile of many of its clergy and lay leaders. Even here, we find allusions to Persian literature as, for example, in the very title of the second volume taken directly from the poet Hafiz: **که عشق آسان نمود اول ولی افتاد مشکل ها**, 'Love seemed easy at first but O how difficult it became!'

His *magnum opus*, however, is surely his three volume study of Christianity in Persian history, prose, poetry and art.[26] The first volume concentrates on the history of Christianity in Iran from the earliest times and claims that, since its rise, there has never been a time when Christianity has not existed, in some form or other, in that country. The second is especially about references to Jesus, the Blessed Virgin

25 Hasan Dehqani-Tafti, *Design of My World*, Lutterworth, London, 1959 and *The Hard Awakening*, SPCK, London, 1981, translated into Persian as *Mushkil 'Ishq*, Newport Beach, 1364 Sh/1985.

26 *Christ and Christianity among the Iranians*, 3 Vols, Sohrab Books, Basingstoke, 1992–1994.

Mary, the disciples of Jesus and to the church in classical Persian poetry. The third is about discussion of Christians and Christianity in Persian prose and poetry and its depiction in art in contemporary times.[27]

In his work, Dehqani-Tafti takes great care to show continuities between Islamic thought and Christianity, for instance, in a common understanding of a supreme and transcendent being but also awareness of the distinctives of each faith and of the differences between them. He shows that the classical Persian poets knew about Christian doctrines such as the Trinity, even if they did not fully understand them, when he quotes from the 18th-century Persian poet Hatif Isfahani:

سه نگردد بریشم ار اورا پرنیان خوانی و حریر و پرند!

Silk does not become three different things,
If you call it satin, damask or brocade![28]

On the Cross, he refers to a contemporary of Rumi's, Rukn al-Din Auhadi, who mentions Jesus' crucifixion and then paraphrases Christ's teaching about taking up our own crosses in our following of him:

جان او بر فلک سوار نشد تا تنش پایبند دار نشد

Until the body is tied to the cross,
The soul cannot mount up to heaven[29]

The Cross, moreover, is not just about obedience to the divine will, it is the supreme manifestation of our love for God and, we might say, of God's love for us. In Auhadi's words again, Jesus declares from the Cross:

گفت اگر درمیانه کس باشد عشق را این دلیل بس باشد!

If there be anyone present here who asks about love,
This is surely a sufficient proof of love![30]

27 *Design of My World*, pp. 66–67.
28 *Christ and Christianity among the Iranians*, Vol. 2, p. 175 (quoting Rukn al-Din Auhadi, *Jam-i Jam*, ed. Sai'd Nafisi, Amir Kabir, Tehran, 1340 Sh).
29 *Christ and Christianity among the Iranians*, Vol. 2, p. 23.
30 *Christ and Christianity among the Iranians*.

The bishop then goes on to quote from Auhadi's better known contemporary, Maulana Jalal al-Din Rumi, whom he calls 'maulavi' in the usual Persian manner, on the transforming power of love:

از محبت دار تختی می شود و ز محبت بار بختی می شود
از محبت شاه بنده می شود و ز محبت مرده زنده می شود

Through love the cross has become a throne,
Through it the rider the lowly mount,
Through love the king has become a slave
And through it the dead are raised to life![31]

Dehqani-Tafti comments that this view of sacrificial love is very close to the self- emptying of Christ in the incarnation and the Cross (Phil. 2:5–11).

There is a great deal more in the books about Christ, Christians and Christianity as understood by the poets of the classical period.

Coming to modern times, he mentions a number of poets but, perhaps, the most significant among them is Hamid Shirazi whose poetical translation of the so-called Nestorian Stela he quotes at length. Here are the opening couplets:

یکی می شنوم ندای تو راحت من رضای تو سیحا
نهفته جسم تو غذای من خون تو شد برای من ارا

The one holy hypostasis of the Blessed Trinity,
The Light of life, that is the Messiah,
Concealing his glory, majesty and worth,
Was revealed in the form of human flesh.

The third volume of *Christ and Christianity among the Iranians* provides commentary on the thought of a number of Iranian writers showing the writer's awareness of the width and depth of Persian literature and its engagement with Christian themes.

Dehqani-Tafti was himself a poet and some of his poetry survives in the hymnody of Persian speaking Christians. It may be

31 *Christ and Christianity among the Iranians*, Vol. 2, p. 22.

appropriate then to end this survey of modern Christian thought in the Middle East and South Asia with this extract from his very popular Eucharistic hymn:

هستی من فدای تو قلب من است جای تو
می شنوم ندای تو راحت من رضای تو
جسم تو غذای من خون تو شد برای من
شربت بی بهای من راحت من رضای تو

My whole being is sacrifice to you,
My heart is your repository.
I listen always to your call,
My peace is in obeying you.
Your body is my food,
Your blood for me is shed.
A drink beyond value,
My ease is in doing your will.[32]

32 In *Sarudnama-yi Kalisa-yi Iran*, Nur Jahan (Tehran?), 1351 Sh/1961, p. 97.

IN CONVERSATION WITH BISHOP GEORGES KHODR

Miles Elwell

This paper provides an overview of some of Bishop Georges Khodr's thoughts, ideas and religious perspectives. Metropolitan of Byblos and Botrys, Bishop Khodr occupies a position of respect across the religious divide in Lebanon; and, at a hundred years old, remains a controversial figure. There are staunch admirers together with loyal friends; but there are also others, ranging from those who have distinct reservations about his views, to some who believe he is a stubborn renegade who endangers the Orthodox Church in particular and Christians in general. Thus, he creates something of a polarisation within his own community and in the country at large.

My doctoral thesis—'Existential Religiosity, Individuality, and Theosis in the Thought of Bishop Georges Khodr'—necessitated a series of meetings with him at his diocesan office in Broumana, Lebanon, in the winter of 2013 and more substantial interviews in the early autumn of the same year. The paper will present a snapshot of these meetings, summarising some of the subject matter, highlighting the challenges involved in this type of fieldwork, and offer a glimpse of his character as a person.

Khodr as a Subject for Doctoral Research

I first came to know of Georges Khodr through marriage. My wife, a Lebanese Muslim, initially made me aware of him, and through visits to the country, my interest in the man and his reputation grew and matured into respect and fascination, not so much, at this stage, for him as a theologian, but for him as a person. He struck me, even with scant awareness of his life and reputation, and a paucity of knowledge

about the Orthodox Church in Lebanon, as someone who, by defining himself and his religiosity, defied an institutionalised identity. What was emerging was a picture of someone whose singularity, independent mind and inner strength were rooted in an uncompromising commitment to Christ. Even in these early days, he came across as a quasi rebel, certainly a radical, who refused to be pigeonholed for the sake of institutional tradition and corporate cohesion. It might be argued that in a country where there are eighteen officially recognised religions, adherence to a religious organisation aids and supports identity within what is a confessional mélange. Khodr shrugs off this kind of compartmentalising and himself spurns predictable labels. This is what has given him an almost unique status across the religious communities, commanding the respect of Muslims and interdenominational Christians alike. It is also what has earned him disapprobation and gained him enemies, not only from extraneous religious movements, but from within his own branch of the Orthodox Church, the Church of Antioch. All this, together with conversations I had with family and friends in Lebanon, laid the foundations and led me into the notional idea of creating an intellectual and existential profile, which would inextricably interweave the man, his theology and philosophy.

The initial introduction took place in the winter of 2013. My intermediary, who set up this informal meeting, was the late George Sayegh, a member of the Orthodox Church—a delightful and gentle man, who was formerly head of the HR department at the American University of Beirut (AUB) where my wife worked both as a student and a graduate. George accompanied me to this first meeting, which was a relaxed affair. The conversation, as a result, was allowed to stray across a number of subject areas—mostly theological; and proved to be a helpful opportunity for Khodr and I to get to know each other.

Most interviews were limited to approximately an hour's duration, in deference to his age—he was almost ninety at the time—and consequential ability to concentrate; but additionally because I did not want to tire him and thus make him reluctant to engage in subsequent talks. Active, in his role as a bishop, as a thinker—he was still contributing a weekly column to *An-Nahar* (a respected national newspaper in Lebanon)—and as a leading figure in the religious and administrative body of the church, he remained possessed of a lively

mind. However, with a monastic past, there was a sense of distance about him, and in his diurnal routine there remained protracted periods of self-isolation. There were silences when, as an interlocutor, I was not certain whether he intended to respond to a comment or question, or whether he did not consider the comment or question worthy of response. Khodr's first language is Arabic, but he is fluent in French and his competence in English cannot be doubted. So it was also difficult to distinguish between a natural pause and a competency that was prey perhaps not only to the deleterious effects of the ageing process, but lack of practice in speaking English. Furthermore, there was his hearing, which was enhanced, at least during the first interviews in January 2013, by hearing-aids. Finally, there was the tone of his voice. Like a lot of elderly people, the voice can lose its power of projection and become cracked; in addition, the modulation can become uneven. As a result, understanding some of his words was occasionally difficult, while listening to the recordings of our discussion often required replays to ascertain the gist of what he was saying. My wife was especially helpful in this regard.

Historical Background

The latter half of the 19th century proved an auspicious time for the Church of Antioch and for Arabism. Intellectuals within this Arab renaissance called for freedom not only from the Ottoman yoke, but from westernisation in general, and from missionising and colonialism in particular—extraneous influences that gnawed at the foundations of Orthodoxy. Indeed, following the First World War, the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire, and the concomitant territorial appropriation by western powers, a new wave of missionaries came on the coat-tails of these occupiers and engaged in routine proselytising, vitiating Orthodoxy's presence. This, it could be argued, was seen as an extension of colonialism and fomented resentment amongst some of the indigenous population.[1]

1 Ignatius IV describes the relationship of the church with the west as 'one of conflict when the western confessions sent us missionaries who ignored our identity and worked to detach individuals or groups from our Church.' (Ignatius IV, 'Introduction to the translation of Cardinal Ratzinger's book, "Entrance into

These were not the first western missions to the region. Both Protestants and Catholics had come to the Near East, in particular to Lebanon, prior to the First World War, but the influx of Protestant missionary movements in the 19th century tended to be seen as something of a threat to the sense of community and identity.[2] It has also been said that Protestantism deliberately targeted the Orthodox, having successfully proselytised neither the Jews and Muslims of Palestine, nor Christians of other denominations.[3]

Georges Khodr was born into a family of modest social status on 6 July 1923, in Harat El Nasarah, Tripoli, North Lebanon, when the country was under the French mandate. After attending school locally, he went to Beirut to study law at the University of St Joseph, a new location that may have opened his eyes to a wider world. At the age of twenty, he was part of a peaceful demonstration protesting against colonialism and witnessed French troops open fire, killing some of his friends. It was a defining moment. Interestingly, however, it did

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Christian faith", Lebanon 1994', in *Orthodoxy and the Issues of Our Time*, Tripoli: 2007, p. 25.) This thinly veiled antipathy towards Rome has long roots that are many hundreds of years deep. The schismatic fractures, which are well documented, may have appeared prior to 1054, but, arguably, the bitterness of Europe's Reformation curdled the relationship between the Latin West and Eastern Orthodoxy even further when Protestantism courted Christianity's ancient churches in the east for support against Rome. Whatever divisive relationship existed before may have been greatly soured by this politicking. See, for example, M B Cunningham and E Theokritoff, 'Who Are The Orthodox Christians? A historical introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, M B Cunningham and E Theokritoff (eds), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 9-10. MacCulloch suggests that division occurred two hundred years or so before 1054. The arguments of the 8th and 9th centuries, he says, 'led to realignment ... (and) Orthodox Christianity.' D MacCulloch, *Silence. A Christian History* (London: Allen Lane, 2013), p. 108.

2 See Sammak, who believes that '(foreign) intervention ... used minorities during the dark ages of misunderstanding and misinterpretation of Islam and its teachings, in order to fulfil the ambition of conquering and dominating the Middle East.' An example, perhaps, of divide and rule. M Sammak, 'Religion and Politics: The Case for Lebanon', in *Religion between Violence and Reconciliation*, T Scheffler (ed.) (Beirut: Ergon Verlag Würzburg In Kommission, 2002), p. 540.

3 M F Wehbe, 'The Rise, Development, and Stability of the Orthodox Youth Movement', MA Thesis, the American University of Beirut, 1981, p. 13. See also Steve Runciman. Referring to the church as 'the poorest of the Patriarchs', he goes on to say that it was subject to 'depredations by Protestant missionaries, mostly American, who, failing to make any impact on the Muslims, turned their attention to the local Christians.' S Runciman, *The Orthodox Churches and The Secular State* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 77.

not engender anti-French sentiments—Khodr is emphatic on this point—nor sever the cultural ties he felt he had with France, for in 1947 he enrolled as a student at the St Sergius Theological Institute in Paris. What this single epistemic rupture did achieve, however, was to implant a hatred of power however it is manifested. It was within this crucible of colonialism, inchoate independence and religious hegemony that Khodr's religio-philosophical perspective was formed.

In 1952, following his time in Paris, he returned to Lebanon and took monastic vows, but was persuaded by the then patriarch, Alexandros Tahhan, to become a parish priest[4] and was ordained in 1954.[5] Alongside his spiritual responsibilities he worked as a teacher in Islamic philosophy and pastoral theology;[6] and in 1970, he was appointed Metropolitan Bishop of Byblos and Botrys.

But no history of the Antiochian Orthodox Church would be complete without taking into account the extent to which the Orthodox Youth Movement (OYM) transformed Orthodoxy from a subjugated and ineffectual Christian denomination into a proud, vibrant and meaningful spiritual movement. As one of its main architects, Khodr played a leading role.

The First Tranche of Interviews

Following the introductory meeting, the fieldwork, with just Khodr and myself, began in earnest in January 2013, but could still be described in its early stages as somewhat exploratory.

It is widely recognised that the Orthodox Church has, in recent years, been associated with a brand of nationalism. It is something Khodr himself acknowledges. In these first interviews, he talked about the church and how it is perceived in Lebanon, claiming that Lebanese people want the patriarch to be powerful, the reason being, as they see it, that the church can thus create a channel through which the people can have access to the state. This was clearly antithetical to his personal views, but it led to another issue: hosw people construe their religious identity. Khodr claimed Régis Debray, the French intellectual and

4 Wehbe, p. 46.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.

academic, said that he belonged to a Catholic culture but had no faith, something Khodr couldn't understand. To identify even obliquely with a religious faith, but then to have no faith is, for him, tantamount to confusion verging on illogicality. He used his consternation to direct a critical eye on his own congregants, saying that some fall short of regular observance. They always find an excuse: they haven't got time or they don't like the bishop. Although this was a serious point made in a seemingly light-hearted way, it was a spotlight on what, he would argue, were the occasional absurdities of life. Another character trait is his propensity for generalisation. You will not find, he said to me in the same interview, a single Arab who does not believe in a Creator. While most probably untrue, it is certainly unverifiable; but it is said to make a point.

When asked what Debray had meant by saying he belonged to a Catholic culture even though he had no faith, Khodr recalled a visit to Lebanon made by the writer André Gide, whom he met. Gide gave a lecture, in which he said that French literature was like a boat on a river, one bank representing Christianity, the other atheism. The boat drifts between the two banks, sometimes closer to one bank than the other. Expatiating on this image, Khodr said that sometimes French writers affirm Christ, sometimes they deny him, but they are never indifferent.

Khodr believes there are fundamental dissimilarities between the eastern church and the western church, and in the discussion, he delineated what he saw as one such difference. While the west focuses on the tragic and terrifying summation of Jesus' ministry, culminating in the psychological agony of Gethsemane and the brutal reality of Golgotha—the beautiful yet sombre musical narration of Bach's Passions is testament to the west's preoccupation with this solemnity and sobriety—he stated that the eastern church shows less interest in the sufferings of Christ. Suffering, he insisted, is a path to resurrection. The latter, it is argued, suggests a Christian perspective that is somewhat existential in a religio-philosophical capacity—existential not just because of Christ's spiritual and psychological agony in Gethsemane, but as a tacit acknowledgement that existence *per se* is an experience inextricably bound to suffering. It is also a perspective that differs, at least in part and by way of nuance, from the western church's understanding of the Easter story. However, far from giving

an insensitive gloss to suffering, this eastern interpretation offers a way forward through the pain of existence towards a resurrection, a personal salvation.

In the light of this different emphasis, he was asked whether he agreed that 'Truth' is a constant, unchanging, but that its exposition changes depending on the people to whom one is talking. He gave an example: 'how do you present the reality—the depths I mean—of the crucifixion of the Lord?' In the west, said Khodr, there is an emphasis on redemption, of abolishing sin. In the eastern church, it is not only about this, but about the giving of new life through the Resurrection.

Remaining on the same topic, it was suggested to him that in general Christianity, as a conduit through which people experience God, is a suffering religion. In general he concurred, but broadened the experience or knowledge of God by citing Origen, who, according to Khodr, advanced the notion that sin is a way of knowing God profoundly—'if you repent of course', he added.

One theme in our discussions was the role of the Orthodox clergy in Lebanon. He was concerned, at the time of writing his book[7]—and it appears he has not modified his views—that clergy, including bishops, too often ingratiate themselves with the rich and powerful; and they justify this by saying the church itself has to be rich and powerful. To his mind, this entices them into political milieux and worldly ways, and endues him with a conviction that the church, his church, belongs more to the world. Presented with an alternative reality that places money at the cornerstone of modern social practice and the facilitator of 'deals', he agreed. Have they become corrupted then, he was asked? His reply was unhesitating. Yes, yes. As an emollient, he added that when they started as young priests or even young bishops they would have had good intentions. He was similarly critical of the laity. 'I know,' he said, 'people in my church who ... buil[t] churches and houses for the church and will give money ... and who believe they are Christians because they don't murder or commit adultery. They are happy about themselves.' If, he seemed to indicate, you discuss their actions and judge their lives according to the law—and by this he meant biblical

7 *The Ways of Childhood*, written in Arabic in the 1970s and published in English in 2016, G Khodr, *The Ways of Childhood*, Nuha Nurayj (trans.) (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2016). It is widely acknowledged that the novel is a thinly veiled personal memoir, reflecting his own life and thoughts.

law—then it can look like they are indeed Christians. 'But of course this is the Mosaic understanding ... and they are nothing.' This was a withering remark in want of some qualification. Challenged that they are nonetheless good people, he wholeheartedly concurred. However, there is an odd if not chaffing fit between an empathetic view of people, who commit extraordinary acts of generosity, supposedly as an expression of their religiosity, and his spiritual rigidity, stemming from a fundamental Christic theology that spurns worldly values and brooks no compromise.

Trying to follow the direction of his thoughts and the rhythm of his speech is not always straightforward. Intelligent Lebanese Orthodox have said to me that while they have listened attentively to his sermons, they have no idea what he is talking about; something that is due in part perhaps to Khodr's gift as a visionary, one who is possessed of a 'poetic' way with words. A long-time friend of his told me that when Khodr talks he is only addressing a small number in the audience or congregation; a recognition of the fact that he is dealing with subject matter which is not to everyone's taste, and even if it were, it cannot be easily digested. It is also inevitable that his background and unworldliness naturally uncouple him from modernity. He is, to use modern parlance, out of sync with contemporary society and, although he accepts his irrevocable place in the world, he has no wish to be a part of it.

Power and money he sees as interconnected in a symbiotic and unhealthy entanglement. In Lebanon, to be affluent can be a door to influence in a socio-political dimension, whether in a personal or confessional capacity; as a consequence, it could be argued, money becomes an object of veneration. He cannot, he said, spiritually understand some of his parishioners who always want more money when he knows they have 'millions of dollars'. But then his monastic temperament has led him down a distinctly different pathway: an exploration of experiential religiosity and mystical spirituality. He said that monasticism signals to people in the world that the most important thing for a Christian in this life is to be united to God in Christ. With that in mind, he expatiated on this goal of (mystic) union with God by saying religion could be a 'temptation'. What he meant by this is that religion as commonly conceived and practised can instil a feeling of satisfaction, of 'job well done', when actually we might be

on the wrong path altogether. People might think one can engage with God through religious practice; or by using ideas and philosophical musings that can act as a channel to the numinous. This, he insisted, is not so much erroneous as a misconception. The true mystics of Islam, he said, teach us that one has to approach God in himself, not through theology. He then qualified this, stating very firmly that he is not against theology. 'I deal with it in my professional life.'

He proceeded at this juncture to push the point home. You can, he said, speak very eloquently about God in a lecture and imagine you are near God, but this is not always true. To speak of God is one thing, to know God is another.

Monasticism, it was suggested—and here the word encompasses nuns and monks—represents a pathway to theosis or deification, the union with God for which we should be striving. He responded to this by stating unequivocally that the difficulty with the spiritual life is that we do not know, we can never know, whether we are near God or not. It might, it was suggested, be the devil playing tricks, something with which he concurred. You can, he implied, do all the right things—you can pray, you can fast—and you can feel you are close to God, that you are receiving him, but it might not be true. This made faith sound an especially tough road, to which he replied, 'Yes, of course it's tough.'

It is this postlapsarian realism, no frills, no assurances, no comforting ritual, that gives Khodr's Christianity an existentialistic tone. It is almost as if he is bleeding his religiosity of any romantic veneer, purging it of sentimentality and saying that the pathway to God involves a relationship with the Divine that cannot be exercised or find adequate expression in the ritualistic routine of the church calendar. Faith as an experiential spirituality is a hard road to follow in a brutal world and demands our fullest commitment.

Islam and Mysticism

In the past, Khodr has said that the common ground between Christianity and Islam resides in the mystical experience.[8] But here he qualified the

8 See, for example, Avakian. 'Khodr regards the mystic tradition of both Christianity and Islam (the Sufi tradition) as the common ground between both religions.' S Avakian, *The 'Other' in Karl Rahner's Transcendental Theology and Georgess Khodr's Spiritual*

statement. While Sufis have a way to know God, Sufism itself does not represent orthodox Islam and in some schools of Islamic thought is repudiated. Khodr said that he had a conversation with a scholar of Islam from the American University of Beirut, who maintained that Muslims love God. Khodr disagreed. While accepting that 'very pure, very holy Muslims ... love God ... in doctrine ... there is no real link between God and Muslim souls.' Getting behind the words, it would seem Khodr is saying there is no personal relationship with God, which would be why Sufism is doctrinally adrift from the main body of Islam. He said that 'a Muslim soul does receive the knowledge of God from the Holy Scripture, the Qur'an. But the spiritual, mystical experience (of God abiding in your soul) ... does not exist in the Qur'an.' For Khodr, mystical experience, whereby one unites with God, may be part of the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of deification, but it does not fit with orthodox Islam. When asked whether he believed Muhammad had a mystical experience, he prevaricated, while believing Muhammad had a mystical experience prior to the revelation. But the general mood of the Qur'an, said Khodr, is not mystical, it is Jewish. You hear and you learn the word of God. By this, he means it is more juridical. He then added an observation that enlarged on his views about mysticism and Islam. 'Muslims in this country,' he continued, 'are against any expression which refers you to any kind of ... knowledge of God. They don't accept that at all. God does not dwell in your soul. You perceive him by mind. And then you believe. Now, what happens in the soul when you believe they don't speak of that. They don't like to philosophise.' As an exception to this, one can look to al-Hallaj,[9] who, as a Muslim experiencing the indwelling of God, declared *ana al-Haqq*—I am the Truth (God). Khodr said in a later discussion that al-Hallaj had created a new vision in Islam, a mystical vision of God, the union of the human being with God—in other words, theosis.

Expanding on the difference between eastern Christianity and Islam, Khodr declared that Muslims 'are afraid of pantheism.' He gave an account of a meeting he had with a prominent Shi'ite leader, Muhammad Mahdi Shams al-Din, scholar and leader of the Supreme Islamic Shī'a Council in Lebanon, (d. 2001), someone for whom he professed great respect. '(When) I spoke ... of God being in us he said

Theology within the Near Eastern Context (Frankfurt-am-Main: Peter Lang, 2012), p. 179.

9 Muslim mystic, executed in 922 CE.

this is pantheism ... This is impossible. He could not grasp ... that God could be in us without the confusion of natures.'

These may appear as blunt statements, but they represent perfect indicators of Khodr's openness: first, of his willingness to discuss aspects of theology with those from a different religious tradition; second, of his own uncompromising character. Towards the end of the same interview, we were again discussing monasticism and it prompted him to say he has nothing against marriage, adding that in the past he has said there are some married couples who are superior to some monks—at what was not made clear. But, he said, there is a temptation to adore the partner and marginalise God. 'Can a man love his wife, a deeply psychological love, and have the same love for God? Have you ever thought about that?' It was a question—and not a rhetorical one—directed at the interviewer, who answered by saying that on a subjective level these things can, arguably, be compartmentalised, but that English, normally overburdened with synonyms, is limited when it comes to love. This was a valuable exchange because it emphasised Khodr the man. While being perhaps opinionated on other matters, here was an issue on which some might venture to say he is not qualified to sermonise. Having never been married, having led a cloistered existence, he did not want to pontificate and was prepared to listen—'only married people can teach me'. So while he can make blistering judgements, he is sufficiently humble on those matters with which he has but a patchy acquaintance.

Second Tranche of Interviews

The latter tranche of interviews took place in October. We were scheduled for five meetings that would start on Monday and run through every morning until, and including, Friday. However, the Monday meeting had to be cancelled because he was tired after returning from Tripoli where he had spent the weekend, a regular trip he took most weeks. His tiredness was unsurprising for he was already a nonagenarian with an agenda sufficiently cluttered to challenge someone half his age. I was informed that I could compensate for the loss of Monday by coming in on the Saturday.

The first day of this second tranche did not go well. He was clearly still tired and I had been told that he sometimes had a disturbed night,

which has repercussions on his mood and ability to function. It was also noticeable that, unlike the previous meetings, he was not wearing hearing-aids. And on this first morning, there appeared to be more interruptions, mainly phone calls that might necessitate his going out of the office to follow up or to find someone to speak to the caller on his behalf.

There was an additional element. A senior member of the diocesan office told me she had almost sent me an email to advise against coming because he appeared to be mentally slowing up and the interviews might not yield as much as one would have liked. This first day, Tuesday, confirmed her reservations. I was doing a lot of the talking in order to elicit some reaction, while many of his responses were either monosyllabic or confined to a few words or a shrug of the shoulders. Listening to the recordings after a ten year gap, they did produce some interesting insights, but I was aware at the time that things had to improve in order to justify the exercise. A decision was reached whereby if he were the same on Wednesday, day two of this second tranche, I would try to get someone from the office to sit in on the conversation to facilitate communication and maybe inspire more fulsome replies.

The absence of hearing-aids, his fatigue, the linguistic divide were complicit in dictating a slow pace and called for much reiteration on my part. Nevertheless, a discussion was initiated to explore the difference between spirituality in the west and spirituality in the east, but it failed to achieve significant traction. Another approach was then attempted. Khodr is known for his interest in art, particularly the Impressionists whom he explored in Paris; and his propensity for writing in a poetic, almost abstract manner, betrays a love of poetry—he is especially fond of Adonis, the Syro-Lebanese poet; as a result, shifting the conversation on to more familiar territory seemed promising. A parallel was drawn between artistic expression and spirituality: both sometimes struggle to convey the essence of ethereal, nebulous and barely formed ideas. This too made little headway.

Later in this halting conversation, we managed to gain what might be called conversational *terra firma*, with Khodr making the point that knowledge of God means, synonymically, love of God. Referring to the apophatic, it was put to him that knowledge of God is limited because God is unknowable—*ipso facto*, love of God would also be

limited, although the latter point was not made. Divine remoteness, it was suggested, might be interpreted as somewhat disturbing in the sense that it is a disincentive to faith. Khodr parried this with the comment, 'God is always disturbing.'

Apophaticism and the unreachable God can give rise to the phenomenon of doubt, and it was to this that the discussion now turned. As'ad Khairallah, one of Khodr's old friends and a retired academic from AUB, had written about Khodr's moment of doubt when he was a young priest, and it was something that had been further explored in a personal meeting with him as part of my doctoral research.[10] While officiating at a mass, and at the moment he was consecrating the elements, Khodr had wondered whether transubstantiation had actually occurred. It had affected him quite profoundly and he was unable for two weeks to officiate. Clearly, he overcame his doubt; but when this account was presented to him during our discussion, he downplayed its importance, admitting no dislocation in his duties as a priest. He insisted he had never experienced serious doubt even if he had had some questioning thoughts when he was young. Asked to describe the nature of this doubt, he said it was of an intellectual nature. All this was a long time ago and whether or not he clearly remembered the event remains supposition, but the impression it left was of someone trying to rake over tracks in the sands. One thing that did emerge was his insistence that it was *intellectual* doubt about transubstantiation because this might explain why he is opposed, and why Orthodoxy in general is opposed, to the role of reason when it comes to analysing religiosity and religious faith.[11]

Reason, factual analyses, intellectual exegeses are not the stuff of Khodr's religiosity. He has an impressive intellect, but discounts it when he is dealing with theology. Indeed, he is uncomfortable about introducing the intellectual process into matters of religion, believing the microscope of rationality is not a fitting tool on the spiritual quest.

10 A E Khairallah, 'The Way of the Cross as a Way of Life: Metropolitan Georgess Khodr's Hope in Times of War', in *Religion between Violence and Reconciliation*, T Scheffler (ed.) (Beirut: Ergon Verlag Würzburg In Kommission, 2002), p. 484; and interview with As'ad Khairallah, the American University of Beirut, 28 October 2013.

11 In his novel, it is made clear that the protagonist (ostensibly Khodr) favours one of Bergson's core philosophical principles, whereby intuition is valued higher than intellect.

As a result, his writing and his discourses in general possess at times the tenor of poetry if only because the nature of what he is trying to communicate is mercurial, subject matter seen, as the Apostle said, through a glass darkly. They sometimes defy direct interpretation and require, ironically, an intellectual assessment or unpacking to discover what they might mean. Asked whether he thought his written work of the past had gone over people's heads, it was clear from his body language that this is precisely what he thinks. Earlier, he had made the remark, 'I don't think we think very profoundly,' although it was never established whom he was referring to: the Lebanese, Lebanese Orthodox, people in general? Did he think the job of the Christian is to shock people, or less dramatically, to make them think? In his reply, he strongly implied this was part of the role. A task some might think he has carried out with an excess of alacrity; and which may have soured others' opinion of him.

Considering the role of the OYM, it was suggested to him that the church may today be caught in a form of stasis, with people's spirituality deteriorating into a dutiful, lacklustre routine centred around ritual observance. Khodr agreed with this. Is there a need, it was then proposed, for the kind of spiritual revival the OYM initiated in the 1940s? He responded in the affirmative. The Orthodox Church, he said, 'needs new life.' Asked why there seemed to be no one to take up the challenge to revitalise the church in the same way as the OYM did in the 1940s, Khodr's reply was terse: 'No faith.' A bald, perhaps harsh comment, but one that chimes with the statement in his novel where he refers to the Lebanese as broken and lacking energy, incapable of visualising a bright new (spiritual) future.

Second Day

He was much more engaged when we met the following day. We started talking about his love of art—Gauguin, the Impressionists—and music, in particular, Wagner. We touched on the traumatic event in his life when he witnessed the killing of his friends and how it instilled an abomination of power. 'I hate power,' he said to me. 'To this present time.' He believes there is a concept of authority in Christianity, not of power. Perhaps it was his Christianity, combined with colonialism's

inculcated fealty, that, despite this despicable act, enabled him to become a student in Paris at the St Sergius Institute, a subject that we turned to on this second day.

This was the heyday of the Russian Orthodox émigrés in Paris and we touched on the intellectual or spiritual effect they may have had on him. In his comments, it became clear it was not so much a matter of being influenced by individual thinkers, many of whom were notable in theological and academic circles both within and without Orthodoxy; rather, it was the spiritual mindset of the Russian Orthodox, how it was so different from the French mind. Clearly, much could be attributed to the fact that Khodr and the Russian émigrés shared the common status of alien residents together with the same denominational Christianity, but there was an additional and significant distinction. '(The) Russians of Paris were particularly important for me because they were Europeans without being Westerners.' This statement represents a valuable insight into his persona. Not only do we have a self-avowed repudiation of power—being Orthodox, he said, he had an instinctive antipathy towards power and hierarchy[12]—but he reveals a distinct wariness of the west and westerners. Not *per se*, but in the modernity they represent and which, he feels they impose on the eastern world. This is clear in his autobiographical novel where he openly fears for the essence of Lebanon as the waves of cultural and technological innovations perpetually roll in from the west like unstoppable breakers. It is the corrupting influence he fears—modernisation at the expense of spirituality. He has written quite copiously and critically on modernity, even chastising women who, à la mode, wear scant clothing in hot weather. This may have less to do with the prudishness that comes with age and more to do with the gulf between himself and, at the time, a world that was being increasingly shaped by westernisation.

He expanded on this preference for the Russian mind, saying they (the Russian émigrés) were not brought up under the influence of Descartes. 'Although I studied this philosophy ... I did not like it. I don't like (the) rationalistic mind. If there is no poetry, there is nothing. Poetry could go together with truth of course, it is not only mere

12 In Khodr's mind, the French would have exemplified power.

imagination ... so for this reason I don't like the strict ... philosophical mind, a German mind. It is too rigid for me. My friends say even if I deal with a philosophical text ... or if I write a philosophical text, it is always combined with imagination or with heart. This is Orthodoxy,' he said laughing.

It cannot be overstated how important these statements are with regard to understanding Khodr and who he is. They are not only about his philosophical preferences, but hold a deeper meaning. They are evidence of a bifurcation in his mind: a poetic creativity vying with the intellectual discipline of formal philosophical process; and it reveals a psychological composite that informs both his spirituality and his Christianity. Later, he was asked whether to have a real, vibrant spirituality one has to be happy as a person. He replied no. It was then put to him that in his autobiographical novel there are moments of loneliness and darkness. Was he a lone figure? He humoured the questioner by replying, 'A peculiar figure'. The question itself arose out of consideration of his reputation for contumacy, controversial statements, and even contradiction, and the resultant polarisation of friends and enemies. His answer, though evasive, suggested that he was not unaware of his standing in the church and outside it, his use of the word 'peculiar' interpreted as a satirical twist, an admission that he is regarded as a rebel, and so also a kind of self-mocking. It is easy to see how the polarisation developed.

In an attempt to delineate his character more acutely, it was suggested to him that he was someone who ploughed a lone furrow; by way of illustration, comparisons were drawn with Bulgakov and al-Ghazali, people who disturbed the religio-philosophical *status quo*; and he was asked whether he felt there was a period in his youth, around the time he was making his mark, when he did not fit. Khodr replied that yes, he had felt misunderstood.

Day 3: The Concept of God

The following day discussions included a comparative study of Christian and Muslim notions of God. Khodr believes that Muslims have a great difficulty with the concept of God, going on to explain

that the Christian's love of God comes from our faith in Jesus. Did he mean by this that Jesus enables our love of God? Yes, he replied.

Returning to a previous theme, we readdressed his contention that for Christianity and Islam the meeting ground is mysticism. But what is mysticism? Khodr has no doubt—it is the love of God. This was now explored, using two famous examples: Teresa of Ávila and al-Hallaj. Khodr claims that some people believe she had Muslim forebears and not far back in her genealogy. Both had visionary experiences, but these would have been dissimilar owing to the different cultural and temporal contexts. Where then is the common ground? In the love of God, said Khodr. But, he said, Muslims are shocked by the very idea of our experience of God—qualifying this statement as his own personal view. Muslim thinkers who hate Sufism, he continued, believe Sufism itself to be what he described as a crypto-theology of incarnation.

He said he believes that the greatest aspect of Orthodoxy is the willingness of the Orthodox to speak openly about their encounter with God, whether it be on a personal or a communal level. But he does not think this is happening as much now as before. This may have something to do with his fear of the modern, western, world, and how it insinuates itself into every aspect of life. With regard to spirituality, he said that the Orthodox see monasticism as 'the normal way'. This might sound at odds with family life bearing in mind the rule of celibacy, but he then added that in the 4th century there was an anathema against those who thought celibacy was higher than, more superior to, married life.

The theme of personal encounters with God was fleshed out when Khodr referred to the icons that Orthodox Christians have in their home. This is an 'inviting in' of the spiritual, of the divine, into people's ordinary life, a witness to quotidian routine, a part of their homes—almost spiritual lodgers that are part of the family. The icons themselves, he said, sometimes represented the Theokratos or the patron saint of the family. He was asked whether these are ornamentation—it could be argued that they serve as part of a domestic sop to a religious tradition, a nationalistic acknowledgement of identity—or whether they are an active symbol of faith. He replied firmly that it is a matter of faith, that the people believe profoundly in the presence of icons. Not, he added, that they believe there is a miraculous element to them as some traditions maintain. He said he

had a professor of patristics when he was a student in Paris, a monk and a great scholar, who told them that no icon is a miracle on its own; it is only so if God wills it.

The Penultimate Day

It is worth noting that, as the days proceeded, he clearly became more used to me and to the process of interviewing, immersing himself in the discussions, and affected, sometimes even galvanized, by my interest and enthusiasm. An illustration of this was evident on the fourth, penultimate, session. We had finished the previous day's discussion on the subject of icons, and the next day, while things were being set up—writing-pad, pen, voice recorder—he came out with a statement. 'You know (there are] Anglicans who venerate icons.' Our meetings were in the mornings, so even though he had spent an afternoon involved in other matters before retiring to bed, his mind had clearly been turning over our previous discussion.

As much as he is against the rigidity of the 'German mind', Khodr's sense of calling or vocation for the religious life sounds more like Germanic duty than a *satori* or a burgeoning sense of God in the heart. He explained that being called to the religious life has little to do with 'personal feeling' or a 'sentimental ... feeling'; instead, one is called by the bishop. In other words, and according to Khodr, one is called to the sacerdotal pathway not by means of divine inspiration, or biblically summoned à la Samuel, but by bureaucratic appointment. Such a development is unlikely to evoke grand 'visions', a spiritual awakening; rather, it seems to suggest a practical step on the rung of a career ladder.

On a personal level, he said he had not decided on the church as a life for himself, even though he had felt he had the spiritual potential to be given to Christ either in the way of the priesthood or monasticism. But, he continued, at that time there was not a developed tradition of monasticism in the Orthodox Church. Monasticism as a concept had to be lived out in the parish community. Asked what it was that attracted him to monasticism he initially replied, 'the absolute'. More obliquely, he then referred to his French education and how they were told that to become a complete disciple of Christ meant having to

remain single. While celibacy is not required of the priesthood in the Orthodox Church, it was felt by Khodr and his contemporaries that Orthodox priests who remained celibate—they were few in number and, of those few, some had studied abroad—were more dedicated to Christ. 'I don't know why we had this feeling.'

Maybe longevity is responsible, but Khodr's view of the priesthood has descended from its idealistic heights to a more practical assessment; and, without question, he has definite notions about what constitutes the priestly function. Writing in 2012, he said a priest 'cannot consider that he is a shepherd for simply going to a family and asking about their health and their children's education: This represents merely social contact and not pastoral care because the latter should be based on God's words.' If the priest, he said, did not deliver holy words—such as verses from the Holy Book or from a life of a saint—and if he was not able to answer the questions people ask, 'this visit would be a waste of time ... Perhaps, someone among the brothers haven't *(sic)* heard this before and thought that the whole thing is about rituals.'[13] In his book, written much earlier, he is even more coruscating. He declares that to believe one must, like the martyr, have passion; and, like the martyr, the believer must be prepared to give blood. And what, he rhetorically asks, does one see in contemporary priests? If Christ were with us in person today, he would not be any more 'merciful than He was to the temple of Jerusalem when He purged it.'[14] The words are damning and the style classic Khodr. Returning to the more recent article he wrote in 2012, he said that if the priest's education is lacking, 'let him start studying for the first time. I have some priests that have become excellent after understanding this and recognizing that priesthood cannot be separated from fatigue.'[15] It is not difficult to appreciate why he cuts a seemingly contradictory and controversial figure. Earlier, it was noted how little he values intellectuality in spiritual matters; and the language he employs to get his points across is nothing if not provocative. As for controversy, just prior to the interviews, I spoke to someone, who was, at the time, an academic at the University of

13 Bishop Georges Khodr, 'The Priest, the Shepherd', Mark Najjar (trans.), in *Raiati*, 27 May 2012.

14 Unpublished translation of Khodr's autobiographical novel, 'The Pathway of Childhood', Nuha Jreije (trans.), 2011, p. 52.

15 Khodr, 'The Priest, the Shepherd'.

Balamand. He had known Khodr since he was a young man. I said it was common knowledge that Khodr had made enemies in his life, but was this still true? 'More than ever,' had been the reply.

Later, we came to a discussion about Christ, the God-man, and his psychological nature. It was suggested that, because the human condition can so often include feelings of despair, could we say that Jesus too suffered from despair? He rejected this. What about, he was then asked, the garden of Gethsemane where Christ was tormented by a range of human emotions. Again, Khodr rebutted the suggestion, preferring to say that he suffered and experienced solitude. Persevering with this exploration of Christ's psychological condition and supposing he experienced the whole gamut of human emotions, I asked him whether Jesus would have felt what many mystics, including Sufis, feel—that this world is not our home, that the apophatic God can feel remote, far way, unreachable, even disinterested in individual or collective experiential plight. Would it have been possible for Jesus to feel a sense of abandonment? At this point, Khodr contributed to the discussion with an unexpected suggestion. 'One could say, in a philosophical way if you like, that Jesus felt a kind of atheism. What is atheism?—abandonment by God.' Jesus, continued Khodr, would have felt alone in the world, abandoned by his Father.

Khodr is not alone in considering these theological speculations. Kallistos Ware, who was interviewed as part of my doctoral research, was surprised by Khodr's statement, but he himself has put forward similar ideas. In discussion, Ware referred to his own belief that Jesus, in Gethsemane, shared the very human experience of being 'cut off from God' and of losing hope,[16] which, arguably, means being alienated from God. Christ 'enters into', said Ware, 'the loss of God',[17] a view that apparently provokes a measure of upset. 'Some people in

16 Interview with Kallistos Ware, Oxford, 9 January 2017. Metropolitan Kallistos Ware (1932-2022) was a well-known and Eastern Orthodox pastor, scholar and writer. See also the obituary of Robin Gibbons, 'Metropolitan Kallistos Ware', *Living Stones Yearbook 2022, History, Theology, Dialogue, Spirituality: Challenges to Christianity in the Middle East*, pp. xxii-xxv.

17 Interview with Kallistos Ware, Oxford, 9 January 2017. Here, he adds, he is 'drawing more on certain modern theologians rather than the Greek fathers.' See also Zacharias, who maps a three stage progression along the spiritual pathway, the second stage being utter despair at God's 'absence'. (Archimandrite Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, Pennsylvania: Mount Thabor Publishing, 2012, pp. 46-8.)

the Orthodox Church are not very happy about that approach.'[18] A point that illustrates how Khodr's personal theological views can court controversy, and goes some way to explaining why he is often relegated to the margins by mainstream ecclesiology and religious convention.

Khodr's reputation for pushing at barriers was very apparent in his presiding role during the formation of the Orthodox Youth Movement. Asked what he considered were the OYM's main achievements, he replied that the church was traditionally a church of lay people, but that this had been superseded by clerical hierarchy. It was his assertion that this was part of the reason why the priesthood felt the church was a career rather than a calling, something of which he disapproved.

This would seem not to fit easily with his earlier claim that a priestly vocation, rather than a calling, was actually a response to a duty-based summons, which, arguably, sails dangerously close to bracketing it with a career plan. But this apparent *volte face* only serves to encapsulate one of his character traits—that of apparent contradiction. However, rather than countering what he had previously said, it may be nearer the mark to interpret his meaning of a 'calling', not as a romanticised religious fillip, but as a progression in a series of logical steps along a spiritual pathway. He would certainly have disapproved of any notion that the church should ever act as a framework for careerist ambitions; and it was this that the OYM had addressed to reset the balance. Their action helped Orthodoxy to become once again a church of highly spiritualised laity, bringing the people and the priesthood together into some kind of symbiotic nexus, both in terms of spirituality and administrative praxis.

As alluded to previously, Khodr often talks and writes in an oblique or elliptical way, hence the comments of some who say they cannot understand him or follow his train of thought. In the book, he makes a reference to 'the Christ who is of their generation'[19] and I asked him to elucidate. He referred to the 'pious generation', those of the Orthodox Church in his early life, who focused on the liturgy—and not always, as Khodr would have it, understanding it very profoundly—at the cost, he believes, of losing the face of Christ, what he called the 'personal Christ'. This, he said to me, is the temptation of Orthodoxy; meaning,

18 Interview with Kallistos Ware, Oxford, 9 January 2017.
19 'The Pathway of Childhood', Nuha, p. 47.

it can cause one to be so immersed in the liturgy, so preoccupied with the written word and concomitant ritual that one overlooks the core of Christianity. He felt that they were rigid, formalistic; they did not understand. By this, two possible inferences can be discerned; first, that they were not very skilled in biblical exposition or in intellectually deciphering the nuances embedded in text; second, they did not realise their error of concentrating on formalised worship and an almost scholastic approach to faith, which occluded an experiential spirituality that focuses on the quintessence of Christianity, Jesus. His generation, on the other hand, experienced Christ 'as a living person—or even that he was life'. Such views, as expressed, would have set him at odds with those of the 'pious generation' and with anyone who shared their religiosity and cleaved to their tradition.

Final Official Meeting

Over the course of my time with Khodr, I felt that something of a relationship had been established, one that was rooted in a growing fascination with him as a person. In his presence, one can detect an intense spirituality interwoven with a distinct Christian *agape*, one that is tempered by his contrary character, personal singularity and aloneness. There is also an insularity that stems from a sense of not belonging to this world, of being his own man. This is peculiarly at odds with a worldly position that has required him over the years to engage with people of every stripe. But then he is a man of contradictions. For all his intemperate views, which would aggrieve many in modern society, he exudes a kind of charism; for all his unstinting love for humanity, there is a strictness and conformity that might be judged old fashioned, even reactionary.

It is not unusual for theologians, members of the priesthood, to be interested in poetry—the example of Rowan Williams is ample testament to this—but whereas others might opt for a poetic conduit to convey a specific theme at a particular time, Khodr's mind seems almost perpetually riveted to a poetic mode of expression. He enwraps his religio-philosophical religiosity in a poetic filigree of words, a reason perhaps why many people appear not to grasp the essential meaning of his discourse. This harks back to what the old friend had said—that

when he speaks in public or writes for public consumption, he is really only communicating with a handful of people. This detachment and his convoluted way of expressing himself is because his whole existence has been about dealing and living with intangibles.

On this final day, we returned to his contention that there are dissimilarities between the east and the west. Being born and brought up under the influence of French colonialism gave him something of a vantage point to compare the respective psyches of east and west, particularly with regard to spirituality; but it also instilled a significant degree of loyalty towards France. The French, he said, initiated a field of study called religious philosophy, believing that Christianity, or any religion, could be treated to philosophical enquiry. Whether they were in fact the first in the field is not at issue here. Bearing in mind Khodr's discomfort with formal academic theology, this would have grated with his own personal spirituality. 'I am certain that, what attracts me the most in Christianity is not the theology, but the sanctity.'[20] Later, and in direct reference to the saints, he wrote in the same article that, 'Because of them, I have closed all the books.'[21] Spirituality is more true for him when it is practised with total immersion, ungilded by intellectual theorising.

Khodr is a very easy man to talk to and is happy to discuss matters in general, but he sees little point in ecumenical dialogue, the gulf being, by his estimation, unbridgeable. What, he was asked again, about dialogue between Christians and Muslims? We had earlier touched on the existence of common ground, that of mysticism, but he now came back with an emphatic statement about Islam's fear of mystical experience. 'You see, they fear mysticism—because they imagine that this would lead to the idea of incarnation ... God is man, man is God. They always fear a true connection between God and man—an encounter.' This is not to say he underplays Muslim faith or practises a religious exclusivism. His own conviction is that God works through the Holy Spirit and can reach us without going through Christ. This leads him into an unusual declaration. He believes—and, as he expressed it, 'sincerely believes'—that, because God works through the Holy Spirit, bypassing the Son, 'a Muslim

20 G Khodr, 'The Saints', Father Symeon Abou Haidar (trans.), in *An-Nahar*, 9 January 1999.
21 Ibid.

may be a member of the church.' This may be so even if Jesus, for a Muslim, is nonetheless merely mortal. In other words, Jesus can be *with* Muslims even if he is not *in* them. 'This', said Khodr, 'is very far from Islam. To be in man is something they don't like because it implies incarnation.'

His reference to an encounter with God is connected to his belief that we are all destined for theosis or deification, a central tenet of the Eastern Orthodox Church. We are more than human and, as it is said, God became man in Jesus Christ, so man could become God. This, like experiential mysticism, is contrary to Sunni Islamic theology, and it was the example of al-Hallaj that prompted Khodr to say that Hallaj believed in deification without using the word. Here perhaps is evidence of the bridge or common ground that is arguably shared by Christianity and Islam; but equally it places this common ground in areas of religiosity where only radicals—like al-Hallaj, like Khodr—can embed their experiential encounter with God.

Theosis and sinning were brought into the conversation and led to a rich vein of speculation. It was suggested that if humankind's destiny is theosis, we could be said to be trying, in our earthly life, to retrace our steps after the Fall, and that adversity is a continuing lesson to help us redefine or strengthen our spirituality. In other words, God strews our path with challenges or obstacles, so sinning is almost inevitable; but this too may be part of the learning process on our pathway to theosis. Khodr took his time to respond to this, choosing his words with care. He said that his own conviction—and he claimed this stems from the Fathers—'is that sin, if you repent, makes your faith clearer or stronger,' and you understand more deeply. He immediately qualified this by saying, with laughter in his voice, that this does not mean you *have* to sin. And he later compounded the point by saying that it is, 'amazing how truth reaches us through sins and difficulties.'

Almost the final comment he made was a pensive reflection on the state of the church and it is tempting to wonder whether he would have felt comfortable making this declaration in the earlier stages of the interviews and of our acquaintanceship. It is a terrible thing, he said, for the intelligent Orthodox to see the gap between Orthodoxy as an idea and the situation in the church, 'how this wonderful church in principle is so weak ... perhaps all churches are weak.'

This concluding remark captures much of what makes Khodr the person. Many people, particularly those in positions of ecclesiastical power, are willing to compromise, to a certain degree, with the world for the sake of maintaining a harmonious juxtaposition of the spiritual with the secular. Their argument might be that this is how 'business' gets done, this is how the church maintains a foothold in a world of secular materialism, little given to spiritual concerns and only tolerating a religious presence so long as it is subordinated to political and social considerations. In the midst of this 'reality', Khodr remains steadfastly not of this world, opposed to modernity, dismissive of many contemporary liberal values that are taken for granted, an embodiment of insouciance in the face of accusations, implied or explicit, that he is a reactionary cleric out of touch with modern life.

Reading the rough transcripts made of each session and listening to the interviews, one is struck by the increasing ease of the flow as we progressed through the days, seven in all, the initial two days separated from the latter five by nine months. This may be attributed to my growing sense of comfort and confidence in the direction of the journey we were on, and to the possibility that Khodr himself had got used to me and thus responded more fluently. In short, a relationship was being established and, in the end, had established itself. He has a reputation for prickliness, evidence perhaps of a strong determination to hold his ground despite his unpopularity in some quarters of the church. As the scholar recounted earlier, he continues to recruit enemies well into old age. 'Khodr is very controversial in his way of thinking,' said the same source, 'in his way of understanding the church, and in his way of acting as a bishop.' He went on to suggest that Khodr has 'some Marcionist tendencies ... in his way of understanding the relationship between (the] Old and New Testaments.'[22] Together with Khodr's reference to Jesus' fleeting bout of atheism in the garden of Gethsemane, all this could place him in an uncomfortable position of having his own religious perspectives categorised alongside sundry heterodox views of the 2nd and 3rd centuries. But this would be to misunderstand someone who is conventional in his theological foundations and in his beliefs, which are in accordance with approved

22 Interview conducted, University of Balamand, 29 October 2013.

Orthodox dogma. However, what all this does do is point to a man who lives a passionate, uncompromising commitment to Christ and to Christianity. As such, and because of his character as a person, he has an intrinsic *modus operandi* whereby he continues to say what he thinks, courting controversy, risking unpopularity. And he continues to be misunderstood, perhaps because sometimes the theological insights he conveys and the type of Christianity he espouses go over the heads of the majority of people who hear or read him. But the radical side of his character is not linked to his essential theology; it is identified more with his intolerance of power whether it be ecclesiastical, political, social position, or wealth. In that sense he is very much in the mould of some of the *soi disant* heretics of the 3rd and 4th century. He is the Old Testament prophet made manifest in a multi-confessional Middle Eastern country, situated in a region of the world where swathes of Christians feel under threat. They are struggling to survive only because their *identity*, not their religiosity, is Christian. Is his brand of spirituality out of kilter with the reality Christians throughout the region are facing today? Is his Christianity, with its inflexible tenets, out of tune with the world at large?

After extended time with him, one came away with the impression that, whilst possessing a love for God's creation and for his creatures, Khodr cares little about what the world thinks. He is, and remains, an independent thinker, an organisational non-conformist and a quintessential religious Outsider.

ISAAC OF NINEVEH, JOHN OF DALYATHA: A DIALOGUE BETWEEN EASTERN AND WESTERN SPIRITUALITY[1]

Antoine Audo SJ

What do we mean by eastern spirituality? Truth to tell, it is a broad question which first of all reminds us of the school of Antioch and the school of Alexandria, which each had their own theology and spirituality. Later, Constantinople, too, had its glory days, and its theological influence. From the 10th century onwards, eastern spirituality also includes the whole spiritual tradition which developed within the Orthodoxy of eastern Europe. The common denominator of eastern spirituality is, therefore, very broad and also includes the Armenian, Coptic and Syriac traditions, which had their own theological literature with theological authors and poets, and various liturgies.

In front of this great eastern monument, we need to find the door into the subject of spirituality. As I come from the Chaldean Church,[2] I would also like to talk to you about two famous mystics who came

1 Lecture given at The Centre for Eastern Christianity, Heythrop College, University of London in November 2009. An earlier version in French published as `Isaac de Ninive, Jean de Dalyatha et la spiritualité orientale', in *Mélanges en mémoire de Mgr. Néophytos Edelby (1920-1995),* Nagi Edelby and Pierre Masri (eds), Collection: Textes et Études sur l'Orient chrétien, Vol. 4, Beirut, Université St Joseph, CEDRAC, 2005, 43-62, and another version appeared in *One in Christ: A Catholic Ecumenical Review* (2010).

2 Antoine Audo, Chaldean Bishop of Aleppo Syria study is embedded in the theological and ecclesial culture of the Chaldean Catholic tradition. Audo situates his thinking in wider ranging reflection given at the Pontifical Oriental Institute (Rome): 'L'Eglise chaldéenne dans l'Eglise catholique d'aujourd'hui: Identité liturgique et communion universelle', Cesare Giraudo (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 (Rome: Orientalia Christiana Analecta, vol. 295, 2013), 101-112. The Chaldean Church is mainly based in Iraq but with communities across the Middle East, however, since the war of 2003 over half of its members now live outside the region, see A Audo SJ, 'Les chrétiens d'Iraq: Histoire et perspectives', *Études* , vol. 40, no. 8 (2008), 209-318.

from the Eastern Syriac tradition, sons of the eastern church, our church, who both lived during the 7th and 8th centuries: Isaac of Nineveh and John of Dalyatha.

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

With each writer I will proceed in four steps.

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

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

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

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

1 Isaac of Nineveh

Isaac of Nineveh lived at the end of the 7th century. He is one of the most renowned of the eastern mystics. His addresses were translated into Greek from the 9th century. We will examine two texts by this author.

Penitence leads to love of God.

Fear is the paternal cane which leads us to the spiritual Eden. When we have reached it, it leaves us and goes back. This Eden is the divine love in which the paradise of all things is found. Blessed Paul was fed with spiritual food, and after he had tasted of the spiritual tree, and after he had tasted of the Tree of Life which is planted there, he wrote, 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him' (1 Cor. 2.9 [American KJV]). Adam was deprived of this tree for having followed the devil's advice. This Tree of Life is God's love, this love which Adam was stripped of, and after that he did not know joy, but worked and toiled in the thorny earth. And those who are deprived of God's love still eat bread won by the sweat of their brows, even if they practise justice, as was commanded to the founder of our race (Gen. 3.19), when he was stripped of this love; and until we find it we will work in this thorny earth, and it is among the thorns that we will sow and reap, even if it is a harvest of justice. And all the time we are pricked, even though we are justified, and we live with sweat on our faces.

But as soon as we have found love, we eat a heavenly bread and we have painless sustenance without fatigue. And this heavenly bread is the bread 'which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world' (John 6.33). It is the food of the Angels. Whoever has found love eats Christ all the time, and thus becomes immortal; for 'whoever eats this bread will not taste death' (John 6.50). Happy are those who eat the bread of love, which is Jesus! Whoever feeds on love feeds on Christ who is the God above everything. John witnesses to this in his words: 'God is love' (1 John 4.16). So he breathes in the life-giving air, that air which the righteous will delight in at the Resurrection.

Love is the Kingdom which our Lord spoke about, when he mysteriously promised the Apostles that they would

eat in his Kingdom: 'You will eat and will drink at my table in my kingdom' (Lk. 22.30). What will they eat, if not love? Love can sustain human beings in place of food and drink—this is the Wine which gladdens the heart of man (Ps. 104.15). Happy are those who will drink of this Wine! It is the Wine of which the impure drank, and became chaste; sinners drank of it, and forgot the ways which made them stumble; drunkards have drunk of it, and become fasters; the rich have drunk of it and aspired to poverty; the poor have drunk of it and become rich in hope; the sick have drunk of it and been strengthened; the ignorant have drunk of it and become wise.

Just as one cannot cross the ocean without a boat or a ship, so no one, in the fear which leads to love, can cross the fetid sea which is between us and paradise. We cross it in the boat of penitence, which has oars of fear. But if they are not on the ship of penitence—this ship on which we cross the sea of this world to go towards God—we will sink in the fetid sea. Penitence is the ship; fear is its skipper, love is the divine port. Fear places us on the ship of penitence, makes us cross the fetid sea of this world, and leads us to the divine port which is love; and from there we look at all the crushing exhaustion of penitence. For as soon as we arrive at love, we have arrived near God, and our path has come to an end: we have crossed the sea and reached the island which is above the world, where the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are. To him be glory and honour, and may we be made worthy to fear him and love him. Amen.

1 Commentary

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

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

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

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

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

2 Interpretation

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

The author's thought is paradoxical, and constructed on a sort of exaggeration. For example, let's look at how he describes those who are deprived of God's love: 'they still eat bread won by the sweat of their brows, even if they practise justice', and 'until we find it we will work in this thorny earth, and it is among the thorns that we will sow and reap, even if it is a harvest of justice'; and 'all the time we are pricked, even though we are justified, and we live with sweat on our faces'.

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

The author says, 'But as soon as we have found love, we eat a heavenly bread and we have painless sustenance without fatigue.' Let us first of all note this rapid movement from one reality to another, and then the author says, 'Whoever has found love eats Christ all the time,' and thus becomes immortal; for 'whoever eats this bread will not taste death' (John 6.50). We might sooner expect an expression such as, whoever has found Christ will eat the heavenly bread; but the author surprises us by his form of expression.

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

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

3 A glance from western tradition

A. Ignatian spirituality

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

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

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

In *Spiritual Exercises* no. 231, St Ignatius, speaking about contemplation to obtain love, says that 'love consists in mutual communication', while Isaac of Nineveh speaks about the port where the ship is to arrive, or the island reached which is above the world. In St Ignatius' *Exercises*, before arriving at the end, '*Ad amorem*', we have to progress gradually in following Christ from the second to the fourth

week, with the choice/election as a powerful moment of commitment of freedom to follow Christ.

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

B. Carmelite spirituality

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

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

B Text 2

> The folly of love for Christ.
> Love, in its nature, is something burning, and when it falls, unlimited, on humanity, it makes the soul seem foolish, because the heart which feels it cannot contain it or tolerate it without a considerable and unusual change appearing in it. And the signs of this change are revealed by the heart in an obvious way: suddenly the face becomes red and joyful, the body warms up; the person rejects fear and shame and becomes as one with no sense of modesty; the ability to be level-headed is lost; impetuosity and agitation rule him. His own life, in comparison with the object of his affection, is now, in his own eyes, as nothing; this is why death itself, death which we fear more than anything, becomes almost a

sort of pleasure for him. And despite all this, his mental image is not divided by the exaltation which is in him, as though it were an imagined thing. If the object of his love is far away, it speaks to him as though it were close; if it is hidden from view, it is in the great mystery that he loses himself; what he sees comes from nature and rebels against sensory perception. He is inflamed in his actions as much as in his vision. He remains alone, but his thoughts speak as though he were with another; and he is struck by amazement.

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

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

1 Commentary

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

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

The author concludes this description with a short prayer to end, an indirect prayer in which God is not directly addressed, but named in the third person: 'May we be worthy to reach this folly from now, through the grace of the God we adore! Amen.'

As we have just seen, we have two paragraphs and a brief conclusion as a prayer.

Initially, we might say that we are at a purely human level. The symptoms of love are those of a creature smitten with the person he

or she loves. Note, further, the absence of any reference to Christ as the object of this love.

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

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

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

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

2 Interpretation

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

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

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

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

Death	is pleasure
Life	is nothing
Far away	is close
Order	is disorder
The wise man	is insane
The dignified man	is undignified

Without passion in the flesh

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

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

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

3 A glance from western tradition

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

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

A. Ignatian spirituality

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

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

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

B. Carmelite spirituality

In Carmelite spirituality, the theme of the transformation of the object of love is strong. The one who loves is changed into the one who is loved (Ascent, I, 4.67); it is also made inferior to the object of love (68). The spouse, Christ, demands that the soul resemble him by movements and acts of love, to the extent of transforming itself into him (Ascent, III, 13.341).

What is proper to love is the desire to be united, joined, to be equal to and to resemble that which is loved in order to perfect oneself in the good of love (Night, II, 13.594).

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

a large number of disciples to taste this experience, as we have already explained.

2 John of Dalyatha

John of Dalyatha lived in the 8th century, and was one of the great mystics, in his originality and his depth.

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

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

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

> Since, in fact, we believe that the venerable and ancient tradition of the Eastern Churches is an integral part of the heritage of Christ's Church, the first need for Catholics is to be familiar with that tradition, so as to be nourished by it and to encourage the process of unity in the best way possible for each.
> Our Eastern Catholic brothers and sisters are very conscious of being the living bearers of this tradition,

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

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

A Text 1

> Love and delight
> 'If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love', says the Word of God (John 15.10). As we advance on the path of the commandments, we remain in love, and by accomplishing them mercy brings us to the peaceful port of delight.
> But you say, 'Show me the difference that there is between love and delight'. Listen, my brother, to what I will tell you: Love itself reaches the holy perfection of delight, just as a small child reaches his perfect size. Whoever remains in the place of love, his work is to keep the commandments, and when he reaches their perfect observance, He who has given the commandments makes him the gift of his holy delight, daughter of those commandments whose father is love. And love's grand-daughter, delight, becomes the mother of those who are loved. The Lover of Delight is also called the Loved of Delight, that is, that he loves

with delight, and is loved by his own. Love, therefore, is granted to the one who is still in the place of keeping the commandments; it is the portion of servants, while delight is what sons share with their fathers, and fathers with their sons.

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

And from then on, it is with a free confidence that delight asks Him, 'Give me what was said by your Father', that is, 'So that they may be one in us' (John 17.21). From Your holy mouth delight has heard You say, 'My Father is your Father, my God is your God' (John 20.17). You have called us Your brothers: join us to You and to Your inheritance, making us God's heirs and co-heirs with Jesus Christ (Rom. 8.47).

1 Commentary

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

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

Love is the Father
Delight is the Son

But the daughter becomes the Mother of those who are loved.

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

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

Finally, whoever reaches perfection, delight, is bold: he has Jesus' very desire to be united with his Father. He discovers himself to be a true brother of Jesus: 'And from then on, it is with a free confidence that delight asks Him [note how the believer becomes delight, and the delight addresses Jesus], "Give me what was said by your Father", that is, "So that they may be one in us" (John 17.21).'

In his final paragraph, John of Dalyatha addresses Jesus without naming him: 'You have called us Your brothers: join us to You and to Your inheritance, making us God's heirs and co-heirs with Jesus Christ (Rom. 8.47).'

2 Interpretation

Here we are in the midst of that Christian tradition which tends towards communion with God. As expressed in the final prayer, this is about reaching filiation in Jesus Christ, through fidelity to the commandments. This is a movement of growth which goes from fidelity to the commandments to the gratuity of God's love. The double movement from purification to communion is part of the spiritual, and, particularly, the mystical tradition. Great spiritual authors talk

about the different stages of reaching the goal. Some mention three stages, others four, or even (St Teresa of Avila), seven.

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

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

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

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

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

3 A glance from western tradition

A. Ignatian spirituality

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

1. Throughout the *Spiritual Exercises*, there is an emphasis on the different weeks, and therefore on the different stages, before reaching the final *Ad Amorem*, which, in John of Dalyatha's language, is Delight. In other words, there is a progression, but without removing the breaks: sin is to be acknowledged in general and in a personal way, choice, personal taste, the creature with his creator, the giving of alms, food, the examination of conscience, etc.

2. A further aspect in Ignatian spirituality is that of personal determinism. The I looking at You, Christ. In John of Dalyatha, however, it is the axis of We which is emphasised with the image of the family—child, father, son, daughter, mother, grand-daughter, etc. The functions are mixed up and transformed, as we noted.

3. This individual 'I' supposes a choice. Man looking at Christ must choose and freedom is questioned and called to make a commitment. Faith is not about destiny but about personal freedom.

4. In Ignatian spirituality we have a focus on the reality of the incarnation of God's Word in history for the salvation of the world (the reign, the two standards). The symbolic axis, this attraction to the *Ad Amorem*, does not eliminate the axis of determinism in which human freedom is called to act; but, on the contrary, contingency is the place where the human decision affirms its freedom.

5. It is certain that John of Dalyatha's text begins with a question which the disciple asks his master, and ends with a prayer as 'We' which broadens the writer's experience to all the brothers, but this does not stop us from asking about the apostolic dimension of such an approach. Ignatian spirituality also tends towards communion with God, but towards a communion which is only realised in the here and now, in the world, with all.

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

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

B Text 2

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

> do for my friends; I love them in the same way as those who bind my wounds, and in the joy of my heart I cry: How I would like, if it were possible, every dumb creature to repeat themselves the mockery to which I am subjected and thus to become hated by every man, so that my anxieties should be cleaned by iniquity! How much must I thank the Doctor of souls because, before the wounds of my soul became infected and poisoned, he prepared dressings to heal them!
>
> To you be the glory, O true Doctor who, with your saving remedies, binds the wounds of those who have been struck! May the mercy of your grace be upon those who tell of the slander against me, and may the ablution which you sprinkle be on those accused of impurity! Amen.

1 Commentary

To a certain extent, this text is in the lyric literary genre. The writer talks about his soul intimately, as the psalmist often does: 'Why are you cast down my soul, why groan within me?' (Ps. 43). It seems that this merciful glance towards enemies is the response to a deep sadness which cannot only be healed by the grace of Christ himself.

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

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

The writer does not end with those who persecute him. He knows that through them, it is Jesus the Doctor of souls who wishes

to heal him. How can the sick man be healed if he does not know he is sick? His enemies therefore become his benefactors, leading him to the way of salvation, and John of Dalyatha asks for God's mercy on them.

2 Interpretation

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

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

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

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

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

This text is very strong in the vision of faith which it carries, and in the level of humility and confidence which it demands. John of Dalyatha is not afraid of being made to despair at the sight of his misery, nor is he humiliated by the fact that it is discovered by all.

He only considers a single goal—the healing given by Jesus, to him as to his enemies, He, the best and most merciful of doctors.

3 A glance from western tradition

A. Ignatian spirituality

In the *Spiritual Exercises* no. 98, St Ignatius asks the retreatant, at the end of the meditation, to make the following offering of himself:

> Eternal Lord of all things, I make my oblation with Thy favour and help, in presence of Thy infinite Goodness and in presence of Thy glorious Mother and of all the Saints of the heavenly Court; that I want and desire, and it is my deliberate determination, if only it be Thy greater service and praise, to imitate Thee in bearing all injuries and all abuse and all poverty of spirit, and actual poverty, too, if Thy most Holy Majesty wants to choose and receive me to such life and state.

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

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

B. Carmelite spirituality

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

faults than to hear all sorts of truth said about me.' (Ch 15)
2. At the start of the Madrid chapter, John of the Cross had prophesied that he would be 'thrown into a corner, like an old rag, an old cooking cloth'. This was in fact what happened and Mother Mary of the Incarnation wrote to him to tell him of her pain and indignation. John of the Cross wrote to Mother Mary of the Incarnation on 6 July 1591, 'As for me, daughter, do not be pained because this is not done to me. But when the fault is thrown on the one who is innocent, that pains me greatly. Because it is not men who do these things, but God who knows what is good for us and does everything for our good. Do not think otherwise than that God does all things. And where there is no love, give love, and you will receive love.'

Conclusion

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

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

The western genius has brought about rational dispute, and the secularisation of public life has taken on such a radical nature that *laïcité* has become sometimes negative and destructive. In theology, the Arian threat is often present in the west, refusing perfect divinity

to Christ and consequently reducing humanity to being only human, closed in by the determining factors of history and contingency. In a word, man is simply man, and the centre of himself.

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

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

ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE OF EASTERN CHRISTIANITY: A JOURNEY INTO WOMEN'S NARRATIVES

Grace Al-Zoughbi

As indigenous members of the first Christian communities, whether deaconesses, historians, theologians or martyrs, eastern Christian women articulated their faith and theology. By presenting a historical sketch through time, the purpose of this article is to illustrate the evolving presence of women in eastern Christianity. Many have gained wisdom, maturity and leadership positions, thus providing strong role models for those who come after them. As a prudent way to understand the context of eastern Christian women transmitting theological critical knowledge, dialoguing with eastern Christianity has brought me into conversation with women I would not otherwise have known. Consequently, I have become more conscious of women working within the Coptic and Maronite traditions, as the earliest expressions of Christianity, resulting in my becoming more cognisant of the presence of eastern Christianity and how that shapes our thinking as Protestant women.

Desert Mothers (4th-5th century)

As I observed the moon rise above the desert in the land where monasticism originally started as a lay movement by St Anthony (ca. 251–356),[1] it dawned on me that the monastic movement focused on a spirituality characterised by a sacrificial life. The desert fathers and mothers left a heritage of spiritual wisdom. They were approached

1 David A Michelson, 'The Rise and Contribution of Monasteries and Monasticism', in *Handbook of Christianity* (Langham, 2021), 375–386, p. 376.

for spiritual direction, counselling, and theological debates,[2] and thus viewed themselves as 'defenders of the true faith'.[3]

The desert mothers or *ammas* (from the original Syriac) were female Christian ascetics who inhabited the deserts of Egypt, Palestine and Syria in the 4th and 5th centuries in monastic communities or as hermits. They were leaders in communities of men and women,[4] 'seasoned in the ascetic life ... known to have reached a level of maturity and wisdom and had experience in teaching by example, exhortation, story and instruction.'[5]

A few names come to mind. Amma Syncletica of Alexandria (d. around 350 CE), became the leader of a community of women who desired to serve God.[6] As a spiritual guide to multiple women, her religious insights were so highly esteemed that Pope Athanasius the Great (d. 373 CE) wrote about the impact of her spiritual achievements.[7] Can her teachings and example of a deep prayer life seeking closeness to God be a model to women in developing a life of spirituality? Certainly. Amma Sarah, a native of Upper Egypt,[8] was known for her asceticism, courage, and spiritual teachings.[9] As a well-educated reader,[10] she was concerned that her heart would be fully upright in her pursuit of God.[11]Amma Theodora (295–412 CE), met the father of monasticism, St Anthony, multiple times and was a colleague of Archbishop Theophilus of Alexandria.[12] She was a renowned spiritual guide.[13] Though *ammas* desired solitude, they had relationships with

2 Laura Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers: Sayings, Lives, and Stories of Early Christian Women* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), p. 14.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., p. 7.
5 Ibid., p. 11.
6 Sally Hogg, *Invisible Women: A History of Women in the Church* (self-published, lulu.com, 2011), p. 68.
7 Nelly van Doorn-Harder, 'Mother Irini's Visions of Leadership: Pachomian Rule and Teaching of the Fathers', in *Copts in Modernity: Proceedings of the 5th International Symposium of Coptic Studies, Melbourne, 13–16 July 2018*, Elizabeth Agaiby, et al. (eds), Text and Studies in Eastern Christianity, Vol. 22 (Leiden et al.: International Symposium of Coptic Studies, Brill, 2021), 270–292, p. 281.
8 Swan, *The Forgotten*, p. 35.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., p. 36.
12 Ibid., p. 63.
13 Van Doorn-Harder, 'Mother', p. 281.

others such as colleagues, followers, and friends. Some were ordained deaconesses.[14] They did not see cultural norms for women as an obstacle to their call or in their pursuit of God.[15] *Ammas* were role models to their disciples as they set aside time each day for their studies and prayerful life. As Lucretia Vasilescu concludes: 'Their life was an impressive experience of the fervent search for God.'[16]

The core practices of desert mothers provide rich insights to modern-day Christians as they seek to be faithful in their spiritual lives in an intensely complex context like the Middle East. The monastic framework encourages the integration of spirituality and theology. At the foundation of the monastic life is a distinct way where the Word of God and spiritual disciplines are at the centre. It was through these times of solitude that desert mothers produced profound theological works, whereas the Middle East is currently marked by a paucity of these, particularly written by women.

Women in the Syriac tradition (4th-10th centuries)

Strolling down Star Street, I could spot the sanctuary of the Syriac Church of the Virgin Mary in the old city of Bethlehem. The voices of women's choir were unmistakable. From the outset, Syriac Christianity rendered women significant positions as widows, deaconesses, and consecrated virgins. Literary sources contain frequent references to deaconesses from the 5th century onwards and continues at least into the 10th century in both Western and Eastern Syriac Churches. In several of the earlier texts there are mentions of Covenantors—*Bnat Qyama*, 'Daughters of the Covenant'—alongside deaconesses. They were women who had taken vows of celibacy and simplicity, working in the service of Christ. Generally comprised of consecrated virgins, *Bnat Qyama*, Syriac women's choirs 'performed hymns that instructed the congregation on Bible, theology, and the life of the Christian community.'[17] These choirs expressed a 'significant teaching ministry

14 Swan, *The Forgotten*, p. 16.

15 Ibid., p. 18.

16 Lucretia Vasilescu, 'Desert Spirituality: Amma, a Spiritual Directress', <https://www.diacronia.ro/en/indexing/details/A233/pdf> [accessed 27/10/22]

17 Susan Ashbrook Harvey, 'Training the Women's Choir: Ascetic Practice and Liturgical Education in Late Antique Syriac Christianity' in Susan Ashbrook Harvey,

over some centuries' with evidence for their liturgical role traceable through at least the 9th century.

It is interesting that late antique Syriac sources refer to these choirs briefly, but distinctly. Jacob of Sarug (d. 521) mentions the women's choirs as '[female] teachers' (*malphanyatha*, in the feminine plural), whose singing declared the 'proclamation' (*karuzutha*, corresponding to the Greek *kerygma*) in the liturgy. 'He refers to them as singing "songs of praise", "with a serene sound". According to Jacob, the "pure" voices of these "pious" women sang "instructive melodies", with "soft tones" and "wonderful tunes" by which heresies were defeated and the truth gloriously performed.'[18] Further, Syriac sources on women ascetics indicate their ability 'to read scripture, hagiography, ascetic and theological literature ...', demonstrating a culture where women were concerned about theological education.

The debate over bringing back the position of deaconesses is also significant. The ministry of deaconesses is documented until at least the 11th century and possibly until the end of the Byzantine empire (1453).[19] Brock explains: 'Deaconesses exist in the sister Oriental Orthodox Churches, the Armenian and the Coptic Orthodox Churches, and in 2017 the Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria revived the female diaconate to meet the present-day needs of the church in Africa.'[20] Similar to the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Greek Orthodox Church has a tradition of the female diaconate that has been in discontinuity. For its revival, it is imperative to 'widen the role for the female diaconate, especially in the context of para-liturgical and non-liturgical activity.'[21]

Thomas Arentzen, Henrik Rydell Johnsén, Andreas Westergren (eds), *Wisdom on the Move: Late Antique Traditions in Multicultural Conversation: Essays in Honor of Samuel Rubenson* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 20–24.

18 Jacob of Sarug, *Homily on Ephrem*, vv. 152, 154 (ed. Amar), (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995), pp. 64–65.

19 Ibid.

20 Sebastian P Brock, 'Deaconesses in the Syriac Church', *One in Christ* 54, no. 1 (2020): 147–157, p. 157.

21 Ibid.

A Maronite Arab Woman (1720–1798)

Hindiyya's narrative is an extension of the debate on the role of women in the Syriac Church. It has been told by authors such as Avril Makhlouf,[22] Akram Khater,[23] and Bernard Heyberger.[24] They offer accounts of her life and contributions within the religious and political climate of 18th-century Lebanon.'About the year 1735 there was, in the neighbourhood of the Jesuit missionaries, a Maronite girl named Hendia, whose extraordinary way of life began to attract the attention of the people. She fasted, wore a hair-cloth, possessed the gift of tears; and in a word, had all the outward appearance of the ancient hermits, and soon acquired a similar reputation. Everybody considered her a model of piety.'[25]

Hindiyya was born to a Maronite family in Aleppo, Syria.[26] Hindiyya's religious practices began at a young age. She practised the oral prayer forms and disciplines such as fasting.[27] Hindiyya began to see herself as espoused to Christ.[28] Hindiyya unique determination to establish a religious congregation for women and men was an indication of her dedication to Christ. Hindiyya became known as foundress and mother superior of a group of monastic women. By 1753, her first convent was established with the majority of the sisters being from Aleppo. She eventually lived in three different places: Aleppo (Syria), Kisrawan, and Dlepta (Lebanon),[29] and founded four monasteries.

Hindiyya was unusually well-read in Arabic religious works.[30] She has a considerable collection of publications attributed to her in Arabic. According to Makhlouf, her writing exhibited more

22 Avril M Makhlouf, 'Hindiyya Anne 'Ajaymi and Her Spiritual Journey: The Essential Lightness of Being', *Journal of Syriac Studies* 4, no. 2 (2001, [2010]), 235–257; Avril M Makhlouf 'Umm Hindiyya's Syriac Heritage', *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, 56 no. 1 (2004), 211–223, <https://doi.org/10.2143/JECS.56.1.578703>.

23 Khater, *Divine*, 2011.

24 Bernard Heyberger, *Hindiyya, Mystic and Criminal (172–798): A Political and Religious Crisis in Lebanon* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2013).

25 Volney, *Voyage en Syrie et en Egypte, Pendant les années 1783, 1784 et 1785* (Paris: Mouton, 1959), 223–225, as cited by Heyberger, *Hindiyya*, p. 1.

26 Avril M Makhlouf, 'Three Christian Women of the Arab Orient: Rafqa, Mariam, Hindiyya', *One in Christ* 44, no. 2 (December 2010), 3–28, pp. 9–10.

27 Makhlouf, 'Hindiyya', p. 237.

28 Ibid., p. 238.

29 Ibid., p. 236.

30 Ibid., pp. 9–10.

theological thinking than those of any other Arab woman in her era and beyond.[31] Hindiyya's major work, which most directly relates to her spirituality, is *Sirr al-Ittihād* ('Mystery of the Union'). It is the first known Arabic account of a mystical experience between Jesus and a Christian woman of the Middle East.[32] Such documented experiences were rare for Arab women. Hindiyya's writings contributed to the treasury of scholarly theological resources. She wrote *Al-Durar al-Saniya* (Precious Jewels), a significant work of over four hundred pages including her one hundred counsels covering the main themes of religious life for her nuns,[33] authored and personally delivered between 1767 and 1775.[34]

The Maronite Church is not intentionally thinking about women and agency, but it has developed room to discuss the role of women. It has become more aware of historical figures—albeit controversial ones—such as Hindiyya which creates new space to be opened within the Maronite tradition for women to participate in the transmission of theological education.

Umminā Irini

Does it take western scholars to explore the voices of eastern women? Known as Umminā in Arabic or Tamav in Coptic, (our Mother) Irini (1936–2006) is a modern-day example of a desert mother who exhibited leadership as the mother superior of the convent of St Abu Saifein. She played a major role in the revival and reformation of Coptic monasticism for women. It is possible to learn about Mother Irini's teachings, visions and spiritual sufferings through the numerous resources her convent has published.[35] Researching her spirituality brings to light the power of creativity through her 'teachings and spiritual advice'.[36] Following her consecration as a nun on 26 October 1954, in a similar lifestyle to St Syncletica from the

31 Ibid., p. 238.
32 Ibid,, pp. 13–14.
33 Fr Toni Khoury, 'Al-Durar al-Saniya fi-Nasa'ih al-umm Hindiyyah' (MTh diss., University of Kaslik, Kaslik, Lebanon, 1999, in Arabic).
34 Makhlouf, 'Hindiyya', p. 249.
35 Van Doorn-Harder, 'Mother', p. 271.
36 Ibid., p. 276.

4th century, Mother Irini gave up her worldly treasures to pursue a path of poverty.[37]

Considered one of the revival leaders, particularly in relation to the monastic life for women, Mother Irini is well-known within Coptic circles. As a female leader within the Coptic revival, she is mentioned along with figures such as Pope Cyril VI (1959–1971) and Pope Shenouda (1971–2012). She was 'endowed with visionary and spiritual capacities' and employed her gifts to teach and guide her nuns as well as visitors who came to the monastery. Not only did she lead a life of prayer and have many visions,[38] but Mother Irini was also a gifted manager, with a leadership style guided by spiritual experiences.[39]

By enhancing the convent's library with publications about godly women, monastic and non-monastic, she expanded the space for women within the Coptic Church where men are usually the official representatives.[40] The revival and renewal in the Coptic Church which seemed to be centred on male monasticism has expanded with figures like Mother Irini. The religious renewal and revival of eastern churches, has in itself stimulated women to engage in theological thought within both a monastic and also an ecclesial context. This engagement has taken place in association with the growing involvement of women in the development of theology in the region and has advanced the domain of theological eduation.

And Today …

There are many growing voices from within eastern Christianity. The young scholar Dina Tarek has produced substantial works in both Biblical Studies and Spiritual Theology through the School of Alexandria Foundation, where she has space to publish and teach. Large numbers of men and women, laity and clergy, read her work. Donna

37 Heba Sharobeem, 'A Modern Desert Mother', *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 22 October 2008, <https://web.archive.org/web/20081022185624/http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2006/820/eg8.htm> [accessed 08/09/23].

38 Van Doorn-Harder, 'Mother', p. 271. Although there are many popular articles and books that outline the life of Mother Irini, many of these may exaggerate some aspects of her life or miracles.

39 Ibid..

40 Ibid.

Rizk Asdourian has research interests that include Coptic Orthodoxy, Armenian Studies, Liturgical Studies, and Women in the Church. A monastic of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Mother Louis Farag is a lecturer who wrote *St Cyril of Alexandria, A New Testament Exegete: His Commentary on the Gospel of John,* and *Balance of the Heart, Desert Spirituality of Twenty-First Century Christians*. I am inspired by eastern Christian women like Souraya Bechalany who was appointed to serve the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) as Secretary General in 2019 and Roula Talhouk, an Anthropologist and a Practical Theologian who continues to teach and supervise doctoral students at Saint Joseph University of Beirut.

Conclusion

As many women in the Middle East endure persecution, they are cognisant that their experience of suffering is vast. Nevertheless, such women are advancing ecclesial theology research. They are developing resources that are indispensable for the church. Ministry has become their identity, character and testimony. By being knowledgeable about Christianity in the Middle East, understanding Christian thought, writing on Christianity within its Islamic context, and conversing in the public square, women in the Middle East can contribute to strengthening Christians in the region, thus enhancing their spheres of influence The eastern Christian women movement is framed by a deep awareness of spirituality, whilst also powerfully proclaiming the *Kerygma* in the terrain where it first started.

PATRIARCH IGNATIUS EPHREM II RAHMANI (1898–1929)

Sebastian Brock

The Syrian Catholic Patriarch, Mar Ignatius Ephrem II Rahmani, was an outstanding figure of his generation: almost uniquely for his time, his name was well known to European scholars of his time, and indeed it remains so today, for quite a number of his publications in the field of Syriac studies have not yet been superseded, despite the great advances that have been made in Syriac scholarship since his day. The only other scholars from the churches of the Middle East who share this high reputation among western scholars are the 18th-century Joseph Shem'un Assemani and Rahmani's older contemporary, Paul Bedjan. I shall return to Patriarch Rahmani's scholarship below, but first it will be helpful to be reminded of the main details of his life.[1]

Born on 12 October 1848 in Mosul, he was educated at the famous Dominican seminary in Mosul, where his intellectual abilities were quickly realised. Like many bright students at that time, he was sent to Rome to continue his studies at the College of the de Propaganda Fidei. Back in the east, he was ordained on 12 April 1873. Appointed as chorepiscopos in 1980, he subsequently became titular bishop of Edessa in 1887, destined to play an important part in the Synod of Sharfet of 1888, whose documents he published, first in Latin, in Rome, 1896, and rather later, in 1922, in Arabic. In the years after the synod he was appointed Archbishop of Baghdad (1892) and then of

1 Much basic information can be found in A Rücker, 'Ignatius Ephraem II Rahmani', *Oriens Christianus* 25/26 (1930), pp. 279–82, and the notice, by J Madey, in F W and T Bautz, *Biographisch-bibliographische Kirchenlexikon*, VII (Herzberg: 1994), cols. 1269–71. An excellent general account is provided by Joelle Turc Dergham, 'Le Patriarch Ignace Éphrem II Rahmani (1848–1929): un érudit remarquable de l'Orient', in A Binggeli, F Briquel-Chatonnet, M Debié, Y Dergham, A Desreumaux, J Dib (eds), *Catalogue des manuscrits syriaques et garshuni du Patriarcat Syrien-Catholique de Charfet (Liban),* I. *Fonds Patriarcal (Rahmani) 1–125* (Dar'un-Harissa: 2021), 29–38.

Aleppo (1894). In the 1890s he made a number of journeys to Europe, in particular to Germany, and in 1893 he attended, and gave a lecture at, the Eucharistic Conference held in Jerusalem that year. After the death of Patriarch Mar Ignatius Kurillos Benni in 1897, Archbishop Rahmani, then aged 49, was elected patriarch in January 1898 at the Synod of Mardin. It will be recalled that this was only shortly after the massacres of 1895/6.

As patriarch he was extremely active in seeing to the building of new churches, schools, and orphanages. He re-established the printing houses in both Charfet and Beirut, making use of them for a number of his own publications. An important initiative was the establishment of a new women's order, the Sisters of St Ephrem (it was to be re-established by Patriarch Tappouni in 1958, since the lugubrious events during the First World War had brought it to an end for a time). No doubt due to the unsettled conditions in the eastern regions of the Ottoman Empire in the years before the World War broke out, Patriarch Rahmani, in 1911, moved the Syrian Catholic Patriarchate away from Mardin to Mosul, and thence, after the war had ended, to Beirut, preferring the French to the British Mandate.[2]

During the First World War Rahmani will have been based in Mosul, which was relatively unaffected by the massacres of 1915 and following years. Already on 11 October 1915 he wrote to Don Behnam Denha, the Syrian Catholic Vicarius in Constantinople reporting that the Syrian Catholics were being treated in the same way as the Armenians, and asking him to approach the authorities. Drop your other concerns, Rahmani goes on, and occupy yourself solely with our refugees. A week later he says that several of the individuals he had mentioned in his previous letter were now dead, and (I quote) 'Now our duty is to save those who have escaped the massacres.'[3] Further details of the fate of his flock in eastern Anatolia during those terrible times were given by Rahmani in a memorandum of 8 July 1919 to the Vatican's Secretary of State, a time when he himself was in Rome.[4]

2 For his close relations with the French authorities, see J Hajjar, *Le Vatican et le catholicisme oriental (1878-1914). Diplomatie et histoire de l'Église* (Paris: 1979), pp. 172–3 and especially pp. 377–84.

3 For the texts, see G-H Ruyssen SJ, *La Questione Armena,* IV (Rome: 2015), pp. 126–7.

4 Ruyssen, *La Questione Armena*, V, pp. 265–71. The Syrian Orthodox figures were given at much the same time by Patriarch Barsaum (then a bishop): these are set out in my *The Hidden Pearl: The Syrian Orthodox Church and its Ancient Aramaic Heritage*,

This gives a brief but informative summary of the massacres of 1915, diocese by diocese. At the end of the memorandum he mentions that he himself at an unspecified date had been arraigned before a court martial 'sous des futiles prétextes'. The same Vatican archives contain correspondence with Cardinal Gasparri in Rome in December 1921 and especially in the months of February and March 1924, the time of the hurried exodus from Urfa, ancient Edessa, of its considerable Christian population. In one of the letters Rahmani also details the harsh conditions imposed on Christians by the Governor of Mardin.[5]

Not surprisingly, there was a break in the flow of Rahmani's literary activity and publications during the years of the war. But before turning to take a look at these publications, one more outside event of his patriarchate is worth recalling. A schism in the Syrian Orthodox Church initiated in 1912 involved visits of both patriarchs to India, where a sizable portion of the Syriac Christian population of South India were under the jurisdiction of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch. The visit gave an opportunity for those in that community who wished to be independent of Antioch, and have their own catholicos. This indeed came about in 1912, when the deposed Patriarch Abdulmasih II consecrated Basileios Pawlos I as the first Catholicos of the Malankara Orthodox Church. It was also the case that a number of Syrian Orthodox bishops in India were interested to make contact with Rome, and were encouraged in this by Rahmani in letters of 1923 when he sent them copies of some of the liturgical books he had edited and published from the press at Charfet. This was the beginning of the movement that led to the creation of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church in 1930 under the leadership of Metropolitan Mar Ivanios.

Before turning to Rahmani's extensive publication activity, it is important to recall that it was due to his request to the Mairie of Paris that on 16 September 1925 the church in Paris which is now dedicated to St Ephrem le Syriaque was handed over the Mission Syrien Catholique en France.

I turn now to the editions of liturgical books prepared by Patriarch Rahmani. Over the course of the years he had amassed a fine collection of Syriac manuscripts, which now form the basis of the Fonds patriarcal

III (Rome: 2001), pp. 66–9.

5 Ruyssen, *La Questione Armena*, VII, pp.129–30, 137–9.

within the manuscript holdings of Charfet. Making good use of his collection of manuscripts, Rahmani undertook what turned out to be an impressive programme of publications of newly revised editions of liturgical books, spanning nearly a quarter of a century. He began with the *Shhimo*, that is the Ferial Breviary, with the weekday prayers, published at Charfet in 1902. The work quickly caught the attention of the famous German scholar of Syriac and Oriental liturgy, Anton Baumstark, who devoted no less than three articles to it in the periodical *Der Katholik*. This was followed in 1904 by an *Index of biblical Lections*, and in the following year by a new edition of the *Diaconale*; in preparing this he took the opportunity to incorporate and thus revive a number of forgotten texts. Three years later, 1907 saw the publication of the *Beth Gazo*, which provides the key verse texts for each of the eight tones. 1912 saw the publication of two further volumes, a bilingual *Gospel Lectionary,* Syriac and Garshuni (that is Arabic in Syriac script), and a Psalter. Not surprisingly the war put a halt to further publications of liturgical texts until 1922, a year which again saw the publication of two volumes, the *Rituale* (which had in fact been ready ever since 1914), and the *Missale*. These also caught the attention of a western liturgical scholar, A Rücker, who wrote a helpful article on them in the *Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft* for 1924.[6] The next volume, published the following year (1923) was a newly compiled collection of texts for the Feast of St Ephrem; the motivation for his doing this will be obvious, and as we shall shortly see, works by St Ephrem were among the many ancient Syriac texts that he published. To accompany the Gospel Lectionary of 1912, the Lectionary for the Acts and Epistles was published in 1925—running to over 450 pages! The last volume of liturgical texts that he published was, not inappropriately, the Burial Services; this came out in 1925. He had in fact intended to publish a Pontificale, with the various ordination services, but this never came to fruition, and the same was the fate of a projected Corpus of Syriac Anaphoras: this would have been a massive undertaking, given that the West Syriac liturgical tradition can boast some 75 or 80 different Anaphoras! None the less, Rahmani's record of publishing good editions of liturgical texts should be seen as truly impressive. Although his *Missale* of 1922 is not infrequently cited by western liturgical scholars (since it includes

6 Ibid., pp. 187–92.

the Syriac Anaphora of Basil, not to be found in any other printed edition), it is regrettable that not more attention has been paid to his other volumes. This is of course partly due to their rarity in western university libraries.

Besides actual liturgical texts for practical use Rahmani also published a number of Syriac documents of importance of the history of liturgy. Two are worth mentioning here. The first is a set of instructions, evidently dating from Late Antiquity describing how a visiting bishop should be received in his episcopal see.[7] From various topographic details that happen to be mentioned in passing, it may be that the town in question was Edessa. The second document is a short text outlining the baptismal and Eucharistic services, explaining the symbolism of the various actions. On internal evidence the work must go back to around 400 AD, thus constituting one of the oldest commentaries on the Liturgy in existence. The publication of this text is associated with a lecture he gave on 18 January 1920 at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome.[8] Surprisingly, this short text proved remarkably influential, leaving traces in all three Syriac ecclesiastical traditions, Chalcedonian, Syrian Orthodox and Church of the East, this last liturgical tradition being represented by a translation into Sogdian, an Iranian language employed by Christian communities in Central Asia in the early Middle Ages. In the Syrian Orthodox tradition it formed the basis for several subsequent liturgical commentaries, and a few years ago I had the good fortune to find another manuscript of the original commentary among the Syriac fragments in the Library of Deir al-Suryan in Egypt.

It is in fact due to his other academic publications, rather than his editions of liturgical texts, that Rahmani's name is a familiar one to western Syriacists, and it is to these that I now turn. Best known of his academic publications is his edition and Latin translation of a work of canon law known as the 'Testament of our Lord' *(Testamentum Domini nostri Iesu Christi)*, published in Mainz (German) in 1899. This Syriac

7 *Studia Syriaca* III (1908), pp. 1*–4*; an English translation, 'An episcopal *adventus* in Syriac', is forthcoming in a volume edited by E Vasilescu in honour of Metropolitan Kallistos Ware.

8 *I Fasti nella Chiesa Patriarcale Antiochena* (Rome: 1920), pp. x–xiii. It is re-edited, with an English translation in my 'An early Syriac Exposition of the Holy Mysteries', in A Andreopoulos and G Speake (eds), *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth. Studies in Honour of Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia* (Oxford/Bern: Peter Lang, 2016), 49–56.

work had been translated from Greek, but as the Greek original does not survive, the publication of the Syriac translation was an event of considerable academic significance. Apart from some articles, this was the first of only a few works that Rahmani published in Europe, another being an edition of the early martyrs of Edessa, Gurya and Shamoni, again furnished with a Latin translation and published this time in Rome (1899).[9] Once the printing press at Charfet had re-established it is not surprising that it proved much more practical and no doubt economic to publish from it, rather than from somewhere in Europe.

From 1904–1909 he edited a number of short but interesting texts, with Latin translations, in four volumes entitled *Studia Syriaca;* a fifth volume was printed but evidently never circulated: this was unfortunate since it contains the section on poetry from an important 9th-century work by Anton of Tagrit. In passing I might mention that, on a visit to Beirut many years ago, I was kindly presented with an unbound copy of this precious work.[10]

Although Rahmani usually based his editions of Syriac texts on manuscripts in his own library, or in eastern libraries, there was one important exception: this was his edition (1906) of St Ephrem's cycle of hymns under the general title of 'On virginity' *(De Virginitate)*, taken from Vatican Syriac 111.

Rahmani was the discoverer of the two most important medieval Syriac World Chronicles, the Chronicle of Patriarch Michael I (d. 1199), and the Anonymous Chronicle to the year 1234. Both are sources of very great importance for historians of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, especially the Crusader period. Already in 1894 Rahmani had announced his intention to publish the unique manuscript of Patriarch Michael's Chronicle, preserved in the Syrian Orthodox Church of St George in Edessa/Urfa, and in 1897 he had a transcript made of it. A couple of years later the French scholar, Jean-Baptiste Chabot, commissioned another copy, and over the years 1899–1923 he published a photographic edition of this

9 The interest of these early Edessene martyrdoms is shown by a number of European publications concerning it that appeared shortly after Rahmani's publication; an English translation can be found in F C Burkitt, *Euphemia and the Goth* (London: 1913), pp. 90–128.

10 The text has subsequently been re-edited, with an English translation, by J Watt, *The Fifth Book of the Rhetoric of Antony of Tagrit* (Leuven: Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Scriptores Syri, 1986, pp. 203–4).

copy with a French translation, thus putting an end to Patriarch Rahmani's own plans to publish it. In 1924, the precious original manuscript was one of the very few valuable objects that the Syrian Orthodox community of Edessa had been able to take with them on their hurried flight from Edessa to their new home in Aleppo. It was in 2008, when I happened to be present in Aleppo for a conference, that Archbishop Gregorios Hanna Ibrahim arranged with the

Mar Gregorios, Archbishop of Aleppo for the Syriac Orthodox, and Dr Sebastian Brock, Oriental Institute, University of Oxford, viewing the Chronicle of Michael the Great of the Syriac Church, Aleppo, June 2008. (Photo courtesy of Aziz Abdul-Nour)

Edessene community in Aleppo to have the manuscript digitized. This resulted in the photographic edition of the manuscript by Dr George Kiraz of the Gorgias Press in the USA (2009). As everyone will be all too aware, Mar Gregorios was kidnapped in April 2013 and his fate still remains unknown.

The other Chronicle, to the year 1234, was discovered by Patriarch Rahmani in the library of a priest in Constantinople and he published part of it in 1904; the complete edition, however, was again the work of Jean-Baptiste Chabot. The present location of the unique manuscript is unknown today: was it a victim, along with many other manuscripts, of the time of the massacres in 1915, or is there a chance it might still turn up in some private library somewhere? In any case, historians of Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages have good reason to be grateful to Patriarch Rahmani for his initial discovery of these two very important Chronicles.

I come now finally to Rahmani's major study of eastern liturgy, entitled *Les liturgies Orientales et Occidentales étudiées séparément et comparées entre elles.* Published in Beirut in 1929, the year of his death, this was an expansion of an earlier work written in Arabic and published in 1924. This is a pioneering work of comparative liturgy, an approach later taken up by Anton Baumstark in his famous and influential book, *La liturgie comparée* (1939, 3rd edition 1953), or (in the English translation of 1958) *Comparative Liturgy.* More recently this approach has been taken up by scholars associated with the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome, notably Fr Juan Mateos, Fr Robert Taft SJ and (more specifically on the oriental side) Professor Gabriele Winkler.

Patriarchs who are also active scholars constitute a rare phenomenon, but there were quite a number of precedents to be found in the line of Syriac patriarchs—Michael the Great, the manuscript of whose Chronicle Rahmani discovered, is just one. It so happens that Patriarch Rahmani's much younger contemporary, Aphram Barsaum, who was Patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church from 1933 to 1957, was an equally remarkable scholar, though much less known to western scholarship, at least until recently, thanks to the appearance of an English translation of his history of Syriac literature entitled *Scattered Pearls.*[11]

11 Published by the Gorgias Press (New Jersey) in 2003.

Finally, it would be interesting to know what role Rahmani played in the discussions that lay behind the promulgation by Pope Benedict XV in 1920 of St Ephrem as a Doctor of the Universal Church.

I hope that this short overview of the life and principle contributions of Patriarch Ignatius Ephrem Rahmani have given some idea of his remarkable achievements, very different in character from those of his likewise remarkable successor, Cardinal Patriarch Tappouni.

'WEAK' AND 'STRONG' COMMUNITIES UNDER THE FRENCH MANDATE: THE SYRIAC ORTHODOX AND THE SYRIAC CATHOLICS

Anna Hager

Introduction

The Syriac Orthodox Church and the Syriac Catholic Church are hardly ever mentioned when writing the history of the modern Middle East.[1] This stems from their small number and their lack of political and economic leverage compared to other, more powerful Christian communities such as the Maronites or the Greek Orthodox. More importantly, unlike the latter, the Syriacs were also poor and uprooted as they had suffered tragic losses and destruction in their homelands of south-eastern Turkey (called *Sayfo* in Syriac) during the First World War. This resulted in their resettling in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq at a time when these states had just been founded as modern nation-states under British or French Mandates.

This article is concerned with the Syriac Orthodox and the Syriac Catholics in Lebanon under the French Mandate up to the 1950s. Yet the sources I happen to have do not allow me to write a comprehensive comparison between these two communities. For the Syriac Orthodox, the various patriarchate-friendly newspapers, *Al-Hikma*, *Majallat al-Batriyarkiyya*, and *Lisan al-Mashriq*, issued respectively in Jerusalem, and later in Iraq in Arabic, feature a section on the various Syriac Orthodox communities and their clergy. However, I do not have a similar set of sources for the Syriac Catholics. I have also conducted a number of qualitative interviews with Syriac Orthodox from Lebanon. Furthermore, the French archives provide valuable information, only

1 Sebastian Brock, 'The Syrian Orthodox Church in the modern Middle East', 13-24; and Anthony O'Mahony, 'Between Rome and Antioch: The Syriac Catholic Church in the modern Middle East', in *Eastern Christianity in the modern Middle East* (London: Routledge, 2010), 120–137.

reporting about events; that is, daily life does not find its way into the archives. In addition, I have also a few Syriac Catholic sources in French and Arabic. Beth Mardutho, the Syriac Institute, has digitised a diverse set of Syriac Orthodox and Syriac Catholic sources.

One of these sources had a defining impact when preparing this contribution. It is an undated document produced by the Syriac Catholic community of Beirut, airing grievances about the alleged church corruption, contrasting their situation with that of their poorer, yet more 'successful' Syriac Orthodox counterparts. This source, which can be dated between 1943 and 1948, compels us, first, to go beyond a history of patriarchs and bishops and include lay people—as communities and individuals—into the larger history. Second, it compels us to rethink our understanding of what makes a community, more precisely what makes it 'strong' or 'weak'. This contribution will thus question the assumption that we could initially have 'weak' Syriac Orthodox as opposed to 'strong' Syriac Catholics. In doing so we will go beyond the two dominant church figures of that time: Syriac Catholic Cardinal Tappouni and Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Ephrem I Barsoum.

Part One will further contextualise Syriac Christians in the Middle East. While Part Two will analyse the conflict between the two Syriac patriarchs, Part Three will adopt the level of the laity, giving a clearer sense of what makes a 'strong' or 'weak' community.

Part One: Syriac Christians in the Context of the Modern Middle East

When we talk about the Syriacs in Syria and Lebanon during the French Mandate, we are in fact talking about devastated communities rebuilding themselves from scratch. The Orthodox in particular lacked church and social structures at first.

At the end of the 19th century, the Syriac Orthodox numbered roughly 500,000 people in the Ottoman Empire,[2] generally located in the cities of Kharput, Diyarbakir, Midyat, Mardin and the region of

2 George A Kiraz, *The Syriac Orthodox in North America (1895–1995). A Short History* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2019), p. 7.

Tur Abdin (as well as smaller communities in Aleppo, Mosul and the villages around Homs). The patriarchal see was located in the Dayr al-Zaafaran monastery near Mardin. Depending on where they lived, the Syriac Orthodox spoke Turkish, Arabic, Armenian, or Kurdish, whereas the use of Neo-Aramaic dialects was restricted to Tur Abdin and the Diyarbakir area.[3] By contrast, the Syriac Catholic communities were more urban than their Orthodox counterparts and displayed a similar level of cultural diversity, being divided between three main areas: Diyarbakir-Mardin, Mosul and Lebanon/Mount Lebanon,[4] where the patriarchal see was established in the late 18th century in the monastery of Sharfeh, before being transferred to Mardin in 1852.[5]

For much of their Ottoman history, the Syriac Orthodox had been part of the Armenian *millet* and a Syriac Orthodox *millet*, or *sűryeni qadim* ('old' Syriac, as opposed to Syriac Catholics and Protestants)[6] was recognized in 1882.[7] However, by 1914, the Syriac Orthodox were still not fully recognized as a separate *millet*.[8] In contrast, a Syriac Catholic *millet* had already been recognized in 1830.[9]

The massacres under Sultan Abdül Hamid II at the end of the 19th century led to the first Syriac Orthodox settlements in Lebanon.[10] In the context of the Armenian genocide starting in 1915, approximately 90,000 Syriac Orthodox were killed[11] and many more were displaced. This is called the *Sayfo* ('sword') in Syriac. The areas of Mardin and Diyarbakir were especially affected.[12] Cardinal Tappouni, who was

3 Arman Akopian, 'The Syriacs of Kharberd (Kharput) on the Eve of the 1915 Genocide', *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 23, 2 (2020), 279–321, p. 284.

4 Joseph Hajjar, *Le Vatican, la France et le catholicisme oriental, 1878-1914* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1979), p. 169.

5 Amir Harrak, 'Sharfeh', in *Sharfeh*, (eds) Sebastian P Brock, Aaron M Butts, George A Kiraz and Lucas Van Rompay (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2011), <https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Sharfeh> [accessed 8/09/23].

6 Akopian, 'The Syriacs of Kharberd', p. 282.

7 Naures Atto, *Hostages in the Homeland, Orphans in the Diaspora: Identity Discourses among the Assyrian/Syriac Elites in the European Diaspora* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, doctoral thesis, 2011), p. 86.

8 Henry Clements, 'Documenting Community in the late Ottoman Empire', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 51, 3 (2019), 423–443, p. 437.

9 Berthold Spüler, 'Die west-syrische (monophysitische) Kirche unter dem Islam', *Saeculum* 9 (1958), 322–344, p. 338.

10 Claude Sélis, *Les Syriens orthodoxes et catholiques* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1988), p. 205.

11 Khaled S Dinno, *The Syrian Orthodox Christians in the Late Ottoman Period and Beyond. Crisis then Revival* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2017), p. 228.

12 Michel Chevalier, *Les montagnards chrétiens du Hakkâri et du Kurdistan septentrional*

elected Syriac Catholic patriarch in 1933, was imprisoned by the Ottomans in 1918 and later freed.[13] Those who survived or were displaced as a result of the *Sayfo* settled first in Syria, with some resettling in Beirut and Zahle in Lebanon.[14] The annexation of Alexandretta by Turkey in 1938 prompted another wave of Syriac Orthodox emigration to Syria and Lebanon.[15]

Aside from a few villages in the Homs Governorate and Aleppo, there was no significant Syriac presence in Lebanon and Syria. Despite the above-mentioned influx, the number of Syriac Orthodox and Syriac Catholics remained low in Syria and Lebanon, except for the Jazeera, compared to the other Christian communities. The 1932 census in Lebanon mentions 2,723 Syriac Orthodox and 2,803 Syriac Catholics compared to around 227,000 Maronites and 178,100 Sunni Muslims.[16] This is far less than the number of 8,000 Syriacs put forward by Cardinal Tappouni in 1932, half of them Catholic, half of them Orthodox.[17] In 1935 there were roughly 1,500 Syriac Orthodox and 1,500 Syriac Catholics in Damascus, while there were roughly 5,000 individuals for each community in Aleppo. Their number had risen slightly in 1943.[18] However, in the Jazeera, the north-eastern part of Syria, the majority of the 60,000 Christians were Syriac Christians.[19] There was mounting migration from the Jazeera to Lebanon as a result of the end of the French

(Paris: Publications du Département de Géographie de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1985).

13 Amir Harrak, 'Tappuni, Gabriel', in *Tappuni, Gabriel*, Sebastian P Brock, Aaron M Butts, George A Kiraz and Lucas Van Rompay (eds), <https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Tappuni-Gabriel>.

14 Dinno, *The Syrian Orthodox Christians*, p. 243.

15 Dinno, *The Syrian Orthodox Christians,* p. 244.

16 Rania Maktabi, 'The Lebanese Census of 1932 Revisited. Who are the Lebanese?', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 26, 2 (1999), 219–241, pp. 227, 222.

17 Œuvre d'Orient, 'Lettre de sa Béatitude Mgr. Tappouni, Patriarche des « Syriens » (Syriaques), à Mgr Lagier', 1932–1933 (Number 34), 23–25.

18 Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 14. There were 1,431 Syriac Orthodox in Damascus and 4,557 in Aleppo, compared to 1,447 Syriac Catholics in Damascus and 5,183 in Aleppo. In 1943 there were 899 Syriac Orthodox in Damascus and 5,393 in Aleppo, compared to 2,076 in Damascus and 6,009 in Aleppo.

19 Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères: 3AE17 / 2e dossier M. de Martel HC Syrie et Liban: 1 October-31 December 1937, Cabinet Politique 1237, Haut-Commissaire au MAE, 'incident de Djézireh, rapport enlèvement du mohafez.'

Mandate in Syria, the subsequent policies of nationalisation and Arabisation[20] and compulsory military service in Syria. Furthermore, Lebanon was seen as having greater political freedom and more economic opportunity.[21]

Prior to that the Jazeera was a region where Syriac Christians thrived. The Jazeera is the north-eastern part of Syria and was under French military control until it came under the control of the Syrian government after the signing of the French-Syrian Treaty in the 1930s. Except for nomadic Arab Sunni tribes, the area was largely empty before the French Mandate, at which point it became economically prosperous. Thanks to its large fertile lands, Patriarch Ignatius Ephrem I, then Bishop of Syria, managed to 'secure[d] the necessary lands in the vicinity of the refugee camps in the then tent city of Qamishli and other locations to implement his viable long-term agrarian-economical programme.'[22] Qamishli, which was created under the French Mandate, became a modern city. As a result, the region attracted Kurdish and Christian refugees from the newly established Turkish Republic. After the Semele massacre in Iraq in 1933, 10,000 Assyrian Christians settled there. In addition, Armenian and Syriac Christians from Aleppo mostly settled in the cities.[23] According to a report in the French archives, the region numbered 60,000 Christians, 60,000 Arab nomads and 56,000 Kurds; among the 60,000 Christians, there were 40–45,000 Syriac Catholics and 15–30,000 Syriac Orthodox.[24] *Majallat al-Batriyarkiyya* dwelled extensively on the success of the Syriac Orthodox in this province—their numerous schools, churches, associations—while noting, however, that despite their presence being the result of the genocide of 1915, these Syriac Orthodox were in fact 'returning' to the land of their ancestors.[25]

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20 Atto, *Hostages in the Homeland*, p. 153.

21 Atto, *Hostages in the Homeland*, p. 153.

22 Aziz Abdul-Nour, 'Episcopal Diplomacy: Oriental Christians or the Syriac Orient at the Paris Peace Conference 1919-1920. Aphram I Barsoum, a Man of Vision on an Impossible Mission', *Living Stones Yearbook 2021, Eastern Christianity, Theological Reflection on Religion, Culture, and Politics in the Holy Land and Christian Encounter with Islam and the Muslim World*, 1–154, p. 106.

23 See Khoury, *Syria and the French mandate*, 525–526.

24 Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères: 'incident de Djézireh, rapport enlèvement du mohafez.'

25 *Majallat al-Batriyarkiyya*, 'أخبار الطائفة تأسيس كنيسة رأس العين في الجزيرة الفراتية', November 1933 (Number

As refugees from Ottoman Anatolia, the Syriac Orthodox and Syriac Catholic Christians, with the Armenians, were officially granted Lebanese citizenship in 1932. As Rondot points out, 'The number of Christians exceeds Muslims [Sunnis, Shiis, Druze] only when the members of the newly established communities (Armenians, etc.) are added to the "old Lebanese" Christians.'[26] The demographic potential of the Syriac Orthodox for the Lebanese Christians remained important as the conflict over the political distribution of power between Christians and Muslims continued and worsened in the years up to the Lebanese Civil War. But because of the fragile demographic equilibrium, the newly arriving Syriac Orthodox were no longer granted citizenship after 1958.[27] Over time there was a growing discrepancy in Lebanon between those who had Lebanese citizenship and those who did not.

When it comes to the socio-economic profile of the Syriac Christians in Lebanon, there were significant differences between the Syriac Orthodox and Syriac Catholics. The latter numbered several powerful Syriac Catholics who played an important role in the history of both Lebanon and Syria, such as Philippe de Terrazi and Edmond Rabbath. By contrast, the Syriac Orthodox lacked such wealthy lay leadership and remained part of the poor working class for much of the 20th century. In 1950, 50 percent of the Syriac Orthodox living in Musaitbeh, the neighbourhood in West Beirut where the Syriac Orthodox settled, were illiterate, whereas only a handful had a high school degree, and only 5 percent of them owned their houses.[28] But gradually Syriac Orthodox community structures emerged in Beirut: charities, including a women's charity, schools, sports club and scouts,[29] as they did in Zahle.

8, Year 1), 266–267.

26 Pierre Rondot, *Les institutions politiques du Liban: des communautés traditionnelles à l'État moderne* (Paris: Institut d'Études de l'Orient Contemporain, 1947), p. 26.

27 Atto, *Hostages in the Homeland*, p. 155.

28 Josef Afram Nijma, شهداء السريان في لبنان ܫܗܕܐ ܣܘܪܝܝܐ ܒܠܒܢܢ *Syriac Martyrs in Lebanon 1975–1990* (Arabic Print, Industrial City al-Boushriyeh, Lebanon: 2010), p. 253.

29 Philipp de Terrazi, 'اصدق ماكان عن تاريخ لبنان و صفحة من اخبار السريان ١ [المجلد الأول] [Vol. 1]', 1948. The Beth Mardutho Collection: <https://archive.org/details/vol10000unse_c7s6/page/n7/mode/2up> [accessed 11 September 2023], pp. 437–438.

Part Two: Internal Syriac Relations: Patriarchs at Odds

The Syriac Churches were dominated during the French Mandate by two church figures, Cardinal Tappouni and Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius Ephrem I (subsequently 'Patriarch Barsoum'). Even though they shared a similar background, they were at odds politically, adopting conflicting positions toward the French presence and Arab nationalism. In this context, the issue of conversion, that is, Syriac Catholic attempts at attracting Syriac Orthodox, had both denominational and political salience.

Gabriel Tappouni (1879–1968, in office 1929–1968) was born in 1879 in Mosul, where he attended the Dominican school. He was ordained priest in 1903, named patriarchal vicar of Mardin in 1913, then of Aleppo in 1919. He was elected patriarch in 1929 and named cardinal in 1935.[30] Patriarch Barsoum was born into a rather wealthy family in Mosul in 1887 where he also attended the Dominican school. He was named bishop of Syria in 1918, adding Lebanon to it in 1923, and elected patriarch in 1933.[31] They thus shared a very similar path and faced similar internal challenges.

Around the time of Patriarch Barsoum's election in 1933, the French archives produced several reports on the crisis surrounding the Syriac Orthodox patriarchal see, saying the community of Mardin opposed its transfer from Dayr al-Zaafaran to Homs or Aleppo.[32] However, remaining in Turkey had been off the table as Patriarch Elias III (1867–1932, in office 1917–1932) had been stripped of his Turkish citizenship in 1931. The French archives further noted that one key reason for relocating the patriarchate to Syria was to halt the number of conversions to Catholicism. We will discuss this later on.

Politically the two church leaders were at odds. While Cardinal Tappouni took on an antagonising position towards Arab nationalism

30 Amir Harrak, 'Tappuni, Gabriel', in *Tappuni, Gabriel*, <https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Tappuni-Gabriel> [accessed 11 September 2023].

31 Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères: Fonds Ponsot: 143PAAP/324/syrien orthodoxe (Jacobite) 2e dossier élection, 17 November 1928, document on Patriarch Barsoum.

32 Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères: Fonds Ponsot: 143PAAP/324/ syrien orthodoxe (Jacobite) 2e dossier élection, 12 January 1933, 'Crise patriarcale jacobite (cf.inf.n° 57-68-69 de décembre 1932), information n° 30.'

in Syria and endorsed the maintenance of the French presence in Syria, Patriarch Barsoum had sided with Arab nationalists since the First World War. He maintained close relationships with the Hashemite family who issued a decree of protection towards the end of the First World War.[33] He remained very cautious during the tensions between the French and the Syrian governments in the 1930s.

When it comes to the relations between the French and Patriarch Barsoum, the French archives depict him as 'very ambitious, opportunistic, deceitful, and arrogant' with close contacts with the Syrian nationalists.[34] The French officials were furthermore angered by his supposed closeness to the Anglican Church and Great Britain, an anger Cardinal Tappouni was happy to fuel with his own information.[35] At the same time, Patriarch Barsoum infuriated the Syriac Catholics by spreading the rumour that the French would generously fund the establishment of a Syriac Orthodox monastery in Zahle.[36]

The grievances of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch were related to what he perceived as the French favouritism towards Catholics: medals, the sending of low-ranking officials to his enthronement in 1933, and a conflict over the Mar Elian monastery in the Homs governorate that had become Catholic in the 19th century and which the Orthodox wanted back (the monastery was destroyed in 2015 by the Islamic State). In a letter dated 1944, Patriarch Barsoum wrote to the French, 'We do not doubt that France will give us our rights back by adopting an attitude of at least neutrality [...] all the more as it has declared since the beginning of the Mandate its protectorate of all Christians of the Levant without distinction. We ask for a clear answer without diplomatic cover.'[37] The demands of Cardinal Tappouni on the other hand relate him fashioning himself as the defender of the Christian

33 Abdul-Nour, 'Episcopal Diplomacy', p. 42.

34 Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères: Fonds Ponsot: 143/PAAP/324 syrien-orthodoxe (Jacobite)/ 3e dossier statut de l'Église syriaque orthodoxe: 17 November 1928.

35 Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères: Fonds Ponsot: 143PAAP/324 syrien orthodoxe (Jacobite) / 2e dossier élection, 1 May 1933.

36 Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères: Fonds Ponsot: 143/PAAP/323 syrien orthodoxe (Jacobite) / 2e dossier, 3 April 1933.

37 Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères Nantes: 1 SL/250/1 Mandat SYRIE-LIBAN service juridique / 1 SL/250 carton 27 (divers dont Bédouins, coopératives)/ Dossier n°8 « Dossier affaires du couvents de Saint Elian » situé au sud-est de Homs, number 583, 26 October 1944, letter of Patriarch Barsoum.

'minorities' after the signing of the French-Syrian treaty in 1936. He saw in the negotiations about Syria's political future an opportunity to speak in the name of all Christians, including the Syriac Orthodox.

Crucially, in a letter to Œuvre d'Orient, Cardinal Tappouni connected the French presence with conversions among Syriac Orthodox to Catholicism: 'anywhere the French influence has expanded, Catholicism has managed—thanks to a kind of inescapable law—to introduce itself, closing the door to deviating sects from America or northern Europe.'[38] Not only were these efforts well documented in the French archives, but, like Cardinal Tappouni, representatives of the French Mandate also saw a connection between their presence and conversions. As High Commissioner Gabriel Puaux (in office 1939–1940) noted in his book *Deux années au Levant*, the Syriac Orthodox had been 'slowly eaten up by dignitaries of Rome and many Jacobites came to believe that they would have, under the Catholic label, more chances to be well regarded by the French.'[39]

The Syriac Catholic Church targeted all levels of the Syriac Orthodox community. After the First World War, it established two schools near refugee camps, which were attended by 'Jacobite children [who] learn the principles of the Catholic faith.'[40] The greatest 'success' was by far the conversion of the Syriac Orthodox bishop of Lebanon and Syria, Bishop Iwannis Yuhanna Ghandour in late 1949. The Syriac Orthodox patriarchate-friendly magazine, *Lisan al-Mashriq*, reported in an article entitled 'Pain and Doubts' how Cardinal Tappouni and the Syriac Catholic bishop of Beirut, Basilius Afram Hiqari, had been able to lure away the Syriac Orthodox bishop.[41] Bishop Ghandour had been a successful bishop;

38 Œuvre d'Orient, 'Lettre de sa Béatitude Mgr. Tappouni, Patriarche des « Syriens » (Syriaques), à Mgr Lagier', 1932–1933 (Number 34), 23–25.

39 Gabriel Puaux, *Deux années au Levant. Souvenir de Syrie et du Liban 1939–1940* (Lorient: Hachette, 1952), p. 100. Cardinal Tappouni made similar claims in a letter to the president of the Œuvre d'Orient in the early 1930s (Œuvre d'Orient, 'Lettre de sa Béatitude Mgr. Tappouni, Patriarche des « Syriens » (Syriaques), à Mgr Lagier'). The evidence gathered for my current research project on the Syriac Orthodox in Lebanon (1918–1982) suggests, however, that Syriac Orthodox refugees rather converted to convert to Protestant Christianity which offered better education and financial opportunities.

40 Œuvre d'Orient, 'Lettre de sa Béatitude Mgr. Tappouni ...', 23–25.

41 *Lisan al-Mashriq*, 'آلام وشكوى', December 1949-January 1950 (Numbers 3 and 4, Year

he had established a community school in Musaitbeh, Beirut, a charity association and the *Majlis Melli*.[42]

As a result, if we remain on the level of church leadership, the picture seems quite clear: the Syriac Orthodox were weak, the Syriac Catholics were strong. In the next part I want to question this assumption.

Part Three: Turning our assumptions upside-down

As quoted earlier, in his 1947 study *Les institutions politiques du Liban*, Pierre Rondot makes the following statement regarding the Syriac Orthodox ('Jacobites'), Syriac Catholics, 'Nestorians' (members of the Church of the East), and Chaldeans in Lebanon, 'Generally poor, only attached to their religious traditions, these communities have no social importance and do not seek any political role.'[43]

Why do we have these assumptions about the Syriac Orthodox being poor as opposed to strong Syriac Catholics? First, the Syriac Orthodox struggles are better documented, whether by the Syriac Orthodox themselves, by the few Syriac Catholic sources or the French archives. For instance, starting in 1927, the Syriac Orthodox newspaper issued in Jerusalem, *Al-Hikma*, relates the financial struggle to purchase land on which to construct a church in Beirut; the communities in Jerusalem and Bethlehem provided financial support.[44] In 1928, construction on the Saint Peter and Saint Paul Cathedral started.

One key difference between the Syriac Orthodox and the Syriac Catholics is that the latter included a number of powerful notables, such as Philippe de Terrazi or Edmond Rabbath. Edmond Rabbath represented Aleppo from 1936–1939 in the Syriac parliament. He was a trained lawyer from the Sorbonne and was politically active in both Syria and Lebanon. Philippe de Terrazi's family came to Beirut in 1808 to help establish a Syriac Catholic diocese.[45] In his *History of Lebanon*

3), p. 135.
42 De Terrazi, 'اصدق ماكان عن تاريخ لبنان و صفحة من اخبار السريان ١ [Vol. 1]', p. 435.
43 Rondot, *Les institutions politiques du Liban*, p. 38.
44 *Al-Hikma*, 'تبرع لبناء كنيسة', February 1928 (Number 5, Year 2), p. 256.
45 De Terrazi, 'اصدق ماكان عن تاريخ لبنان و صفحة من اخبار السريان ١ [Vol. 1]', p. 370.

published in 1948, Philippe de Terrazi, stressed the lay effort made for the relief of the refugees after the First World War—though he does not specify whether it targeted specifically Syriac Catholic or Syriac Orthodox too—saying 'we travelled alone to Cairo, Alexandria and there we collected another amount [of money],' the bishop of Baghdad and Basra is said to have provided a third of the amount necessary. With this, the Syriac Catholics bought a piece of land south of the Hotel Dieu area, Beirut, where they provided room for 110 families.[46] By contrast, the Syriac Orthodox in Lebanon did not have such powerful leaders. Also politically there were huge differences between Syria and Lebanon. In Syria there were both Syriac Catholic and Syriac Orthodox MPs, whereas in Lebanon there was no Syriac Orthodox MP deputy until after the end of the Civil War. And the Syriac Orthodox had to compete with four other Christian 'minorities' for the minority seat of Beirut. It can also be assumed that Syriac Catholics as Catholics had access to extensive Catholic social services—something Syriac Orthodox could have had too, in theory.

However, what does success and strength mean in this context? Is it the strength of the church leadership, its lay leaders or members? The situation of the Syriac Orthodox communities in Lebanon seemed more challenging compared to the situation in the Jazeera. But I contend that there are more layers to the idea of strength. A document produced by Syriac Catholics in the 1940s and digitised by Beth Mardutho, makes a case for a strong Syriac Orthodox community in Beirut.

Beth Mardutho, The Syriac Institute, has digitised an undated document in Arabic signed by Philippe de Terrazi and five other individuals which aired the grievances of the Syriac Catholic community of Beirut to Cardinal Tappouni.[47] The document can be dated to after 1943 and before 1948 because it claims that there was no single publication by a Syriac Catholic in Lebanon. Philippe de Terrazi, however, published his book on Lebanon in 1948. The text signed by de Terrazi and the other individuals depicts the Syriac Catholic community as weak, plagued by 'corruption [several cases detailed],

46 De Terrazi, 'اصدق ماكان عن تاريخ لبنان و صفحة من اخبار السريان ١' [Vol. 1]', p. 425.

47 The Mayor of Reform in the Syriac Diocese of Beirut, (عمدة الاصلاح في ابرشية بيروت السريانية) 'عريضة عمدة الاصلاح السريانية الى مطارنة السريان الكاثوليك' n.d., The Beth Mardutho Collection: <https://archive.org/details/unset0000unse_k3c6/page/n58/mode/2up> [accessed 11 September 2023].

lies, deceit' (page 15), facing 'spiritual and material ruin' (page 23) and lacking a *majlis melli*. It targets in particular the bishop of Beirut, Bishop Hiqari (who was successful in converting the Syriac Orthodox bishop of Beirut, see Part Two) for his corruption.

It is to be noted the situation of the Syriac Catholics is contrasted with that of the Syriac Orthodox, arguing that the latter were much more successful as a community despite the hardships they had faced. The document makes three surprising claims or comments. First, it speaks only highly of the Syriac Orthodox, referring to them as 'our Syriac Orthodox brothers'. Second, it claims that, as a result of disastrous church leadership, twenty-seven Syriac Catholic families had converted to Syriac Orthodoxy. This information is supported by an article in the Syriac Orthodox newspaper *Lisan al-Mashriq* reporting in 1950 that Philippe de Terrazi had 'brought back' seventy-six families who had converted to Syriac Orthodoxy.[48] Third, the writers commend the Syriac Orthodox for having succeeded despite their hardship, attributing it to an honest and committed clergy: 'How can we not be ashamed when we see the community of our Syriac Orthodox brothers in Beirut walking on the path of reform, guided by only one bishop and one priest' (page 23). At the same time, it notes that 'our Syriac Orthodox brothers, heads and inferiors, old and young, male and female, rich and poor [..] [all] compete to strive for their community' (page 25), animated by 'national enthusiasm' (page 25).

Now the document is obviously biased. But it suggests that in order to build a strong, and more important, cohesive community, it takes more than just powerful church leaders or successful individuals, even notables. The text displays a lack of and desire for internal cohesion in which the church ought to play a role—but in cooperation with a committed laity.

Conclusion

This contribution has provided an overview of the Syriac Orthodox and the Syriac Catholic communities in Syria and Lebanon under the French Mandate, adopting alternatively the perspective of the church

48 *Lisan al-Mashriq*, 'آلام وشكوى' , December 1949–January 1950 (Numbers 3 and 4, Year 3), p. 135.

leadership and then the laity. While in Part Two the issue of the French presence and its impact on Syriac Orthodox conversion to Catholicism suggested a 'weaker' Syriac Orthodox community, an undated and unlikely document analysed in Part Three claimed that a 'strong' community needed cohesion, leadership and a sense of belonging. Crucially, the lay level hints at friendlier inter-denominational relations.

THE JURIDICIZATION OF DOCTRINE AT THE EXPENSE OF THEOLOGICAL SCHOLARSHIP. THE CASE OF MIK'AYEL CH'AMCH'IAN'S *SHIELD OF FAITH*.

Vrej Nersessian

The rift between the Armenian Orthodox and Catholic communities in Constantinople at the end of the 18th and first half of the 19th century

The 19th and 20th centuries as seen in the context of Armenian Church history has a crucial importance for the understanding of the present-day situation of the Armenian Church now spread all over the world. When one appreciates that the Armenian Church has continually been, but particularly in the first half of the 19th century, most intimately, and almost inseparably, associated with the Armenian nation, then a brief look at the political events of this period is justified. Arnold Toynbee is quite judicial when referring to the eastern churches in the Ottoman Empire: 'In the Near East a church is merely the foremost aspect of a nationality.'[1] At the beginning of the 19th century the Armenian people lived under three major political allegiances: the Persian, Russian and Ottoman hegemonies.

In the first decade of the 19th century after a series of wars the Persians sued for peace and signed the Treaty of Turkmenchai (1828) while eastern Armenia became part of Tsarist Russia. The most important imperial decision concerning the Armenians was the decree issued in 1836 called *Polozheniye* ('status') by which the church became the policing agent of the state enforcing its decisions among the Armenian people.[2] The entrance of mighty Russia presenting

1 Arnold Toynbee, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire*, London, 1916, pp. 617–18.

2 Vrej Nerses Nersessian, 'The Armenian church under the sceptre of the tsars, 1828–1905', *Living Stones Yearbook* 2020, pp. 255–76. For text of the *Polozheniye* translated from the Russian by M K'artashian, see A Eretseants, *Ամենայն Հայոց կաթողիկոսութիւնը և Կովկասի Հայք։ Բ. Կաթողիկոսութիւն Ս. Յովհաննէս Ը Կարբեցւոյ*

itself as the liberator of all Orthodox Christians among the Balkan peoples to cast off the heavy yoke of Turkish domination coincided with the spread of nationalism. The successful struggles of the Serbs (1804–1830) and the Greeks were not lost upon the Armenians. The Armenian historian Pasdermadjian gives a concise description of the state of the Christian populations in the Ottoman Empire:

> As to the position of Christian peoples under the Turkish yoke, these were a people reduced to servitude, stripped of their elementary human rights, their property and lives constantly exposed to the arbitrary will of the government and the attacks of Muslim subjects of the Empire.[3]

Under pressure from the European powers a number of reforms were administered between 1839–1878 in the Ottoman Empire to improve the treatment of the Christian peoples and collectively called the 'Noble Rescript of the Rose Chamber'—*Gülhane Hatt-ı Şerif*—3 November 1839, which inaugurated the *Tanzimat* period. This reform adopted the concept of Ottomanism—that is the idea of regarding as Ottoman subjects all individuals living in the Ottoman territories regardless of their faith and languages.[4] This was followed in quick succession by number of other reforms sponsored by western powers aimed at achieving equality among the subjects of the empire. In order to forestall more drastic intervention the government issued a second edict called *Hatt-i humayun* ('Imperial Rescript') in 1856, which proclaimed the equality of all Muslims and non-Muslims alike and paved the path for a democratic government of the communal life, granting voice to ordinary people. The final result was the compilation of statutes called *Sahmanadrutiwn (Սահմանադրություն)*, in Turkish *Ermeni Patrikliği Nizâmâtı*.[5]

եւ «Պօլօժէնիէ» (1831–1842) ('The Catholicate of All Armenians in the Caucasus'), Tiflis, 1895, p. 259; Krikor *vardapet* Maksoudian, *Chosen of God. The election of the Catholicos of All Armenians. From the Fourth century to the Present*, New York, 1995, pp. 102–108; Appendix I and II, 'The text of the *Polozheniye* in Classical and Modern Armenian', pp. 164–169.

3 H Pasdermadjian, *Histoire de l'Arménie*, ch. XI, English translation in the *Armenian Review,* vol. xv, no. 4 1962, pp. 72–73.

4 Kemal H Karpat, *An Inquiry into the Social Foundations of Nationalism in the Ottoman State*, Princeton, 1973.

5 Kemal H Karpat, 'Millets and Nationality: The roots of incongruity of Nation and

All the reforms and promises made by the Ottoman rulers under pressure from the European powers brought no real change in the situation of the Christians, particularly of the Armenians, who lived in the heart of Asia Minor and were more fully integrated into the structure of the Ottoman Empire than the peoples of the Balkan countries. The case of the Armenians was on the agenda of the negotiations at the San Stefano Congress (3 March 1878) and again at the Berlin Congress (13 June 1878). Among the delegation attending the Berlin Congress was former Patriarch of Constantinople (1869–1873), and later Catholicos of All Armenians, Mkrtich I Vanetsi called *Khrimyan Hayrik* ('Father') (1892–1907), who returned to Constantinople despondent and summed up his experience with this famous parable: 'The Europeans placed a cauldron of liberty filled with *harisa* (meat and oat dish), the Bulgarians, Serbs and Montenegrins took their portions of the tasty *harisa* with their iron ladles; but the Armenians had only a paper ladle, which collapsed when they dipped it into the cauldron to take their share.'[6] The father of German liberalism Friedrich Naumann, who supported the suppression of the Armenians by the Young Turks leading to the Genocide, wrote, 'The Turks did well, when they beat the Armenians to death or otherwise the Turks could not have defended themselves against the Armenians ... the Armenian is the worst man in the world.'[7]

The Armenian *Millet*

Originally the Arabic term *millet (milla)* was applied to the community of Muslims in contradistinction to the non-Muslims but in the Ottoman context it came to designate the non-Muslim communities. The *millet* system emerged gradually as an answer to the efforts of the Ottoman administration to recognise the cultures of the various religious-ethnic

State in the Post-Ottoman Era' in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire,* Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (eds), London, 1982, vol. I, pp. 141–169. For an English translation of the 'Armenian National Constitution', see H F B Lynch, *Armenia: Travels and Studies*, London, 1901, vol. II, Appendix I, pp. 449–67.

6 Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: the development of Armenian Political Parties in the Nineteenth Century*, Los Angeles, 1963, pp. 28–29.

7 W Gust, *Der Völkermord an den Armeniern*, 1993, p. 61, quoted by Burchard Brentjes, *The Armenians, Assyrians and Kurds. Three Nations One Fate*?, Varanasi, 1999, p. 40; Vrej Nersessian, 'The impact of the genocide of 1915 on the Armenian Orthodox Apostolic Church', *Sion*, July-November (2016), pp. 63–74.

groups it ruled. The system provided, on the one hand, a degree of religious, cultural and ethnic continuity within communities and, on the other, permitted their incorporation into the Ottoman administrative, economic and political system. So, ethnic-religious groups preserved their culture and religion while remaining subject to continuous 'Ottomanization' in other spheres of life.[8] At the turn of the 19th century there were three major *millets* in the Ottoman state: the Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox *(Ermeni)* and the Jewish. The patriarchates as an institution were a manifestation of the *millet* system, that gave each of the religious communities a degree of legal autonomy and authority with the acquiescence of the Ottoman rulers. Mik'ayel Ch'amch'ian's remarkable *History of Armenia* assigns the founding of the Armenian Patriarchate to the reign of Sultan Mehmet (II) in 1461, but on the bases of sources not available to Ch'amch'ian, Hayk Berberian dismissed the traditional accounts and concluded that the rank, with 'certain rights', was conferred on the Armenian religious leaders of Constantinople in the first half of the 16th century, more precisely, between 1526 and 1543.[9]

The patriarch was both the spiritual and civic leader of the entire Armenian population *(milletbashi)* in rank equal to a pasha. It was incumbent upon him to defend the national church against the encroachments of Catholic and Protestant missionaries, who began to gain converts in the 18th and 19th centuries.

In 1780 Ch'amch'ian began to write his magisterial *History of Armenia* in three volumes which he completed in 1784 and which was published in 1784–86.[10] Unlike Movses Khorenatsi who

8 Karpat, 'Millets and Nationality', p. 141–42; Alexander Humphries, 'Political Patriarchs: A study of the political significance of Patriarch Thomas of the Chaldean Catholic Church during the creation of Iraq', *Living Stones Yearbook* 2022, pp. 179–180.

9 Mik'ayel Ch'amch'ian, *Պատմութիւն Հայոց* ('History of the Armenians'), Venice, 1786, vol. III, p. 500; Hayk Berberian, 'Կ. Պոլսոյ հայ պատրիարքութեան հիմնադրութիւնը' ('The founding of the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople'), *HA*, 78. (1964), cols. 338–339; Kevork B Bardakjian, 'The rise of the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople', *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 89–100; Hrant Asatur, *Կոստանդնուպոլսոյ հայկոր եւ իրենց պատրիարքները* ('The Armenians of Constantinople and their Patriarchs'), Istanbul, 2011, lists Yovakim Bps. of Brusa as the first patriarch (1461–1478) and not Grigor Bps. (1526–1537).

10 Mik'ayel Ch'amch'ian, *Պատմութիւն Հայոց ի սկզբանէ աշխարհի մինչեւ գամ տեառն 1784* ('History of Armenia from the beginning to the year of the Lord 1784'), Venice, 1784, vols. I-III; facs., Erevan, 1985; abridged version in one volume,

begins the history of the Armenians with a brief account of the earliest Armenian heroes from Hayk to Ara and his descendants, Ch'amch'ian acknowledges that while the origins of many nations are shrouded in legends the Armenians have the Bible as the only source of their history. His poses and seeks new insights for the advancement of historiography:

> If historical research is consumed to merely quench interest, it is unacceptable; if it is to only increase the stock of memory, this overburdens memory, does not bear fruit, becomes tiresome instead of bringing joy. But if a historical work is to be read to attain wisdom to correct human behaviour then it is a product for the good.[11]

Pre-dating the Soviet period of Armenian historiography, in Leo's view Ch'amch'ian's magisterial analysis over a wide terrain with great skill matches his contemporary Edward Gibbon.[12] He uses 23 Armenian and over 70 foreign authors, hundreds of documents, colophons, letters, church canons, and lives of saints. He was a staunch Catholic and member of the Mkhitarist Congregation and his primary source is the 'Letter of Love and Concord', in the Armenian text called *Dashants T'ught (Դաշանց Թուղթ)* composed between the years 1141 and 1238, coinciding with the third and fourth Crusades, being one of the documents among the forgeries called *The Donation of Constantine*. In the 18th century Catholic missionaries revived this document as an instrument to achieve reunification of the Armenian Church with Holy See of Rome.[13]

Խրախճան Պատմութեան ('Joy of history'), Constantinople, 1811, the same in Turkish in Armenian letters (1812); Johannes Avdall, *History of Armenia by Father Michael Chamich in two volumes*, Calcutta, 1827.

11 Ch'amch'ian, *History of Armenia*, 'Introduction', p, 42: «Քանզի ընթերցանութիւն և տեղեկութիւն պատմութեանց եթէ սոսկ առ հետաքրքրութեան իցէ . ընդունայն է. և եթէ առ գանձելոյ ի յիշողութեան և եթ ծանոաբեռն զի առաջինն ոչ պտղաբերէ իսկ երկրորդն յաւէտ վաստակեցուցանէ՝ քան բերկրեցուցանէ:Այլ եէթէ; վասն ստանալոյ զիանճար առ ի ուղղելոյ զգնացս անձին, արդիւնանար է ի բարին ».

12 Leo (Babakhanian Mik'ayel), *Հայոց Պատմութիւն* ('Armenian History'), Erevan, 1973, vol. 3, bk. II, p. 517.

13 *Dashants T'ught* ('Letter of Concord'), a forgery of the 12th or 13th century based on an Appendix found in Agathangelos's *History* entitled 'Թուղթ սիրոյ եւ միաբանութեան մեծի կայսերն Կոստանդիանոսի, եւ սուրբ պապին Սեղբեստոսի.

Ch'amch'ian accepts the authenticity of this document and in the first volume of his work, among the primary sources, he lists the *History* by Agathangelos of whom he says: 'He wrote a book concerning Trdat ... but as to what language he wrote his book in, Greek or Armenian, we are not certain.' He mentions that the 1709 printed edition of the *History* by Agathangelos contains the text of the *Dashants T'ught* with many additions.[14] From this we may conclude that he considers Agathangelos as the author of *Dashants T'ught*. In his notes to his sources he reaffirms the story of the visit of St Grigor to Rome and in his conclusion asserts that *Dashants T'ught* is not 'a fabrication but true for we always find allusions to it in Armenian literature stretching as far back as to the time of Khorenats'i.'[15] This is a significant departure since the Mkhitarists do not consider *Dashants T'ught* an authentic and reliable document. In the introduction of the 1835 edition of the *History* by Agathangelos printed by the Mkhitarists they maintain that the text is 'contaminated' *(խանգարուած)*.

The text of the *Dashants T'ught* was first published with an accompanying study by its most unforgiving critic, Karapet *vardapet* Shahnazarian, who considered it a forgery and fabrication of the Middle Ages invented by the latinophile *Fratres Unitores* or 'Unifying

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Եւ Տրդատայ թագաւորին, եւ սրբոյն Գրիգորի', Constantinople, 1824, pp. 331–363; Clemens Galanus, *Conciliatio ecclesiae Armenae cum Romana*, Pars I, Rome, 1690, pp. 31–35; Armenian text and Italian translations, see Venice, 1695; E V Gulbekian, 'The conversion of King Trdat and Khorenats'i's *History of the Armenians'*, *Le Muséon*, tome 90-Fasc. 1–2 (1977), pp. 49-62; Vrej Nersessian, review article, 'The Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church and the vision of the *Fratre Unitores* or Unifying Friars among Armenians*', Sion 8–12* (2019), pp. 197–98; and 'The See of Holy Etchmiadsin and the Vatican: A chronicle of the contacts between Armenian Catholicoi and Popes'*, Sion, 1–2–3* (2021), pp. 78–87 and 4–7, pp. 183–195; Hratch Bart'ikyan, 'Դաշանց Թուղթ. Կազմը, ստեղծման ժամանակը, հեղինակն ու նպատակը, ('"Letter of Concord". Its composition, time of creation, author and purpose'), *Studia Armeno-Byzantina*, vol. III, Erevan, 2006, pp. 179–116; the title of the Italian translation is *Lettera dell'Amicitia e dell' Unione di Constantino gran Cesare e di San Siluestro Sommo Pontifice, e di Tradate Re dell' Armenia, e di S. Gregorio Illuminatore della Natione Armena. Anno del Signore 316,* Venice, 1683.

14 Ch'amch'ian, *History of Armenia*, vol. I, p. 10.

15 Ch'amch'ian, *History of Armenia*, « Սա գրեաց մատեան մի վասն Տրդատայ և վասն Լուսաւորչին մերոյ ... Իսկ թէ յոր լեզու շարագրեալ իցէ սորա զգիրս իւր, արդեօք յունարէն ՝ թէ հայերէն, տարակոյս է» and « Նախ՝ թէ այս Թուղթ Դաշանց ոչ է կեղծիք, այլ ճշմարիտ. քանզի օրինակ նորա միշտ գտանիւր յազգէ մերում, նաև յաւուրս Խորենացւոյն». See Vol. I, pp. 10, 642.

Friars', affiliated to *Propaganda Fide*, which he describes as containing a 'litany of fabrications and mistruths' *(ստապաճույճ)*, 'extravagant' *(աղեսատաբան)* and 'ignominious' *(խայտառակ)*.[16]

Mkhitar Sebastatsi (1676–1749) entered communion with Rome and established the Mkhitarist Benedictine Order on the small island of St Lazarus in August 1717, which split in 1773 when a number of extreme papists left the island and met in Trieste and failing to remove the causes of disagreement declared themselves a separate order in 1803, and re-established themselves in Vienna in 1811. In 1740, with the election of a patriarch and his confirmation by Pope Benedict XIV, the Armenian Catholic Church was formally founded as separate ecclesial entity in the monastery of Bzommar-Lebanon. In 1830 through the intervention of the French ambassador in Constantinople, the Armenian Catholic community was legally recognised by the Ottoman authorities as a *millet*. Pope Pius IX (1846–1878) united the patriarchate with the Armenian Catholic diocese of Constantinople and the patriarchate was moved to Constantinople. In 1925, after the genocide, the patriarchate returned to Bzommar.[17]

'An Invitation to Love' (Բան հրաւէր սիրոյ)[18]

Under the rules and regulations of the *millet* system the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople was the sole leader of the Armenian

16 Shahnazareants *vard*. Karapet, *Դաշանց ծղրտոյ քննութիւնն ու հերքումն* ('An investigation and rejection of the *Dashants T'ughi*'), Paris, 1862. He numerates 13 'errors' (*ստութիւնները* on pp. 99–111); Archbishop Maghak'ia Ormanian (*pseud.* K'nnaser) in his substantial study, 'Հերքում Ս. Գրիգոր Լուսաւորիչի Հռոմ երթալու առասպելին' ('Rejecting the legend of St Gregory the Illuminator's visit to Rome'), *HHT*, 2nd year (1949–50), pp. 235–246. The confusion in the sources arises from the use by Armenian authors of the term 'Rome', 'New Rome' and 'World of the Romans' *(Հռոմ, Հռոմոց աշխարհ)* in place of Byzantium and the Franks *(Փռանգք)* in place of Greeks *(Յունաց)*.

17 Soon after, with the intervention of the British ambassador in Constantinople, the Ottoman government created a Protestant *millet* in 1847, which included the Armenian Protestants.

18 (Grigor Gaparachian), *Բան հրաւէր սիրոյ:Որ առաջի առնէ զպատասխանի հնդրոյ ինչ ինչ մասանց հաւատոյ ըստ Լուսաւորչաւանդ վարդապետութեան Հայաստանեայց առաքելական սուրբ Եկեղեցւոյ* ('Invitation to love containing answers to the many tenants of faith according to the Illuminator's teaching of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church'), Poghos Arapian, Constantinople, 17 May 1820, p. 43.

community and it was incumbent upon him to defend the national church against the encroachments of the Catholic and Protestant missionaries engaged in proselytism. Conversion was a political issue within the Ottoman Empire: the French and to a lesser degree the Austrian ambassadors supported the Catholic cause; the British diplomats protected Protestants, while the Armenian national church had no foreign power to support it. The Ottoman rulers did not welcome the emergence of a Catholic *millet,* which would provide easy reasons for European powers to interfere in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire; for that reason the pope had to be content appointing in1758 an Armenian bishop with authority corresponding to that of a *nuncio*. Despite the efforts of the patriarchs, Catholicism was spreading, which an observant scribe in his memorial describes in these terms:

> ... gradually some were attracted and went and mixed with the startled sheep of the Mkhitarist brotherhood and others to the alienated herd of Triestian goats (reference to the Vienna Mkhitarists) and another half to the pack of foxes in Lebanon (reference to the Antonian brotherhood) and others to the estranged group of Collegians and many from the separated faction of our people sent their sons to Rome to the schools called College, where they studied Latin and Armenian and then after being ordained priests, returned to their homeland and deceitful *(եւ խորամանկ)* and well trained *(արուեստակեալ բանիւք)* convinced many among the simple minded to convert to their faith.[19]

19 H T'op'chean (=Topdjian), 'Կաթոլիկ գրականութիւնը Արմաշի ձեռագիրներուն մէջ' ('Catholic literature among the manuscript collection in the Monastery of Armash'), *HHT*, 2nd Year (1949-50), pp. 294-309, «... Ապաքէն բազումք ի մերոց հատուածեալ ժողովրդոց ի մանկական տիս առաքեալ ի Հռովմ, ի դպրոցն որ անուանեալ գոլէջ, մնան ժամանակս ինչ յուսումն լատինական եւ հայկական դպրութեան, ապա ընկալեալ զկարգ քահանայութեան և զիրաման քարոզութեան դարձ առնեն իւրաքանչիւր ի հայրենիս իւրեանց եւ խորամանկ եւ արուեստակեալ բանիւք պարտեալ զբազումս ի պարզամտաց յինքեանս յանկուցանեն», p. 304; see H T'op'chian, *Յուցակ ձեռագրաց Արմաշի վանքին* ('Catalogue of manuscripts in the Monastery of Armash'), Venice, 1962. The Theological Academy of Armash was founded in 1889 in the Monastery of the Holy Virgin called Tcharkhap'an, under the patronage of the Armenian Patriarchate, preparing priests, and had a scriptorium dating back to 1786. The entire valuable manuscript collection was

Countless internal disputes remained to plague the Armenian community throughout the 19th century. For most of the period Armenian passions were directed more within the community than without. However, the Ottoman policy was to stabilize the *millet* system by supporting the patriarchate, and the *amiras* were the cutting edge of this policy. Their own values and interests within the *millet* were in perfect accord with Ottoman policy, and this coincidence made the *amiras* formidable opponents. Even the French ambassador in Istanbul feared their enmity, as reported in his letter to the foreign minister concerning his efforts to advance the cause of Catholicism:

> ... éviter ... le double inconvenient d'attirer gratuitement sur moi seul; 'inimite fort redoutable des şarafs arméniens et de tous les influens qu'ils ont su gagner à leur cause.'[20]

At this period an unseemly dissension surfaced between the followers of Mkhitar Sebastatsi, 'the Abbotians', and the Collegians (named after the College for the *Propaganda de Fide*), who abandoned Venice and settled in Vienna. The former favoured putting aside all doctrinal-religious disputes through *rapprochement* to prevent split in the brotherhood. Mkhitar Sebastatsi as far back as 12 January 1719 and again on 14 April 1733 had presented a comprehensive memorandum to the 'Roman Board of Inquisition seeking permission for Catholic Armenians to frequent Armenian Apostolic Orthodox churches to receive the sacraments of Baptism, Marriage and Burial'. This suggests that Mkhitar Sebastatsi was against the proselytising activities of the missionaries, wishing to remain faithful to the traditions of the Mother Church. He and his affiliates were committed to creating an Armenian Catholicism *(կաթոլիկութիւն)* and refrain from promoting latinism *(լատինացնել)*. While the Collegians, supported by their staunchest allies, the Catholic magnates of the Duzian family, demanded the following modifications in the doctrines rituals and practices to achieve union.

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destroyed during the Genocide of 1915.

20 Gabriel Ayvazovski, *Պատմութիւն Օսմանեան Պետութեան* ('History of the Ottoman State'), Venice, 1841, vol. 2, p. 519; 'A E Correspondence Diplomatique', *Turquie*, vol. 232 (July 1819–December 1820), p. 108; Hagop Barsoumian, 'The dual role of the Armenian *Amira* class within the Ottoman Government and the Armenian *Millet* (1750–1850)', in Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, pp. 171–184.

1. The two natures and wills
2. The *Filioque* clause
3. The doctrine of purgatory
4. The supremacy of the Pope of Rome
5. The sacrament of extreme unction
6. The abandoning of the anathema against the Council of Chalcedon and the Tome of Pope Leo
7. Exclude from the 'Litany of General Intercessions' in the Divine Liturgy the names of Grigor Tat'evatsi, Movses Tat'evatsi, Hovhannes Ojnetsi and Hovhannes Vorotnetsi.[21]

Grigor Tat'evatsi in his *Book of Questions*, in a chapter entitled 'The unity and the separation of the church', lists the differences and similarities between the Armenian, Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Syrian churches and explains that the elements that separate them do not have *legal status* but are all a question of *'communicatio in sacris'*. According to him the Latins have these practices *(աւանդութիւնս)* which are alien to the Eastern Orthodox Churches.

1. They do not offer the sacrament out of the cup
2. The same priest can celebrate liturgy three times on the same day
3. And that in the same church without discrimination
4. They do not celebrate liturgy of the '*Lucermarium*' on the Eve of Nativity and Easter

21 According to the pro-Chalcedonian treatise known as the *Narratio de rebus Armeniae,* Emperor Heraclius summoned Catholicos Ezr (630–641) to Karin and coerced him into accepting union with the Imperial Church of Constantinople by accepting the doctrinal tenets formulated at the Council of Chalcedon and the Tome of Leo and the Seven Ecumenical Councils. This was part of the constant pressure on the Armenian Church, first within the borders of the Imperial Church and later by the Roman Catholic Church. But no permanent success was achieved. Cf. *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, translated, with notes, by R W Thomson, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 1999, Part I (Chapter 41), pp. 90–94 and Part II, pp. 228–231. This action of Catholicos Ezr taking 'communion' with the emperor was considered a treachery against the Armenian tradition and a rebuke was coined around his name: 'Truly your name is EZR ('brink, precipice, edge') since you took the Armenian church to the brink of dishonour' («Յիրաւի կոչեցաւ անուն ԵԶՐ, վասնզի յԵԶՐ տարեալ հաներ զՀայաստանեայս»); see Maghak'ia Ormanian, *Azgapatum*, vol. I, Bk. 2, p. 69.

5. They have purgatory
6. Acknowledge the procession of the Holy Ghost from the Father and the Son *(Filioque)*
7. They mark saints of other nations outside the Lectionary
8. They celebrate the liturgy on all fast days
9. They do not ordain priests from women
10. They baptise women *'in necesitate'* and make secular persons confess and re-baptise again[22]

Because the Catholic Armenians could only receive the Holy Sacraments in the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church and attend Divine Liturgy celebrated in the Armenian language, the followers of Mkhitar were against those intransigent Collegians who advised their flock: 'Do not even pass by the front of an Armenian Church, and if you are obliged to do so because you have left your hat there, do not go into the church to retrieve it but leave it there and flee.'[23] The slogan advanced by the Collegians was 'I am not an Armenian, I am a Catholic' («pēn Ērmēni tēyil im, pēn kat'olik im'= Ես հայ չեմ,ես կաթոլիկ եմ»). In response the Turks rejected this claim by drawing a clear distinction between religious affiliation and ethnic origin.

A slim volume called 'History of the events which happened in Constantinople concerning the famous discussions proving the truth of the Armenian faith for those who were ignorant of it and were sinning against it'[24] gives a succinct account of efforts of Patriarch Poghos Grigorian Andrianapolsetsi (1815–1823) between 1816 and 1823,

22 Grigor Tat'evatsi, *Գիրք հարցմանց* ('Book of Questions'), Constantinople, 1729, p. 553; facs. edition, Jerusalem,1993.

23 Gabriel Ayvazovski, op. cit., p. 41. «Հայոց ժամուն առջեւեն անգամ մի անցնիր, իսկ եթե անցնել պետք եղավ ու գդակը գլխեդ հոն ձգեցիր, ներս մի մտներ առնելու, ձգե փախիր»..

24 *Պատմութիւն անցից որ եղեւ ի Կոստանդնուպոլիս վասն յայտնի կացուցանելոյ զճշմարտութիւն հայադաւանացց ս. եկեղեցւոյ ՝ այնոցիկ, որոց չէին տեղեակ մեղանչէին*, Constantinople, Andreas *vard*. Aknetsi, 15 February, 1818, p. 35; see also H Kurdian, 'Հայ-Հայ Կաթոլիկ բաժանման մասին վաւերաթուղթ մը' ('A document concerning the separation of the Armenian-Armenian Catholics'), *Hask* 1–2 (1975), pp. 31–38. This is a short unused document copied by the scribe T'adeos Mihrdat attached to a manuscript entitled Պատմութիւն անցից . յաւէլուած 1818-ի ('Additional information on the History of events of 1818') written by Patriarch Karapet Palattsi (1823–1831), which in several details differs from the account of Ormanian.

who called five meetings composed of a committee of eight members representing each of the factions to discuss doctrinal differences.[25] In 1820 an agreement was reached in which it was agreed that in the 'Order of Ordination' the anathemas pronounced by the ordination candidates against the Council of Chalcedon and the Tome of Leo will not be required, and the names of Grigor Tat'evatsi, Movses Tat'evatsi and Hovhannes Orotnetsi would be excluded from the 'Litany of General Intercession' and, for those who required 'Extreme Unction', blessed oil would be provided. Patriarch Poghos ordained two celibate priests and during the ordination ceremony the anathemas against the Council of Chalcedon and the Tome of Pope Leo were not pronounced. In the same meeting the patriarch asked every papist to sign the following brief confession: 'Whatsoever the Holy Orthodox Armenian Church from the time of St Gregory the Illuminator accepts until the present I also accept, and whatsoever she rejects, I too reject. In witness to this my true confession, I hereby voluntarily have affixed my signature and seal.' As many were unwilling to sign this confession, later, to make matters easier, the Nicene Creed was substituted.[26] On 17 May the declaration called *Բան հրաւէր Սիրոյ* ('An Invitation to Love') was printed and communicated in the community. Mik'ayel *vardapet* Ch'amch'ian who represented the Mkhitarist Congregation of Venice was a member of the committee and had by this time completed his *Վահան Հաւատոյ ('Shield of Faith')* in defence of the Orthodoxy of the Armenian Church.

Things, however, assumed a grave aspect when Patriarch Poghos, in carrying out one of the conditions of the plan of union, consecrated holy oil for use in the administration of 'extreme unction'. The common people, only puzzled by the subtleties of doctrine, found the innovations in the rites of the church alarming. The faction of the papists who were opposed to the union on any terms, kept exasperating the nationals with their sarcasms: 'If now you would only mention the pope in your liturgy, you will be perfect Catholics!' On 19 August members from Collegio Urbano, hostile to the unity, thwarted and disrupted the reconciliation. From among them a Collegian, in disguise as a member of the Armenian Apostolic Church, holding in his hand a copy of the *Invitation to Love*, from which he had cut out the portrait St Gregory the Illuminator and replaced it with a portrait of

25 For a full list of the participants, see Hrant Asatur, op. cit., pp. 152–153.
26 Leon Arpee, *A History of Armenian Christianity*, New York, 1946, p. 258.

the pope, ran through the streets of the Armenian quarter shouting, 'Our patriarch has become a Frank he has denounced our Father the Illuminator and has accepted the Pope of the Franks' («պատրիարքն մեր ֆրանկացեալ՝ ուրացաւ զլուսաւորիչ հայրն մեր,և զպապան Ֆռանկաց ընկալաւ է»).[27] The patriarch was instructed to discover the instigators. Scores were thrown into prison and many sent into exile, some were executed for refusing to convert to Islam, while five were hanged. Among the beheaded was Father Komitas K'eomirchian, despite having openly confessed that he had not become a *'Frank'* («միաբանեալ են ընդ Ֆռանկս»).[28] On 18 September 1820 a hapless octogenarian, Gregory Sahakian, was brought to vespers to the door of the Patriarchal Church and beheaded.[29] The papal family of the Duzian *amiras,* in charge of the royal mint, were charged with dissent for supporting the Collegians (altars for celebration of mass were discovered in their homes) and were replaced by the Palian dynasty at the imperial mint.[30] The Armenian poet, playwright, and activist, Mkrtich Peshiktashlian (1828–68), in turmoil because of confessional

27 See note 13.

28 John Whooley, '*The Mekhitarists: Religion, culture and ecumenism in Armenian-Catholic relations',* in *Eastern Christianity*, Anthony O'Mahony (ed.), London, 2004, p. 462, suggests that Patriarch Awetik' Ewdokiatsi (1704–1706) was 'of particular notoriety' and was incarcerated in the Bastille, where he died in 1711, and Father Komitas K'eomirchian who was beheaded for refusing to convert to Islam. He was not a Catholic. Ch'amch'ian states that Father Komitas was protesting against those who accused him of becoming a Catholic: 'Everything that they say is a lie' («թէ սուտ է այն ամենայն, զոր խօսին դորա»); see Vrej Nersessian, 'Review article', *Sion* (2019), pp. 195–219; Maghak'ia Ormanian, *Azgapatum*, vol. II, Bk. 3, pp. 2756–2759; Mik'ayel Ch'amch'ian, *History of Armenia*, Vol. III, p. 755; Hrant Asatur, *The Armenians of Constantinople and their patriarchs*, pp. 96–98; Sirvard Malkhasian, *Անտիք պատրիարքի խորհրդաւոր կեանքը Կ.Պոլոյ պատրիարքարանեն Պասթիլի զնդանները* ('The mysterious life of Patriarch Awetik' from the Patriarchate of Constantinople to the prison in Bastille') (Istanbul, 2023) (in Turkish).

29 For a full list of those sent to exile or executed, see Maghak'ia Ormanian, *Azgapatum*, vol. III, Bk. I, pp. 3470–71.

30 The most comprehensive account of the events from 1817–1823 is provided by Perperian *varzapet* Awetis, *Պատմութիւն Հայոց սկսեալ ի 1772 ամէ մինչեւ զամն 1860 հանդերձ կարեւոր տեղեկութեամբ եւ ժամանակագրութիւն երեսից* ('Armenian history from the year 1772 until the year of the Lord 1860'), Constantinople, 1871, Chapters 17–31, pp. 81–171, pp. 435–621. It contains a *Chronicle* of events from 1769–1860. This is a continuation of the *History* by M Ch'amch'ian who covers the period up to 1772; Tigran H T' Sawaleants, *Պատմութիւն Երուսաղէմի* ('History of Jerusalem'), translated into modern Armenian by Mesrop Bsp. Nshanian, Jerusalem, 1931, vol. II, pp. 935–941.

disputes and schism, became closely involved in community affairs, supporting the unity of the nation, and expressed his frustration in a poem called 'We are brothers' *(Եղբայր եմք մեմք)*. All the eight verses end with the same refrain 'We are all brothers':

> 'Clasp hands, for we are brothers dear
> Of old by tempest rent apart
> The dark designs of cruel Fate
> Shall fail, when heart is joined to heart
> What sound, beneath the stars aflame,
> So lovely as a brother's name.'[31]

In a recent study Sebouh David Aslanian regards the splinter in the Mkhitarist Congregation, which he calls 'Great Schism', a gross exaggeration—a term first employed to describe the break-up between the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches in 1054—firstly, as a consequence of 'disputes over constitutionalism and representative governance in a monastic setting' and, secondly, that the Habsburg authorities welcomed the expelled monks from Venice to Trieste, 'to topple Venice from its pedestal of prestige as the leading port and emporium in the eastern Mediterranean.' He argues that the split in the Mkhitarist Congregation cannot be attributed 'to theological or doctrinal differences among the parties' but was motivated by 'mercantile factors'.[32] All the above arguments of his are plainly questionable and contrary to the efforts of the two communities in Constantinople to achieve reconciliation as evidenced in the publication called *Invitation to Love*, which failed as a result of the overzealous Catholicism advocated by the seditious monks of the Trieste faction. While on the one hand Aslanian dismisses Archbishop Ormanian's arguments on the causes of the split, in the same breath he states 'these had to do with rival and irreconcilable theological positions between the exponents of the two parties.'[33]

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31 Agop J Hacikyan et al., *The heritage of Armenian literature*, Vol. III, *From the eighteenth century to modern times*, Detroit, 2005, pp. 286–87 and 289–90.

32 Sebouh Aslanian, 'The "Great Schism" of 1773: Venice and the founding of the Armenian community in Trieste', in H Berberian and T Daryaee (eds), *Reflection of Armenian identity in history and historiography*, UCI Jordan Centre for Persian Studies, 2018, pp. 84–85.

33 Sebouh, op. cit., p. 122. Aslanian forgets that Archbishop Ormanian was a founder

The Failure to Implement the Many Acts of Union with Rome in the 13th Century

The ecclesiology of the Christian church underwent substantial changes by the decisions of the Council of Constantinople of 381 recognising that the centre of gravity of the empire had shifted eastward ever since the 3rd century, when Constantinople was declared 'the second Rome', which very rapidly became a 'New Rome' and its bishop 'Bishop of New Rome'. The contacts of the Armenian Church with Rome only extend to the 'pre-Christian' period. This is the supposed visit of the Armenian king Trdat I to Rome to receive his crown from Emperor Nero which in the medieval period is transported and enshrined in the *Letter of Concord (Dashants T'ught)*, cited in a military context to recall earlier Roman assistance to Armenia, or in an ecclesiastical context to demonstrate the orthodoxy of Armenian faith and practice, mutually confirmed by monarchs Constantine and Trdat.[34] In the early Christian period Armenia did not cultivate political or ecclesiastical ties with Rome before the 12th century during the Crusades. In 1054 the negotiations between Byzantium and the papacy failed disastrously resulting in the final breach between Rome and the eastern churches, the latter publishing a pamphlet in Constantinople entitled *Against the Franks*, in which twenty-eight Latin malpractices were cited, some authentic but others obviously untrue.[35] The decline and fall of the Macedonian (Graeco-Armenian) dynasty ('Graeco' because as always, its civilization was Greek; 'Armenian' because the elements which directed its destinies and provided the greater part of the forces for its defence were largely Armenian or of Armenian origin) was sealed in the disastrous defeat of the Byzantines by the Seljuk Turks at the battle of Manzikert in 1071 when the Emperor Diogenes Romanos was captured and Asia Minor was left open to the invaders.[36]

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member of Sacred Propagation of the Faith before his return to the fold of the Armenian Orthodox Church on 28–29 August 1879 with 45 other Armenian Catholic males and 30 females.

34 See note 16.

35 Steven Runciman, *The Eastern Schism*, Oxford, 1956, pp. 55–77; Marcus Ward, *The Byzantine Church*, Madras, 1953, p. 66.

36 Peter Charanis, *The Armenians in the Byzantine Empire*, Lisbon, 1963, p. 57; Hrach' Step'anyan, *Հայ ժողովրդի պայքարը Թաթար- Մոնղոլական լծի դեմ* ('The struggle of Armenia under Tatar-Mongol occupation'), Erevan, 1990, pp. 144.

In the aftermath of the Seljuk conquest of Armenia, a New Armenia (Little Armenia or the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia) was founded in exile, in the south-eastern corner of Asia Minor and northern Syria in 1199. This was the first period of the long history when Armenia became involved with Rome. Armenian historians like Matthew of Edessa regard the arrival of the *Khachenkalk'* (Crusades = *խաչընկալք*), which means 'those who had taken up the cross', as the fulfilment of the prophecy of the Armenian patriarch Nerses the Great (353–373) at the time of his death on Daniel's vision of the beast which predicts that the recapture of Jerusalem from the infidels will be by the Franks («ի յազգէն Փռանկաց լիցի փրկութիւնն Երուսաղէմի») (Daniel 7:7).[37] It is not clear whether in the mind of the historian Daniel's fourth beast represents the Crusaders, who will devour and trample the enemies of Christ, or whether it stands for Muslim rule, now to be destroyed. Sebeos writing sometime soon after 660 identifies the Muslims with Daniel's fourth beast as he tried to come to terms with the new power in the east.[38] The Armenian Church's rapprochement with Rome began at this period in the context of seeking military aid from the west to protect the new state from the threat posed by the Turks and, later, the Mongols, which consistently required papal approval.

Several Armeno-Latin conclaves were summoned for unity in Sis (1243 and 1307) and Adana (1316), largely attended by bishops of the Cilician diocesan and princes of Cilicia, with no representation from Greater Armenia.[39] Esayi Nch'ets'i, abbot of the Monastery of

37 Matt'eos Urahayetsi (of Edessa), *Պատմութիւն Մատթէոսի Ուռհայեցւոյ* ('History of Mat'ew of Edessa'), Jerusalem, 1869, pp. 306–307 and 324; it covers the years 952–53 down to 1136, continuation by Grigor the Priest down to 1162.

38 Sebeos, *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, p. 177; N G Garsoian, 'Quidam Narseus? A note on the mission of St. Nerses the Great', *Armenia between Byzantium and the Sasanians*, London, 1985, pp. 148–164.

39 Vrej Nersessian, 'The See of Holy Etchmiadzin and the Vatican: A chronicle of the contacts between Armenian Catholicoi and Popes', *Sion*, 1–2-3 (2021), pp. 78–87 and 4–7, pp. 183–195. For a contextualization of these developments according to the Papal correspondences with the Cilician court, see W H Rudt de Collenberg, 'Les Bullae et Litterae adressées par les papes d'Avignon à l'Arménie cilicienne, 1305–1375 (d'après les Registres de l'Archivio Segreto Vaticano', in *Armenian Studies in Memoriam Haig Berberian*, Dickran Kouymjian (ed.), Lisbon, 1986, pp. 697–726. For the English renderings of the First-Second Letters of Pope John XXII to Archbishop Zak'aria of Artaz and Letter of Pope John XXII to the heads of state and theologians of Southern Caucasia, see S Peter Cowe, 'The role of correspondence in elucidating the intensification of Latin-Armenian ecclesiastical interchanges in the first quarter

Gladzor, describes these councils summoned as 'erroneous councils' *(սուտ ժողով)*, in particular the Council of Adana.[40] The famous abbot of the university at Gladzor and his supporters are unanimous that the unity of the church is a God-pleasing act and it is the devil 'that by his provocative deceit keeps us apart, to achieve victory easily.' Being realistic he confides that in the absence of all the necessary requirements for the unity of the churches, 'every church should remain loyal to the traditions it has inherited from the past and at the same time be respectful towards the laws and practices of the national churches.'[41]

After the death of Gregory VII Anavarzets'i (1293–1307) in Sis, King Levon summons a council in Sis in 1307 and presents to the delegates a letter of the former Catholicos proposing the following doctrinal and sacramental changes:

—To mix water in the Eucharistic cup
—Accept the authority of the seven Ecumenical Councils
—Confess two natures, two wills and two actions in Christ
—Celebrate the dominical feast days with the Greeks and Latins—Birth of Christ on 25 December; Annunciation on 25 March; visit to the Temple on 2 February etc.
—End the Lent of the Nativity and Easter with olive oil and fish
—Recite the Trisagion with the addition of the word 'Christ' as in 'Christ who was Crucified'.[42]

In 1198 Cilicia became a kingdom; in 1375 the last king was carried away a captive into Egypt. Armenian Messianism, a salvation that was to come from the west, never materialised. After so many unhappy experiences, the Catholicoi became an instrument of pressure in the

of the fourteenth century', *JSAS*, 13 (2003, 2004), pp. 61–68.

40 Nicolas Coureas, 'The Papacy's relations with the kings and the nobility of Armenia in the period 1300–1350', *Actes du Colloque* '*Les Lusignans et L'Outre Mer*', C Mutafian (ed.), Poitiers, 1993, pp. 99–107.

41 Matenadaran Ms. 9622, fls. 734–753 'Letter of Esayi *vardapet* in response to the letter of Catholicos of Sis (Yovhannes VI Ssetsi, 1203–1221) and the king (Leo)'. The precise date of the letter is not known, but it must have been written during the final decade of the 14th century.

42 Eznik Petrosyan, *Abp.*, *Հայ եկեղեցու պատմություն* (*Ա մաս*) ('History of the Armenian Church') (Part 1), Erevan, 2016, pp. 203–204.

hands of foreign powers and hence the eastern clergy held a National Council in Ejmiadsin in 1441 and decided to 'return' *(վերադարձ)* the Holy See of the Catholicoi back to Holy Ejmiadsin. Thus Little Armenia disappeared from history, yet its role was not a negligible one, either in political or in the religious and cultural sphere. For three stormy centuries it withstood the pressure of Turkish Islam and joined with the Frankish Crusaders in a last effort to preserve the Christian heritage of Western Asia.[43]

Fratres Unitores and the role of the 'Inquisitor haereticae pravitatis'—(Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith)

In 1341, in Avignon, the city and archdiocese in France which became the seat of the papacy from 1309 to 1377 (a period known as the 'Babylonian Captivity'), a number of latinophile Armenian clergy supporting the union of the Armenian Church with Rome acted as a catalyst in the formation of an Armenian Catholic brotherhood affiliated with the Dominican Order, called the *Fratres Unitores (Միաբանող)* in Nakhijevan in the archbishopric of Sultaniyyah (Sultanieh).[44]

The most significant among them was Yovhannes K'rnetsi who composed a list of 19 errors in the Armenian Church and provided it to *Unitores* clergy. His followers were Nerses Palients (PaghonTaronatsi) and Simeon Pek. In 1336 Palients is mentioned as bishop in Urmia. There he meets with the bishop of Karin named Simeon Pek, they travel to Cilicia and devote themselves to the *Unitores* cause. Ch'amch'ian writes: 'United with other same minded they travelled here and there, preached and if necessary they re-baptised, re-confirmed all Armenians according to Latin rites, and re-ordained their priests and instructed them to celebrate the liturgy in Latin and according to Catholic rites, alter all the orders of the Fasts and other practices, so that thereafter

43 J J Saunders, 'The Armenian Ally', in *Aspects of the Crusades*, London, 1968, p. 63.

44 M A van den Oudenrijn, *Bishops and Archbishops of Naxivan'* in *Archivum Fratrum Praedictorum*, vol. VI (1936), pp. 161–216; Jean Richard, *La papauté et les missions d'orient au moyen âge (XIII-XV siècles)*, 2nd ed., École Française, Rome, 1988. Sultaniyyah was established by the Mongols in the 13th century and was significantly expanded into a capital in 1305; see *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, C E Bosworth et al. (eds), vol. IX, Brill, Leiden, 1997.

they can join the Church of Rome and would confess with Catholicos Mkhitar (1st Grnetsi, 1341–1355) that the Armenian rite of Baptism was dubious and their liturgy is not a true sacrifice.'[45] Nerses Palients for his adversarial activities was persecuted by the Armenian political and ecclesiastical authorities and in 1341, 'embittered', he fled to Avignon and presented himself to Pope Benedict spreading malicious untruth concerning the Armenian Church's faith and practices, the most extreme case of which was the compilation of 117 Armenian errors, the 110th being a list of 'heretical' *(մոլորական)* books of the Armenian Church which in 1341 he presented to Pope Benedict XII.[46]

45 Ch'amch'ian, *History*, pp. 330–331. Catholicos Mkhitar calls a meeting at Sis in 1342, and point by point discusses the 117 errors. Pope Clement VI (1342–1352) and Pope Innocent VI (1352–1362) send Nerses Palients to negotiate the submission to the Roman Catholic Church in return for military aid. See J Gray, *Le Pape Clement VI et les affaires d'Orient, 1342–1352*, Paris, 1904, pp. 133–46.

46 I list the 18 titles with minor notes: 1. *Tonapachar—Tonapachar, Tonapachaz, Tonaphacen, Tenophacer* (confusion between the vowels o-e;a-o; a-er-z r-n; p-ph) (*Տօնապատճառ*—A book against the feasts of the Roman and Greek churches); 2. *Hanadoarmat, Anadoarmat—Կնիքն Հաւատոյ* ('Seal of Faith' composed by Vardan Aygektsi in 1205); 3. *Johannes Mandagonensis—Յովհաննէս Մանդակունի* (Armenian theologian opposed to the Greek Church (478–490), *Treatise against the Council of Chalcedon*; 4. *Johannes Ossinensis—Յովհաննէս Օձնեցի* (Catholicos from 717–728, anti-Chalcedonian tract); 5. *Liber Miascosurus, Myascosurum, Myascosutum, Myastosuru Nerses Lambronatsi's (1153–1198) (Liber) unius locutionis = Գիրք Միաբանութեան*; 6. *Liber Michael, Liber Michaelis patriarchae Antiocheni—Գիրք Միքայէլի* (Chronicle of Patriarch Michael of Antioch translated into Armenian in 1248); 7. *Paulus Taronensis—Պօղոս Տարօնեցի* (11–12th-century theologian, *'Epistle against Theopistus')*; 8. *Octavensis, Tochanensis, Occenensis* (confusion in the letters t-t-c, a-e, n-v)*—Ուխտանէս եպիսկոպոս* (historian of the 10th century on, 'The history of the separation of the Georgian and Armenian churches')*;* 9. *Liber Matthaeus—Մատթէոս գիրք* (12th-century historian Matthew of Edessa's *Chronicle*); 10. *Canones apostolorum, Liber Canonum apostolorum—Կանոնք առաքելական* (contains all the 'errors of the Armenian church'); 11. *Liber Sergniz, Sergium—Սարգիս Շնորհալի* (12th-century author, 'Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles')*;* 12. *Liber Marucha. Marocha—Մայրագոմեցի* (7th-century anti-Chalcedonian theologian); 13. *Liber Nanam, Ranam, Vanam—Նանան գիրք* (9th-century monophysite Jacobite Nana's 'Commentary on the Gospel of St John'); 14. *Liber Ignadius—Իգնատիոս գիրք* (12th-century monk Ignatios's 'Commentary on the Gospel of St Luke'); 15. *Liber Ganazan, Guanazan, Guanazam,* Latin title *'Liber virgarum'*, i. e.*—Գիրք Գանազանաց* ('Chronicle of Catholicoi'); 16. *Pataraquin Mehging, Pataraquin Mebging, Neginua Pataraquin, Naguig Patracum—Մեկնիչ Պատարագին* ('Commentators on the Divine Liturgy'); 17. *Textorquire, Teytorgunt,* translated title given as *'Liber epistolarum—Գիրք Թղթոց* ('Book of Letters' compiled in 1298. Collected Letters on the doctrinal position of the Armenian Church towards Chalcedonianism and Nestorianism); 18. *Aismanorc, Aismanore, Aismavort, Aysyjanot,* translated title given as*—Martyrologium i.e. Յայսմաւուրք).*

For a complete annotated list, see H Anasyan, *Հայոց մոլորական համարուած գրքերն*

Here we need to point out that the accusations were refuted by fellow Armenian Franciscan Daniel of Tabriz,[47] the Synod of Sis 1341–42 and later by Catholic authors (Galanus, Villote, Mansi). According to Ormanian, Nerses Palients was from Taron and not Sis who had gone to Kṙna and there joined the *Unitores*. In a colophon written by him in 1332 he writes 'I Nerses, by calling a *vardapet*, but by labour useless soil and dust among the *vardapets*, son of Vahram from the land of Taron in the province of Sis, from the monastery of Lazar, in the village called Kor.'[48] It is worth reminding the reader the Nerses Palients' action had its antecedent in Byzantine circles in the shape of *Narratio de rebus Armenie* written in Greek by an Armenian-Chalcedonian at the beginning of the 8th century. The author of this document was a Chalcedonian Armenian 'who had renounced his faith, accepted the doctrine of the Greeks and composed his book of errors which the Armenians believed in those times.'[49]

In the 12th century the infiltration of the Roman Catholic Church into Cilicia and the Chalcedonian issue of the Byzantine era re-surfaced in Cilicia. This was the result of the political changes that took place in Cilicia. Prince Leo II in 1198 restored Armenian independence by receiving his crown from the pope and the German emperor. Thereafter during the entire 13–14th centuries, just as the Byzantine rulers had tried to enforce Orthodoxy on the Armenians, so also the papacy wished to bring their submission to the Roman Catholic Church under the guise of latinisation. The demands of the papacy caused a rift between the Cilician kingdom and the mother country where the theologians of the monasteries of Artaz and Tat'ew

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ըստ Լատինական մի ցուցակի ('Armenian heretical books according to an ancient Latin list'), *Մանր Երկեր* ('Minor Works'), Los Angeles, 1987, pp. 303–317; reprinted from *Ejmiadsin,* 10 (1957), pp. 27–89. The entire corpus of anti-Chalcedonian theological works were deemed heretical.

47 For a complete published text, see 'Responsio fratris Danielis (De Thaurisio) ad errores impositos Hermenis' in *RHC Documents Arméniens*, t. II, Paris, 1906, pp. 559–650; J D Mansi, *Concilium Armenorum, in que objecti Armenis in libello errores condemnatur, eorumqe fides amplius, anno 1342 celebratum; ex ms. codice Bibliothecae Regiae*, t. XXV, Graz, 1961, pp. 1185–1270.

48 M Ormanian, *Abp., Azgapatum*, vol. II, p. 1279; Lewond Alishan, *Հայապատում* ('Armenian History'), Venice, 1893, p. 375.

49 G Garritte, *La Narratio de rebus Armeniae* in *CSCO*, vol. 132, subsidia t. 4, Louvain 1967; Armenian translation of the text from the Greek by H Bartikian, *BM*, No. 6 (1962), pp. 457–470.

were the staunch defenders of the national traditions. Religion was a powerful stimulant of national consciousness. The sense of a common religious heritage uniting the Armenians of both realms enabled them to express their national self-determination by forcing the return of the See of the Catholicate of All Armenians back to its original location in Ejmiadsin in 1441.[50]

'Վահան Հաւատոյ' ('Shield of Faith') The Orthodoxy of the Armenian Church[51]

On 12 January 1719 and on 14 April 1733, the founder of the Mkhitarist Congregation, Mkhitar Sebastatsi, presents to the College of *Propaganda Fide* a comprehensive communication in which he gives dispensation to Catholic Armenians in Constantinople to attend Armenian Orthodox Churches and participate in their rites. This is evidence that Mkhitar Sebastatsi was against the presence of Catholic missionaries engaged in proselytising, emphasizing his mission to protect the national, cultural, religious and social coherence of the Armenian nation. A group of Mkhitarists, among them Ch'amch'ian who was 'a devoted catholic but not a latinophile', was developing the notion that the two churches could co-operate by dialogue without compromising their identities. They vigorously defended the autocephalous character of the Armenian Church by drawing attention to the fact that the Armenian Church had not removed itself from the Roman Catholic Church and the doctrinal position

50 Arshak Alpoyachian, 'Աթոռին Էջմիածին վերահաստատութեան շարժառիթները եւ անոր գլխաւոր գործիչները' (The motives for returning the See of Holy Ejmiadsin and its principal motivators), *HHT* 2nd Year (1949–1950), pp. 1–15.

51 *Վահան Հաւատոյ Ուղղափառութեան Հայաստանեայց Եկեղեցւոյ Յօրինեալ ի Հ. Միքայէլ վարդապետէ Չամչեան:Ի համառոտութենէ անտի գաղափարեալ ի Պէտրոսեան Պողոս Սարկաւագէ Կ. Պոլսեցւոյ դասաւսաց անուանեալոյ*: « Ի Կիպրոս նաւահանգիստ Թուղլայ ի Փետր» ուար) 1823: Տպագրեալ արդեամբ և վերատեսչութեամբ . Տ. Յովհաննու Խաչիկեան Խաչակիր Քահանայի ՝ յիւրում տպարանի յամի Տեառն 1873 Ի կալկաթա:Էջ. 115 + 26. (vii) Փայտփորագիր պատկեր Թարգմանչաց վարդապետների—ձաղից լուսանցքից: Եղիշէ—Գրիգոր Նարեկացի—Ներսես Շնորհալի—Ներսես Լամբրոնացի—Մովսէս Խորենացի—Սար. (գիս՞) մեկն. (իչ՞). Engraved woodcut portraits of the Translators, engraved by Madhub Chander Mullink: Initials Տ. Յ. Իս (Ter Yovhannes Khachikian): Երկրորդ մասը սկսում է դիմապատկերով Տեր Յովհաննես Խաչիկեան Աւագ Քահանայ ասպետ = Revd. Johaness Chachiek.

of the Armenian Church had not been officially condemned by the papacy. The adoption of this view by the Mkhitarists is the principle theme of Ch'amch'ian's three volume *History of Armenia*. In his history Ch'amch'ian is critical of those Catholic historians who, by distorting the above fact, have tried to prove that the Armenian Church had deviated from orthodoxy. Ch'amch'ian cannot even hide his disdain for the Catholic apologist Clemens Galanus (†1666), whom papal circles named 'God's scourge against the eastern heretics', while he himself boasted that through bribery he could with the participation of corrupt and arrogant Catholic Armenian clergy secure 'abundant harvest' for Rome.[52] Clemens Galanus from the Order of Theatins published in Rome in two parts his *Conciliationis Ecclesiae Armenae cum Romana ex ipsis Armenorum Patrum et Doctorum testimoniis, in dua partes, historialem et controversialum, divisae Pars prime*, and produced two *Conciliationis Ecclesia Armenae cum Romana (= Միաբանութիւն Հայոց եկեղեցւոյն ընդ Մեծի Եկեղեցւոյն Հռոմայ)*.[53] The work is based on the writings of the famous Franciscan Luc Wadding and the Armenian Dominican *Unitores* priest Grigor Dsodsoretsi (Գրիգոր Ծործորեցի), *The Letter of Yovhannes K'rnetsi* to *Fratres Unitores* shortly before their establishment, which includes the 19 errors of the Armenian Church, extracts from *Letter of Concord (Dashants T'ught)*, and finally the *Letter to King Het'um* (1226–70) in which Galanus calls Hovhan Odznetsi, Anania Shirakatsi, Poghos Taronatsi, Vardan Areveltsi and Mkhitar Gosh 'false *vardapets*' *(սուտ վարդապետներ)*.[54] Galanus also includes in his *Conciliationis* the tract

52 K Ezian, *Բռնի միութիւն Հայոց Լեհաստանի ընդ եկեղեցւոյն Հռոմայ* ('The forced union of the Armenians of Poland with the church of Rome'), St Petersburg, 1884, p. 121.

53 *Միաբանութիւն Հայոց սուրբ եկեղեցւոյն ընդ մեծի սուրբ եկեղեցւոյն Հռոմայ* (Latin and Armenian texts), 2 vols, Rome, 1650–58. See Vrej Nersessian, *Catalogue of Early Armenian Books 1512–1850*, The British Library, London, 1980, nos 17 and 18, p. 50.

54 M A van den Oudenrijn O.P., *Յովհաննես Քռնեցիի Ընդհանրական Թուղթը Կապանոի 'Conciliatio' իև մէջ* ('The inclusion of Yovhannes K'rnets'is Encyclical addressed to the *Fratres Unitorum* in the "Conciliation"') translated into Armenian by Gnel *Ds. Vardapet*, *HHT*, 2nd year (1949–50), pp. 109–208. The Russian theologian Alexandr Anniskiy in his *History of the Armenian Church* (Kishniev, 1900) calls the Armenian church Fathers mentioned by Galanus 'blind', 'ignorant', 'haughty', 'fanatic Monophysites'; see review by Hakob Manandyan in *Երկեր* ('Collected Works', Erevan, 2010, Vol. VII, pp. 40-48) where he concludes 'the obscurant and arbitrary views of modern authors like Anniskiy are obstacle to just and even minded valuation: "C'est une grande folie de vouloir être sage tout seul."'

'On the seven sacraments', the translation of which into Armenian Galanus attributes to Yovhannes K'rnetsi but whose translator is in fact Yovhannes Erznkatsi (also known as Dsordoretsi) who participated in the Council of Adana.[55] Ch'amch'ian draws a different conclusion by convincingly establishing the orthodoxy of these patristic fathers. With extended explanations he refutes the 'false accusations' *(սուտ մեղադրանքները)*. At the same time he does not neglect to enumerate the many points which the 'two sister' churches have in common, in contrast to the Catholic missionaries, who in exasperation continued to demand the return of the Armenian Church into the 'fold of the Catholic Church'. Ch'amch'ian, a brilliant and prophetic theologian, remaining impenitently and loyally a Mkhitarist, is convinced that there is no need for this; he gives an appropriate reassurance in his *Shield of Faith* written between 1738–1823, which fell into the hands of the Roman *magisterium* who maintained their conviction of spiritual absolutism and intransigence and added the book to their list of heretical books and had it destroyed. The Mkhitarists in Venice did not dare defend Ch'amch'ian in front of the Propaganda Inquisition and sought to protect the Catholic Armenians in the Ottoman Empire from fear of persecution. An Armenian Catholic in Venice, called by his Italian name Marchese Giovanni de Serpos (Yovhannes *aspet* Seghbosian), published his *Dissertatione Polemico-Critica … concernenti gli armeni catholici studdti dell impero ottoman, presantati all sacra Congregazione di Propaganda* (Venice 1783), in which he denounces the accusations of Galanus and utilises freely the *History of the Armenians* and *Shield of Faith* by Mik'ayel Ch'amch'ian, Papal Bulls and the decisions of the Councils of the *Propaganda Fidei* to defend Ch'amch'ian from being denounced as a heretic. Most interesting is the quotation of the decisions of the encyclicals issued on 31 January 1702 and 13 March 1755 on the rituals and practices of the eastern churches based on the evidence of which Pope Benedict XIII (1640–1730) declared, 'Let every church observe its own rituals' («Պահեսցեն իւրաքանչիւր [եկեղեցի]զիւրեիհանց ծես»).[56]

55 The tract *On the seven sacraments* is the Armenian version of Saint Thomas Aquinas's (c. 1225–74) *('… et transtulerunt pro tune quartum librum Sententiarum sancti Thome propter sacraments')*.

56 Maghakia Ormanian, *Ազգապատում*, Vol. II, Bk. 3, pp. 3163–3166. Serpos defends the Orthodoxy of the Armenian church, all its rituals and practices in six books covering 1,608 pages. He is also the author of a *History of Armenia*, Venice, 1786, which is modelled on Ch'amch'ian's work.

Clement Galanus, 'God's scourge', had secured great authority among Catholics through his missionary and historical works. For that very reason many scholars blindly follow him, repeating everything found in his writings. Thus, western scholars unable to access Armenian sources predominantly shaped their views of Armenian Christianity on the writings of Galanus.[57] His reputation suffered when he came under severe criticism from the theologians of the 'New Julfa' School, when a printing press was founded in New Julfa in 1687, predating the founding of the Mkhitarist Congregation and Press.[58]

Description of the Only Printed Edition in Comparison with a Manuscript Copy (Arm. MS. 14) in the University of California

According to Patriarch Ormanian the original manuscript of *Shield of Faith*, a copy of which he had seen in the Armenian Atonian Catholic monastery in Constantinople, consisted of 924 handwritten pages[59] was completed in 1776. Ch'amch'ian, a member of the reconciliation delegation representing the Mkhitarists of Venice (see above) asserts the 'Orthodoxy' of the Armenian Church against Catholic papist accusations that the Armenian Church had deviated from the truth.

For setting out the facts of this extraordinary case I am dependent on the printed edition of *Shield of Faith* and the manuscript copy

57 Ch'amch'ian, *Armenian History*, vol. III, chapter XXVII, pp. 622–629; Leo, *Երկերի ժողովածու* ('Collected Works'), Vol. V, Erevan, 1986, p. 225; and sadly several modern Mkhitarist historians—Balgy Alexander (Palcian), *Historia doctrinae Catholicae inter Armenos unionisque eorum cum Ecclesia Romana in Concilio Florentineo*, Vienna, 1878; Vardan *vardapet* Hatsuni, *Կանուր խնդիրներ հայ եկեղեցւոյ պատմութեան* ('Important questions in the history of the Armenian Church'), Venice, 1927; L S Kogian, *Հայոց եկեղեցին մինչև Ֆլորենտիոյ ժողովը* ('The Armenian Church up to the Council of Florence'), Beirut, 1961; B L Zekiyan, 'Les disputes religieuses du XIVe siècle, préludes des divisions et du statut ecclésiologique postérieur de l'église Arménienne', *Actes du Colloque*, C Mutafian (ed.), pp. 305–315; John Whooley, however, continues upholding Galanus's reputation. See Vrej Nersessian, review article: 'The Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church and the vision of the Fratres Unitores or Unifying Friars among Armenians', *Sion*, August-December (2019), pp. 195–219.

58 Vrej Nersessian, 'The impact of the New Julfa—"New Geneva" school of theologians against the crisis of proselytization and apostasy in Safavid Iran', *Living Stones Yearbook* 2022, pp. 240–310.

59 M Ormanian, *Ազգապատում*, vol. II, Bk. 3, pp. 2162–2163.

formerly in the collection of the late Dr Caro Minassian of New Julfa and now part of the University of California's collection (Arm. MS. Nr. 14).

Members of the schismatic Collegian faction of the Catholic community in Constantinople, who opposed the faction to which Mik'ayel Ch'amch'ian belonged, managed to steal the manuscript from the safe in which it had been kept. Their leader, Poghos *vardapet* P'apasian, made a copy of it, travelled to Rome and, submitted the manuscript to the *magisterium*, the church's 'teaching office' in the Vatican. The Inquisition appointed by the Holy See, meeting at the monastery of St Mary at Minerva on 5 May 1819, concluded that Ch'amch'ian could not be considered the author of the manuscript submitted to them and hence was to be found innocent of the accusation of heresy. The verdict was confirmed by Pope Pius VII on 30 June 1819. However, the Inquisition resolved that Ch'amch'ian's *Shield of Faith* should be censored and listed among the heretical books.

From the inscription in the manuscript (fls 60–60v) and the printed version (pp. 116–118) we learn that in August 1817 a notable named Yarut'iwn *agha* Pezian purchased a copy of the abridged version from the Collegian clerics in Constantinople. Deacon Poghos Petrosian employed at the time as a tutor to Yarut'iwn *agha's* nephews made a copy for his own use. In 1823 the deacon left Constantinople for Cyprus, and while waiting for a ship to journey to Jerusalem, he completed the title page, subtitles, and other divisions of his codex that had been only sketchily laid out by the abridger of Ch'amch'ian's original manuscript. The deacon states that after arriving in Jerusalem, he offered his codex to Archbishop Mkrtich *vrd.* Ghrimetsi (i.e. from Crimea, †1828), then chief sacristan of the Armenian Patriarchate. It is to be noted that the manuscript collection in Jerusalem contains two manuscripts written by deacon Poghos Petrosian: MS 409, written in 1821 at Tuzla, Cyprus («*Ի Կիպրոս նաւահանգիստն Թուղլայ,ի փետր (ւա)ր 1825*», printed on the title page of the printed edition) and MS. 2692, written in 1821 at Pera in Constantinople.[60]

60 In the margin of the copy in UCLA MS. 14, fls. 61–6av, the owner of the manuscript Dr Caro Minassian attests that his manuscript is a copy made by Martiros Ter Yovakimian in Calcutta from the exemplar belonging to Isahak *vrd.* Ter Grigorian; for other manuscript copies, see Vrej Nersessian, *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,* The British Library, 2012, vol. II, Or. MS. 14177,

The abridged version was published in Calcutta in 1873 by the priest Yovhannes Khachikian. The publication is based on the short version copied in Tuzla, Cyprus in 1828, as stated on the title page. In the preface of the book the publisher states that in 1844 he had seen a manuscript copy of the text with Ter Isahak *vardapet* Grigorian (d. 1831), who had arrived in India as *nuncio* of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem. A while later, the priest Martiros Ter Yovakimian (1846–1849),[61] who had been sent from New Julfa as a diocesan priest, borrowed the manuscript from Isahak *vardapet* to make a copy for himself, and it was this manuscript that formed the basis of the printed edition.[62]

The chapter headings are as follows:

—i. Title page
—ii-iii. Dedication to Ter Grigoris prelate of the Diocese of All-Saviours Convent of (New) Julfa
—iv. Printer's introduction
—v. Icon of a cross with 6-line eulogy
—vi-vii. Eleven verses inserted by the printer, entitled 'On the glory of the Church' *('Յաւելուած Տպագրչի ի Փառս Եկեղեցւոյ')* topped by a quotation from Yovhannes Erznkatsi's also called Dsordsoretsi, *'Ի գովեստ Լուսա. (ւորչի) յամի տեառն 1288'*, ('In Praise of St Gregory the Illuminator').[63]
—viii. Frontispiece portrait of the 'Translators' representing Eghishe, Grigor Narekatsi, Nerses *Shnorhali*, Nerses Lambronatsi, Movses Khorenatsi, Sargis

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pp. 874–77; Norayr Pogharian, *Aրթ.*, *Մայր Ցուցակ ձեռագրաց Սրբոց Յակոբեանց* ('Grand catalogue of St James' manuscripts'), Jerusalem 1966–1991, 11 vols, 2: 345–346 and 8: 311–312. For copies of the manuscript in All Saviour's Monastery in New Julfa (Isfahan), see Smbat Ter Awetisian, Vienna, 1970, Vol. I, MS. 504 (p. 776); Onik Eganyan, *Ցուցակ Մատենադարանի* ('Catalogue of Manuscripts in the Matenadaran'), Erevan, 1965–70, Vol. 2, MS 9030 and 9842, cols 856–57 and 1002.

61 Tigran Baghramyan, deacon, *Արեւմտեան Բենգալիայում թաղված հայ հոգեւորականներ* ('Armenian clergy buried in West Bengal'), Yerevan-Kolkata, 2007, pp. 144–45.

62 In the margin of the copy in UCLA MS. 14, fol. 61–61v, the owner of the manuscript Dr Caro Minassian attests that his manuscript is the copy made by Martiros Ter Yovakimian in Calcutta from the exemplar belonging to Isahak *vardape*t Ter Grigorian.

63 Yovhannes *vrd.* Dsordsoretsi (or Erznkatsi, 1260?–1335?), a graduate of the University of Gladzor and pupil of Esayi Ntchetsi (1255?–1338).

Mek(nitch?) accompanied by the legend:
«Հանդէս բարունեաց տանս ասքանազն ան
Արզոյ հռետորաց չքնաղ տեսար—ան»
Portrait of the priest Khatchikian inscribed 'Engraved by Madhub Chander Mulliek' . Տ.Յ.Խ (initials of Ter Yovhannes Khatchikian)
—ix. Blank.
—Pp. 1–5. (fols 3–4v), *Հաստատութիւն Ուղղափառութեան Հայաստանեայց Եկեղեցւոյ* ('Confirmation of the Orthodoxy of the Armenian Church').
—1st Task, pp. 5–10 (fols 4v-7), *Խնդիր առաջին Յաղագս ժողովոյն Քաղկեդոնի*, 'Concerning the Council of Chalcedon'. *Sub sections*
—2nd Task, pp. 10–16 (fols 7–9v), 'What do Armenians think on the one or two natures in Christ' *(Զի՞նչ միտս ասեն հայք մի բնութիւն կամ երկու բնութիւն ի Քրիստոս)* {*167}.
—3rd Task, pp. 16–21 (fols 9v-11v) 'Concerning the procession of the Holy Spirit' *(Յաղագս բղխման Հոգւոյն սրբոյ)*.
—4th Task, pp. 21–27 (fols 54–57v), 'What view do Armenians hold on the deceased and what meaning does the word purgatory hold for them' *(Թէ զի՞նչ կարծիս իցեն հայք վասն անջեցելոց,և յի՞նչ միտս առեալ լինի ի նոցանէ բառս Քաւարան)*.
—5th Task, pp. 27–31 (fols 11v-13v), 'On the inclusion of the phrase "Who was crucified for us" in the Trisagion 'Holy God' *(Յաղագս խաչեցարիւ երգելոյ սուրբ աստուածն)*[64]{pp. 309–310}.
—6th Task, pp. 32–36 (fols 52–54v), 'Concerning the feast day of Christ's birth' *(Յաղագս տօնի Ծննդեան Քրիստոսի)* {*pp. 577}.
—7th Task, pp. 37–53 (fols 37–45v), 'Concerning the

64 The publisher has made the following annotation: First, he explains the origin of the hymn 'Holy God' and proves that all peoples, including Latins recite the hymn addressed to the Son, as evidenced in the singing of the hymn on Good Friday, when in place of the 'Word' 'who was crucified' a real cross is held aloft. Therefore, it is the right of the Armenian church to continue to sing as before and not to change.

sacred cup as to whether it should be undiluted or mixed with water' *(Յաղագս սրբոյ բաժակին ընդ բանի անապակ կամ ջրախառն մատուցանելոյ).*

—8th Task, pp. 53–64 (fols 45v-52), 'On how the rules and commandments of the church should be observed' *(Ի՛ զի՞նչ պիսի եղանակաւ պահելի են օրէնք և պատուիրանք Եկեղեցւոյ).*[65]

—9th Task, pp. 65–77 (fols 31–37), 'Extreme unction' *(Յաղագս վերջին օծման)* {*pp. 743}.

—10th Task, pp. 77–103 (fols 13v-31), 'Concerning the Primacy of the See of Rome' *(Յաղագս նախապատիւթեան Առաքելական Աթոռոյն)* {*pp. 824}.

—Pp. 103–115, 'The Armenian Church is free of heresy and schimatism' *(Յաղագս ազգ գոլոյ եկեղեցւոյ հայոց ի հերետիկոսութենէ և ի հերձուածողութենէ).*[66]

—Pp. 116–118, contains the various colophons and inscriptions signed by Gamillius Sp'artsian notary of the Holy Roman Inquisition. (Seal); Petrosian *deacon* Poghos (Patriarchaste of Jerusalem 1824); Ter Grigor Isahak *nuncio* of the Apostolic See of Jerusalem to India (30 June 1846, Calcutta); Ter Martiros Ter Yovakimian (New Julfa, 6 March 1852). The scribe of the manuscript is named as Andreas Ter Eghiazarian.

—Unpaginated page carrying the portrait of the publisher and owner of the printing press, Ter Yovhannes Khachikian, archpriest and *Aspet* = Revd Johanness Catchik (reverse side blank).

Appended to the printed version of *Shield of Faith* with new pagination is a 23-page response entitled 'Աղաղակ սրտի ընդդէմ վատասիրտ արանց որք խռովին ի բարի գործս այլոց' ('Anguish from the heart against those timid individuals who are disturbed by the good works of others').

65 The scribe of the manuscript has erred in designating this as the 4th Task.

66 The numbers with * in { } brackets inserted by the publisher with notes are those of the unabridged manuscript. The complete manuscript ends on page 880. The end section expands his concerted opposition to Clemens Galanus', by re-stating the view of the Armenian theologians *Hovhannes Imastaser* Odznetsi, Parsam, Vorotnetsi (Yovhannes) and Tat'evatsi (Grigor) *vardape*t on the Orthodoxy of the Armenian Church.

Revd Khatchikian is responding to those who hearing of the news of the publication of *Shield of Faith* were criticising him for having printed the work of a dedicated papist and a Catholic *vardapet* (i.e. Mik'ayel Ch'amch'ian), who stood accused of not being a worthy Armenian and cunningly pretending to defend the Armenian Church, while allegedly promoting the conversion of the Armenians to Roman Catholicism («չէր օրէն մեզ տպագրել զայն գործ Պապական Վարդապետի,և ոչ իսկ նորին յազգս' արժան ծագումն»). His accusers doubted Ch'amch'ian's sincerity and circulated rumours that his motives were a cynical facade. One of the major criticisms against Ch'amch'ian was that he had been too reliant on the contents of *Dashants T'ught*. The publisher declines to give the name of his accuser, confessing 'I do not wish to give his name for two reasons; first for the respect I have towards him and secondly from my fear that I am not certain of his identity.' The publisher narrates his defence in the form of questions and answers. And his justification for publishing the work is: 'Yes, he was a papist and a brave one too for, according to some co-religionists, he was not against his national church but was faithful and defended it according to his best ability.'

> «Հ(արց). Զի՞նչ կամիս ասել թէ չէր նա Պապական և պաշտպան Հ(այ. Եկեղեցւոյ:
> «Պ(ատասխան). Այո նա պապական էր և կարի քաջ,սակայն ըստ ոմանց կրօնակցաց՝ չէր հակառակ իւրոյ ազգային եկեղեցւոյ,այլ հաւատարիմ և պաշտպան ըստ կարի»,
> (ending with the words of the Apostle), 'Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called', and 'Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God' (I Cor. 7:20 and 24).[67]

I would hazard a guess suggesting that the person questioning his wisdom for printing *Shield of Faith* was his long-time friend and colleague, the priest Yovhannes Mkrian (1831–1909), with whom he did not wish to begin a long acrimonious theological argument. Khatchikian bequeathed his outstanding library to Father Mkrian which was bought for the library of the Catholicate of Cilicia in Antelias.

67 *Shield of Faith*, Calcutta, 1873, Appendix, pp. 1–2.

The work begins with a broad history of the Armenian Church. During its entire history in times of prosperity and many tragic instances, it has never deviated from its true beliefs and reform, which it inherited from St Gregory the Illuminator, but kept unchanged and still preserves the same until now.

Then he lists the contents of his thesis in ten chapters of the errors and accusation levelled against the Armenian Church. I will list these and provide, with due brevity the arguments he advances proving the contrary.

Concerning the Council of Chalcedon

The Armenian Church not having participated in the Council of Chalcedon preserved the Christological traditions of the first three Ecumenical Councils, and came to side with those who rejected Chalcedon. Its adherence to non-Chalcedonian Christology remained a potential problem in its relations with Byzantium and Rome.

Could the Armenian Church be defined as schismatic because it rejects the Council of Chalcedon? If the Armenian Church was convinced that the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon were faithful to the decisions reached at the Council of Ephesus, without Nestorius's claim that Christ had two natures, they would never have rejected it. After a prolonged discussion he makes this observation. The French and German churches anathematised the Seventh Council, but were never declared heretics, similarly the Armenians anathematised the Fourth Council and that should not make them heretics or schismatic. In the Seventh Ecumenical Council, on the use of images in worship, the term 'veneration' *(Երկրպագութիւն)* was one of the many sore points, which ignited the mutual distrust of east and west and eventually contributed to the final schism.[68] In the same manner the tortuous doctrinal

68 Vrej Nersessian, 'Vrt'anes K'ert'ogh' in *ODLA,* Oliver Nicholson (ed.), Oxford, 2018, vol. II, p. 1575; S Der Nersessian 'Une apologie des images du septième siècle', *EBA*, vol. I, pp. 379–403; supra, 'Image worship in Armenian and its opponents', *EBA*, vol. I, pp. 405–415; E Durean, Abp. 'Yaghags Patkeramartits' ('Concerning the Iconoclasts'), *Sion* 17 (1927), pp. 23–25, 61–63. Armenia did not participate in the Second Council of Nicaea in 787 but persecuted the two Armenian iconoclastic sects, the Paulicians and the T'ondrakians, whom Grigor Magistros referred to as 'bandits', 'brigands',

debate on the term 'two natures' *(Բնութիւն)* employed by Nestorius undermined the unity and stability of the church and became the principal cause of rift between the Christian east and west. Ch'amch'ian reiterates, 'If you travel through Europe ask its citizens how many natures are there in Christ only the learned will have an answer but the ordinary people and some among the clergy will be scandalized *(յապուշ մնան)* and will not understand as to what the question is in reference to.' In the same way that theologians justify the stance of the French towards the Seventh Council, they should accept the stance of the Armenian Church. Ecumenical councils do not possess inherent, automatic infallibility. He concludes the Armenian Church should not concede to the demand of the Catholics to lift the anathema regarding the Council of Chalcedon in their sacrament of ordination. The ecumenicity of a council is not *a priori* certain. The acceptance of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicea in 325 is of fundamental importance. There were councils that were not convoked or conducted as ecumenical but have come to be accepted as ecumenical. The canons of smaller synods, such as those of Ancyra in 314, Neocaesaria in 320, Antioch in 329, Gangra in 324, have acquired ecumenical status. But the converse is also true. Councils that were convoked as ecumenical failed acceptance; such were the Council of Sardica and the Second Council of Ephesus in 449. The historian H Jedin rightly observes that 'for the first thousand years and beyond, the intention and will of the convokers of a council were not sufficient to establish its ecumenicity; nor the acknowledgment of its decisions.'[69]

'outlaws'. See Vrej Nersessian, *The T'ondrakian Movement*, London, 1987, pp. 37–73; Mesrop K Krikorian, *vrd.*, 'The attitude of the Oriental Orthodox Churches towards the Vth, VIth, VIIth and VIIIth Ecumenical Councils', *AR* 31 (1978), pp. 42–46. The 7th Ecumenical Council would have been acceptable by the non-Chalcedonians if the Assembly had not unnecessarily condemned saintly patriarchs Dioscorus and Severus (*Conciliorum oecumenicorum decretal*, Bologna, 1973, p. 135).

69 Vladimir Gaité, *Abbay*, *Հարձուածող Պապութիւն կամ Հռոմի ի յարաբերութեան ընդ Արեւելեան եկեղեցիս. Գործ Արքայ Կէթէի: Թարգմանութիւն Միաբանից Ջարխափան Ս. Աստուածածնի Վանաց* ('Schismatic Papacy or Rome. Its relations with Eastern Churches'), translated into Armenian (from the French) by a member of the Church of the Holy Virgin), Armash, 1869, vol. I, pp. 119, reprints in 1867, 1871, 1873, and *Վարդապետութիւն Ընդհանրական ուղղափառ եկեղեցւոյ հանդերձ տարբերութեամբ որ ընդ այլ եկեղեցիս քրիստոնէից* ('The teaching of the universal church, and the differences in the other Christian churches'), translated from the French by Khoren *Vrd.* Ashegeants, Armash, 1871, p. 343; Hans Küng, *Infallible? An Enquiry*, Collins, London, 1971, p. 167.

In 1014, at the coronation of the German emperor Henry II, the singing of the Nicene Creed included the *Filioque*, the Latin term meaning 'and from the Son', added to the Niceno-Constantinople creed at the Spanish Council in Toledo in 594, which became a major theological issue between east and west. Patriarch Photius, in an *Encyclical* addressed to the other patriarchs (866), attacked both the interpolation and the doctrine of the 'double procession'. The Fifth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople II, 553) had stated that 'the Creed cannot be subtracted from, added to, altered or distorted in any way.' (Mansi 17: 516C) The interpolated creed was accepted in Rome in 1014 (reaffirmed in 1274, 1438–39) and was rejected in the east.

The Armenian Church did not distort, or interpolate the Nicene creed. The Armenian Church is accused of reciting 'processing from the Father' or 'emanating from the Father' *(ելող ի հօրէ or բղխալ ի հօրէ)* but not 'and from the Son'.

Mkhitarist theologians were worthy continuators of the work of the *Fratres Unitores*, by printing the works of Armenian Church Fathers with texts interpolated or altered with far-fetched interpretations supporting the dissemination of fabricated theories concerning the doctrines of the Armenian Church. They do not even shy away from distorting the works of such authoritative famous church fathers as Grigor Narekatsi (declared Doctor of the Universal Church) and Nerses *Shnorhali* to support their subversive fabrications. For instance Grigor Narekatsi's 'Holy Spirit which is of the same essence' is corrupted to *Father and Son'* (Narek, 34: VII), or 'We praise with the Father and the Son the Lord Holy Spirit which springs *(բղխումն)* forth from them sharing their glory' (Narek, 75: VI). Nerses *Shnorhali* in his seminal epic poem 'Jesus the Son' and *Letters to Emperor Alexius III and Emmanuel* repeats on fifteen occasions the doctrine of the Armenian Church in these words:

> The Father being unbegotten, and the Son being unbegotten and the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father, they are not thereby separated according to nature.[70]

70 Nerses IV Klayetsi, called *Shnorhali*, *Epistle for the Unity of the church addressed to the*

In his *General Encyclical (Ընդհանրական)* in the section 'Who is God' he says 'The Holy Spirit is called the one who proceeds from the Father and is equal in glory to the Son.'[71] In the 'Confession of Faith' Armenians confess 'We confess the Holy Spirit God, unbegotten, eternal, not born but proceeding from the Father, in the image of His essence and shares the glory of the Son' («Հաւատամք զՍուրբ Հոգին Աստուած՝ անեղ,անժամանակ,չծնեալ,այլ բղեալ ի Հօրէ. Էակից Հօր եւ փառակից Որդւոյ») (Breviary), and in the hymn sung at the 'Morning office', 'Proceeding from the Father, emanate from my soul words pleasing to You' («Բղխումն ի Հօրէ,բղխեա ի հոգւոյս,բան քեզ ի հաճոյս») (Breviary). This is precisely what St John declares (25:26).

Pope Pius IX (1846–1878) called the First Vatican Council in which he validated papal primacy and infallibility. Such claims were resisted, not only by the Byzantines but also by the non-Chalcedonian churches. For Orthodoxy the pope is certainly the first bishop within an undivided Christendom, but he is *primus inter pares*, the first among equals. He is the elder brother within the Christian church, not a supreme ruler, and in particular he has no right to claim direct jurisdiction over the Christian east. The Russian theologian Alexei Khomiakov, commenting on exchanges at the time, wrote: 'The Pope is greatly mistaken in supposing that we consider the ecclesiastical hierarchy to be the guardian of dogma. The case is quite different. The varying constancy and the unerring truth of Christian dogma does not depend on any hierarchical order; it is guarded by the totality, by the whole people of the church, which is the Body of Christ.'[72] The basic contention was that the Third Ecumenical Council (Ephesus 431) had categorically prohibited an addition to the creed, however true or worthy. No matter how great the Roman Church is, its authority is less than an Ecumenical Council.

Greeks', Holy Ejmiadsin, 1865, pp. 163–176; see Vrej Nersessian, 'Das Beispiel eines Heiligen: Leben und Werk des Hl. Nerses Clajensis, mit dem Beinamen Schnorhali', Friedrich von Heyer (ed.), *Die Kirchen der Welt*, Band XVIII, *Die Kirche Armeniens*, Stuttgart, 1978, pp. 59–69.

71 Nerses IV Klyetsi, called *Shnohali*, *General Encyclical*, translation and introduction by Fr Aṙakel Aljalian, New York, 1996, p. 20.

72 Vladimir Gaité, *Abbay*, *The schismatic papacy*, pp. 58–63; Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, Penguin Books, London, 1972, p. 255.

The Catholic doctrine of purgatory was an outcome of the granting of papal indulgences in 1095 by Pope Urban II to the participants in the Crusade which would be recognised as a substitute for all penances—or, in popular language, would ensure the immediate entry into Heaven of a Crusader who died in the state of repentance and confession.[73] This was from the beginning a peculiarly personal expression of papal plenitude of power and infallibility, and there were no limits to the use the popes made of this privilege. Roman Catholics believed that outside the visible church there was no salvation and that to be a member of the visible church it was necessary to be subject to the pope of Rome. A man cannot be saved without the true and complete faith; and he cannot believe the true and complete faith unless he believes the word of the infallible church.[74]

According to Catholic doctrine purgatory is the state of purification between death and heaven leading to eventual intimate union with the triune God. Pope XXII (1244–1334) preached that the saints will not enjoy the beatific vision until after final judgement, a view condemned by his successor. They accuse the Armenian Church for employing the term 'expiation' *(քաւարան)* and not the Latin term 'purgatory'. The Armenian Church remaining faithful to the words of St John 'I am the gate for the sheep' (John 10:7; cf. Phil. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:8) and in that spirit sings of the church as 'Christ our door of life, allow us to come before God the Father and the Holy Spirit, singing always your glory.'

In the Armenian liturgy the priest in his litany recited in secret seeks mercy and remission of sins for those present in the church and 'for the souls of those who are at rest. Give them rest and enlighten them and reckon them among thy saints in the kingdom of heaven and make them worthy of thy mercy' (Divine Liturgy, p. 86). It is malicious to say that Armenians do not accept purgatory as the 'place for expiation of men *(k'awaran)* because of which they are heretics' (Հայքս ոչ ընդունին զքաւարան,վասն որոյ են հերետիկոսս). According to Ch'amch'ian in

73 R W Southern, 'Indulgences' in *Western society and the church in the middle ages (The Pelican History of the Church 2)*, Penguin Books, London, 1970, pp. 136–143; Henry Chadwick, 'Purgatory' in *East and West: The making of a rift in the Church. From the Apostolic times until the Council of Florence*, Oxford, 2005, pp. 244–245.

74 Owen Chadwick, *The Reformation (The Pelican History of the Church 3)*, Penguin Books, London, 1964, p. 367.

Christian literature the term 'place of expiation' *(քաւարան)* is much more suited than 'purgatory' *(քուռկպաթօղիում)* to the biblical term 'heavenly kingdom' or 'abode of the triumphant or of the saints'. When reciting the 'litany of General Intercessions' the names of the Triumphant Church or saints is recited on the right side of the altar while those of the Militant Church are recited on the left side of the altar. It is not a definition of location but signifies that those mentioned on the right side enjoy blessed sight of the Lord and those on the left the bitter sight of the Lord. But according to Tat'evatsi all the souls are in the same place but there is a difference in their works and image, some are full of immortality and joy and others bitterness and despair.[75]

The church is the *k'awaran* from the verb *k'awich* or *k'awch'akan* (meaning to atone, absolve, expiate) (cf. 'Thou answered them, O Lord, our God: thou wast the God that forgavest them' (Psalm 99:8). The prayer for remission of sins recited by the priest is significant:

> O Christ, Son of God, forbearing and compassionate, have compassion, in thy love as our creator, upon the souls of thy servants who are at rest, especially upon the soul(s) of thy servants (N or NN name) for whom we are offering these prayers. Be mindful of them in the great day of the coming of thy kingdom. Make them worthy of mercy, of expiation and forgiveness of sins. Glorify them and reckon them with the company of thy saints at thy right hand, for thou art Lord and creator of all, judge of the living and of the dead'. *(The Memorial Office)*

In the prayer of 'Exhortation for Communion' the celebrant recites: 'In holiness let us taste of the holy, holy, and precious body and blood of our Lord ... This is life, hope of resurrection, expiation and remission of sins.' In 'The Prayer in the Sanctuary', the celebrant in loud voice then says, 'In this dwelling of holiness and place of praise, in this habitation of angels and the place of expiation of men …'. Catholicos Nerses in his *General Encyclical* reiterates the biblical view: 'He came (i.e. Christ) willingly to suffer, and the one who could not suffer suffered on the cross, having taken upon himself our suffering nature. He died an innocent death

75 M Ormanian, *Տեղիք Աստուածաբանութեան: Տեսական Աստուածաբանութիւն* ('The Sources of Theology. Systematic Theology'), Jerusalem, 1985, pp. 183–196.

in His mortal body in order to give life to the natures which died by sin. He descended into the tomb and destroyed Hell twice ... He gave the hope of resurrection to mortal nature freed from the corruption of death by the resurrection of His divine body.'[76]

'The Memorial Office' one of the hymns sung defines the Armenian view in these terms:

> In the supernal Jerusalem in the dwellings of the angels
> Where Enoch and Elijah live old in age like doves,
> Worthily glorified in the garden of Eden,
> Merciful Lord, have mercy on the souls of those of us
> who have fallen sleep.

The Armenian elaborate mosaic floor dated sometime not later than the 6th century, excavated in the Musrara Quarter near the Damascus Gate, Jerusalem, has this inscription 'To the memory and salvation of all Armenians whose name the Lord knows.' The funerary mosaic is decorated with a massive stem of a grape vine framing in circular scrolls forty-one birds—doves, partridges, peacocks, eagles, a basket of grapes, basket of bread and a chalice. One of the central themes to which Agat'angelos frequently returns in his *The Teaching of St Gregory* is 'The Redemption of Mankind' in which he says 'the birds become the just, the resurrected, and those who are to attain heaven.' The imagery in the mosaic—grapevine related to Christ, the passion, the church, the eucharist, and the Tree of Life—all point to the concept of *k'awaran* as being the place for the expiation of sins.[77]

Amongst the miniatures illustrating the life of Christ there is an image called 'The Harrowing of Hell' or 'Descent into Hades' *(Deesis)*, which depicts Christ, treading down the broken gates of Hades after his death and before his Resurrection, freeing those whom Hades had held captive. Christ lifts up Adam and takes him to paradise with

76 Nerses Klayetsi, op. cit., p. 20.

77 (Owesepian) Garegin Hovsep'ian, 'Mosaik mit armenischer Inschrift in Norden Jerusalem', *ZDPF* 18 (1895), pp. 88–90; B N Aṙakelian, 'Armenian mosaic of the early middle ages', in *Primo Simposio Internazionale di Arte Armena. Atti, Venezia*, 1978, pp. 1–9, figs. 1–10; Bezalel Narkiss, 'The Musrara Mosaic' in *Armenian Art Treasures of Jerusalem*, Jerusalem, 1980, pp. 26–27, figs. 39–40; Agat'angelos, *The Teaching of St Gregory*, §605, 658–59, pp. 163–64, 211–212.

all the other patriarchs, prophets, martyrs and 'forefathers', where they are greeted by Enoch and Elijah at the gate, blessing them with sign of the cross. In the Divine Liturgy the 'Responsory of the Great Entrance' echoes this theme through Psalm 24:7–10. The visualisation of this act, is enacted in the Armenian Church on Palm Sunday in the ceremony of 'Opening of the Doors', rubrics of which states that this is 'the mystery of the Second coming and the Day of Judgment'. Finally, in the Divine Liturgy, the *Anamnesis* ends with this prayer: 'And descending into the nether regions of death in the body which he took of our kinship and mightily breaking asunder the bolts of hell, he made thee known to us, the only true God, the God of the living and of the dead.'[78]

The church is the new paradise, the spiritual Eden, the sanctuary of God, an earthly heaven. In the Armenian position the concept of purgatory and indulgences are alien as it is in eastern Christianity. St Gregory in his Sermons *(Yachakhapatum)* says: 'As some mindless say, let no one be deceived, that there is a place another abode in between kingdom of heaven and hell called limbo' (Lat. *limbus*).[79] This was supposed to have been the abode of the unbaptised infants *(Երախայից* or *անդրանկաց)* who had not been personally guilty in any way, but because they had not been baptised were excluded forever from heavenly bliss. The Armenian Church practises infant baptism and anyone not baptised is barred from taking part in any of the seven sacraments.

78 S Der Nersessian, 'An Armenian version of the homilies on the Harrowing of Hell', *Byzantine and Armenian Studies*, Louvain, 1973, pp. 437–455, and 'A homily on the Raising of Lazarus and Harrowing of Hell', *BA*, pp. 457–67 ; Vrej Nerses Nersessian, 'Sources of Armenian iconography', in *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*, The British Library, London, 2012, vol. I, p. 35–36; for a sample of an illuminated folio of the Harrowing of Hell from an Armenian Lectionary in the British Library, Ms. No. Or. 15, 291, fls 211v-212r illustrating the Feast of Easter, see *Treasures from the Ark*, pp. 218–219.

79 Quotation from Tēr-Mik'elian, *Catechism of the Holy Armenian church (Հայաստանեայց Սուրբ Եկեղեցու Քրիստոնէական)*, Tehran, 2003, p. 505, note 3; *Yatchakhapatum (Գիրք որ կոչի Յաճախապատում)*. This is a collection of everyday sermons attributed to St Gregory (or St Mesrop). There have been several publications: Constantinople (1737, 1824), Calcutta (1813), Venice (1826, 1838, rep. 1954), Holy Ejmiadsin (1894); translation into modern Eastern Armenian, Tehran, 2003.

The accusation of the missionaries against the Armenian Church was that it is abhorrent for a Christian to say 'God crucified' *(Աստուած խաչեցաւ)* or 'God died' *(Աստուած մեռաւ)*. Ch'amch'ian writes: 'some among the ignorant missionaries, beginning with Clement Galanus for the use of "was crucified" in hymn of the Trisagion, accused the Armenians of being adherents of the ancient heretical concept of "theopaschism" meaning "God the Father suffered as the Son".' To say that the 'human being was crucified' is to suggest the human nature was crucified which is the heresy of Nestorius. But to say 'God crucified' is to maintain that the divine nature suffered in his human body, which is the doctrine of the Catholic Church.

The contentious clause is replaced by other appropriate phrases such as 'who didst rise from the dead' (at Easter) or 'who was born and manifested to us' (Epiphany)', or 'who didst come and art to come'. From this it is clear that the Trisagion is sung in honour of Christ, not of the Trinity. Step'anos Siwnetsi (680–735) in his Commentary on the Office relates the Trisagion to the elevation of the Gospel. Step'anos is convinced that if the Godhead was present in Christ incarnate, it 'was legitimate to say that "God was crucified for us" has risen from the dead' and 'was born and revealed to us.' The tenor of the Armenian theology is daring in accepting that God does suffer and die on the cross. The Armenian poet St Grigor Narekatsi (951–1003) likens the relationship between the human and the divine in Christ. 'You gave oil, and in this oil you placed a wick, which exemplified your union, without imperfection, with our condition, formed and wove with your love of mankind' (Lamentations 20).

David the Invincible (590–660) defines the Cross with the predicate *Astuadsenkal* (*Աստուածընկալ* = God-receiving), since, for the Armenian theologian, 'the tree of life' in the Book of Revelation (2:7, 22:2; 22:19) becomes the 'wood of life' in the shape of the cross. For Abraham saw in the Sabek tree the Cross of Christ. Stone Crosses as symbols of life and are known and called *Amenaprkitch*. (*Ամենափրկիչ*= All Saviour's). David the Invincible states '... where the cross is, there is also the crucified, and where the cross and the crucified are there is the crucifixion.' One of the chants composed by Grigor Narekatsi, sung on Easter Sunday, invokes the powerful image of Christ as a lion on the cross:

I tell of the voice of the lion
Who roared on the four-winged cross
On the four-winged cross he roared,
His voice resounding in Hades.'[80]

Finally, the doxology that follows the hymn is 'Glorified and blessed ever holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God, Mother of Christ, offer our supplication to your Son and our God' makes it absolutely explicit that the hymn is addressed to the Son.

The Feast of Nativity and Epiphany

The missionaries continued their subversive outworn accusation that the Armenian Church does not celebrate the birth of Christ on 25 of December and continued celebrating the 'manifestation' or 'revelation' of Christ as 'Son of God' on 6 January, the Day of His Baptism originating in the 3rd century. Not adhering to changes in the western church calendar is deemed as a heretical deviation from faith and doctrine. The actual date of Christ's birth is not known, the date for its celebration was designated as 25 December by the early 4th century in Rome. The designation of 25 December was adopted to replace the birthday of the invincible or unconquered sun god (Lat. *dies natalis Solis Invicti*), which Emperor Aurelian established in 274 in honour of the Syrian sun god, to counter worship of the pagan god in favour of Christ, the true 'sun of justice'.

The Armenian Church remaining loyal to the practice of the ancient church marks the feast of His Birth and Baptism on 6 January. This was the practice in the universal church from the 4th century. The 6th and 7th canon in the Apostolic Canons states: 'It is written on the 6th section of the constitution thus: that the Apostles ordered and established that let there be a feast day for the Birth and Revelation of our Lord and Saviour, first among the feasts of the church on 21st of the month

79 Vrej Nersessian, 'The Armenian Tradition', in Augustine Casidy (ed.), *The Orthodox Christian Word*, Routledge, London, 2012, 41–57, pp. 46–47; one of the letters of Patriarch Photius addressed to the Armenian Prince Ashot Bagratuni is on the subject of 'theopaschism'; see Igor Dorfmann-Lazarev, 'Arméniens et Byzantins à l'époque de Photius: deux débats théologiques après le triomphe de l'orthodoxie', *CSCO 609, Subsidia* 117m, Louvain, 2004.

of Tibet, which corresponds to the 6th of January of the Romans.'[81] 'Through the Incarnation God reveals himself to mankind but at His baptism God the Father bears witness: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am pleased' (Matt. 3:17; Mark 1:11; Lk. 3:22). Thus Christ by His Birth and Baptism established His 'Epiphany' and 'Theophany'. For this reason the two events were celebrated on the same day. More importantly St Basil the Great (c. 330–79) also subscribed to celebrating the 'Birth' and 'Revelation' of Christ as God on 6 January. In the western church Liberius, pope 352–366, was the first to celebrate the Feast of Epiphany on 6 January but in 354, according to the information of contemporaries, the two feast were split and 25 December became the date for marking the Nativity only.[82] But the Armenian Church following the ancient tradition displays not only its faithfulness to the old practices, but also protects the mystery that exists between Christ's birth and baptism, as a double expression of the Saviour's incarnation and the adoption of a pagan feast.[83] Nerse IV Klayetsi in his 'Definition of Faith', addressed to Emperor Manuel, writes: 'This is the practice of the Armenian Church passed down to us from our forefathers, to mark the birth and baptism of our Lord on the same day, and we say this not just for the sake of being difficult but in immense reverence since all churches from the beginning did the same, which is also known to you in your wisdom.

81 Vazgen Hakobyan, *Կանոնագիրք Հայոց* (Armenian *Liber Canonum*), Erevan, 1964, vol. I, p. 32, and notes on pp. 543–44.

82 The observance in the west spread to the East: Rome 336, Constantinople, 379; Antioch, 386, Alexandria, 433, Jerusalem, 549 etc. See Ter Petrosyan Eznik, 'Քրիստոսի Ծննդյան տոնը Հունվարի 6 -ին տոնելու հայ եկեղեցու ավանդությունը' ('The tradition in the Armenian Church of marking Christ's Nativity on the 6th of January'), *Ejmiadsin* 6 (1986), lists the names of all those Armenian theologians who bear evidence to the Armenian church's position: 'Վասն տօնի Ծննդեանն Քրիստոսի' ('Concerning the feast of Christ's birth'), Anania Sanahentsi (Mat. MS. no. 6453, fols 66a-72b), Step'annos Siwnetsi, Poghos Taronatsi, Kirakos Erznkatsi, Grigor Tat'evatsi. John of Damascus in his 'Letter of Reply to the Armenians' accuses the Armenian Church of Adoptionism. See *Louys Monthly*, 1905, pp. 1112–13; 1906, pp. 957–60 and 75–79.

83 Ter Mkrtchian Karapet, 'Աստուածայայտնութեան տօնի ճիշդ օրը՝ ըստ պատմութեան' ('The correct date of God's revelation according to historical sources'), *Երկերի ժողովածու* ('Collected works'), Holy Ejmiadsin, 2008, Part I, p. 237–243. The Patristic sources he quotes in support of the Feast of Epiphany being celebrated on 6 January are: The Apostolic Canons, Clement of Alexandria, John Patriarch of Jerusalem, Gregory the Theologian, St Basil, St Hippolytus of Rome, St Cyprian, St Marutta Bishop of Maiperkat, the canons of the Council of Karin held during the reign of Emperor Justinian, followed by Armenian sources.

But although as time passed this single feast was divided into two, but we kept the tradition passed to us by St Grigor ....'[84]

*Concerning the Preference of Using Unleavened Bread and Chalice of Unmixed Wine (*անապական = *'zeon'. lit. 'hot')*[85]

Ch'amch'ian states in a rhetorical way 'This seditious and unacceptable accusation is always made against the Armenian Orthodox Holy Church, but she does not despair so much on these falsification, but it pains, as to why those who are so knowledgeable on the ancient validity of the mysteries and rites of the early church, display such a degree of ignorance, perverse hatred and enmity, that permits them to define the Armenian Church as heretical and schismatic.' The Roman Catholic Church bears witness that the use of unmixed wine in the chalice is an old authentic practice, for it was Pope Alexander I (ca. 109-ca. 116) who decreed to mix water in the cup in the Roman Church, imitating the flow of blood and water from the side of Jesus Christ (cf. John 9:34). According to Nerses *Shnorhali*, the water that flowed out of Christ's side represented his Holy Baptism, and the blood the life-giving sacrament of the communion.

The disputes around the use of mixing water with the wine and the use of unleavened bread arose after the Armenian Church had split after the Council of Chalcedon. When the Armenian Catholicos Movses II Eghivardetsi (574–604) was summoned to Constantinople by Emperor Maurice (582–602), he is reported to have answered 'I will not cross the Azat river (which is the Persian border). Neither will I eat the oven-baked bread (leavened bread), nor will I drink (their) hot water.'[86]

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84 Nerses IV Klayetsi, called *Shnorhali*, '*Definition of Faith*', p. 243; «Է եւ այս աւանդութիւն Հայոց ի նախնեացն սկսեալ՝ զտաւն ծննդեանն եւ մկրտութեանն ի միում աւուրն տաւնել»; Cf. St Nerses *Shnorhali, Նամականի ԺԲ դար* ('Epistles 12th century. Armenian-Byzantine church relations'), translated into modern Armenian by Seda Stambultsyan, Holy Ejmiadsin, 2011, pp. 85–86.

85 «Հայք ըստ որում ոչ խմորում առնեն զհացն սրբարար խորհրդոյն, եւ ջուր ոչ խառնեն ի զինի բաժակին, վասն որոյ են հերեղըստիկոս». R Taft , 'Zeon (lit. "hot"), the custom, unique to the Byzantine rite, of adding hot water to the chalice at Eucharist, first alluded in the 6th century', *ODB,* Oxford University Press, 1991, vol. 3, pp. 2223–24, and 'Water into Wine', *Le Muséon* 100 (1987), pp. 323–42.

86 J M Hannsens, *Institutionis liturgicae de ritibus orientalibus. II-III. De missa rituum orintalium*, Rome, 1930–1932, pp. 262–282; *Narratio de rebus Armeniae,* which dates from the

These words obviously allude to leavened bread and wine mixed with *zeon*. The Armenians employed unleavened bread in the eucharist as an expression of one divine nature in Christ.[87] The decisive text attached to the use of unleavened bread is St Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 5:6–8. Since the Armenians rejected any addition of water, they evidently did not practise the custom of the *zeon*. The twelfth canon of the Trullan synod which condemned the use of unmixed wine in the eucharist (Mansi XI, 956–957), reads: 'It has come to our attention that when the unbloody sacrifice is offered in Armenia, pure wine unmixed with water is brought to the altar.' In their defence the Armenians appeal to what Chrysostom, says in his commentary of the Gospel of Matthew: 'Why did the risen Lord drink no water'?[88] The Armenian position is that drinking of wine alone was appropriate for the risen Jesus in his immortal state, and not mixing water, which is itself corruptible, will corrupt the purity of the wine. The testimonies in the many commentaries on the Divine Liturgy justify the use of unmixed wine in order to remove from the eucharistic cup of immortality any hint of corruption and death. The objection that the death of the Lord must be proclaimed in the eucharistic celebration could not persuade them to change, since his resurrection too must be proclaimed, and

11th century, and for the various attributions of it see H Bartikyan and Karine Melik'yan.

87 John H Erickson, 'Leavened and unleavened: Some theological implications of the Schism of 1054', in John H Erikson, *The Challenge of our past*, Crestwood, 1991, p. 137; Hans Joachim Schulz, *The Byzantine Liturgy. Symbolic Structure and Faith Expression*, trans. Matthew J O'Connell, New York, 1986, pp. 39-43.

88 PG 58:740A. The passage in Chrysostom is as follows: 'Why did the risen Lord drink no water but only wine? Since there are some who are accustomed to use water in the mysteries, he wanted to show that he established the mysteries using wine, and therefore when he rose from the dead he set the customary table with wine.' Chrysostom is here opposing certain heretics who attempted to celebrate the eucharist with water. See Khosrov Anjewatsi (d. 972), *Մեկնութիւն աղօթից պատարագին* ('Commentary on the prayers of the Divine Liturgy'), Venice, 1869, translated with an Introduction by S Peter Cowe, *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy by Xosrov Anjewac'i*, St Vartan Press, New York, 1991; Nerses Lambronatsi, *Մեկնութիւն Ւտրիրդոյ Պատարագին* ('Commentary on the Divine Liturgy'), Venice, 1847; translated into French by Isaac Kechichian, *Nerses de Lambron (1153–1192), Explication de la Divine Liturgie*, Beirut, 2000; Gat'rjian, Y, *Սրբազան պատարագամատոյց հայոց* ('The Sacred Missals of the Armenians. Translations of the Greek, Syriac, and Latin Liturgies'), with introduction and commentary, Vienna, 1897, p. 747; see review of F C Conybeare, *The Armenian Church: Heritage and Identity*, compiled, with introduction, by the Revd Nerses Vrej Nersessian, New York, 2001, pp. 757–58.

the living, not the dead, body of the Lord be received there. This is in tune with their theology of the cross as being the symbol 'that God holds up to us' *(աստուածդնկալ)* and the phrase 'was crucified' sung in the Trisagion.

Concerning Extreme Unction[89]

All the Orthodox churches accept seven sacraments: i.e. Baptism, Confirmation, Communion, Penance, Matrimony, Burial and Blessing for the sick. In the Armenian Church the 'Order for the sick' *(Կարգ Հիւանդաց)* is the completion, the extreme unction. It needs to be said that the two are one and the same sacrament differing only in their practical execution and effect. For instance in the case of veneration of images there are two options. One is doctrinal by which we accept that it is worthy to venerate the images of Christ and saints and the second we acknowledge that images are a source of piety. If in the first instance someone denies the veneration of images or implies it is not worth adoring images as being against the doctrine of the church, he is not a heretic. But from the perspective of the second option, if one has no use of images as a source of meditation (not adoring icons) is not misguided nor is one a heretic. It is the same in the case of extreme unction. The Calvinists and Lutherans also denounced this sacrament as being Simoniac heresy but are not labelled heretics.

In the Armenian Church the practice is in place of the oil; the priest lays his hands over the sick and says 'dispel my illness and heal my sickness' *(Փարատեա զցաւս եւ բժշկեա զհիւանդութիւնս)*, cf. 'shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover' (Mark 16:18); 'If any sick among you let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord' (James 5:14). And this sacrament in the early church did not have the name 'extreme' unction. The term was introduced in the Councils of Florence (1438–45) and Trent (1543–63).

Therefore, the Armenian Church by not employing the term 'extreme' (*վերջին*, final) and not using oil but only by laying on hands,

89 The term 'extreme unction', used in the Catholic tradition until recent times, is now usually referred to as 'anointing of the sick'. [Eds]

with a cross and the holy Gospel, the sacrament of healing is performed according to the command of Christ and Apostolic tradition. The extreme unction in the Armenian Church is performed as part of Baptism. The neophyte is first washed in the font, which is sanctified by the sign of the holy Cross and the holy Gospel and by the pouring of holy oil *(myron)* from the mouth of a dove (representing the Holy Spirit). The immersion into the font symbolises his death (John 19:30), the resurrection is symbolised when the neophyte is raised from the water. The Chrismation *(droshm-դրոշմ)* is when all the parts of body are anointed beginning with the forehead (in the following order: eyes, ears, nostrils, mouth, hands, heart, back, feet) and reciting the prayer ('Sweet ointment in the name of Jesus Christ is poured upon thee as a seal of incorruptible heavenly gift'), by the conclusion of which the child becomes a full member of the church, His original or adamic sin forgiven (I Peter 2:9). Finally, as a full member of the church of Christ he is offered Holy Communion. The child receives all the three great mysteries necessary for salvation one after the other and becomes a full Christian through one continuous sacred act.[90] The Order of Communion of Sick persons or Laying-on of Hands on sick persons should be considered as extreme unction without the word unction, while the sacrament, which the Roman Church calls extreme unction, is the Confirmation *(droshm)* which is performed as part of Baptism.

Concerning the Primacy of the See of Rome

To protect and defend the 'autocephalous' character of the Armenian Church in the 13th century precocious writing of treatises appeared in spiritual literature defending the unique character of the orthodoxy of the church's theology, purity of rituals and traditions. One such theologian was Mkhit'ar Tashratsi or Skewratsi, who is the author of a treaty called 'Concerning the equality among the twelve apostles' *(Յաղագս համապատուութեան երկոտասանից առաքելոց)*. This was a writing which he produced on the order of King Het'um I (1226–1270) on his diplomatic mission to Acca. As a representative of the Armenian king Het'um I and

90 Grigor Tat'evatsi, *Գիրք Հարցմանց* ('Book of Questions'), Constantinople, 1729, facs. reprint Jerusalem, 1993, Chapter IX, pp. 604–605; F C Conybeare, *Rituale Armenorum*, Oxford, 1905; facs. reprint, 2005, pp. 86–108.

Catholicos Kostandin Barjraberdtsi (1221–67) he had a meeting with the legate of Pope Urban IV (1261–1264). This was the time when the Roman Catholic Church demanded the Armenian Catholicate established in Hromklay unreservedly submit to the jurisdiction of the papacy. In this treatise he argues that the Armenian Church was autocephalous, that they did not *become* autocephalous nor were they *granted* autocephaly by some higher authority. The most famous of the canons issued by Nicea, the official recognition *sui iuris* the independence of the patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, Jerusalem and the Armenian patriarchate on the basis of the 'ancient customs', is a custodian of the same ecclesiological arrangement. He defends the independence of the Armenian Church against the illegitimate encroachment from the Roman Church.[91] He makes it obvious that Christ's commission to St Peter in Matthew 16:18, ' Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build the church' means that the church was built first 'on one man', as a lesson about its unity but Christ gave 'equal power to all the Apostles' (John 20:22). St Paul who is speaking on behalf of Christ confirms this in his Letter to the Ephesians, 'Now therefore you are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God. And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*. In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord.' This was the response of Mkhitar to the legate of Pope Urban IV on the saying of St Matthew on St Peter being the 'rock' on which the church was founded.

Ch'amch'ian states that from among all the nations the Armenian people among all others very explicitly agree to St Peter being the leader among the apostles and was 'made the rock on which the church was founded' but there is no elaboration on the primacy of Peter, but

91 Bzoyan Azat, 'Մխիթար բահանայ Սկեւռացու հակաճառութիւնները տասներկու առաքեալների համապատուութեան մասին' ('The discourse of Mkhitar Skewratsi on the equality of the twelve apostles'), *Gandzasar* V (1994), pp. 137–157. A similar debate was ignited in 1951, when Cardinal Petros Grigor Aghagianian newly elevated to the rank of Cardinal by Pope Pius XII published his Encyclical calling upon the Armenian church to return to the 'fold of Roman Catholicism'. See Derenik Poladian, Bps., *Refutation of the Encyclical of Gregory Peter Cardinal Aghagianian*, translated by Matthew A Callender, Lebanon, 1953, p. 67. A manuscript copy of the Mkhitar Skwratsi's text is available in MS. No. 42 in the Armenian section of *Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris* dated 1274; a French translation by E Dulaurier (1869). The text has had three printings, Jerusalem, 1857, 1860 and 1865.

more on the whole college of apostles and their universal missionary work.'[92] Pope Gregory VII (1073–85) with demonic personal drive was committed to his belief in papal primacy and infallibility in 1073. Every church accepted the papal primacy, but without the jurisdictional teeth which Gregory VII gave it. For Orthodoxy the pope is certainly the first bishop within undivided Christendom, but he is *primus inter pares*, the first among equals. He is the elder brother within the Christian family, not a supreme ruler, and in particular he has no right to claim direct jurisdiction over the Christian east. In the words of Archbishop Bessarion, present at the Council of Ferrara-Florence, 'Indeed, we are not ignorant of the rights and privileges of the Roman Church; but we know also the limits set to those privileges ... No matter how great the Roman Church is, it is notwithstanding less than an Ecumenical council and the Universal Church.'[93]

Until the arrival of the Crusades in the Near East, the relations between the Armenians Church and the Catholic Church were on the whole very cordial. The fact of the pre-eminence of St Peter among the Apostles, the words of Jesus addressed to him, the knowledge that Peter had preached in Rome, and had been martyred there, and that the pope was his vicar did not lead the Armenian theologians to conclude that the 'Patriarch of Rome' had primatial authority outside the limits of his jurisdiction in the west.[94] The first formal contact with the Latin Church occurred 1141,[95] St Nerses *Shnorhali*, in his *Elegy on the Fall of Edessa*, written after 1144, apostrophized the Roman See:

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92 Agat'angelos, *The Teaching of St Gregory*, translated by Robert W Thomson, New York, 2001 (revised ed.), p. 35.

93 Joseph Gill, *Personalities of the Council of Florence and other Essays*, Oxford, 1964, p. 267. Cf. Vrej Nersessian 'Ուղղափառ եկեղեցիների դաւանանքը «Առաջնութեան» եւ «Գահաերէցութեան» խնդրի շուրջ' ('Orthodox understanding of Primacy and Catholicity'), *Sion* 2015, pp. 6–14.

94 Tiran Nersoyan Bps, 'Problems and exercise of Primacy in the Armenian Church' in *Armenian Church Historical Studies. Matters of Doctrine and Administration*, edited with introduction by Revd Vrej Nersessian, New York, 1996, p. 225.

95 Vrej Nersessian, 'The See of Holy Ejmiadsin and the Vatican: A Chronicle of the contacts between Armenian Catholicoi and Popes', *Sion* 2–3. (2021), pp. 78–87, cont. 4–7 (2021), pp. 183–195. The 'Lettera dell'amicitia e dell unione ...' (*Dashants T'ught'* recounting a meeting between the two churches during the time of St Gregory the Illuminator of Armenia and St Sylvester of Rome was a forgery created during the Crusades, which formed the bases of Clemens Galanus's *Conciliatonis ecclesiae Armenae cum Romans.*

And you, Rome, Mother of Cities
Brilliant above all and honourable
You throne of the great Peter
first among the apostles
You immovable church
built on the rock of Cephas,
Invincible at the doors of hell,
and breaker of the seal of heavens,
Becoming vine of many branches,
and Paul's firmly rooted tree,
Besprinkled with his blood
like paradise, which is in Eden.[96]

The 'Latinization' efforts of the missionary preachers, the consequences of the activities of the *Fratres Unitores* changed profoundly the relationship between the two churches. During the Cilician period alone, steps to trade unity for military assistance, to subject the Armenian Church to papal jurisdiction were undertaken by the following popes: Innocent II (1130–1143), Eugenius III (1145–53), Lucius III (1181–85), Clement III (1187–91), Innocent IV (1243–54) and Urban IV (1261–12).[97]

Ch'amch'ian concludes his commentary on the subject of primacy with this passage 'We Armenians have our own Catholicoi. As for accepting the primacy of the pope we have no antagonism or opposition. The Universal Church was made up of independent regional churches bound together by a common faith and reverencing the pope as successor of St Peter, the senior bishop and elder brother of the Universal Episcopate.'

In conclusion, I will present in translation the opening statement of the author's title to his final chapter 'The Armenian Church is free from heresy and schismatism' ('Յաղագս ազատ գոլոյ եկեղեցին հայոց ի հերետիկոսութենէ եւ ի հերձուածողութեն'):

> The Orthodoxy of the Armenian Church will not be falsified by the utterances of slanderous evil-speakers.

96 E Dulaurier, 'Elegie sur la prise d'Edesse', *RHC* I, pp. 223-68; Nerses Klayetsi, called *Shnorhali*, *Lament on the fall of Edessa*, trans. and annotated by T M van Lint, in K Ciggar and F Teule (eds), *East and West in the Crusade States*, OLA 92 (1999), Louvain, p. 20; Bernard Hamilton, 'The Christian World of the Middle Ages', *BCA*, 2003.

97 Vrej Nersessian, 'Review article: The Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church ...', p. 197.

What we have outlined in this book from the beginning until now, is as light illuminates the judicious orthodoxy and reforming path of the Armenian Church, not from my perspective but in accordance to the result of my study of the sources, not as if adding new light, but only by bringing it to full view by placing it on a mantelpiece to dispel the shadows of darkness created by the fabrications of the enemy. And I hope from now on there will be no darkness, but everything will shine explicitly as when a light by its rays enlightens.

Թէ ուղղափառթիւն հայոց ոչ արատաւորի ի բանից վայրախոսաց և չարախօսաց:

Զոր ինչ միանգամ խօսեցաք ի սկզբանէ մատենիս մինչև ցարդ,իբրև զլոյս պայծառացուցեալ ցուցանեն զողջմտութիւն և զուղղափառութիւն և բարեկարգութիւն եկեղեցւոյ Հայաստանեայց,ոչ եթէ մերովս ասութեամբ,այլ իրացն իսկութեամբ,քանզի մեք սովին մատենագրիւթեամբ ոչ իբր նոր ինչ պայծառութիւն յաւելաք այդն լուսոյ, այլ միայն ի հանդէս ատենի իբրև ի վերայ աշտանակի եդաք առ ի փարատել զստուերս խաւարացուցիչս՝ զառ ի թշնամեաց չարախօսութենէ նիւթեալն: Եւ յուսամ թէ այսուհետև ոչ մնաց մթագնութենէ տեղի,այլ ամենայն ինչ բացայայտ փայլմամբ ի վեր երևեցաւ,որպէս յորժամ ճրագն նշողիւք լուսաւորեացէ.[98]

98 In 1948 a group of Mkhitarist monks lead by Revd Arsen Komitasian (Ant'imosian) and Bishop Georg Hiwrmiwzian published a pamphlet in Armenian and Italian called 'The Armenian nation and church are schismatics and heretics', accusing their brethren in Venice of pretending to be Roman Catholics but are in reality apologists for a heretical church. 'The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith' did not summon a meeting to discuss the content of the pamphlet but ordered both the Armenian and Italian texts to be destroyed. See Awetis Perperian, *Պատմութիւն Հայոց սկսեալ ի ամէ Փրկչին մինչեւ ցամն հանդերձ կարեւոր տեղեկութեամբ եւ ժամանակագրութեամբ երեւելի իրաց* ('History of Armenia beginning from the year of the Lord 1772 until 1860'), Constantinople, 1871, Chapter 64, pp. 867–870; in response to the same event Matteos Choukhachian, Patriarch of Constantinople, 1844–1848, later Catholicos of All Armenians, 1858–1865 wrote his *Հանդիսարն Ուղղաբառութեան Հայոց Եկեղեցւոյ* ('Panorama on the Orthodoxy of the Armenian Church'), Constantinople, 1848, pp. 495. Chapters 12–16 contain the author's observations on the conflict between the Armenian Orthodox and Catholic communities in Constantinople.

Conclusion

The Ottoman state regarded the Roman Catholics in the east as a dissenting minority and discouraged them. It was safer for Latin communities to allow themselves to be assumed by the Turkish governors that they were Eastern Orthodox. It was in the Turks' interest to protect the Orthodox and as of 1728 had decreed Latin proselytism illegal. The Ottoman sultans' law courts strengthened the ecclesiastical authority of the Orthodox patriarchs over their communities and regarded the patriarchs of the eastern churches as its representatives.

The inter-confessional conflicts between Catholic Armenians and Orthodox became troublesome in the 18th century in Constantinople.

The two most outstanding clergy of the time were Catholicos Simeon I Erevantsi (1763–80) (b. 1710-d. 1780) and the Mkhitarist scholar Mik'ayel Ch'amch'ian (1738–1823) who responded to the crises in very contrasting ways.

In 1774 Catholicos Simeon founded the first printing press on the Armenian soil. One of the first books he printed was his *Tonatsoyts (Տօնացոյց)* (4th printing 1906) in response to the publication in 1758 of Hakopos Ch'amch'ian's *Calendar (Օրացոյց)* introducing Latin rites and feasts, which Erevantsi defines as a 'poisonous guide' *(թունացոյց),* 'which must be discarded into the corners of streets as garbage to be trampled underfoot, reduced to feed for moths and mice' («անկանի ի յանկիւնս,ի փողոցս և յաղբիւսս և լինի կոխան ոտից,և կեր ցեցից և մկանց»). He calls the Mkhitarists and the Collegians 'newly budding Lutherans' *(նորաբոյս լոթերականաց).* In contrast Mik'ayel Ch'amch'ian from 1784 in a calculated effort was endeavouring to raise the national consciousness of his nation, which for him had a religious dimension. 'The Armenian-speaking Yahweh, the Armenian-speaking and Armenian citizen Adam, Armenian-speaking, God worshipping Hayk, the holy rivers Euphrates and Tigris, the holy Mount Ararat are graces that God has gifted to the Armenian nation. He would not consider the Armenian nation worthy of any one of these graces, if it had not been faithful to the Catholic faith from the beginning.' He has some reservations on the primacy claim of the pope and addressing his opponents he writes 'I am an Armenian, I do not accept the Frankish patriarch of the Franks, I do not accept the pope as I have my catholicos, I have a patriarch and catholicos

of my nation ... for the pope is not the catholicos of my people but that of the Franks' («Ես հայ եմ,ոչ ընդունիմ,այսինքն ոչ ճանանչեմ ինձ յատուկ պատրիարք զպատրիարքն Ֆռանկաց,ոչ ընդունիմ, ինձ կաթողիկոս զպապն ձեր,ես իմումս ազգի պատրիարք և կաթողիկոս ունիմ ... քանզի պապն ոչ է կաթողիկոս ազգին մերոյ,այլ Ֆռանկաց կաթողիկոս») *(Shield of Faith)*. It is significant that Ch'amch'ian has reservations on the concept of the primacy of the pope, he advocates: 'It is not essential for all the faithful, particularly demanding from the simple minded to know that the pope is the supreme head of the church, or he is above all patriarchs' («Ոչ է հարկ իւրաքանչիւր հաւատացելոց,մանաւանդ պարզամտաց գիտել որոշակի,թէ պապն է գլուխ եկեղեցւոյ,կամ ի վեր քան զամենայն պատրիարքունս»). His view was shared by a member monk of the Mkhitarist order, the famous geographer and defender of *Shield of Faith*, Lucas Inchichian (1758–1833).[99] He published a pamphlet, in which he advanced the concept that above religion and everything else stands first and foremost the nation's interests and the inspiration of unity. Inchichian's primary aim was to expand his teachers Ch'amch'ian's view that it is the duty of every Armenian 'to place the love of his nation and motherland above everything else ... The nation is the greatest society, and the most natural, and whoever belongs to that nation is obliged to love his nation above everything else.' Inchichian's stand is directed against the latinophiles: 'an Armenian, who does not confess the religion of the majority could not have also its nationhood.'[100] His stance failed to reconcile the feuding Mkhitarists and Collegians, who regarded him an apostate to their confession. They were also many in the Armenian Orthodox Church who never ceased to be sceptical of Ch'amch'ian's motives. While Archpriest Ter Yovhannes Khatchikian in his appendix informs us that some 'individuals' (whom he is reluctant to name) 'behind my back were gossiping, that it was not proper of me to have printed the

99 Charles Dowsett, *Decoding the mysteries of medieval Armenia. The collected studies of Charles J. F. Dowsett, First Calouste Gulbenkian Professor of Armenian Studies*, Oxford, 1965–1991, compiled, with preface and introduction by Dr Vrej Nersessian, Erevan, 2022, 296–339. See 'The Madman has come back again', in commemoration of the 200th anniversary of Lord Byron's birth, pp. 320–333.

100 Ghukas Inchichian, 'Ազգասէր. Ճառ ասացեալ ի փոյթ յորդորանաց յընտելութիւն սիրոյ ազգի և ի զգուշութիւն նորին ընդիմակաց ախտիցն հակառակաց' ('Lecture on the love of the nation warning to those who oppose it'), Venice, 1815.

work of a papist *vardapet*, who is not even worthy to have been of our nation, but recalling the words of Aristotle I say to them "where I am not let my enemies beat me there"' (« Ուր չեմ ես՝թող անդ զանիցէ և զիս թշնամին ») (*Shield of Faith*, Calcutta, 1873, p. 2). Former Patriarch of Constantinople Matt'eos Tchuhachian and later Catholicos of All Armenians (Matt'eos I, 1858–1865) calls Mik'ayel Ch'amch'ian 'blessed', 'for from the depth of his heart, putting aside all fear of human violence, taking upon himself every personal punishment and dishonour, wrote his three-volume *Shield of Faith* defending the orthodoxy of the Armenian Church and when he came to know that his work had been stolen by papal agents and destroyed, he did not despair, did not cease preaching the truth, on the contrary he grew stronger.'[101]

In the ill-conceived latinizing activities of western missionaries, whose origins stretched back to the Cilician period, their presumed attempt to save the kingdom by bringing about the union of the Armenian Church with the Church of Rome failed. The extremist who accused the Armenian Church of 'heresy' and proceeded to make 'corrections' of their 'errors' ended by creating splits in the ethnic and national solidarity of the Armenian people. Thanks to the theologians who emerged from the famous monasteries of Gladzor, Ta'ew, Sanahin in the homeland, New Julfa and Constantinople in the diaspora, the tide of latinization was resisted, remaining steadfast to the guidelines of the ecumenical spirit: 'Do not mix muddied teaching with the clear and limpid teaching of our Holy and Apostle like patriarch St Gregory' (« Մի խառնեսցի պղտոր ուսումն ընդ յստակ և ականակիտ վարդապետութիւն ս. և առաքելանման հայրապետին Գրիգորի ») (Arshak Ter Mik'elian).

101 Matt'eos Tchuhachian, Patriarch, *Համդիսարան Ուղղափառութեան Հայոց Եկեղեցւոյ* ('Overview of the Orthodoxy of the Armenian Church'), Constantinople, 1854, p. 267.

Abbreviations

AR	*Armenian Review*
BM	*Banber Matenadarani*
CSCO	*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum*
EBA	*Études Byzantines et Arméniennes*
Ejmiadsin	*Official Monthly of the Holy See of Ejmiadsin*
Gandzasar	*Theological Journal of the Diocese of Artsakh*
HHT	*Hask Hayagitakan Taregirk'*
JSAS	*Journal for the Society of Armenian Studies*
ODB	*Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*
ODLA	*The Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity*
RHC	*Recueil des historiens des croisades—Documents arméniens*
Sion	*Official Monthly of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem*
ZDPV	*Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästinavereins*