Christian Engagement with Islam

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Ecumenical Journeys since 1910

By

Douglas Pratt

BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

Cover illustration: watercolour by Celine van Hoek © 2017.

The Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available online at http://catalog.loc.gov
LC record available at http://lccn.loc.gov/

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: “Brill”. See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISBN 978-90-04-33801-2 (hardback)
ISBN 978-90-04-34494-5 (e-book)

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Preface

It was some years ago, early into my academic career, that a question surfaced in my mind that was to lead into several years of research and a number of publications: What had taken the Christian Church, in the twentieth century, into the arena of interreligious dialogue? What had been going on, why, and to what effect? Already the one question had expanded into others. Allied to that question, another was soon posed: Why do Christians and Muslim engage dialogically? And, again, the initial question led to others: What has been happening in this field? What has been the history and experience of Christian engagement with Islam in recent times – and what is happening now? With an academic background in philosophical theology, and having developed and pursued a phenomenological approach to the wider study of religions, I found myself engaging in historical oriented studies in order to even begin to answer these questions. It has been an interesting, as well as challenging, journey of discovery. Accordingly, this book is very much a product of these several years of research and reflection, all the while undertaken as but one of a number of scholarly interests I have pursued. It draws upon material I have published elsewhere in various formats, for which due acknowledgement is given. As well, it has engaged me in research into new areas of dialogical engagement between Christians and Muslims which has been a fascinating and, at times, quite absorbing pursuit.

Whilst, as indicated, this present book takes a broadly historical approach, its very contemporaneity suggests it is more of a study in recent Christian engagement with Islam rather than being an academic history as such of modern Christian-Muslim dialogue. For the aim is to narrate and discuss an unfolding and unfinished story, drawing out some of its key features, analysing and critiquing where appropriate, and drawing together, under an ecumenical umbrella, some of the key arenas and trajectories of the contemporary story in order to highlight both the complementarity and comprehensiveness found therein. The story, and indeed the ongoing reality, of contemporary Christian-Muslim dialogical engagement is both exciting and encouraging. For it remains the case that, between them, Islam and Christianity represent over half the earth's population. Their history of interaction, as well as current areas of contentious encounter, impact the global human society still today – indeed, this latter features almost daily in the news media. Ours may be an age of predominating secularity and even strident secularism, at least in the West, but religion as such, and in particular the many and varied expressions of Christianity and

Islam, remains a potent force and factor in human affairs in many parts of the world.

It is to be hoped that this text will introduce, and perhaps open up, the comparatively new and certainly inviting field of study into contemporary Christian-Muslim relations. It is by no means a final or definitive work on the subject. Rather it is very much a solid attempt to survey, review and discuss some key dimensions which implicitly invites further and deeper study: any one of the chapters herein is worthy of expansion into a book-length study in its own right. There is more, much more, work to be done. But, for now, something of an exploratory foray has been engaged which I hope the reader will enjoy entering.

Douglas Pratt
Advent 2016

Acknowledgments

I am very grateful to my publisher, Maurits van den Boogert, and the team at Brill, especially Franca de Kort and Wilma de Weert, for encouragement, guidance and support in the production of this book. I am also grateful to a number of colleagues who advised and commented upon specific chapters, especially John Chesworth, David Bone and Sigvard von Sicard in respect of chapter 8; Michael Ipgrave, Lucinder Mosher, David Marshall and Daniel Madigan in respect of chapter 9, and Hansjörg Schmid in respect of chapter 10. Their suggestions toward, and affirmation of, my work in these areas have been most helpful. I am also grateful for critical comments from the reviewers of the initial completed text. I am sure the final product has benefitted from all comments and suggestions; any remaining infelicities remain my own responsibility.

It is also a happy duty to acknowledge the initial source, and permissions for the use of, earlier published work out of which this book, in part, has arisen. Chapter 2 is a revised version of material initially published in my 2005 text, *The Challenge of Islam: Encounters in Interfaith Dialogue* (Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 101-118) and which is now re-published by Routledge (Abingdon: Routledge Revival Library, 2017). I am grateful for permission granted to re-use that material here. Similarly, material in Part 1 below draws upon and expands work published in my *The Church and other Faiths: The World Council of Churches, the Vatican, and Interreligious Dialogue* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), together with two journal articles.[1] I am here able to draw together these previously disparate threads in order to achieve the aim of this book. Chapters 9 and 10 represent a substantial development of material first published as 'Textual Authority and Hermeneutical Adventure: Three 21st Century Christian-Muslim Dialogue Initiatives', in Douglas Pratt, Jon Hoover, John Davies, and John Chesworth (Eds.), *The Character of Christian-Muslim Encounter: Essays in Honour of David Thomas* HCMR Vol. 25 (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2015), 559-578. Chapter 11 is a development of my article, 'An Uncommon Call: Prospect for a New Dialogue with Muslims?' (*Asian Christian Review* Vol. 2 No. 2 & 3, Summer/Winter 2008, 36-53) for which the publisher has kindly permitted usage of the original material.

1 These are Douglas Pratt, The World Council of Churches in Dialogue with Muslims: Retrospect and Prospect (*Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* Vol. 20/1, January, 2009, 21-42); and Douglas Pratt, The Vatican in Dialogue with Islam: Inclusion and Engagement (*Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 21/3, July 2010, 245-262).

List of Abbreviations

AA	*Apostolicam Actuositatem*
AACC	All Africa Church Conference
ACTFOR	*The Attitude of the Church toward Followers of Other Religions*
ACW	*A Common Word*
AG	*Ad Gentes*
Bulletin	Bulletin of the Secretariat for Non-Christians/ Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue
CCAJ	Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews
CSIC	Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations
CWC	Christian World Communions
CWME	Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (WCC)
DFI	Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies (WCC Sub-unit)
DH	*Dignitatis Humanae*
DI	*Dominus Iesus*
DP	*Dialogue and Proclamation*
DV	*Dei Verbum*
ELC	European Liaison Committee (re PROCMURA)
ES	*Ecclesiam Suam*
F&O	Faith and Order (WCC)
GA	General Adviser (re PROCMURA)
IAP	Islam in Africa Project
ICCJ	International Council for Christians and Jews
IMC	International Missionary Council
IRM	*International Review of Mission*
IRRD	Interreligious Relations and Dialogue (WCC Office)
L&W	Life and Work (WCC)
LG	*Lumen Gentium*
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
MAfr	Missions to Africa (Catholic religious Order)
NA	*Nostra Aetate*
NIFCON	Network for Interfaith Concerns (of the Anglican Communion)
OIRR	Office on Inter-religious Relations (WCC)
PCID	Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue
PISAI	Pontifical Institute for the Study of Arabic and Islam
PROCMURA	Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa
Pro Dialogo	Bulletin of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue
RABIIT	Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought (Jordan)

RCC	Roman Catholic Church
RH	*Redemptor Hominis*
SNC	Secretariat for Non-Christians (Vatican Office)
WARC	World Alliance of Reformed Churches
WCC	World Council of Churches
WEA	World Evangelical Alliance
WICS	World Islamic Call Society

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Interreligious dialogue and the promotion of interfaith relations is a feature of our times. Dialogical engagement with Islam forms a component element and has been a major factor of ecumenical Church life since at least the middle of the twentieth century. It continues to be a contentious activity as well as an ongoing commitment, although it would be fair to say that of all the bi-lateral interreligious dialogical engagements that occupy the Christian Church in various settings, it is arguably that of Christian–Muslim relations which is the most challenging, problematic, and pressing. To be sure, for Christianity all dialogues with other religions – or with the peoples of those religions – are of equal significance and import, at least in terms of the quest to attain and enhance peaceful co-existence and harmonious inter-communal relations. However, it is undeniably the case that it is the variegated situations with respect to Islam that, especially since the latter part of the twentieth century, have impacted on Christian life and sensibilities in different parts of the world and in a host of different ways. As well as opportunities for cooperative endeavours, this encounter and relational engagement has raised, and continues to raise, a number of practical problems and theological issues that require continual work to ameliorate, if not resolve. It is this dialogical context and relationship that has been singled out for particular attention here. It is an arena of Christian engagement with a significant religious 'other' that has impacted the Christian Church to varying degrees and, indeed, the ecumenical journey that has been a prominent feature of the Church worldwide since the early years of the twentieth century. Dimensions of this journey form the focus of an investigation into elements of contemporary engagement of the Christian Church with Islam. I have been necessarily selective in this undertaking. This study is more representative than comprehensive, and guided by a set of criteria in respect to ecumenical scope of the selected foci of the study. Accordingly, this book attempts to chart the modern, or at least recent and contemporary history of Christian engagement with Islam as mediated through the offices and activities of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Vatican (RCC), and by examining select significant other ecumenical Christian–Muslim dialogues. I have also chosen to include the recent (2007) Muslim letter and, importantly, the emerging history of Christian response to it.

Whilst couched in the language and terms of an historical study, the very contemporaneity of this history can be problematic. It is dealing with an

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unfinished narrative, with a state of affairs that is very much in flux. While some early points of reference and accompanying texts are relatively fixed, and so may be subject to critical historical scrutiny, it remains the case that the agencies and activities studied here are in full flight still; the story is not over, by any means. So it may be better to approach this book more as an investigative study into contemporary phenomena of Christian–Muslim relations. It is perhaps rather too early to think of this as 'history', even though the study is very much one of historical description and related analysis and discussion. Thus the underlying aim is to unfold a contemporary narrative, or narratives, and discern the issues, dominant themes, and theological rationales and motifs that tell us why, how, and with what effect the Christian Church during the past century or so has, relative to the preceding thirteen centuries, radically shifted its position vis-à-vis Islam. What is the broadly ecumenical story of recent Christian–Muslim dialogue? What can be discovered through the story with respect to underlying theology and allied policy? What sort of assessment might be forthcoming both of the story so far and of its potential future? What sort of problems and challenges lie ahead?

It was Daniel Madigan who observed that, from the perspective of Christianity, 'the Muslim is … the other who is problematic because too-much-like-us, or perhaps even claiming-to-be-us' for, indeed, in some ways 'Islam presents the same quandary to the Christian as Christianity does to the Jew: it clearly grows out of the same matrix, and yet it proposes an alternative reading of the same figures and the same history of God's engagement with humanity, a reading it claims is more valid, and definitive'.[1] The very origins and development of Islam took place in dialogue and encounter with Christianity and, because of a combination of theological similarity and dissimilarity, as well as political rivalry, resulted in an ambiguous stance towards Christians and Christianity at best; a wholly negative one at worst. Indeed, the Qur'ān provides scriptural support both for those who are inclined to positive regard and dialogical openness, and equally to those opposed. Hence today in Islam there are Muslims who, perceiving themselves to be acting validly and in accord with the tenets of their faith, engage in dialogue and cooperative relations with Christians. Equally and contrariwise, there are those who regard themselves to be upholding the true tenets of Islam by rejecting the way of dialogue and relational détente with Christians, indeed with any religious 'other'. Madigan also usefully reminds us of the danger of a 'too-easy slippage' between what we think

1 Daniel Madigan, SJ, 'Christian-Muslim Dialogue', in Catherine Cornille (Ed), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue* (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), p. 244.

of as Christian–Muslim dialogue and the rather more amorphous arena of the so-called 'Muslim-West' dialogue.[2] Certainly it is tempting, especially in today's world, to equate one mode of engagement with the other. But the ideological encounter of the world of Islam with the modern 'western' world is by no means the same as the encounter of Islam with Christianity. Indeed, when it comes to relations with the secular West, these two faith communities might find they have more they agree on than not.

Following this introductory chapter, the scene-setting chapter 2 situates the modern phase of Christian–Muslim engagement within the context of a long-standing historical trajectory that has engaged Christianity and Islam down through the centuries and which, I suggest, incorporates the interplay of affinity, enmity, and inquiry as markers of the dialogical journey. As we will see, although there has been a considerable history of Christian–Muslim encounter, the contemporary era of engagement arguably emerged out of wider interreligious concerns expressed at the 1910 Edinburgh World Mission Conference. The broader context at that time was an emerging new set of questions about relations with religious 'others', in particular the novel question of what constitutes the proper relation of the gospel and the church to peoples of other faiths. Eventually, by the 1960s, ecumenical involvement in interreligious dialogue and allied relational engagement, including with Islam, became firmly embedded in the life and work of the WCC. And at around the same time a new stance of the Roman Catholic Church in regards to relational openness toward other faiths, including especially Islam, was ushered in during the course of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Between the WCC and the Vatican, both separately and jointly, the period of modern dialogical relations with the world of Islam can be said to have emerged with vigour and commitment during the second half of the twentieth century.

Part 1 below presents an analysis and discussion of the work of the WCC and the Vatican with respect to engagement with Islam during the course of the second half of the twentieth century. These two institutions together represent the vast majority of Christians and, with regards to the WCC, encompass a wide range of Christian churches; their work represents and encapsulates the broad field of Christian engagement with Islam. Furthermore, this ecumenical dialogical activity has been supported by the development of bi-lateral engagements between specific Christian World Communions (CWC) and particular elements of the Islamic world, along with regional ecumenical and/or

2 Madigan, 'Christian-Muslim Dialogue', p. 257.

Catholic initiatives. Examples include a Catholic–Shi'a dialogue,[3] together with initiatives undertaken from within the Anglican Communion[4] and the Lutheran World Federation[5], among many others. At a special meeting in late 2001 the goals of the Anglican – al-Azhar agreement were established as, among others, to encourage Anglicans to understand Islam and to encourage Muslims to understand Christianity; to share together in solving problems and conflicts that happen sometimes between Muslims and Christians in different parts of the world; and to work together against injustice and the abuse of human rights.[6] Such CWC-Muslim dialogues are premised, in general, on some expression of common faith in God; shared responsibilities with respect to religious indifference, on the one hand, and religious fanaticism on the other; and the intention to counteract the legacy of negative interaction and instead cooperatively contribute to the general human betterment. Although they reflect a wide range of Christian–Muslim engagements, such instances of CWC engagement with Islam are not the focus of this study. Rather I concentrate on a key selection of distinctly ecumenical (WCC and Vatican) ventures in Christian–Muslim dialogue.

Part 2 includes a selection of more focussed and/or recent examples of the ecumenical journey into engagement with Islam. In the first place there is a review of key 21st century developments under the aegis of the WCC; these often include also participation of representatives from the Vatican. Here special attention will be paid to some key documents that give evidence of the nature and direction of the engagement. I then outline, in chapter 8, the origins and development of the Programme for Christian–Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) that began around 1960 and which rather parallels, and

3 See for example Anthony O'Mahoney et al. (Eds), *Catholics and Shi'a in Dialogue: Studies in Theology and Spirituality* (London: Melisende Press, 2004); Anthony O'Mahoney et al. (Eds), *A Catholic–Shi'a Engagement: Faith and Reason in Theory and Practice* (London: Melisende Press, 2006); Anthony O'Mahoney et al. (Eds), *A Catholic–Shi'a Dialogue: Ethics in Today's Society* (London: Melisende Press, 2008).

4 For example, the agreement for dialogue between the Anglican Communion and al-Azhar al-Sharif signed at Lambeth Palace, London on 30 January 2002. This agreement, and the dialogical process that ensued, grew out of visits during the 1990s between the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr George Carey, and the Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar in Cairo, Egypt, Dr Mohamed Sayed Tantawy.

5 See Simone Sinn, 'On Lutheran Theology and Practice in Relation to Islam', *Current Dialogue* 52 (July 2012): 42-49.

6 Anglican-al Azhar Agreement: <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/111577/An-agreement-for-dialogue-between-the-Anglican-Communion-and-al-Azhar-al-Sharif.pdf> (Accessed 27/11/2016).

constitutes a very particular expression of, the wider ecumenical journey itself. Chapters 9, 10 and 11 explore three significant developments that emerged during the opening decade of the twenty-first century. These are the Building Bridges series initiated by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Reverend George Carey; a joint Catholic-Protestant Theological Forum initiative in Germany; and an initiative from the Muslim side that has provoked a fresh wave of ecumenical Christian responses, namely the significant 2007 'Come to a Common Word' letter which invites Christians to join anew with the Muslims in pursuing theological dialogue. Each of these dialogical developments are, to a greater of lesser degree, ecumenical in their scope and intentions and they show how the recent history of Christian–Muslim relations is being played out in diverse, yet often overlapping, ways. Very often they address concerns and issues that have their roots deep within the history of encounter between these two faiths.

Jørgen Nielsen observes that discussion about relations between Christians and Muslims is often couched within a context of what might be called the 'Crusades syndrome'. Historically speaking, the Crusading era was complex and multi-faceted and, indeed, not called 'Crusades' as such until sometime later.[7] Nielsen uses the term 'crusade' expansively, to denote a mindset and a clutch of presuppositions and received motifs of prejudicial assumption: talk of the Crusades thus embraces a

> …whole range of conscious memory of a history of conflict on both sides of the Mediterranean, a memory which to a great extent is mythology. This starts with the earliest capture of the Byzantine provinces of the Middle East and North Africa by Arab Muslim expansion, the Muslim conquest and the Christian re-conquest of Spain and southern Italy, the Crusades themselves, and the growth of the Ottoman Empire in the ruins of Byzantium.[8]

The crusade motif was later revived in the nineteenth century within the context of imperial discourse among European powers. Towards the end of the First World War French and British military leaders each spoke of their respective victories over the Ottoman armies in Palestine and Syria 'in crusading

7 Jørgen S. Nielsen, 'The Current Situation of Christian-Muslim Relations: Emerging Challenges, Signs of Hope', in Douglas Pratt, Jon Hoover, John Davies and John Chesworth (Eds), *The Character of Christian-Muslim Encounter: Essays in Honour of David Thomas*. (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2015), p. 416.

8 Nielsen, 'The Current Situation', p. 416.

terms'.[9] This has been paralleled, and the term invoked afresh, throughout the twentieth century, culminating in the perhaps now infamous use made of it by President George W. Bush in respect to the so-called 'war on terror'. And it cuts both ways, for there are many in the Muslim world who see an ideological advantage in keeping alive the judgement that opposition to, or even a critique of Islam is proof positive of the West's (and others') continuing crusade against Islam. Lodged in the collective subconscious, 'it is easily brought to the surface when circumstances are right', for example,

> …in daily conversation in many parts of the Muslim world it finds expression in a lively trade in conspiracy theories. Any prominent media personality or politician who is perceived consistently to be against Arabs or Muslims is often assumed to be a Crusader or a Jew and definitely Islamophobic, regardless of facts. Any move by a western government or institution or statement by a significant personality which is explicitly favourable to an Arab perspective is, in some quarters, dismissed as yet another cynical move to retain control.[10]

And if it is the case that the crusade motif is kept alive in this way within the Muslim world, it is certainly the case that the West, at least, in both cultural as well as religious regard is steeped with a self-perception of needing, from time to time, to respond to Islam, and especially the incursions of Muslims, whether real or perceived, in terms of enacting a reactionary crusade of resistance and exclusion. Nielsen notes how this historical mentality has transferred into non-Western and non-European regions, with a deleterious result so far as undermining a previous history of Christian–Muslim co-existence is concerned. Thus, for instance,

> …resource-rich North American conservative evangelical Christianity meets oil-funded forms of Arab Islam and together set the tone and the agendas. Both parties bring with them perceptions of relations between Islam and Christianity at the core of which are an innate enmity and distrust symbolized by the Crusades and the myths of the Mediterranean frontier.[11]

9 Ibid.
10 Nielsen, 'The Current Situation', p. 417.
11 Ibid.

Yet it is also the case that during the centuries of Christian–Muslim interaction there has been considerable positive, or at least ideologically neutral, intercourse; much of it around trade and commerce. As Nielsen asks: 'So why is it that the conflict is remembered and restated, while the positive interaction and interdependence is so easily forgotten?'[12] He suggests the reason has to do with religion as a marker of communal identity, rather than religion *qua* religious phenomena (beliefs, dogmas, rituals etc.), and for which the crusading venture was a complex accompanying motif. Thus,

> Christianity was the glue which was to hold together the nascent state structures of European Catholic Christendom. The Crusades were an essential dimension in this project. They were the means by which the Christianization of Europe itself was confirmed as well as providing the ideology which moved the crusading armies against Baltic paganism, central European Jewry, eastern Orthodox Christianity, and the Muslim Arab world.[13]

The crusading motif has overshadowed the even more profoundly significant dimension of cultural and intellectual interchange that took place between socio-political blocs of the Muslim world – culminating in the Ottoman Empire, on the one hand, and modern secular nation-states on the other, so far as Western Christianity's encounter with Islam was concerned. More recently, within

> …two years after the collapse of the Soviet system, a new range of issues, encouraged by political and commercial interests, began to surface, coalescing around the idea of 'Islam, the new enemy'. By this time the public debate had become heated. Although the phrase 'clash of civilizations' can be traced some years further back, it became common currency in the wake of the publication of Samuel Huntington's article of that title in *Foreign Affairs* in the summer of 1993. The then secretary-general of NATO, Willi Claes, inadvertently revealed how far this perspective had penetrated into the corridors of power when in 1995 he publicly warned against the threats from Islam.[14]

12 Nielsen, 'The Current Situation', p. 418.

13 Ibid.

14 Nielsen, 'The Current Situation', p. 420.

The political and military interactions involving Islam with other entities – the West, Russia, African states, Israel, and Christianity or the Church in a variety of places – over recent decades need not detain us here; Nielsen's helpful work gives a competent overview.

To be sure, there can often be a 'rather ambiguous attitude' emanating from some, possibly many, churches today with regards to Islam, and even interreligious dialogue more generally.[15] Indeed, from some quarters of the Christian church it is clear that in respect of negative perceptions of and reactions to Islam there is a hardening of heart and mind. On the other hand there are some Christian leaders, at least, who tend to the view that 'although Islam appeared chronologically after the coming of Christ, at least its central message of "submission to God" is relevant for Christians as well as Muslims' and that, indeed, Muhammad can be legitimately viewed by Christians as a bearer of the same 'message' of Jesus.[16] Such questions have guided the design and execution of this book which concludes with a chapter that draws out and discusses some salient points that have arisen from the preceding investigations and which warrant critical reflection. The modern history of Christian engagement with Islam continues to unfold. Hopefully, from this study of twentieth and twenty-first century developments, some salient pointers may be gleaned as to its future prospects.

15 Andrew M. Sharp, *Orthodox Christians and Islam in the Postmodern Age* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2012), p. 201; cf. Basil Cousins, 'The Russian Orthodox Church, Tartar Christians and Islam', in Anthony O'Mahoney (ed.), *Eastern Christianity: Studies in Modern History, Religion and Politics.* (London: Fox Communications and Publications, 2004), pp. 338-371.

16 Sharp, *Orthodox Christians and Islam*, p. 73.

CHAPTER 2

Christian Encounters with Islam: An Historical Precursor

In order to better grasp the significance of Christian engagement with Islam since the early twentieth century, and in particular the ecumenical journeys that we will herein traverse, it may be helpful to set the wider scene by way of an orienting historical precursor. What have been some of the key markers of the journey since Christians and Muslims first encountered each other? What can we discern of the nature and dynamics of interaction and engagement that provides background context for a fuller understanding of events and developments of the twentieth, and early twenty-first, centuries? To be sure, Islam and Christianity have had a long history of mutual competition. There are marked differences, and there are points of similarity if not also commonality. In some respects their very closeness has given rise to sharp clashes and reciprocal condemnation; yet this same closeness can be a clue to the dynamic of their similarity. Both are pre-eminently religions of belief. Each has struggled to define its own orthodoxy against variant heterodoxies and heresies from within. And each has a history of self-proclamation as embodying 'universal truth' – especially over against any other rival claimant to that truth. It is therefore little wonder that these two religions have a history of interaction marked more by negative encounters and clashes than positive and respectful engagement. Charles Kimball once asked: 'Why have these two communities clashed so vigorously through the centuries? What informs the sense of mistrust that pervades the history of Christian–Muslim relations and skews attempts to relate more constructively today?'[1] Issues arising out of the history of Christian–Muslim interfaith encounter are certainly complex.[2] In this chapter I suggest a set of undergirding hermeneutical perceptions and orientations concerning

1 Charles Kimball, *Striving Together: A Way Forward in Christian-Muslim Relations* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), p. 37.

2 See for example: Rollin Armour, Sr., *Islam, Christianity, and the West: a troubled history* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002); Hugh Goddard, *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000); – *Muslim Perceptions of Christianity* (London: Grey Seal, 1996); Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); L. Ridgeon (Ed), *Islamic Interpretations of Christianity* (Oxford: Routledge, 2001); W.M. Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and Misperceptions* (London: Routledge 1991).

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the complex history of this relationship. On the way I shall note some of the particular dialogical options that have been utilised with varying degrees of success. More significantly, they lay the groundwork for reflection upon the nature of, and prospects for, dialogical engagement now.

Jean-Marie Gaudeul has offered a useful review of the history of the relationship between Islam and Christianity in which the mutual challenge and response that has engaged the attentions of each may be tracked through broad ages or epochs.[3] I will broadly follow his outline, but re-interpret the historical process it yields in terms of a series of identifying epochs, which I denote as *expansion, equilibrium, exhortation, enmity* and *exploration*. They do not just mark out historical eras as such; rather, they delineate the ebb and flow of a relationship of encounter, indicating the state of play in the relationship between Islam and Christianity that has obtained at particular times in history. In other words, these terms indicate modes of relationship and interaction *per se*. While each may provide an identifier, or demarcate, a particular period, it could be argued that they are always part of the wider picture of Christian–Muslim encounter. They certainly persist into the present day so far as the interaction between Islam and Christianity are concerned.

1 Relations in an Epoch of Expansion

In the earliest days of mid-seventh century Islamic expansion under the first four 'Rightly Guided' Caliphs – the *Rashidun* (632-661) – who followed Muhammad as leaders of the Muslim community (*Ummah*), the focus of Islam as an emerging community and nation was more or less on itself as the divine mission primarily within and to Arabia and, secondarily, to the world at large. In the earliest days, with the fervour of rightness and the confirmation of conquest dominant, there was little room to consider any religious 'other' as anything like approximating a dialogue partner. By comparison, Christianity was relatively settled. The 'orthodox' knew who they were and who constituted their 'heterodox' opponents. Rival Christian communities had staked their claims. Arianism, Nestorianism, and Monophysitism represented variant heterodoxies relative to the triumphs of orthodox Christianity in regard to the outcomes of the great councils – of Nicea (325), Ephesus (431), Constantinople (381) and Chalcedon (451). Christianity, a religion that espoused unity, in reality embraced wide diversity. In this context, cultural contrasts with nascent

3 Jean-Marie Gaudeul, *Encounters and Clashes. Islam and Christianity in History* (Rome: Pontifico Instituto di Studi Arabi e Islamici, 1990/2000).

Islam soon became apparent. Although Islam emerged religiously confident, its leaders quickly saw the need to redress the relative intellectual inferiority as compared with the Christianity – and Judaism – of the time. This began with the *Umayyad* dynasty and caliphate (661-750) based in Damascus. The flow of ideas gained from the work of translating Greek literary and philosophical texts into Arabic emerged during this caliphate. Under the *Abbasid* dynasty and caliphate (750-1258) that ruled from Baghdad, this flow amplified at first then ebbed during the ninth century as tendencies to reactionary reformism set in. It flourished again in the latter half (950-1258) of the Abbasid era as interest in things Hellenic impacted on theology and stirred up philosophical interests within the Islamic world, only to wane once more as reaction to, and rejection of, foreign influences and ideas re-surfaced within the body of Islam. However, as an overall assessment of this era, Gaudeul comments that there can be seen 'eagerness of Muslims to discover the Greek culture, their efforts to learn, and at the same time the later realisation that Philosophy could present dangers for Faith, Reason could doubt Revelation, and Dialogue might be a threat to Islam'.[4] The epoch of expansion was an age wherein Islam became a force and factor to be reckoned with seriously so far as Christianity was concerned. During this period dialogical encounter began to take place in either of two modes: direct (as in the East) and indirect (as was the case in the West). This is reflected, for example, in the distinction between 'on the one hand, Syriac and Arabic texts produced by Christians under Islamic rule, who are engaged in a genuine attempt to express and defend their faith within a new linguistic and religious milieu, and, on the other hand, the much more polemical and vituperative material from Latin- and Greek-speaking writers'.[5]

Direct dialogue, the situation of interaction and relationship that occurred in regards to Christian – and also Jewish – communities living under Muslim rule, was dominated by the concept and institution of *dhimma*. This refers to viewing, and so effectively defining, Christians (together with Jews and any others who worship one God and, importantly, who possess a revelatory scriptural text) as a 'protected people' by virtue of being a 'people of the book' (their respective scriptures). In respect to this social construct defining relational status and relativities, it was incumbent upon Muslim rulers to ensure the protection of the religious rights of the 'peoples of the book' who happened to

4 Gaudeul, *Encounters*, p. 25.

5 Daniel Madigan, SJ, 'Christian-Muslim Dialogue', in Catherine Cornille (Ed), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue* (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), p. 248. See also Sydney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

live within Muslim jurisdiction, albeit within a framework of submission to Muslim rule and the payment of a special tax (*jizya*) in lieu of military service. This set the legal context for daily contact. However, socially and psychologically, mutual suspicion and antagonism tended to prevail. The decrees of *dhimma* and concomitant beliefs and faith-attitude predetermined the parameters of relationship, at least from the Muslim point of view.

The Christian response to such contextual boundaries being set by Muslims may be seen in early writers such as St John of Damascus (675-753).[6] Living within the Islamic *Ummah*, yet writing to present Christianity to Christians, John treated Islam as false belief: Christianity may regard Islam as but another heresy over against which orthodox faith must defend itself. John attacked Islam with a variety of *reductio ad absurdum* arguments, turning the tables on Muslims who argued against Christian belief. While there is some element of superiority threading through his work, it does not contain the negativity or polemical aggression toward Islam that emerges in later centuries. At this time, the dominant sense is of Christians having something to offer Muslims as they seek to understand their own faith in a broader context. Gaudeul remarks that such work 'may be one of the earliest instances of Christian theology offering its help to other believers without any ulterior motive'.[7]

A predominating form of early dialogue from the Christian perspective may be seen in the work of the Nestorian patriarch, Timothy (728-823).[8] Christians were by and large preoccupied with stating and re-stating received orthodoxy in clear terms and in a determined style. Creedal faith, as promulgated by conciliar and episcopal decree, would be proclaimed in a rather matter-of-fact way. The text of Timothy's *Apology*, his main work which was used by many generations of Christians, derives directly from dialogical engagement with the Muslim Caliph, *al-Mahdi*. Questions are put by the Muslim to the Christian. The response is a simple statement of faith: there is no attempt at bridging the divide between Muslim and Christian worlds of discourse; no advance in mutual understanding is made, nor is it possible. Such 'dialogue' is really a

6 See Reinhold Glei, 'John of Damascus' in D. Thomas and B. Roggema (Eds), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History. Vol. 1 (600-900)* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2009), pp. 296-301.

7 Gaudeul, *Encounters*, p. 30.

8 Patriarch from 780, Timothy was head of a missionary church (with missions to both India and China). He was active with Church reform and the education of his clergy. Fluent in Greek, Syriac and Arabic, he moved to Baghdad so that, as head and spokesperson for his Church, he would have direct access to the Caliph of the Islamic empire. See Martin Heimgartner, 'Timothy I' in Thomas and Roggema (Eds), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History. Vol. 1*, pp. 515-519.

variant of parallel monologue. This was the pattern that was to hold in respect of Christian–Muslim engagement over many centuries. Meanwhile, there was evidence of developing sophistication of Islamic argument. A ninth century Muslim retort to Christian critiques of Islam was given by one Ali al-Tabari, a former Nestorian Christian who wrote as a convert to Islam, stressing the incoherence of Christian teaching.[9] At this stage Muslim critics focussed on 'problems attendant upon the Incarnation, echoing critics of former times by asking how a being could be both divine and human, how God could die, how he could control the universe if he was on earth, and so on'.[10] Gaudeul argues that in the writings of al-Tabari can be seen 'an attempt made by a convert to find peace of mind through achieving a synthesis between his former faith and his new belief. ...This would be similar to the Christian way of reading the Old Testament'.[11] Nonetheless al-Tabari did articulate a number of 'embarrassing questions' for Christians which typify the nature of issues raised in the encounter: 'Can God undergo suffering?'; 'Is Christ God or man?'; 'Is Christ the creator or a creature?' and so on. Furthermore, he focused on the criteria of true religion asking if the criteria used against Islam could not be used equally against Christianity. This applied particularly to the issue of prophethood and the charge by Christians that Muhammad did not fit the pattern or profile of an authentic prophet. Al-Tabari drew together Quranic texts which set the rules for dialogue, so far as Islamic scriptural warrant is concerned: belief in the previous revelations from the one and the same God; belief in the veracity of the revelation through Muhammad without distinction; the utter oneness of God who only is the Lord to be served, and who will not guide his people into error.

By way of stylistic contrast, another early paradigm of direct dialogue involves examples of correspondence that took place, whether purportedly or actually, between a Christian and a Muslim scholar. For instance, during the ninth century, there was the dialogical conversation of the supposed Muslim letter of al-Hashimi and the Christian response of al-Kindi.[12] The two 'letters' were most probably a single sole-authored work, and quite likely by a Christian using symbolic names and the mode of an apparent interchange of letters in order to portray a dialogical debate. Al-Hashimi, in a letter of some 37 pages, presents Islam and argues anti-Christian polemics; al-Kindi, in a 230-page retort, gives a Christian apologetic together with a critique of Islam. This work

9 See D. Thomas, 'Early Muslim Relations with Christianity', *Anvil*, 6/1 (1989), pp. 23-31.

10 Thomas, 'Early Muslim Relations', p. 27.

11 Gaudeul, *Encounters*, p. 42.

12 See Laura Bottini, 'The Apology of Al-Kindi' in Thomas and Roggema (Eds), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History. Vol. 1*, pp. 585-594.

'represents the state of Christian–Muslim dialogue as it was taking place daily among civil servants and educated people'[13] and is very important for the history of Christian–Muslim dialogue. Most Muslim writers in later periods attempted in one way or another to answer al-Kindi. For many generations, Christians have known Islam through the description given by these letters, which were translated into Latin from the 12th century onwards, so making them available to the Church and scholars in the West. At the time of al-Hashimi and al-Kindi the key issues to have emerged were undoubtedly the question of the veracity and status of the doctrine of the Trinity on the one hand, and the legitimacy and integrity of the Qurʾān on the other. Each proponent accused the other of falsity and credulity in regards to these two respective foundational elements of faith.

Dialogue under Muslim rule took place in many contexts and engaged many forms, both oral and written. The encounter was rooted in lived experiential engagement and relationship. And if the tone of exchange was initially courteous and calm, politics soon effected a shift from tolerance to intolerance; so 'dialogue' gradually became an arena for hostile engagement rather than an exercise in friendly encounter. Indeed, Islam had effectively produced a set of limiting conventions to the game-play of dialogical encounter: there could be no direct criticism of Islam, the Qurʾān or Muhammad. From the Christian point of view, reference to the scriptures became less acceptable and useful: Muslims were inclined to modify scriptural meaning in the service of Islam (so al-Tabari) or reject the scriptures outright as falsified (so al-Hashimi). But the context and experience of direct dialogue was not the only mode of encounter between Muslim and Christian.

In the West an indirect dialogue of sorts was pursued. In marked contrast to the East, the Western Christian Empire did not have the dialogical 'partner', as it were, residing within, nor at that time engaged with at its borders. Christians within the Western empire addressed Islam and Muslims from a distance, and across also a language barrier – writers of Latin, the *lingua franca* of the West, addressed Arabic writing and speaking Muslims. This was similar for Eastern Christianity whose *lingua franca* was Greek. Dialogue was thus indirect and mediate. Direct dialogue presupposes at least a common language if not also a shared worldview, or fundamental and axiomatic presuppositions; dialogue is a mode of communication, after all. Also, indirect dialogue was effectively serving another purpose than that of direct dialogical encounter, for the indirect mode was not self-reflexive: it did not raise the question of 'dialogical attitude' in respect of the internal intellectual task of dialogical engagement

13 Gaudeul, *Encounters*, p. 52.

such as might be the case today. Rather, in speaking about the religious 'other', ostensibly to that other but in fact to their own, 'dialogue' was often subordinated to internal apologetics. Nevertheless,

> Protected as they are by political or linguistic borders, the authors are prone to throw insults at Islam, Muhammad and Muslims ... (with) in the background all the resentment of the Byzantines or of other populations who have suffered defeat at the hands of the Muslims. It is often the militant tone of War literature.[14]

It is not difficult to demonstrate that indirect dialogue in the early epoch of Islamic expansion was more a matter of diatribe and invective than dispassionate engagement in mutual understanding and critical self-reflection.

On the other hand, there is a famous example of dialogue by correspondence in the names of the Byzantine (Christian) Emperor Leo III (717-741) and the Umayyad Caliph Umar II (717-720), but quite possibly compiled in the closing years of the ninth century.[15] There is no particular originality in these documents, but they do provide a good example of the typical dialogical encounter of the era. The Muslim letter argues that Jews and Christians adulterated the scriptures; that Jesus is not God; that Christian salvation is problematic and that Christian practices are indeed misleading. It then goes on to give answer to the Christian critique of Islam; to assert Muhammad as a genuine prophet and to affirm that Islam is validated by its very success. The Christian letter retorts with the witness of scripture that Jesus is the Word of God; that there is in fact an undergirding unity of all Christians; and that the Qurʾān is falsified. It goes on to argue in favour of the Trinity, assert the divinity of Christ, and offer a defence of Christian practices. It ends with an attack on Islamic practices and discussions of other sundry items. Gaudeul notes that, with this exchange, 'we reach the end of the first period of Christian–Muslim dialogue: a period of clumsy efforts on either side to try and define their own position in front of the "other", and to formulate the relevant objections to the other doctrine'.[16] Although more used as rhetorical devices for self-promotion, the dialogical encounters thus far noted reveal that the pattern of style and content, if not also the form and argumentative substance, had emerged; and these had become quite fixed.

14 Gaudeul, *Encounters*, p. 62.

15 See Mark Swanson, 'The Arabic letter of Leo III to 'Umar II', in Thomas and Roggema (Eds), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History. Vol. 1*, pp. 377-380.

16 Gaudeul, *Encounters*, p. 74.

2 Relations in an Epoch of Equilibrium

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries the early and dramatic expansion of the Islamic dynastic empire was checked; political fragmentation and relative weakness ensued. This resulted, effectively, in a form of geo-political re-balancing of the worlds of Islam and Christendom, at least around the Mediterranean basin. It was the time when Christianity made an aggressive comeback. Spurred on by the emergence of the new european civilisation out of Europe's Dark Age, crusades to recover the Holy Land from the infidel were inaugurated.[17] By now Islam had known several centuries of untrammelled development and growth, with military success and political and cultural achievement a confirmation of divine sanction. Indeed, Islam had been militarily on the winning side and had found pride in its victories, while Christians had seemed destined for the losing side. However, after 1050 'the trend had stopped and Christians and Muslims met on the battlefield on equal terms. Military success could no longer be invoked as a sign of God's approval'.[18]

In the economic sphere the winds of change were blowing in favour of the West. Ownership of the most prosperous trading vessels, entrepreneurial initiative, and the profits and power that went with that, which had once been the lot of Muslims, shifted westwards. At the same time there was a growing mutual militancy and intolerance: each was inclined to invoke the idea of the Holy War against the other side. In the Christian West this made for resurgence and renewal in spiritual matters which, coupled with growth in material prosperity, stimulated a new self-awareness and self-confidence. Europe 'idealised the figure of the Pilgrim and Knight defending Christendom against its enemies',[19] a motif that exists still today. And the worldview clash that existed between Christian and Muslim, fuelled on the Christian side by a wholly negative view of Islam as given out in sermons and writings, also pertained to the clash between Christian Roman (Latin) West and Christian Byzantine (Greek) East: this was the age of the Great Schism in Christianity and the initial aftermath of mutual Christian anathema and animosity. And within and among the Muslim community *jihad* was exalted in books and poems; regulations concerning the *dhimmī* communities proliferated and intensified in humiliation;

17 Among the many histories of the Crusades, see for example: Thomas Asbridge, *The Crusades: The Authoritative History of the War for the Holy Land* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010). See also Zachary Karabell, *Peace Be Upon You: Fourteen Centuries of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Conflict and Cooperation* (New York, NY: Vantage Books, 2007), pp. 87-114.

18 Gaudeul, *Encounters*, p. 81.

19 Gaudeul, *Encounters*, p. 82.

and the rise of both anti-Christian and anti-Jewish polemics spawned concomitant riots and massacres.

At one level this was an age of intense antagonism and a see-saw of violent outburst between Christianity and Islam: neither side exactly had the upper hand; on another level it saw a mutual cultural exchange which also gave a sense of balancing counterpoint. Islamic intellectual greatness flowered on three fronts: in theology, philosophy, and mysticism. Furthermore, a re-invigorated Christian mission to Muslims accompanied the era of the Crusades (1095-1270). Gradually, however, zeal for evangelical conversion tempered the zest for military conquest. At the same time, each religion looked to its own inner consolidation. In the development of orthodoxy within Islam, and the promulgation of defining criteria, principles, and methods, Muslim scholars tended towards theological options that offered protection against 'Christian contamination'. And Christians were no less adept in producing their own discrediting diatribes against Islam. These have persisted ever since. Both sides consolidated their paradigms and platforms of prejudice.

The Bible's multiple human authorship was taken by Muslims to mean that the text of Christian scripture was in some way falsified (*tahrif*), or that it had suffered textual substitution (*tabdil*). The argument used, and which has found echo and repetition down to today, was: alteration could have happened; the existence of textual discrepancies, inconsistencies and contradictions prove it did happen. Thus Christian doctrine was condemned as false. The doctrine of the Trinity was regularly attacked as an invention and indeed self-contradictory: How can three things be one? The incarnation was constantly criticised as an impossibility and also an absurdity. If God becomes man, he is no longer God; if a man becomes God, he is no longer man. If Christ is composed of both, He is neither God nor man.

Anti-Christian Islamic polemics of this period can be found in the work of the famous Muslim scholar al-Ghazali (1059-1111).[20] On the basis of the acceptance of both the truth of Islam and the authenticity of the Christian scriptures, an Islamic hermeneutic is then applied to the Christian scripture in which texts implying the divinity of Jesus are read allegorically and texts implying his humanity are read literally. From this there flows detailed rebuttal of Christian claims, together with an Islamic explication of Christian phenomena. This forms a somewhat new departure, an approach that eclipses the hitherto dominant pattern of this era. Meanwhile, from the Christian side there may be

20 For a concise discussion, see Maha El Kaisy-Friemuth, 'Al-Ghazali' in D. Thomas and A. Mallett (Eds), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History. Vol. 3 (1050-1200)* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2011), pp. 363-369.

found an example of an apologetical style of dialogical treatise, written in the early eleventh century in a climate of considerable mutual respect and openness between Muslim and Christian. Such a treatise was written by a Nestorian bishop, Elias (975-1046), who became Metropolitan of Nisibis (on the border of present-day Turkey and Syria).[21] An attempt is made to explain the Trinity by using universal philosophical categories; the need to search for a common language about God is advocated: indeed, 'no human language about God can avoid being analogical or metaphorical'.[22] The eirenical work of such a scholarly person as Elias notwithstanding, the epoch of which he is part is more an age of enhanced missionary motivation and praxis than polite and erudite inquiry. Nevertheless, the spirit of eirenical engagement was furthered by none other than Pope Gregory VII (1020-1085).[23] Despite a variety of battles that took place between Muslims and Christians during his time as Pontiff, Gregory continued to stress peaceful missionary outreach and, in 1076, wrote a letter to a Muslim leader, al-Nazir, in response to the latter's request that the Pope ordain a bishop for the Christians under his rule.[24] The Pope's letter is notable in that he avoids any antagonistic statements – he neither deprecates Islam nor elevates Christianity over it – and, indeed, he stresses common elements of faith and the working of God in both religions.

A new Christian paradigm emerged with the work of Peter the Venerable (Peter of Cluny; 1094-1156) in regards to his refutation of Islam as a sectarian heresy.[25] Gaudeul has analysed Peter's reasoning as follows: (1) Muslims are obliged by the Qur'ān to regard the books of the Bible as revealed by God. (2) Owing to inconsistencies between Qur'ān and Bible, one of the two books must be rejected. (3) The Bible cannot be rejected: that would be against the Qur'ān. But the reverse is possible. (4) It can be proved from both the Bible and the Qur'ān that: (i) The Qur'ān was not revealed by God, and (ii) Muhammad was not a prophet (according to the Biblical meaning of the term).[26] For Peter, Islam had to be answered, and of his own efforts he claimed 'to have a really

21 See Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala, 'Elias of Nisibi', in D. Thomas and A. Mallett (Eds), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History. Vol. 2 (900-1050)* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2010), pp. 727-741.

22 Gaudeul, *Encounters*, p. 102.

23 See Tomaz Mastnak, 'Gregory VII', in Thomas and Mallett (Eds), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History. Vol. 3*, pp. 182-203.

24 Gaudeul, *Encounters*, p. 104.

25 Se Dominque Iogna-Prat and John Tolan, 'Peter of Cluny', in Thomas and Mallett (Eds), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History. Vol. 3*, pp. 604-610.

26 Gaudeul, *Encounters*, p. 118.

suitable reply as a Christian armoury against this pestilence'.[27] Yet he wrote to Muslims seeking to redress military approaches (attack and destroy) with missionary ones (persuade and convert), thus: 'I do not attack you – Muslims – as our people often do, by arms, but by words; not by force, but by reason, not in hatred, but in love'.[28] Peter was not attempting dialogue as we would understand it today. He learnt about Islam in order to provide Christians with an 'armoury' to counter it; his concern was to prove the other wrong and his style reflected the emergence of scholasticism as the predominant method of religious discourse and reflection, which then prevailed for several centuries.

3 Relationships in an Epoch of Exhortation

The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries which, so far as the West is concerned, marks the shift from late medieval to the early modern period, may be viewed as an epoch of exhortation. During this period the worlds of both Islam and Christianity underwent great change. The Crusader states steadily declined and fizzled: Islam regained much of what it had formerly lost to the Christians. Then came the Mongol invasions that disrupted and changed forever the shape of *dar al-Islam*. The seeds of eventual Ottoman ascendancy were also sown. A new Europe was emerging, signalling new cultural development; new prosperity and growing self-confidence coupled with both a spiritual renewal and a revitalised militaristic outlook. Indeed, the emergence of this Europe predominated in the encounter between Islam and Christianity. The warring clash between these two worlds was as much psychological as physically militaristic. Self-image and the image of the 'other' were important dimensions. As Gaudeul notes: 'Europe had discovered its existence as "Christendom" at the time of the first Crusade ....It was now exploring its roots (Greek and Latin cultures) as well as bearing new fruits (new structures and nations). A great need was felt for the integration of all these elements in a Christian synthesis'.[29] And, at the same time, the 'Muslim world had been torn by strife and threatened in its very existence by the Mongol invasion. The aftermath...was marked by a return to as orthodox a way of thinking and of living as could be achieved'.[30] The Christian negative image of Islam that had emerged as the virtual standard perspective saw this religious 'other' as a falsehood and a deliberate perversion of truth; as

27 Gaudeul, *Encounters*, p. 119.
28 Ibid.
29 Gaudeul, *Encounters*, p. 129.
30 Ibid.

being a religion of violence, spread by the sword; as a way of self-indulgence and licentiousness; as inspired by Satan and founded by the Antichrist – identified, of course, as Muhammad. Muslims could, and did, hold much the same kind of image of Christianity. Under Muslim rule, the situation of the *dhimmī* communities deteriorated further, but so too did the state of religious minorities, especially Jews, in the Christian West. Humiliation and degradation of the other was the order of the day.

Image is a function of imagination. The religious imagination, fuelled by hatred and prejudice, resulted in a dehumanising image of the religious 'other'. Islam was perceived by many as the antithesis of Christianity. Christianity was proclaimed over and against all falsehoods and idolatries, of which Islam was the most potent and threatening. This was the age of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274).[31] His great work, *Summa Contra Gentiles* (1259-1254), was written to help with missionary efforts in respect of non-Christians, in general, and Muslims in particular. Here was a high-water mark of the shaping of the Christian negative image of the other, now given intellectual respectability and reasoned perspective. Aquinas, and before him his teacher Albert the Great (1200-1280), had rediscovered Aristotelian logic and metaphysics from the work of Muslim philosophers.[32] This opened to the West new ways of thinking and new approaches to the understanding of reality which was much more favourable to scientific empirical inquiry than had previously been the case. In respect of theological reflection, both in general and with regard to interreligious encounters, St Thomas' method was to maximise the use of reason and draw on scripture for illustration. As faith includes supra-rational mystery that is beyond reason – being apprehensible only as revelation – arguments from reason cannot therefore prove faith or convince the unbeliever. But argument can answer argument, showing up insufficiency and logical weakness. Aquinas' reasonable assumption was that the Christian could meet both Jewish and Muslim co-religionist at intellectual depth because there is a common need for, and ability to grasp, the truth. Furthermore, it was possible to do this because the categories of such discourse, derived from Greek philosophy, were held in common. Thus the overriding task was to seek the common faith-experience and a common language to talk about it, a goal still relevant today. Interestingly, in the spirit of St Thomas Aquinas, the Spaniard Ramon Llull

31 See John Tolan, 'Thomas Aquinas', in D. Thomas and A. Mallett (Eds), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History. Vol. 4 (1200-1350)* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2012), pp. 521-529.

32 See, for example, Oliver Leaman, *An Introduction to Classical Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

(Raymond Lull; c. 1232-1315) undertook a missionising dialogue with Jews and Muslims on the grounds of the commonality of reason.[33] Of this attempt to relate positively to Muslims during this epoch, Michael Nazir-Ali comments, 'Raymond Lull advocated a peaceful approach to Islam instead of the Crusades'; and he notes also that 'Francis of Assisi actually visited Saladin during the Crusades, and John Wycliffe refused to deny the beatific vision to Muslims'.[34] It was not all a matter of hostility and war; intimations of *salaam* occurred in the midst of the hortatory animosity.

4 Relations in an Epoch of Enmity

The fifteenth to eighteenth centuries, on the whole, may be regarded as an age of aggressive clashes. This was a time of predominance of the Ottoman caliphate; for the West, the terms 'Turk' and 'Muslim' became effectively synonymous and interchangeable. Christian–Muslim clashes ebbed and flowed in places as far flung as North Africa, Ethiopia, East Africa, and South East Asia. In 1492 Spain was drawn back into the fold of the Christian West with the triumph of Isabella and Ferdinand and, in the same year, Christopher Columbus set off with Spanish blessing to explore and conquer a New World. Indeed, this era was a time of dramatic geographic expansion of the Christian West's Old World into the New World. It also saw the emergence of Europe into modern nation states. Geo-political change was dramatic and far-reaching. In consequence 'Christian–Muslim dialogue was affected by this change since there would no longer be encounters between "Muslims" and "Christians", but encounters between "Turks" (or "Moors") and "Frenchmen", "Spaniards", or "Germans".'[35] It was also the time of the European wars of religion and of huge change wrought by the Reformation of the Christian West. It marks the emergence of the modern era, or the age of modernity.

Christianity, in this context, became absorbed with its own internal problems, its own encounters and clashes, and this resulted in an era of relative indifference towards Islam, although the inclination to see Islam as 'just another heresy that had to be eradicated, by violence if need be' persisted

33 See Harvey Hames, 'Ramon Llull', in Thomas and Mallett (Eds), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History. Vol. 4*, pp. 703-717.

34 Michael Nazir-Ali, *Frontiers in Muslim–Christian Encounter* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1991), p. 18.

35 Gaudeul, *Encounters*, p. 188.

nonetheless.[36] And behind this enmity there lay an increasing divergence of fundamental aspects of worldview. Renaissance and Humanism, the roots of western secularisation, had emerged to drive the wedge deeper between Christian and Muslim perspectives. As Gaudeul notes, whereas 'European thinking started from Human Rights, Islamic thinking was based on God's Law, or God's Right to Man's obedience. In the 13th century, Christian and Muslim scholars spoke the same language; in the 18th century their philosophical views had become incompatible'.[37]

At the same time the Muslim world spread globally and diversified culturally throughout India, Africa, and Asia, with concomitant problems and issues for the Islamic *Ummah*. Ottoman rule in traditionally Muslim lands of the Middle East, North Africa, Egypt and so on, made for a greater emphasis on law and order, with a return to doctrinal orthodoxy, rigid control over scholars and writers, and domestication of Sufi Brotherhoods. Attitudes of Islam to Christianity oscillated between indifference and hostility. In effect, both Islam and Christianity 'shared the same planet but mentally they lived in two worlds, and, as time went on, the mental universe of each society grew more impervious to the thinking, the values and motivations, and indeed the whole mental universe of the other'.[38] For the Christian West, the pressing reality of the Ottoman Empire evoked various attempts at a response to Islam, even, from some quarters, a call to Christians to renounce the responses of militarism and have recourse, instead, to ways of peaceful engagement with this religious other. In this context, a dream of the essential unity-in-diversity of all religions was abroad, given expression by Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464) through his *Una religio in rituum varietate* (One Religion in a Variety of Rites).[39]

Nicholas wrote an imaginary dialogue between members of different faiths in which he sought to expose the 'fundamental unity in religion even though each community worships God by different rites and under different names'.[40] This was, in effect, an early attempt to deal constructively with the reality of religious plurality as it was then encountered and apprehended. But the Reformation and the Ottoman Empire reinforced the notion that, for Christianity, Islam was an inherent threat to be resisted. Luther (1483-1546) and

36 Gaudeul, *Encounters*, p. 189.
37 Ibid.
38 Gaudeul, *Encounters*, p. 191.
39 See John Tolan, 'Nicholas of Cusa', in D. Thomas and A. Mallett (Eds), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History. Vol. 5 (1350-1500)* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2013), pp. 421-428.
40 Kimball, *Striving*, p. 44.

before him Dante (1265-1321),[41] gave colourful and vehement expression to this perspective. As Kimball comments: 'This bias, rooted in inaccurate and invidious caricature, is a firm fixture in the cultural heritage bequeathed to contemporary Western civilization'.[42] Nonetheless, people such as Nicholas attempted a Christian exegesis of the texts of the Qur'ān to show that, deep down, the Qur'ān agrees with Christianity. But then they would go on to prove the superiority of Christianity over Islam. Openness has its limits after all.

The main thrust of Christianity's perspective on Islam hardened again from the late fifteenth century. For instance, a French bishop decreed that 'Islam was the enemy of the Christians. To violence the only answer was violence. Discussion could only weaken the purpose of Christian armies'.[43] Such views resonate still today. And although there were some who were open to interfaith discussions with Muslims in a way that prefigures the modern approach to dialogue, such openness was, arguably, 'based on an illusion about the true extent of the differences between Islam and Christianity' and 'the desire to return to a more evangelical attitude in spreading the Gospel'.[44] In the end relational openness was short-lived: optimism based on discerned commonalities gave way to the despair of incontrovertibly distinctive differences.

Meanwhile, so far as the majority of Church leaders and Christians more widely were concerned, there was a fundamental hostility toward Islam and to Muslims. It was as much 'Christendom' as 'Christianity' that stood opposed to Islam. And uppermost in the European consciousness was the threatening reality of the Turks. Christian military victories resulted in decrees giving Muslims the choice of conversion or expulsion as, for example, in Spain. Those who converted remained ever suspect and fed the insatiable appetite of the Inquisition. Muslim reaction included resistance, adaptation, and compromise as possible responses to enforced conversion to Christianity. Dissimulation for the purpose of survival was legitimated. All could be well, provided one's heart is set on Islam; in other words, a distinction was made between outward behaviour and inner intention. Indeed, a fatwa was issued allowing the maintenance of mental reservations whilst publicly professing Christian faith. Double allegiance or 'bi-confessionalism' was deemed allowable, although the criticism of syncretism nonetheless prevailed.

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41 See Paolo de Ventura, 'Dante Alighieri', in Thomas and Mallett (Eds), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History. Vol. 4*, pp. 784-793.

42 Kimball, *Striving*, p. 44.

43 Gaudeul, *Encounters*, p. 198.

44 Gaudeul, *Encounters*, p. 199.

Out of this epoch a set of themes of Muslim anti-Christian polemics can be readily discerned. The Trinity was attacked through rational argument and scriptural scrutiny as well as from the Qurʾān; Christ was treated as being not divine, rather as being the same in human status as other prophets. His death and salvific role were challenged if not negated. Muhammad was affirmed as superior to Jesus. Church ideology, structures, and practices were criticised and attacked; Islam was propounded as a pure doctrine without superstition, having a pure scripture and being victorious. Interestingly, it is worth noting that many Muslims used, against Christianity as a whole, arguments that Protestants were using against Catholics. Intra-religious and inter-religious dynamics, as we might say today, were in evidence in this early modern period.

Nonetheless, a surprisingly modern sounding approach emerged with the Christian scholar Ludovico Marraci (1612-1700) who critiqued the Qurʾān for Christians yet, at the same time, advocated an approach to Islam by way of identifying three different modes of encounter: a scientific approach that sought knowledge of Islam from Muslim sources; theological reflection on this, whereby an attempt is made to find a certain coherence between Christian belief and the information about Islam; and the missionary response, which promotes a particular dialogue with Muslims wherein care is taken not to give offence and at the same time pains are taken to render the Christian message intelligible to Muslims.[45] We will see this approach overtly echoed in the work of the African Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations (see below). On the whole, however, during this 'epoch of enmity' effective dialogical engagement was virtually non-existent: any 'encounters' were for the purposes of mutual refutation, the challenge of combative controversy, or else the attempt at missionary conversion.

5 Relations in an Epoch of Exploration

Gaudeul refers to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as an age of 'Old Quarrels and New Perspectives'. It can be seen, too, as a time of great exploration on many fronts. On the one hand, with respect to both an inner quest for self-awareness, appreciation and understanding as well as, on the other, in regards to the exterior quest for knowledge and understanding of the external world, including that of the 'other' – howsoever defined and configured. In our context, it refers to the self-reflection and the internal 'discovery' that can be discerned operative in the worlds of Christianity and Islam, as well as between

45 Gaudeul, *Encounters*, p. 213.

them. The nineteenth century ushered in the European Industrial revolution and its various socio-political *sequae*, including colonial expansion and consolidation and great advances in many fields of scientific and exploratory endeavour. It was a period that saw the rise of the modern missionary movement, especially in respect to the Protestant West. Indeed, the epoch of exploration is also an age of mutual mission: Christian evangelism on the one hand; Islamic *da'wah* on the other. The exploratory motif in Islam at the earlier stage of this epoch was arguably more muted, but it certainly forged ahead during the twentieth century, especially where there was strong positive interactions with the Christian west (largely the case in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries).

These centuries also witnessed the decline and eventual demise, in 1924, of the Ottoman Empire along with the emancipation of Christian countries, including Greece, Serbia, and Rumania from Islamic rule. Tragically, this was accompanied at points with reactionary massacres of Christians by Muslims, such as occurred with Lebanese and Syrians, and especially also the Armenians. Furthermore, the demise of the Ottoman rule that had dominated in the Arabian Peninsula opened the way for the rise to predominance in the Middle East – and beyond – of Saudi Arabia. Parts of the Muslim world emerged in the course of this epoch with new-found vigour and political clout. But in many other quarters, especially where Muslim lands and peoples were within the territories of western colonial empires, the hegemonic position of the West during this epoch signalled rather more the humiliation of Islam and Muslims: non-Muslims were usurping the Islamic heritage. Broadly speaking, during this epoch, and especially from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, Islam was being – or perceived itself to be – judged, from within in some quarters, by its abuses and temporal weaknesses and defined in terms of backwardness, fatalism, and fanaticism. Muslim laxity in terms of piety and intentionality was regarded, in the eyes of critical and reactionary Muslims, as a contributing – perhaps critically so – factor. The scene was set for an internal exploration of what it means to be Muslim that would lead to the resurgence of stricter forms of Muslim identity; eventually yielding today's variants of Islamism. Indeed, the inevitable internal Islamic response was a resurgence in reform and revivalism, encompassing theological, spiritual, political and social dimensions of Islam.

Throughout the twentieth century there has been a continuing Western hegemony, albeit with a shift in focal drivers from the British and European empires to the post-WWII cold war stalemate of the US-led 'West' over against the USSR and its coterie of client states, and thence late twentieth century predominance of the United States of America with, among others, the rising

power of a resurgent China on the one side, and a steadily re-grouping and re-emergence of an influential Russia on the other. Initially Western hegemony emerged to new heights in the aftermath of the First World War. Post-World War II, the complex Palestine/Israel issue was followed by the shifting sands of Middle East allegiances and later, with the fall of the Iron Curtain, the emergence of the 'Arab Muslim' as the archetypical 'enemy' of the 'free' West. And this brings us to the present day wherein, a century after allied western forces did battle with the armies of the Ottoman caliphate, the West is engaged with the self-proclaimed heir to the caliphal heritage, viz., the Islamic State of Iraq and Shams – ISIS, or the so-called 'Islamic State' (IS). There is an historical irony at play. For, in a way, the birth of ISIS, whilst attributable directly to recent events, problems and developments, nevertheless is traceable in part to the demise of the Osmanli (Ottoman) predecessor. The sense of a spiral trajectory – if not advance, exactly – which can be a description for the journey of Christian engagement with Islam can be usefully applied elsewhere. Others of the many factors and developments pertaining to the contours and trajectories of the epoch of exploration need not detain us here as we will be exploring some particular features in the following chapters. We may note, however, Gaudeul's remark: 'For centuries, Christians had been humiliated by Muslims, while for the past 200 years it is the Muslims who have suffered and been humiliated at the hands of "Christian" nations'.[46]

The story of Christianity's engagement with Islam throughout history and into the modern era – and certainly since the middle of the twentieth century – is arguably one of affinity and inquiry struggling with an inherent countervailing tendency to antipathy. In response to the efforts and methods of Christian missionaries, and in fulfilment of its own missionary calling, Islamic efforts to actively promote the faith and seek conversions have emerged since the late nineteenth century. Today, for example, the Muslim World League, formed in 1962, promotes Islam in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries, seeking 'to explain Islamic teachings and principles ... and to confront those trying to attack Islam or to convert Muslims'.[47] The underlying mutual perspective during much of this epoch would seem to be that neither side can conceive of their proclamation of 'divine truth' without a concomitant denunciation and deprecation of the other's viewpoint. Nevertheless, there have been many examples of dialogical engagements that mark out the epoch of

46 Gaudeul, *Encounters*, p. 252.

47 Gaudeul, *Encounters,* p. 275.

exploration, and not just limited to a dialogue of Muslims with Christians.[48] Certainly, as we shall see, Christian–Muslim dialogue emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century assuming a new level of importance and inviting new prospects for mutual exploration. This has only increased in the opening decade or so of the twenty-first century.

48 See for example, Norman Solomon, Richard Harries and Tim Winter (Eds), *Abraham's Children: Jews, Christian and Muslims in Conversation* (London: T & T Clark, 2005); Perry Schmidt-Leukel and Lloyd Ridgeon (Eds), *Islam and Inter-Faith Relations: The Gerald Weisfeld Lectures 2006* (London: SCM Press, 2007), among many other records and accounts of genuine exploratory dialogical conversations.

PART 1

Engagement Underway: 20thC Ecumenical Journeys

CHAPTER 3

World Council of Churches: c. 1910-1970

The ecumenical movement, so far as recent history of the Christian Church is concerned, has been one of the key defining features of Christianity in the twentieth century. To all intents and purposes this movement commenced with the 1910 World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh, Scotland, which was itself an outcome of nineteenth century antecedents. From 1910 onwards, ecumenical Christianity not only addressed internal issues pertaining to theology, self-understanding, and inter-church relations, it also engaged with wider social issues and concerns including the question of the relationship to peoples of other faiths. Ecumenical engagement with Islam emerged with, and out of, this modern-era turn of the Christian Church toward interreligious dialogue and interfaith relations *per se*. What happened, and why? What have been some of the salient points of development? Where is it all going? In order to give the fuller context to ecumenical relations with Islam during the twentieth century, and especially with regards to matters of inception and early dialogue developmental trajectory, it will be necessary to look, albeit briefly, at the broader situation of ecumenical engagement in interreligious dialogue and, indeed, to begin with the nineteenth century in order to provide some background context. Accordingly, I commence this chapter with a review of some of the salient nineteenth century features, then examine developments in the dialogical engagement of ecumenical Christianity with Islam during the twentieth century. Thus, following the nineteenth century review, I pay attention to events that occurred during the early twentieth century, including the critical 1938 conference of the International Missionary Council (IMC) – itself a direct product of the 1910 Edinburgh conference – held in Tambaram, India, and note the establishment of the World Council of Churches as the point of mid-twentieth century ecumenical consolidation, followed by a discussion of the early mid-century years of the WCC's interreligious dialogical development.

It will be necessary, on the way, to engage a discussion of interest in, and developments of, Christian mission to the Jews by way of a dialogical precursor. For both the ecumenical movement and, as we shall see, the Roman Catholic Church the post-War question of the Church's relations with Jews and Judaism acted as the effective fulcrum for the advent of new mid-twentieth century policies favouring interreligious dialogue *per se*. This proved critical to the emergence of the new ecumenical era of interreligious dialogue as well as throwing into sharp relief the need for the Church to engage in dialogue

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with Muslims quite specifically. Indeed, it provided an important prompt and model for the contemporary dialogical relationship of Christianity to Muslims and Islam. I then turn to the pivotal Study programme 'The Word of God and the Living Faiths of Men'. An examination of this dialogical study is also an important contextualising discussion. It is arguably this event which marks the launch of the WCC ship into the seas of interreligious dialogue and, from there, into the harbours of engagement with Islam. Finally, I explore the development of direct, intentional, and specifically Christian–Muslim dialogue as undertaken in and through the offices and programmes of the WCC. The next chapter explores ensuing developments in these ecumenical relations with Islam.

1 Nineteenth Century Dialogical Antecedents

In part, the impetus for ecumenical involvement in interreligious dialogue derived from nineteenth century missionary activities which in turn arose out of the evangelical revival in eighteenth century England and its American corollary, the Great Awakening. Very early in the nineteenth century the English Baptist missionary William Carey (1761-1834) – whose own sailing from England to India in the late eighteenth century can be said to mark the beginning of the Protestant missionary movement[1] – called for a meeting of missionaries to address common concerns.[2] The first such conference, as it happens, was not held until 1846. From this gathering of some 800 Church leaders there was born the 'Evangelical Alliance', an umbrella missionary-oriented organisation.[3] Further conferences were held in England during the nineteenth century and one in New York in the year 1900.[4] At this stage, of course, missionary interests did not extend to dialogical explorations with persons of other faiths. Rather, the quest to convert people from the presumed falsity of their religion – if they could even be said to have such – to the salvific truth of Christianity was the order of the day. By and large the nineteenth century continued along the trajectory of presumed – and often active – conflictual relationships on the part

1 W.R. Hogg, *Ecumenical Foundations, a History of the International Missionary Council and its Nineteenth Century Background* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), pp. 7ff.

2 See Ruth Rouse, 'William Carey's "Pleasing Dream"', *International Review of Mission* [*hereafter: IRM*], 38 (1949): 181-192.

3 Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill (Eds), *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517 – 1948*, 3rd Edition (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1986), p. 319.

4 Cf. J.H. Oldham, 'After Twenty-Five Years', *IRM* 24 (1935): 300-313.

of Christianity with other religious traditions.[5] A benign paternalism was perhaps about as far that a positive disposition on the part of Christians towards people of other faiths might extend. The concerns of evangelical proclamation and salvific conversion were uppermost; relations with any religious 'other' were subordinated, in varying degrees, to missionary imperatives. Interreligious dialogue, as we might think of it today, was certainly not part of the ecclesial vocabulary, let alone Church activity.

Yet there were voices raised from within the mission fields that signalled the beginnings of change; men and women whose initial zeal to effect conversions – necessarily premised on the idea of the religious superiority and priority of Christianity – had encountered depths of religion and vistas of spirituality that had given them pause for thought. Maybe another approach was required. Perhaps, they said, we should talk with, rather than at, the person of another faith. A change of predominating attitude was mooted. The priority of evangelical witness in the quest for extending the reach of Christian salvation by way of conversion was by no means dampened, but it was queried as the only valid modality of interaction. The stage was set for new developments and thinking in respect to mission and the question of the person of another faith.

2 Early Twentieth Century Developments

The most significant gathering, so far as early developmental factors is concerned, was the first World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in June of 1910.[6] This Protestant event was the largest meeting of missionaries from around the world that had so far ever been held.[7] Its genesis can be traced back a full century to the initial unsuccessful proposal made by William Carey for an international world conference to have been held during the 19th Century.[8] It

5 Cf. Wesley Ariarajah, 'Dialogue, Interfaith', *in* Nicholas Lossky, *et.al* (Eds), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991), p. 281.

6 See Volume 1, *IRM* (1912) for an early record and discussion of this conference and its outcomes.

7 The event brought together official representatives from many missionary organisations, viz., 46 British societies represented by over 500 delegates; 60 American societies represented by over 500 delegates; 41 European continental societies represented by 170 delegates; 12 South African and Australian societies represented by 26 delegates. See, for example, S. Wesley Ariarajah, *Hindus and Christians: A Century of Protestant Ecumenical Thought* (Amsterdam / Grand Rapids, Michigan: Editions Rodopi & Wm B. Eerdmans, 1991).

8 Kenneth Scott Latourette, 'Ecumenical Bearings of the Missionary Movement and the International Missionary Council', *in* Rouse and Neill, *History*, p. 355.

is also, as noted above, 'commonly accepted as marking the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement'.[9] The work of the Conference was undertaken by a number of commissions, of which two were relevant to the eventual emergence of interreligious dialogical activities. These were Commission I – 'Carrying the Gospel to All in the Non-Christian World', and Commission IV – 'Missionary message in relation to non-Christian religions'. Furthermore – and of great significance – out of this gathering there emerged the International Missionary Council (IMC) which, during the course of the twentieth century, played a key role in debates about, and the development of, interreligious dialogue with the ecumenical movement.[10]

The second World Missionary Conference was held in Jerusalem – on the Mount of Olives – at Easter in 1928.[11] As with the Edinburgh conference, the 'issue of religious plurality, and the proper Christian response to it' was the focus of much attention.[12] However, it was the perception of a global growth in secularism, and the challenge which that posed for religion in general, and Christianity in particular, that was of uppermost concern at that time. Nevertheless, the ecumenical leader, John R. Mott, commented that the 'meeting at Jerusalem ushered in a new day in the attitude of the missionary movement toward non-Christian religions' which, as 'systems of thought and faith … were dealt with positively and not simply negatively. Chief attention was to bringing out their values… to be appreciated, conserved and where necessary supplemented'.[13] Indeed, the challenge of secularism was perceived to offer a point of contact with other religions: secularism was identified as the 'chief antagonist of the Christian faith – in fact, of all religious faiths'.[14]

This Jerusalem conference included a call for other religions to join with Christianity in the struggle against secularism.[15] Although a controversial initiative, to be severely criticised some ten years later, it nevertheless prefigured one of the platforms of dialogical engagement that was to emerge several

9 Ariarajah, 'Dialogue, Interfaith', *in* Lossky, *Dictionary*, p. 281.

10 The formation of the IMC was interrupted by the First World War; it was constituted, finally and formally, in October 1921. See Latourette *in* Rouse and Neill, *History*, pp. 366ff. cf. Philip A. Potter, 'Mission', *in* Lossky, *Dictionary*, pp. 690f.

11 Latourette *in* Rouse and Neill *History* pp. 368f; see William Paton, 'The Jerusalem Meeting of the International Missionary Council', *IRM* 17 (1928): 3-10.

12 Jan Hendrik Pranger, *Dialogue in Discussion*: *The World Council of Churches and the Challenge of Religious Plurality between 1967 and 1979* (IIMO Research Publication 38, Utrecht-Leiden, 1994), p. 1.

13 John R. Mott, 'At Edinburgh, Jerusalem and Madras', *IRM* 27 (1938): 297-320.

14 Ibid.

15 Cf. Ariarajah, 'Dialogue, Interfaith', *in* Lossky, *Dictionary*, p. 282.

decades further on: working together in a common cause.[16] The outcome of the conference was a statement – 'The Christian Message' – which attempted to span a range of concerns.[17] Christian and non-Christian alike were seen to be in need of salvation: each shared equally in the human need of redemption, and the quest for justice and community, at least. Although there were sharp points of theological disagreement there was nonetheless a general inclination 'to admit that other religions had spiritual values' which Christians could positively affirm: but certainly not salvation as such, of course; the uniqueness of Christ vis-à-vis salvation was not up for debate.[18] As Ariarajah observed, 'Insofar as it was a message addressed to all churches with the unanimous approval of the participants, it is a significant document in ecumenical history. ... (It) spoke against any imperialistic attitude of Christians to other faiths ... (it made) use of the word "sharing" for the act of Christian witness to those of other faiths'.[19] So, as a consequence of the Jerusalem meeting, the 'stage was being set for the need for a clear, concise, and considered Christian position in relation to people of other faiths'.[20] But the way ahead was not clear. There emerged a wave of conservative reactions against the nascent pluralist perspective implied in the very stance of being open to interreligious dialogue: opposition was voiced to the call for dialogical engagement that the debates at Jerusalem had signalled.[21]

Meanwhile, two other developments emerged during the 1920s alongside the IMC. Each of these sought to interlink Christians and Churches around significant areas of Christian life and concern, and across the diversity of denominational identities. They were the Life and Work (L&W) movement, founded in 1925 at a convention in Stockholm, Sweden; and the Faith and Order (F&O) movement which was formed in 1927 at a convention held in

16 Indeed, secularism, as a point of common cause with other faiths, was soon critiqued by Hendrikus Kraemer: see his 'Christianity and Secularism', *IRM* 19 (1930): 195-208, where he advocates the theology of Karl Barth and the priority of revelation as the counterpoint to secular corrosion; and also by Emil Brunner who argued against 'the all-menacing tide of secularism' asserting 'there is but one breakwater—the Word of God', 'Secularism as a problem for the Church', *IRM* 19 (1930): 511.

17 Cf. O.C. Quick, 'The Jerusalem Meeting and the Christian Message', *IRM* 17 (1928): 445-454.

18 Jutta Sperber, *Christians and Muslims: The Dialogue Activities of the World Council of Churches and Their Theological Foundation* (Berlin & New York: de Gruyter, 2000), p. 7; cf. D.S. Cairns, 'The Christian Message: a comparison of thought in 1910 and 1928', *IRM* 18 (1929): 321-331.

19 Ariarajah, *Hindus and Christians,* p. 45.

20 Ariarajah, *Hindus and Christians,* p. 51.

21 Cf. Pranger, *Dialogue in Discussion*, p. 46.

Lausanne, Switzerland. Thus, by the late twenties, there were three organisational strands of activity – IMC, L&W, and F&O – that focussed Christian concern and galvanised ecumenical action. Missionary issues and activities; engagements in wider issues of contemporary Christian life; and the need to address doctrinal matters had given rise to concomitant institutional arrangements. These, in turn, gave structural shape to the emerging ecumenical movement. Further, each contributed to the growing awareness that a new mode of both interaction with, and perception of, the religious 'other' was urgently required.

Throughout the 1930s and 40s, interrupted by the Second World War, these three bodies continued to function, meet, and hold conferences. And during the inter-war years some significant ideological shifts took place in wider western society that were to impact greatly upon the trajectory of interreligious engagement. In particular, missionary optimism in respect to relations with other faiths, and recognition of common values (cf. Jerusalem 1928) were eclipsed by the challenge of the new ideologies: Nazism and Fascism; and then by resurgent evangelicalism at the IMC Tambaram meeting in 1938.

3 IMC at Tambaram, 1938

The meeting of the International Missionary Council held at Tambaram, near Madras in India, in 1938 would rank among the most highly significant early ecumenical gatherings. Larger and more representative than the Jerusalem conference of 1928, this meeting 'dramatized the fact that the Christian church had become a truly worldwide company'.[22] To be sure, the motif of other religions evincing some positive spiritual values, as affirmed at Jerusalem a decade earlier, was maintained in principle – alongside the unassailable uniqueness of Christ, to which all other religious claims and values were, in the end, to be relativised.[23] This particular occasion was to become famous within the ecumenical movement as a moment at which relations with people of other faiths was reconsidered and curtailed relative to the openness and broad acceptance that had emerged so far. An assertion of Christian uniqueness and superiority was made such that intercourse with any other faith tradition was correspondingly queried – if not negated – if it was other than evangelistic in modality

22 Ans Van der Bent, 'Ecumenical Conferences' *in* Lossky *Dictionary*, p. 327.

23 Cf. Sperber, *Christians and Muslims*, p. 7; cf. James Thayer Addison, 'The Changing Attitude toward non-Christian Religions', *IRM* 27 (1938): 110-121.

and intent.[24] The change of stance derived largely, but by no means solely, nor without opposition, from the work of the Dutch missionary theologian, Hendrikus Kraemer.[25]

Kraemer, as a missionary in Indonesia, certainly new well the religion of Islam together with local Muslim and other religious cultures. He had a deep positive appreciation for the cultural and value dimensions of other faiths. But this appreciation, even sympathetic understanding, was not to be confused with the imperative of Christian salvific proclamation. The outcome of Kraemer's work, which was to remain highly influential until quite late into the twentieth century, was to popularise and extend the Barthian distinction between revelation, understood as divinely given through Christ alone, and religion *per se* – that is, all forms of human seeking-for-the-Divine. Christian faith was raised above all other faiths, even if some value in other faiths was acknowledged or allowed for, albeit in a limited sense, of course.[26] Nevertheless, 'Kraemer succeeded in convincing the majority of the participants that the gospel was in discontinuity with world religions. At Tambaram the church-centred mission theology that sought to replace the world religions regained its place in mission history'.[27] Tambaram affirmed both continuity and discontinuity: Christianity, *qua* religion, is one of many; yet revelation in and through Christ sets Christianity apart from all religion.

4 Mid-Century Consolidation: The WCC

Following World War II the Western world engaged in reconstruction and recovery; the stalled ecumenical movement resumed its developmental trajectory. In 1947 the IMC reconvened in Whitby, Canada, to resume its particular interdenominational efforts. The World Council of Churches came into being soon after the war. Its inaugural Assembly was held in Amsterdam in 1948.[28] As

24 Cf. William Paton, 'The Meeting of the International Missionary Council at Tambaram, Madras', *IRM* 28 (1939): 161-173.

25 H. Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (London, Edinburgh House Press, 1938).

26 Yet cf. H.H. Farmer, 'The Faith by which the Church lives', *IRM* 28 (1939): 174-184, who notes, in respect of attitudes to other religions, a consciousness 'of groping our way towards a deeper understanding' wherein 'we were by no means inclined to accept Kraemer's theses without reservation' (p. 179).

27 Ariarajah, *Hindus and Christians,* p. 85

28 See Willem Adolf Visser't Hooft, 'The Genesis of the World Council of Churches' *in* Rouse and Neill, *History*, pp. 697-724.

noted previously, the WCC was formed, structurally, out of an amalgamation of the two pre-War ecumenical movements (F&O; L&W).[29] Theological reflection and social action were viewed as the two areas of Christian life in regards to which the constituting Churches of this new umbrella organisation – the Council itself is 'a fellowship of churches' – believed it was right for Christian churches to do as much together rather than continue to do apart.[30] The stage was now set for significant new prospects for engagement in issues such as relationships to other religions. However, other than a report and recommendations on the 'Christian Approach to the Jews',[31] the inaugural Assembly of the WCC did not address directly the matter of Christianity's relationship to other faiths; rather the presumption of evangelical witness predominated, and this was soon to be reinforced by the IMC.

In 1952 the IMC met again, this time in Willingen, Germany.[32] The church-centred view of mission was affirmed once more, although not without critical opposition.[33] Ecumenical unity was set in the context of universal mission. The Church is one in its proclamation of Christian salvation for all. The unity implicit in the missionary imperative lay at the foundation of the drive toward a visible and greater ecumenism. The relationship between mission and ecclesial unity was affirmed as necessary: each presupposes the other. The negative implications for interreligious dialogue were very significant: 'It is important to note that the attitude of countering the liberal ideas on relationships with people of other faiths emphasized at Tambaram was reaffirmed at Willingen and became one of the main streams within the Protestant churches both inside and outside the World Council of Churches'.[34] The predominant Christian ideology at the time held that relationship to persons of other religions was to be primarily, if not solely, evangelistic and *not* dialogical. 'The overall note was one of caution against possible syncretism and the loss of the sense of mission'.[35] The uniqueness of Christ's lordship was affirmed over against rela-

29 Cf. Tom Stransky, 'World Council of Churches' *in* Lossky, *Dictionary* p. 1083.

30 Cf. Marlin VanElderen, 'WCC, Membership of' *in* Lossky, *Dictionary*, p. 1098. See also Marlin VanElderen and Martin Conway, *Introducing the World Council of Churches*, Rev. Ed. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2001).

31 Allan R. Brockway, *et. al.* (Eds), *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People: Statements by the World Council of Churches and its member churches*. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1988), pp. 5-9.

32 Cf. a report on this first post-War meeting by John Beattie, 'Willingen 1952', *IRM*, Vol. 41 (1952), pp. 433-443.

33 Cf. Van der Bent, 'Ecumenical Conferences' *in* Lossky, *Dictionary*, pp. 328-9.

34 Ariarajah, *Hindus and Christians*, p. 94.

35 Ariarajah, *Hindus and Christians*, p. 95.

tivism and syncretism, both of which were deemed to be 'rampant'. The *de facto* stance of the ecumenical movement towards other religions appeared at this stage to be unremittingly exclusivist. Prospects for dialogical engagement, other than for missionary purposes, would seem to have been bleak.

The second Assembly of the WCC, held in Evanston (USA) in 1954, saw some shift in ground towards a more inclusivist stance, and thereby a new openness to other religions and the possibility of genuine dialogue.[36] A new mood in respect to other faiths was evident. An affirmation of the ecumenical heritage was coupled with a new note of humility. The pre-War language of sharing re-emerged. There seemed to have been something of a thaw; a warming openness to other religions and their peoples expressed, for example, in the acceptance and high valuation of Asian Christian leadership which promoted positive relating to other religions. By 1955 the Central Committee of the WCC was discussing the theme of the relationship of Christianity to non-Christian religions. Directions taken by Tambaram were re-opened and re-examined; the debates and dialogical issues raised in the late thirties were again addressed. The fundamental issues arising out of Kraemer's dialectical approach to other religions continued to be actively engaged, but the basic questions that had been left unresolved were now re-defined. The motif of 'general revelation' was affirmed, albeit with the rider that the human response to such revelation leads almost inevitably to 'idol-worship': hence the necessary limitation of, and misguided thinking contained within and about, other religions.[37] Critical issues from Tambaram were approached from a fresh, post-war, perspective:

> Must the attitude of the evangelist be that Christianity should *supplant* other religions? Or can it content itself with the conviction that Christianity is the *fulfilment* of other religions? Are there still further alternatives – those that hold that in Christ a *transformation* has taken place, or that in Christ *all* religions are brought under judgement?[38]

An awareness of the renaissance of other religions had come to the fore in missionary circles.[39] Nevertheless, there was still an overriding Christocentrism

36 Cf. Ans Van der Bent, 'WCC Assemblies', *in* Lossky, *Dictionary*, pp. 1091-92.

37 Cf. Sperber, *Christians and Muslims*, p. 8.

38 Ariarajah, *Hindus and Christians,* p. 99.

39 See Lesslie Newbigin, who in this regard expressed a quietly confident Christian position; 'The Summons the Christian Mission Today', *IRM* 48 (1959): 177-189.

and allied priority given to the missionary imperative in evidence.[40] But the issue of establishing and pursuing an interactive relationship with other religions was gathering momentum.[41] The drive to engage seriously in interreligious dialogue was again underway. And its first port of call was with respect to Jews and Judaism.

5 Relations with Jews: A Dialogical Precursor

The Church's relation to the Jews is both a unique datum of Christian life and also at the same time something of a paradigm and precursor to interreligious dialogue and, in particular, Christian–Muslim dialogue. A Christian mission to the Jews had been pursued as a distinctive evangelical cause throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, quite distinct from the more general outreach to people of other faiths, or of none.[42] Arguably the earliest modern-period institution for training of missionaries to Jews, however, was the *Institutum Judaicum* founded by Johann Callenberg in 1728.[43] Although by the time of the 1910 Edinburgh missionary conference there were a number of societies whose focus was mission to the Jews, on the grounds that such missions 'were a special category – because Jews were a special category', no specific attention was in fact given to this missional dimension at the Edinburgh gathering.[44] Indeed, by the mid-1920s, while a range of IMC study centres was paying attention to the various major world religions, at the same time the IMC 'had done nothing at all about evangelizing Jews'.[45] However, at the instigation

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40 Cf. Austin Fulton, 'The Missionary Nature of the Church: Reflections on the Christian Faith and other religions', *IRM* 48 (1959): 389-397.

41 See for example, David G. Moses, who expresses a somewhat typical sympathetic outlook toward other religions, yet within a clear assertion of the superiority of Christianity; 'Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions', *IRM* 43 (1954): 146-154.

42 I am greatly indebted to the work of Allan Brockway for material for this section. See Allan R. Brockway, *For Love of the Jews: A Theological History of the International Missionary Council's Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews, 1927-1961*. (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, England, 1992).

43 See Brockway, *For Love of the Jews,* p. 6; also L. Zechhausen, *The Christian Approach to the Jew, Being a Report of Conferences on the subject held at Budapest and Warsaw in April 1927* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1927), pp. 185f.

44 Brockway, *For Love of the Jews*, pp. 7-12.

45 Brockway, *For Love of the Jews*, p. 13.

of British interests, this was to change.[46] Two conferences were held in 1927 – in Warsaw and Budapest – on the theme of 'The Christian Approach to the Jew'. These were followed, in 1931, by a similar North American conference, and all three contributed to the development of 'both the theology and the methodology of the Jewish mission that was to prevail in the IMC for the next thirty or so years'.[47] In general, there was a utopian expectation evident: Jews would welcome emancipation from the stifling darkness of the ghetto into the light and life of the Church. The Great Commission (Mt. 28:19-20) was the driving imperative for the mission to the Jews as well as for the wider missionary enterprise as such.[48]

By 1932 the IMC had established a Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews (CCAJ) but, rather than directly advance an evangelising mission as such, the primary agenda item it pursued was the phenomenon of antisemitism that had emerged into Christian consciousness.[49] Antisemitism is expressive of 'varying degrees of resentment and antagonism towards Jews' *per se*.[50] Formal statements were issued; however it was clear that

> …the missionaries' interest in and concern for antisemitism was focused on the need to overcome an obstacle to their conversionary efforts. They were acutely aware that no Jew would listen to the declaration of the gospel if even the slightest hint of antisemitism could be detected in the evangelists' attitude. This pragmatic reason for combating what was repeatedly called an "evil" was to remain the effective motivation for combating antisemitism for decades. At the same time, the spectre overshadowing continental Europe, with its less threatening but nonetheless disturbing reflections in England and America, prompted another type of rationale for combating Jew-hatred…human rights.[51]

46 See, e.g., Conrad Hoffman, Jr., *The Jews Today: A Call to Christian Action* (New York: Friendship Press, 1941), p. 62.

47 Brockway, *For Love of the Jews,* p. 14.

48 Cf. Brockway, *For Love of the Jews*, p. 23.

49 Cf. A.E. Garvie, 'The Jewish Problem', *IRM* 30 (1941): 216-224, who early in the war years voiced an emerging awareness of the persecution of Jews under Nazism and the obligation upon the Christian Church to respond; cf. Robert Smith, 'The New Captivity of the Jews', *IRM* 30 (1941): 225-231; Hans Kosmala, 'Judaism and Christianity: A summons to the Christian Church', *IRM* (1941): 521-530.

50 Brockway, *For Love of the Jews*, p. 34. Note: the term 'antisemitism' expresses an anti-Jewish position more clearly than the standard form of 'Anti-Semitism' which, strictly speaking, means opposition to 'Semites', or Semitic-speaking people.

51 Brockway, *For Love of the Jews*, p. 37.

Although Christian efforts, such as they were, could not prevail against the evil of the Nazi 'final solution' in respect of the Jews, this ultimate outworking of Christian antisemitism galvanised combative and humanitarian responses – various Christian relief and rescue efforts, mostly quite localised[52] – and began the process whereby a relation hitherto dominated by an evangelising assumption began to change, eventually to issue in the outreach of dialogical invitation and relationship building efforts. Meanwhile, in the immediate aftermath of World War II, the struggle to contend with antisemitism and all that it implied for Christian self-understanding sat alongside the attempt to renew the previous mission of Jewish evangelism.[53] In the event, 'the situation following the war was so radically different that the missionaries were compelled to re-examine both their program and their rationale for it'.[54] A prospective change appeared at hand.

However, as it happened, the establishment of the WCC – with which the IMC was in a collaborative relationship and would eventually merge – together with the establishment of the State of Israel (on May 14, 1948) 'were to have significant if not determinative consequences for the Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews'.[55] In the post-war era much had changed; yet in many ways little had changed – or else it was yet to change. As Brockway remarks, 'the charge continued to be made – and not only by Jews – that it was illegitimate, if not un-Christian, for Jews to be targeted for conversion. As a consequence, it was necessary constantly to clarify the missionary imperative of the Church'.[56] Issues were not just pragmatic; there were also serious theological questions although, for the most part, they were never properly or substantially addressed.

> Though Christian opposition to antisemitism could only be of benefit to the welfare of Jews, it provided a way for the Church to sweep the theological significance of the Jewish people under the carpet. The otherwise laudable emphasis upon antisemitism as violation of human rights and as a barrier to conversion became, therefore, a substitute for wrestling with the critical issue of the theological significance of the Jewish people

52 For example, the refugee service of the WCC; the *Svenska Israels Missionen* in Austria; the Scottish Mission to the Jews in Czechoslovakia and Hungary; various mission and other church agencies in Poland. See Brockway, *For Love of the Jews*, pp. 91-92.

53 Cf. Jokob Jocz, 'The theological validity of Jewish Missions', *IRM* 35 (1946): 357-369.

54 Cf. Brockway, *For Love of the Jews*, p. 51.

55 Brockway, *For Love of the Jews*, p. 54.

56 Brockway, *For Love of the Jews*, p. 80.

> for Christian self-understanding. Misguided as it was, medieval persecution of Jews because the Jewish people had "killed God" nevertheless took the Jewish people with theological seriousness, as the missionary movement, by and large, did not.[57]

Post-war missionary attitudes towards the Jews maintained, for the most part, a paternalistic attitude, albeit ameliorated, relative to earlier stances, in the light of the Holocaust and a deepening of the distinction being made between the Christian relation to Jews, on the one hand, and the Christian relationship to people of other faiths, on the other. The evangelistic imperative was common to both; but in the case of Jews there was a shift from language of conversion (Jews becoming Christian) to that of fulfilment (Christ the completion of Judaism): thus 'evangelization of Jews was the service of the Church to the Jewish people, the service of offering them the possibility of becoming fulfilled *Jews*'.[58]

The newly emerging WCC was clear in its statement of Christian opposition to antisemitism in all its guises; at the same time it effectively endorsed and maintained the benign missionary perspective of the CCAJ.[59] However, the fact of Israel, presenting a new self-assertive face to Jews and Judaism, was cause for both confusion and concern: in the Christian camp there was evident 'bewilderment and frustration at the entrance onto the world scene of politically empowered Jewry'.[60] Arguably, from the missionary point of view,

> …by establishing the Jewish state and fighting a war to sustain it, Jews were giving cause for the intensification of antisemitism, which, in turn, would make the missionaries' task all that much harder. The CCAJ and its member agencies had not hesitated to engage in "politics" during the Nazi period when Jews and Hebrew Christians were clearly victims. To support, defend, and protect Jews under those conditions was to struggle against antisemitism. But now, with the State of Israel, a new and different challenge was before them.[61]

If, however, at the inauguration of the WCC it appeared that the motif of special relationship to the Jews was the underpinning of a continued targeted

57 Brockway, *For Love of the Jews*, p. 77.
58 Brockway, *For Love of the Jews*, p. 83.
59 Brockway, *For Love of the Jews*, pp. 103ff.
60 Brockway, *For Love of the Jews*, p. 108.
61 Brockway, *For Love of the Jews*, p. 120.

mission, the 1954 Evanston Assembly was to see a distinct change. As Brockway comments:

> Opposition to antisemitism had secured a firm and permanent position on the ecumenical agenda, though not for the reason the missionaries had posited throughout their history and at Amsterdam, i.e., as a barrier to evangelism. Instead the phrase, "antisemitism is sin against God and man," would forever be part of the inter-group, and human relations, and human rights lexicon.[62]

From Evanston there had arisen a sharp change of theological orientation: 'We cannot be one in Christ nor can we truly believe and witness to the promise of God if we do not recognize that it is still valid for the people of the promise made to Abraham'.[63]

If the idea of a mission to convert Jews had been overtaken by the idea of mission as a fulfilment of Jewish religion in Christ, now even this paternalistic presumption was itself effectively superseded: Jews and Judaism are here to stay, and in their staying there was a theological challenge to Christianity as well as a new opportunity for rethinking mission and opening up to dialogue. Much the same could be said vis-à-vis Christian relations with Islam. Mission can now give way to – or at least allow for – the emergence of a genuine inter-religious dialogical relationship. In any case, the question of Christian relation to Jews was a central one, only not in the way the missionary movement had expected it to be. All this was accompanied by some innovative theological thinking which, in the event, tended to be side-lined.[64] But, arguably, the experience of shifting modalities of relations with Jews, and limits set upon theological reflection in respect of that, provide something of a foretaste of what was yet to emerge on a wider front.

6 Engaging Dialogue: 'The Word of God and the Living Faiths of Men'

Commencing in 1955, the WCC study programme 'The Word of God and the Living Faiths of Men' ran until 1971. It involved a number of Study Centres around the world, together with a series of regional ecumenical consultations

62 Brockway, *For Love of the Jews*, p. 149.

63 World Council of Churches, *The Evanston Report: The Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1954* (London: SCM Press, 1955), p. 327.

64 Cf. Brockway, *For Love of the Jews*, p. 156.

and allied reflection meetings.[65] The programme signalled a growing responsiveness within the WCC and, indeed, the wider Christian ecumenical movement it represented to the increasingly pressing demand for serious addressing of intercultural and interreligious relations and issues. By post-war mid-twentieth century the early emergence of globalisation was beginning to be felt and improvements to mass media, enabling a more rapid and immediate exchange of information, were well underway. The television age was dawning. Increased and more widely-spread demographic shifts, through the ebbs and flows of migration, were bringing about ever more significant cultural and population encounters. Eurocentric Christianity was giving way to a genuinely global perspective of a Christian *oikumene*, and it is at this juncture that new – indeed epoch-making – developments occur. Interreligious dialogue soon became not merely a theoretical option; it was an immediate existential demand, one to which the Christian Church, in and through the work of the WCC and also the Roman Catholic Church, responded. Although a specific focus on Islam began relatively slowly, it has emerged as a foremost concern and an arena of considerable dialogical activity. This has remained the case, indeed even intensified, in the twenty-first century.

By 1957 the threefold purpose of the WCC Study Centres included research, a focus on contemporary religious development, and educational activities. Key interrelated issues were identified as i) the saving activity of God; ii) questions that focussed on 'religion' and 'religious man (sic)'; iii) the nature of the 'resurgence' of non-Christian religions; and iv) the proclamation of the Gospel. It would appear that, some twenty years after the event, the 1938 Tambaram conference was still the starting point of discussions. In fact, since Tambaram, it had been taken as axiomatic that religions as such are 'wholes', or whole systems; an integrated *weltanschauung* wherein the whole is more than merely the sum of its parts. It was in this sense that a distinction is to be made between Christianity as a religion and the Gospel of Jesus Christ: *qua* religion, Christianity is in continuity with all religions; but in respect of the gospel, the Christian message is quite discontinuous. The obligation to witness, resulting in the need to clarify the relation of the Gospel to other religions – something not undertaken since Tambaram – together with emerging new modalities of, and contexts for, interreligious engagement and so the need for learning about the 'other', constituted the fundamental rationale for the programme.[66] Furthermore, such study needed to be ecumenical because all churches are

65 Cf. Ariarajah, *in* Lossky *Dictionary*, pp. 283-287.

66 See: 'The Word of God and the Living Faiths of Men – a document for study and discussion'. WCC Working paper. (WCC-Archive File Box 4612.002/2).

involved, either directly or indirectly, and because the large and complex nature of the task requires resources from throughout the world church.

Despite a clear loading of Christian theological presuppositions onto the question of relationship with other faiths, thereby implicitly pre-empting genuine dialogical openness, in many respects it was this programme that enabled interreligious dialogue to be taken up by ecumenical Christianity in a way never before possible. Indeed, it is arguably the case that it was the 1960s which marked the period during which interreligious dialogue was taken up within the ecumenical movement via the work of the WCC, commencing with a series of intra-Christian meetings that paved the way for dialogue proper to get underway. This includes the beginnings of the specific focus on, and attention paid to, Islam.

7 Turning to Islam: Developing the Dialogical Engagement

A consultation of 'The Word of God and the Living Faiths of Men' programme, which took place in Jerusalem in July 1960, brought together a dozen Christians from five churches and six countries to consider the Christian approach to peoples of Muslim faith, and in relation to the then dominant religio-political situation of the Middle East. The report of the meeting noted the 'pervasive adverse effect upon Christian–Muslim relationships of long-ingrained attitudes of prejudice and antagonism', and that it was therefore necessary for Christians 'to approach Muslims in a spirit of respect, friendship and common yielding to the present voice of God'.[67] The four sub-headings give the clue as to the direction and tone of the substantive content of the consultation: the Christian responsibility 'to understand and to know Islam'; 'to meet Muslims in a meaningful way'; to communicate 'effectively' with Muslims; and the 'responsibility of the Christian Churches to realise their unity'. These topics are also significant in that they comprise four components of what may be called the dynamics of ecumenism: education, relationship, witness, and ecclesial (church) unity. Along with other programmatic foci of the WCC, the Christian Church was seen to be called, in the context of dialogue with Islam, to listen and learn; to engage with respect; and to bear faithful witness. Significantly, this consultation affirmed the study programme as being inclusive specifically

67 'Report of the Jerusalem Consultation: The Word of God and the living faiths of men' (Unpublished paper, 1960. WCC Archive File Box: 4612.001/6).

of Christian–Muslim dialogue with the final report underlining 'the responsibility of Christians for meeting Muslims in a constructive way'.[68]

Some years later, in June 1966, an ecumenical consultation on the topic of relations with Muslims took place in Broumana, Lebanon. This gathering of Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant Christians, most coming from the Muslim world, was organised by the Faith and Order Secretariat[69] of the WCC. A later document records this event as the effective point of commencement of the commitment of the WCC to Christian–Muslim dialogue.[70] It has been said that 'it was possible to agree how things should look from a practical point of view, but no agreement was reached on any theological questions'.[71] Indeed, participants were 'widely divided on such basic issues as: Do the Muslims worship the same God...does God in some way work within other religions too?'[72] Despite such limitations and uncertainties there was nevertheless an undoubted burgeoning interest in dialogue with Muslims. The following year a conference with the title 'Christians in Dialogue with Men [sic] of Other Faiths' was held in Kandy, Sri Lanka, under the auspices of the WCC's Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME). This was wider ranging than that which focussed on Christian–Muslim relations specifically, but it was nonetheless as important for that arena of dialogue as for any other. Significantly, Roman Catholic participation at this 1967 event signalled a deepening of the truly ecumenical embrace of Christian engagement with other faiths at this time.

In 1968, a WCC Christian–Muslim student-focussed dialogue was held at the Selly Oak Federation of Colleges in Birmingham, England. In this case a group of Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant students of Islamic Studies met with a group of Muslims. All participants were active in the area of Christian–Muslim relations to a greater or lesser degree. The meeting itself had two phases. In the first, 'the Christians discussed specifically Christian questions in

68 Sperber, *Christians and Muslims*, p. 8.

69 The Faith and Order Secretariat at this time was the day-to-day organisational unit within the WCC bureaucracy. This is to be distinguished from the Faith and Order Commission which is an elected body of representatives from among the member churches of the WCC and, until recently, was formed of into large 'plenary' Commission of some 100 or more individuals who might meet on one occasion between WCC Assemblies, and a smaller 'Standing Commission' that would meet more frequently.

70 'The involvement of the WCC in international and regional Christian-Muslim dialogues' (Unpublished paper 1974, WCC Archive File Box: 4612.006/2).

71 Sperber, *Christians and Muslims*, p. 25.

72 A. Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the Twentieth Century* (London: Macmillan 1997), p. 29

the presence of the Muslims'; while in the second they discussed directly with the Muslims questions pertaining to Christian–Muslim dialogue, with the outcome that there 'was a high degree of agreement on and interest in a future dialogue on many issues'.[73]

Another significant Christian–Muslim dialogue, held under the auspices of the WCC Faith and Order Commission, took place in Switzerland during March 1969.[74] At this event, which focussed on possibilities and prospects for Christian–Muslim dialogue, issues to do with the Israeli–Palestinian conflict arose. This topic would re-surface time and again at WCC-sponsored interreligious dialogue events involving Muslims. Sperber notes that the 'solution of the Palestinian problem in the sense of the West's abandoning its pro-Israeli attitude became the criterion to judge the credibility of the Christian/Muslim dialogue and, indeed, of inter-religious dialogue in general'.[75] It provoked a number of official pronouncements and statements which stressed the need for justice for both Jews and Palestinians; the need for territorial integrity inclusive of Israel; and full religious freedoms and access to holy sites for all, as noted in the Official Statements on the Middle East. However, this was by no means the only issue addressed at the consultation. Among the relevant material presented and discussed, two documents are worth noting. The first, a paper by the Orthodox theologian Georges Khodr, advocated dialogue in the context of spiritual renewal.[76] Khodr laid down the theological challenge of interreligious dialogue to Christians in no uncertain terms:

> For those who believe in Jesus as God and Saviour, the lineage of Abraham traced from the Father of Believers to the Arab Prophet should be sought as a mysterious providential track. Christians cannot remain indifferent to the strokes brushed onto the canvas of the Koran by the Divine Word, just as it is important above all to sense the aim of the Book: it is one of piety and love for Jesus. In whatever fashion may be depicted the portrayal of Jesus as a person in the Koran, it is essential that we should understand that Mohammad sets himself in the line of descent and considers himself the bearer of his message.[77]

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73 Sperber, *Christians and Muslims*, p. 25

74 See documents pertaining to the WCC Faith and Order Commission's Muslim–Christian Consultation, Cartigny, March 2-9 1969 (WCC Archive File Box 4612.006/1).

75 Sperber, *Christians and Muslims*, p. 74.

76 See Andrew M. Sharp, *Orthodox Christians and Islam in the Postmodern Age* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2012).

77 G. Khodr (1969), 'The Word of God and Holy Scripture', p. 6; (WCC Archive File Box 4612.006/1).

A leading ecumenical figure at the time, John B. Taylor, discussed the prospect for Christian–Muslim dialogue by way of reporting on the 1968 Selly Oak event noted above. His comments and reflections give insight into the development of dialogical perspectives and thinking that apply more widely than merely to the Christian–Muslim context. He spoke of the 'spirit of dialogue' in this event as involving a 'repentance wherein we turned our backs on past and present prejudice, wherein we turned to our neighbour in the spirit of love, and wherein we turned to God, as He offered Himself to us': thus were yielded 'fruits of dialogue' in the form of the mutual exploration and discovery of 'the supreme importance of God for us both'.[78] The motivation for dialogue was experienced as neither a

> …tool of condescension nor a new technique of proselytization' but rather an 'enrichment that the Christian might receive from learning from the Muslim… (and) an inescapable compulsiveness about the claims of inter-religious dialogue upon the Christian, in so far as the Christian must take seriously that which is supremely significant for his Muslim neighbour, namely his experience of being submitted to God.[79]

Taylor spoke of 'ultimate hopes' for dialogue in terms of engaging in dialogical relations from a perspective of 'respecting and loving our neighbour not only for what he already was, but for what, under God, he might be. … Muslims and Christians might more fully grow together in service of the world, in service of each other, and in service of God'.[80] Taylor further argued that the experience of dialogue

> …might well lead to shared prayers of intercession and petition, and even to carefully conceived acts of worship, emphasizing, for example, confession and adoration. While one should be careful not to offend, alienate or mislead other Christians or Muslims who might have less experience of the integrity of dialogue, nevertheless one should be prepared to encounter suspicion and opposition. This might have to be endured if one was to persevere in obedience to the claims of inter-religious communication and witness.[81]

78 John B. Taylor (1969), 'Discussions on Christian-Muslim Dialogue', p. 2; (WCC Archive File Box 4612.006/1)

79 Ibid

80 Taylor, 'Discussion on Christian-Muslim Dialogue', p. 3

81 Ibid

If there is 'conversion' within dialogue it is not to 'the other side' but to God. Taylor affirmed 'a turning to God in response to God's turning to us' as being of the essence of Christian–Muslim dialogical engagement: there is 'no place in dialogue for self-imposition…for the desire to succeed or expand at the cost of others'.[82] And of the relationship between dialogue and proclamation, Taylor advanced the possibility of a mutual expectation that proclamation 'be in the spirit of dialogue, and dialogue may provide the possibility of proclamation'.[83]

8 Conclusion

Following earlier beginnings, the decade of the 1960s was a distinct period of exciting new developments, enthusiasm, and optimism for interreligious dialogue in general and Christian–Muslim engagement in particular. It seemed, indeed, that a new and irenic era in the long history of otherwise predominantly hostile interrelations between the two faiths had indeed dawned, portending perhaps a positive, even collegial, relationship between these Peoples of the Book. Although many of the hopes, ideals and aspirations for this new phase of Christian engagement with Islam were not to be realised, at least as envisaged, nevertheless within the next few decades the essential driver of goodwill, coupled with an underlying theological imperative born of changes in perception and understanding that had emerged during this decade, continued to predominate through the remainder of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. We turn now to track this ecumenical journey of engagement with Islam through the closing decades of the twentieth century.

82 Taylor, 'Discussions on Christian-Muslim Dialogue', pp. 6–7.
83 Taylor, 'Discussions on Christian-Muslim Dialogue', p. 7.

CHAPTER 4

From Dialogue to Relationship: c. 1970-2000

In 1971 the Dialogue Sub-Unit of the WCC concluded the 16 year study programme 'The Word of God and the Living Faiths of Men'. The WCC administration then moved to formalise its burgeoning engagement in the field of interreligious dialogue by way of re-organising the Dialogue Sub-Unit under the title 'Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies', thenceforth often referred to simply as the DFI sub-unit.[1] Energies and hopes for the immediate future of interreligious dialogue were high. In this chapter I shall traverse the work of this new programmatic engagement with particular reference to the field of Christian–Muslim relations, alighting on and discussing key moments of development. It is not possible to undertake even a summary overview of the considerable variety of conferences with different Muslim partners and diverse agendas tackled; it is necessary to be selective, and to orient the selection to discerning the dialogical temperature and focus within given spans of time. Accordingly, I begin with the special consultation that took place in 1972, then note a number of ways in which this dialogical endeavour expanded during the mid-1970s. This is followed by a discussion of a range of problems and issues encountered in the late 1970s and early 1980s. I turn then to the phenomenon of regional Christian–Muslim engagements organised by, or held under the auspices of, the WCC with reference especially to the mid-late 1980s. Traversing the 1990s will provide a platform for identifying and further clarifying salient issues that emerged. In respect to this, close attention will be paid to the document *Issues in Christian–Muslim Relations: Ecumenical Considerations* formally approved by the WCC in 1992. This is followed by a penultimate discussion of the shift in orientation from dialogical to a wider, social agenda driven and relationship-building focus of engagement. The chapter concludes at the cusp of the new millennium and the changes and new developments ushered in during the opening decade of the twenty-first century.

1 The inclusion of 'ideologies' refers to the fact that initially the work of this sub-Unit was intended to engage also with Marxism. However, this did not really work out, and arguably deflected attention and energy from the field of interreligious dialogue as such.

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1 1972: The Broumana Consultation

Among early dialogical events there was, in 1972, a very significant Christian–Muslim consultation held, once again, in Broumana, Lebanon. The theme of this event was 'The Quest for Human Understanding and Cooperation: Christian and Muslim Contributions' and it constituted the then largest bilateral dialogical meeting so far organised by the WCC.[2] The four topics covered included (i): Religions, nations and the search for world community; (ii): Truth, revelation and obedience; (iii): Community relationship between Christians and Muslims; and (iv): Prayer and worship. In his introductory remarks, Stanley Samartha noted the primary purposes of the event as being the initiating of better, informed relations; the application of spiritual resources to common problems; suggesting ways of practical cooperation; and raising of basic questions on human life and existence, which would be topics for further and long-range reflection. For Samartha, the combination of theological and historical factors meant it was 'both necessary and urgent that Christians and Muslims continue to be in dialogue' and, furthermore, that the scope and depth of dialogue be extended:

> Judaism, Christianity and Islam belong together historically and they also speak of the same God who is Creator, Revealer and Judge. However, it would be most unwise to ignore the deep differences between us. Dialogue is called for not only because of the elements we share but also because of the chasm that divides us … even the question of what is common between us is answered in different ways by Christians and Muslims. It is understandable that what is common between us is not formulated in the same way on the two sides.[3]

This Broumana meeting, albeit of non-representative individuals, issued a non-binding memorandum in which the reason for the meeting was given in terms of the perceived *kairos* of history, the present socio-political situation, and the motif of common humanity in the context of together honouring 'our conscious dependence upon God in a world that often seems to deny Him'.[4]

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2 See S.J. Samartha and J.B. Taylor (Eds), *Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Papers presented at the Broumana Consultation, 12-18 July 1972* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1973).

3 S.J. Samartha, 'Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the Perspective of Recent History', p. 8; (Unpublished paper, WCC Archive File Box 4612.007/2).

4 Broumana Report 'In Search of Understanding and Cooperation: Christian and Muslim Contributions', *Study Encounter*, Vol. VIII, No. 3 (1972), p. 2.

The prospect of formulating a theological framework 'for our mutual recognition and awareness' was raised in respect to affirming common commitments within the horizon of recognising perspectival diversities. Dialogue was seen as an activity that does not seek to 'suppress differences but rather to explore them frankly and self-critically together' in the hope of achieving a form of convergence that would not be an 'impatient syncretism' but rather an 'openness to God's further guidance'.[5] Although there was recognition of local specificity in respect to dialogical contexts and agendas, thereby calling forth a variety of sensitivities and approaches, nevertheless certain 'irreducible principles' were advanced, namely those of clear and frank witness of self-identity; mutuality of respect and, concomitantly, avoidance of invidious comparisons, and, in particular, the upholding of religious freedom – meaning that missionary activity ought not be identified with exploitative proselytism. Christian–Muslim dialogue, as a process, holds out the prospect of advancing world community, deepening the understanding of revelation, strengthening the relation of religion and society, and broadening devotional practice.

> Where Muslims and Christians meet together we are not only listening to each other, but we are listening for God. On occasion, therefore, Christian and Muslim individuals or groups may also express their mutual understanding and trust in opening themselves to each other's devotional idiom, notably of *dua*, of supplication and meditation.[6]

In keeping with the tenor of these early dialogical consultations this Broumana meeting, although engendering some 'heated discussion on the problem of Palestine',[7] nevertheless explored issues of practical co-operation, mutual concerns, and modes of common life. However, as with other similar conferences, there was no addressing of specifically religious or theological issues. According to Pranger, 'This kind of interreligious discourse proved too sensitive for the WCC', and he further comments that:

> It had proved impossible to find acceptance, in the WCC, for the characterization of interreligious dialogue as a collective religious quest, or a discourse on religious themes. The fear of syncretism, and the claim of the uniqueness of the Christian Gospel amidst other religions, did prove

5 Ibid.

6 Broumana Report 'In Search of Understanding and Cooperation', p. 4.

7 Jutta Sperber, *Christians and Muslims: The Dialogue Activities of the World Council of Churches and Their Theological Foundation* (Berlin & New York: de Gruyter, 2000), p. 28.

> insurmountable obstacles for this interpretation of the meaning and significance of dialogue for the ecumenical movement.[8]

One of this meeting's Vatican participants, Michael Fitzgerald MAfr, published a reflective report in which he noted a number of salient points.[9] He stressed the 'danger of religious exclusivism resulting from an identification of religion and state' and voiced some disquiet at the apparent options of nationalist-religious (theocratic) and secular ideologies as models of state identity; he advocated instead the quest for a 'midway' position. For Fitzgerald the underlying theological questions were unavoidable: Can Islam accept Christians theologically, and not merely as protected persons (*dhimmī*s) in the Islamic state? Can Christian theology find a place for Islam? What is the relationship between the universal mission and the particular realisation? He also noted, approvingly, the general and non-binding nature of the memorandum that was issued (as appropriate to a non-representational gathering) but opined nevertheless that 'concrete problems of community relations can only be tackled and solved at the local level… (A)n international gathering of this kind is most profitably engaged when it is discussing strictly theological issues'.[10]

2 Extending the Field of Engagement: the mid-1970s

In July 1974 a regional Christian–Muslim dialogue – the first of a series of such regional events – was held in Accra, Ghana. This particular occasion was organised under the combined auspices of the Dialogue Sub-unit and the Faith and Order secretariat of the WCC, the Islam in Africa project (of which, more below in Part 2) of the African Churches, and the Department for Religious Knowledge of the University of Ghana.[11] It had as its theme 'The Unity of God and the Community of Mankind: Cooperation between African Muslims and Christians in Work and Witness'. In his introductory remarks John B. Taylor noted that the

8 Jan Hendrik Pranger, *Dialogue in Discussion*: *The World Council of Churches and the Challenge of Religious Plurality between 1967 and 1979* (IIMO Research Publication 38, Utrecht-Leiden, 1994), p. 124.

9 M.L. Fitzgerald, 'Lebanon–Broumana: Muslim-Christian Consultation (July '72)' *Bulletin* 21 (1972): 58-62.

10 Fitzgerald, 'Lebanon-Broumana', p. 62.

11 See Document 'The Involvement of the WCC in International and Regional Christian-Muslim Dialogues'; (WCC Archive File Box 4612.006/2).

> Christian-Muslim solidarity that comes from working together, and the fulfilment of the religious duty to serve the needs of our fellow men and women and thereby to come closer to them… (and) … is related to being servants of God in worship; one notes the semantic overlap between work and worship in the word 'service' and one sees the Arabic root for servant and worshipper as the same.[12]

Three issues were raised by Taylor, effectively questions which give the clue as to where interreligious engagement between Muslims and Christians then stood. Is co-existence enough; or can there be more to Christian–Muslim relations? Can competition be avoided; or must particularity necessarily mean antipathy towards the other? In what ways can proper inter-faith co-operation be fostered? As with many such dialogues, such probing questions notwithstanding, the focus of interaction was, in the end, mainly on practical issues and aspects. Even at this stage relationship engagement around applied issues was beginning to emerge as more immediately fruitful than theological dialogue per se.

A delegation from Saudi Arabia, which visited the Geneva offices of the World Council of Churches in October, 1972, discussed issues of human rights and the status of Jerusalem. However, it was later reported that 'the attitude of the Saudi Arabian representatives showed little readiness to make concessions'.[13] In contrast, at the second regional Christian–Muslim dialogue event, held in Hong Kong in January 1975 with the theme 'Muslims and Christians in Society: towards Good-Will, Consultation and Working Together in Southeast Asia', there was much positive energy for practical socio-political issues, although theological issues were kept 'very much in the background'.[14] The resultant memorandum from the meeting affirmed a dual Christian and Muslim perspective which held that, properly understood, the two faiths, by virtue of being grounded on a compatible belief in God, 'enjoin on us a loving relationship with each other and with all human beings'; each possesses distinctive elements, and yet both equally affirm 'no compulsion in religion'.[15] Among issues identified were the tension between dialogue and

12 John B. Taylor, Introductory Speech at the conference on 'The Unity of God and the Community of Mankind: Cooperation between African Muslims and Christians in Work and Witness', Accra, Ghana, July 1974; (WCC Archive File Box 4612.010/1).

13 Sperber, *Christians and Muslims*, p. 30.

14 Ibid.

15 Hong Kong regional Christian-Muslim dialogue event January 1975: Memorandum. (WCC Archive File Box 4612.033/2).

witness; concerns about proselytism; the need for mutual education to overcome ignorance and misunderstanding; and variable styles of dialogue. Furthermore, it was affirmed that dialogue does not just apply to the discursive modality – other modes, now commonly referred to as the dialogues of life, action, and experience, were also upheld; and that interreligious dialogue must reach out into the secular world. And as well, in dialogue, partners need to display an openness to the initiative of the other. These echo an almost standard self-awareness of those involved in interreligious dialogue, here slanted toward Christian–Muslim engagement.

Toward the end of October 1975 an *ad hoc* consultation on the Middle East was convened in Cartigny, Switzerland. Occurring at a time 'of general optimism about the region', it proffered the view that future dialogical engagement under the auspices of the WCC 'should serve to reduce prejudices against Islam and to create understanding between Jews and Muslims'.[16] The possibility of initiating a three-way Jewish-Christian–Muslim 'trialogue' was mooted, though nothing concrete was forthcoming. One problem that emerged, and which was particularly pertinent to Christian–Muslim engagement, was brought about by having, on the one side, a formal and representative body – the World Council of Churches – while, on the other side, there was usually no such equivalent representative entity but rather a range of regional-based institutions. Therefore dialogue became more and more the province of a select group of those interested and available. Alongside the problem of equality of dialogical partners lay also the issue of initiative for dialogue. Who takes the lead? Who issues the invitations? And, who provides the funding?

One UK-based Muslim researcher, Ataullah Siddiqui, has noted that in contrast with such global Christian institutions as the WCC and the Vatican, Muslim institutions do not 'express the same enthusiasm that the Churches and their units and councils show on the question of dialogue. In a sense, Muslim institutions respond as institutions as far as dialogue is concerned, but are not initiators of dialogue with other religions and beliefs'.[17] Historical and political context is important in explaining this. Many Muslim countries have had their energies and agendas directed and constrained by their various struggles to come out from under Western colonial domination. Questions addressed by Muslims in these countries were more likely to be about 'how to counter the Western political forces who were occupying their lands and were in control of all their important institutions'[18] rather than addressing finer

16 Sperber, *Christians and Muslims*, p. 31.

17 A. Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the Twentieth Century* (London: Macmillan 1997), p. xvi.

18 Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue,* p. 5.

theological points of interreligious debate. Yet a Christian–Muslim dialogue event held in Tripoli in 1976 addressed the issue of religion as ideology – asserting that, in fact, religion is above ideologies as such – and explored questions such as the common doctrinal basis and meeting points between the two religions. This particular dialogue promoted the idea of social justice as being the 'fruit of faith in God' and the overcoming of mutual animosities.[19] Religion as life-guide and as supportive of human rights, together with upholding freedom of belief, the promotion of peace, the assertion of the fundamental harmony of science and religion, and the disavowal of mutually competitive proselytising, were among some of the topics included in the Final Declaration of this consultation.

A very specific *ad hoc* dialogue on the theme of Christian and Muslim mission was held in Chambésy, Switzerland, in June of 1976. This event was organised by the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) of the WCC together with the journal *International Review of Mission*; the Islamic Foundation (Leicester, UK) and the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations (CSIC) at Selly Oak, Birmingham, England. In the event, the occasion turned out to be 'a dialogue in which profound theological differences could not be bridged pragmatically. Therefore the aggression and accusations were stronger than in earlier dialogues, particularly from the Muslims against the Christians'.[20] Yet the conference ended on note of calling for more, and more widely representative, such conferences.

A subsequent planning meeting for Christian–Muslim dialogical endeavours, held in October 1976, noted the growing significance of Christian–Muslim dialogue as such and the success of the major dialogues undertaken thus far, especially in regards to 'improved mutual relationships'.[21] However, the meeting also noted that 'despite an increasing range of initiatives from both Muslim and Christian sides at international, regional and local levels, there was still a major problem in that many Muslims and Christians still distrusted the idea of dialogue'.[22] It was also observed that dialogues were being sponsored by other bodies. The sphere of interest and ownership was widening: 'good links between the regional and international levels as a result of the choice of

19 See Christian-Muslim Dialogue meeting, Tripoli, 1976: Text of the Final Declaration (WCC Archive File Box 4612.030/1).

20 Sperber, *Christians and Muslims*, p. 32.

21 Ibid.

22 Christian-Muslim Dialogue Planning meeting, October 1976: Aide-Mémoire. (WCC Archive File Box 4612.029/1).

themes, participants and sites' were recorded.[23] As well as attending 'to basic rules and aims' the meeting also 'dealt above all with the nature of and issues for future dialogues. The tendency was towards regional dialogues on practical questions, and only in this context on theological matters as well'.[24] Thus planning for 'regional and local projects on both fundamental and practical questions and problems' was approved and a balanced approach to interreligious dialogue activities was commended, in particular with respect to the juxtaposing of socio-political and religious and/or theological issues.[25] At the same time it was noted that a number of things ought to be avoided with regard to dialogical engagement, including unfair comparison or caricature; attempts at syncretism; covert attempts to proselytise; complacency in regard to 'static co-existence'; and defensive or hostile attitudes to secular neighbours.[26] Dialogical engagement had now produced its own best-practice rules and ethical guidelines, albeit implicitly so.

3 Difficulties and Challenges: late 1970s – early 1980s

Despite some good engagements and encouraging developments, by the late 1970s it would appear that Muslim enthusiasm for dialogue was waning. Critical voices about the dialogue process and its outcomes were being raised. For some Muslims there was an unresolved issue with respect to the credibility of dialogue. Some charged the Christian side with 'avoiding theology more and more', while others held that the Christians wanted to avoid fronting up to the serious religio-political problems that faced Muslims.[27] Nevertheless, in a 1978 report to the Dialogue Sub-unit Working Group (which oversaw the administration of the WCC's interreligious dialogue programme, DFI), the director highlighted, among other things, the value of

> ...encouraging an exchange of communication of the varied experiences of Christians as neighbours with Muslims ...(the) need to avoid a monotheistic Abrahamic pact over against other world faiths ...(the) need for Christians and Muslims to respect each other's missionary vocations ...

23 Sperber, *Christians and Muslims*, p. 32.
24 Ibid.
25 Sperber, *Christians and Muslims,* p. 33.
26 Christian-Muslim Dialogue Planning meeting, October 1976: Aide-Mémoire. (WCC Archive File Box 4612.029/1).
27 Sperber, *Christians and Muslims*, p. 79.

(and) encouragement for DFI staff to continue involvement with local-level dialogue activities.[28]

In March 1979 a meeting was called to evaluate and plan further Christian–Muslim dialogues. This involved a widely representative group of people from the WCC, the Vatican and some key Muslim organisations, together with a number of scholars and other leaders. The resultant report laid out the foundations for Christian–Muslim relations. Dialogue *per se* was affirmed as a useful activity, provided it was not a front for proselytism. In the following May the Dialogue Sub-unit Core Group (as distinct from the overseeing Working Group) noted that wider development aid issues had drawn the DFI Sub-unit into a proposed international consultation. This could be taken as suggestive of a growing shift of energy and focus from theoretical and theological dimensions toward the more pragmatic and applied dimensions of interreligious engagement. Further, the outcomes of the planning meeting were reviewed which, on the one hand, resulted in the affirmation that 'the practical proposals were considered very good' but, on the other hand, yielded the critical assessment of the theological statements being seen as offering nothing new.[29] Nevertheless, the final report 'was received positively as the basis for further work'.[30] Significantly, however, 'it was emphasised that there could be no discussion about mission in principle, as the Muslims wished, but only about the forms of mission'.[31] Theological engagement in dialogue was becoming more and more muted in favour of a shift toward relational engagement at a pragmatic level only. This was a feature of developments within the ecumenical engagement with people of other faiths more widely, but with significant and particular application in the arena of Christian–Muslim relations.

At the end of 1979 a reflection conference on Christian–Muslim encounters was convened in Mombassa, Kenya, under the theme of 'Christian Presence and Witness in Relation to Muslim Neighbours'. It was jointly organised by a number of departments or programme units of the WCC at the time, including the Dialogue Sub-unit; CWME; Commission of the Churches on International Affairs; Commission for Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service; and the Programme for Theological Education. The extent of this organisational support speaks volumes of the then wide interest and engagement in interreligious

28 Minutes of the Third Meeting of the DFI Sub-unit Working Group, Trinidad, May 1978, p. 5; cf. pp. 40ff. (WCC Archive File Box 4612.022).

29 Sperber, *Christians and Muslims*, p. 35.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

dialogue, in particular Christian–Muslim dialogue, across the WCC structures that pertained at this time. It also reflects the steady shift from a theological toward a more wide-ranging pragmatic agenda and focus. Indeed, it has been observed that 'One of the most important experiences of the conference participants was that dialogue begins where people live side by side' and that this gave rise to the proposal to replace the term 'dialogue' – now deemed to denote something 'narrow' – with the term 'relationships' that, in contrast, was spoken of approvingly as something more 'comprehensive'.[32] Also of particular interest is the fact that, in the light of this shift in self-understanding of the field of engagement with Islam, 'support for equal civil rights for everyone in Muslim states' was given, together with an expression of sympathy 'for the Muslim's wish to have an Islamic state'.[33]

June 1980 saw a Christian–Muslim Youth Dialogue event, involving some fifty participants between the ages of 20 and 35, which took place at the WCC's ecumenical centre in Bossey, Switzerland. Perhaps, not unsurprisingly, the young participants placed an emphasis 'on the distinction between faith and religion in order to preserve the renewing force of religion' and expressed no confidence at all in respect to 'a transforming force of the power structures within the church and *umma*'.[34] By August of that year the recommendations from a Mombassa meeting with respect to the future of Christian–Muslim dialogue were received by the Central Committee of the WCC, then revised and referred to member churches which were urged 'to seek encounter and cooperation with Muslims' and to 'give more support to the study centres (and) plan dialogue conferences'.[35] At the same time it was determined that 'theological views and cultural experiences were to be collected for a second reflective conference'.[36] Interest in matters theological had not, nor did they ever, totally disappear. But in the programmatic schema of the WCC, and given the multiple strands of interest, advocacy, and resistance with which the WCC's bureaucratic machinery and programme staff must ever negotiate, it became increasingly difficult to pursue theological dialogue interests and issues as the 20th century advanced.

In March of 1982 an International Christian–Muslim dialogue event was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, organised by the Dialogue Sub-unit conjointly with the World Muslim League. Observers were sent from the Vatican's

32 Sperber, *Christians and Muslims*, p. 36.
33 Ibid.
34 Sperber, *Christians and Muslims*, p. 37.
35 Sperber, *Christians and Muslims*, p. 38.
36 Ibid.

Secretariat for Non-Christians, the Organisation of the Islamic Foreign Ministers Conference, and UNESCO. Interest was clearly high and expectations were raised. Fr Thomas (Tom) Michel, one of the Vatican observers, noted somewhat trenchantly the 'mismatch' between the two sides in dialogue.[37] Interestingly, however, Sperber remarks that in the context of this event the WCC

> …found itself in a new situation where it had less say on the planning and agenda and, above all, was not able to select the Muslim participants. This meant the final theme 'Christians and Muslims Living and Working Together: Ethics and Practices of Humanitarian and Development Programmes' was tackled by Christian practitioners, who wanted to solve the problems with joint activities, and Muslim theoreticians, who wanted to make their fundamental ethical and religious reservations about aid projects clear at last.[38]

Once again, and in this case almost as soon as the principal event was concluded, there was a follow-up Christian reflection conference in April 1982 to allow the Christian participants to evaluate what had occurred and to draw up suitable recommendations.

As it turned out, the notion of forming a Christian–Muslim Liaison 'Standing' Committee was favourably received with the result that, in October of 1982, Stuart Brown, of the Islam desk in the Dialogue Sub-unit, 'met with the Geneva representatives of the World Muslim Congress and the World Muslim League for an exchange of information – in a sense an embryonic form of the long requested Joint Standing Committee'.[39] This committee, now including also members of the World Islamic Call Society and the World Conference on Religion and Peace, as well as participation from the Vatican Secretariat, met again in Geneva and continued to convene annually for a number of years. The primary purpose was for mutual report and exchange. The last meeting took place in 1990. Arguably, while dialogical in terms of the modality of engagement, this series of Christian–Muslim joint 'Standing Committee' meetings reflected the shift from 'dialogue' as an end it itself to a focus on fostering 'relationships' whereby issues of mutual concern and endeavours of common interest – other than overtly theological – might be addressed.

37 See Tom Michel, SJ, Report of the WCC/World Muslim Congress, 'Christians and Muslims Living and Working Together: the Ethics and Practices of Humanitarian Development Programs' meeting in Colombo, Sri Lanka. *Bulletin* No. 51 [XVII/2] (1982): 204-219.

38 Sperber, *Christians and Muslims*, p. 39.

39 Sperber, *Christians and Muslims*, p. 42.

4 Regional Dialogue Events: 1984–1989

In 1984 the Central Committee of the WCC gave approval for five small regional Christian–Muslim dialogue events to take place. This signalled a subtle but also significant shift: although there was no consequent de-politicisation in respect to the troublesome context of the Middle East, the regional focus 'made it clear that Islam and its concerns cannot be equated with the Middle East and the Arabs'.[40] The series was launched in 1985. A new era of engagement seemed to be opening up. The intention was 'to study specific issues that play an important role in Muslim-Christian relations'.[41] One of the earliest took place in March 1986. It was focussed on Francophone Africa with some thirty participants from a dozen African nations. Through the range of topics addressed there 'was clear evidence of the tensions between the Christian and Islamic conceptions of the state'.[42] However, later in that same year a meeting of Sub-units of the WCC Programme Unit I advocated a restructuring of the regional Christian–Muslim dialogue events. Stuart Brown was charged with compiling a detailed examination of the endeavours undertaken thus far in the field of Christian–Muslim relations. This resulted in the publication of a significant record.[43]

An Asian regional Christian–Muslim dialogue event was held in December 1986 in Indonesia. It covered themes of religion and state, religion and family, religion and the economy and the then socio-political situation of Indonesia. Major differences between Christianity and Islam, especially with respect to Islamic law, were also addressed. The following year, in September, a European-oriented regional event took place in Greece with the theme of Religion and Society. Once again, Islamic law and 'the conception of state and society relating to it' were given considerable attention with the result that it became clear to all that, yet again, 'much clarification is required'.[44] A North American regional Christian–Muslim dialogue event was held in New Windsor, USA, and focussed on the challenge of religious pluralism. A measure of relative harmony in respect to contemporary socio-economic analysis was achieved on this occasion, but greater differences emerged in respect to more overtly theological matters. However, secularism – from which all were seen to have

40 Sperber, *Christians and Muslims*, p. 74.

41 DFI Programme Statement, 1984. (WCC Archive File Box 4612.060/2).

42 Sperber, *Christians and Muslims*, p. 42.

43 Stuart E. Brown (Ed), *Meeting in Faith: Twenty Years of Christian–Muslim Conversations Sponsored by the WCC* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1988).

44 Sperber, *Christians and Muslims*, p. 43.

benefited – was not itself subject to critique in the North American context such as was the case, at times, elsewhere. The final event in this sequence of regional Christian–Muslim dialogues, an Anglophone African gathering, took place in Tanzania in June 1989. As with previous such occasions, the pattern of proceedings involved a series of sub-topics with a paper on each presented from either side. Discussion was usually, but not always, followed by a document or semi-formal statement as an outcome of the meeting. Issues of religion and state, clarification of terminology, Islamic Law, Canon Law, nature of secular society and so on were relatively standard topics.

By the end of the eighties another sequence of transitions was underway: the imminent departure of Stuart E. Brown was acknowledged at the June 1989 Casablanca meeting of the Dialogue Working Group. He was replaced by Ulrich Schoen as *locum tenens* for two years on the Christian–Muslim desk, awaiting arrival of Tarik Mitri. Brown 'had prepared the way for the conversations with world-wide Muslim organisations and African Muslims' in particular.[45] Furthermore, this meeting affirmed that, for the future, emphasis was to be placed on the theme of 'Ecumenical Considerations on Muslim–Christian Dialogue' together with taking close account of majority–minority issues and engaging students and other young people in dialogue events.

5 Developments in the Nineties: Clarifying the Issues

Dialogical advances with people of Muslim faith notwithstanding, by the time of the 1991 Canberra Assembly it was noted that in Africa and Asia, as in many places elsewhere, a good number of Christians 'feel threatened by Islamization and the introduction of the Sharia law' and the WCC was urged to 'take this issue very seriously in its dialogue with people of other faiths'.[46] In March 1992 the Executive Committee of the WCC again explored aspects of Christian–Muslim dialogue and relations. The (now) Inter-religious Relations Advisory Group, in its 1992 report to the General Secretary, noted the urgent need for relational initiatives vis-à-vis Christians living in Muslim societies where the call for the Islamisation of society or State is pressed, together with other situ-

45 Sperber, *Christians and Muslims*, p. 46.

46 Michael Kinnamon (Ed), *Signs of the Spirit. Official Report, Seventh Assembly, Canberra, Australia, 7-20 February 1991* (Geneva: WCC Publications / Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991), p. 92.

ations of inter-communal tensions.[47] A call was made to the Churches for the 'creation of a network of people assigned to the task of inter-religious relations in their contexts'.[48]

The Advisory Group examined guidelines for Christian–Muslim dialogue, undertaking a measure of review, and laid plans for further such dialogue events; however, such activities were now to be referred to as 'relational initiatives'. The shift of focus from theological to relational engagement, noted above, was now well and truly embedded in the thinking and activity of the WCC. This process was aided by an ad hoc group, inclusive of some Muslim advisors, which produced a draft document entitled *Issues in Christian-Muslim Relations: Ecumenical Considerations* which 'was meant to stimulate a reflection on the future orientation of Christian–Muslim relations as it identified progress achieved in dialogue, problems faced and questions inviting a concentrated effort of exchange and cooperation'.[49] Significantly, it was anticipated that

> …this reflection would extend beyond the limited church constituency involved in dialogue and concerned about its future. The discussion process was meant to engage the World Council of Churches as a whole in reaffirming, in a more specific and concrete manner, its commitment to improve Christian-Muslim relations. Such a renewed commitment was seen to be a timely signal addressed to Muslim neighbours and dialogue partners.[50]

Formally adopted by the Central Committee at its August 1992 meeting, the reception and discussion of the document went very positively, although there was 'an insistence on the need to be sensitive to the problems faced by Christian communities in some predominantly Muslim societies'.[51] Indeed, such insistence recurred often in subsequent meetings of the Central Committee and tended to overshadow other thus indicating that the predominance of concerns about Islamic hegemony on the one hand, and the freedom required for Christian life and witness on the other, were not being adequately addressed *in situ*. However, it was pointed out that rather than offering practical guidance

47 See Report of the Advisory Group on Inter-Religious Relations to the General Secretary, May 1992. (WCC Archive File Box 4612.066/1).
48 Ibid.
49 Tarek Mitri, in 'From Canberra to Harare' (Unpublished WCC-OIRR Report, May 1997), p. 8.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.

for the conduct of dialogues, the document provided 'a good analysis of Islam and Muslims, with seven themes for future dialogue between Christians and Muslims'.[52] This analysis helped to provide a much-needed sense of direction, with the themes providing a broad frame of reference: 'the document was useful, as it had been widely used by Christians and Muslims, separately and together, as an indicator of what issues the WCC considers pertinent and/or urgent for dialogue and how they may need to be approached'.[53] So, what does this document actually say?

The Introduction delineates two dimensions to the relationship between Islam and Christianity: on the one hand, the practical matter of communal co-existence are articulated; on the other hand, interestingly, it gives a range of theological challenges.[54] Despite the clear favouring of pragmatic relationship engagement, theology and theological issues are ever close at hand. Although there had been considerable effort expended, and advances made, in terms of new understandings in dialogue and allied scholarship in recent decades, caution was expressed for the medium-term future due to new political and other developments 'threatening to build up new attitudes of distrust and hostility'.[55] A measure of urgency was thus expressed about maintaining a long-term commitment to the continuation of this arena of dialogical engagement. Following this Introduction, Part 1 discusses Christian–Muslim Encounter, acknowledging the complexity of almost one and half millennia of interaction between these two religions. The road has been chequered, to say the least. Negative stereotyping and mutually hostile prejudices have been all too often the substantial order of the day. A useful definition of principle is given.

> Dialogue is not only conversation (dialogue of ideas) but is also an encounter between people (dialogue of life). It depends on mutual trust, demands respect for the identity and integrity of the other, and requires a willingness to question one's own self-understanding as well as an openness to understand others on their own terms.[56]

The ideal and aspirations of dialogue do not always or easily translate into reality. Indeed, on the Islamic side reservations about dialogue – 'seeing it as a

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52 Sperber, *Christians and Muslims*, p. 48.

53 Mitri, in 'From Canberra to Harare', p. 8.

54 Introduction, *Issues in Christian–Muslim Relations: Ecumenical Considerations*: <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/c-mrel-e.html> (Accessed 6 March 2016).

55 Ibid.

56 Part I (Christian–Muslim Encounter), *Issues in Christian–Muslim Relations*.

covert form of Christian neo-imperialism or as intellectual colonialism' – are acknowledged; and at the same time there are many Christians 'who consider dialogue with Muslims as marked by naive romanticism, which fails to confront the perceived threat of Islamic fanaticism'.[57]

Dialogical engagement is an immense challenge and not without considerable risk. Part II points to that by addressing the issue of understanding Islam and Muslims. The unifying dimension of a significantly common belief-system is, in reality, juxtaposed with 'considerable diversity' in Islamic identity and culture. A brief sketch of Islam is given that touches on these central beliefs and worldview perspectives, noting some points of convergence with Christianity as well as acknowledging the many 'real and substantial differences between Christian and Islamic teaching', and stressing the need for greater mutual education.[58] Some specific issues are canvassed in Part III, including the mutual challenge of pluralism, majority–minority relations, and a range of issues related to communal co-existence. This consideration leads into the discussion of Part IV on 'living and working together', especially given the fact that 'Christians and Muslims comprise nearly half of the world's population. The nature of the relationship between these two communities is of considerable significance for the welfare of the whole human family'.[59] The common value of peace and the possibility of collaborative work in areas of justice, human rights and related areas of concern are advanced in the context of an eschatological vision for this dialogical relationship: 'Ultimately, this exchange and mutual transformation could lead to the enrichment of the whole human family'.[60] This document was clearly a significant contribution to ecumenical engagement with Islam at the time suffering, like so many documents and good initiatives, the perennial problem of institutional amnesia. Significant reflective documents are so often set aside as life rolls on to the next pressing issue or more pragmatically appealing event.

In December 1992 another rather significant and successful conference on the subject of Islamic Law was held in Geneva, with a follow-up conference to continue this pragmatic-focussed dialogue. Held in November 1993 it did just

57 Ibid.

58 Part II (On understanding Islam and Muslims), *Issues in Christian–Muslim Relations*.

59 Part IV (Living and working together), *Issues in Christian–Muslim Relations*.

60 Ibid. Further references are given, viz.: *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths* (WCC 1990); Stuart E. Brown (Ed), *Meeting in Faith: Twenty Years of Christian-Muslim Conversations Sponsored by the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1989); *The San Antonio Report. Your Will be Done: Mission in Christ's Way*, Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, San Antonio, Texas, USA, May 1989 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990).

that and also addressed additional matters such as secularisation, religion and modernity, plurality of legal systems, religious revival, the role of religious institutions and leaders, political legitimacy, sources of law, majority–minority relations and human rights. Comprehensive agendas have often been seen as appealing and exciting, especially within the field of ecumenical endeavours, but they can also often prove overwhelming, resulting in little concrete advance. A further and similar event, which focussed more on the subject of human rights, was held in November 1994 in Berlin at which the participants 'expressed support for common citizenship, freedom of religion, human dignity and women's rights'.[61] And an attempt was made 'to re-examine, but from a Christian–Muslim perspective, the theological and ethical foundation of a truly universal discourse on human rights in a pluralist world'.[62] Exciting agendas indeed. But the excitement and the prospect of perhaps some new and real developments in Christian ecumenical engagement with Islam was soon to run into some difficulties.

6 From Dialogue to Relationship with Muslims

Following the 1991 Canberra Assembly the Dialogue Sub-unit (DFI) was replaced by the new structure, the Office on Inter-religious Relations (OIRR). As a consequence of this and other structural and programmatic changes that occurred, the quest to develop new relationships and to further diversify Islamic dialogue partners was deemed a principal concern of the Christian–Muslim desk within the OIRR. It would appear that some losses had occurred in relation to earlier work undertaken in this area by the Dialogue Sub-unit. But at the same time ongoing difficulties were encountered, especially with respect to discerning appropriate organisational partners when there is no counterpart to the WCC and no Islamic parallel to a Christian Church or denomination, at least in organisational terms. Further, such Islamic organisations and institutions which might be expected to provide a structural avenue for developing dialogical partnerships tended to have their own more political, rather than religious, agendas. In consequence, although they were 'interested in common statements, joint advocacy and collaborative action', the OIRR as such was 'not in a position to commit the WCC', so there was little that could be

61 Sperber, *Christians and Muslims*, p. 50; cf. Tarek Mitri (Ed), *Religion and Human Rights: A Christian–Muslim Discussion* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996).

62 Mitri, in 'From Canberra to Harare', p. 9.

concretely achieved.[63] Nevertheless, these limitations notwithstanding, 'there were exchanges of visits, occasional participation in meetings and in a few cases, jointly sponsored meetings'.[64] However, a persistent problem lay in the difficulty of assuring transparent balanced representation: in the end 'there was no alternative except that of multiplying efforts to expose the WCC, in a more intentional manner, to the plurality of opinions and positions within the Islamic community and seek dialogue and cooperation with those who are prepared to consider dialogue and cooperation'.[65]

Interestingly, together with the important stress on maintaining good relations with Muslims with whom there had been long-standing dialogical relationships, it was seen as 'equally important to open up towards those with whom Christians are often in disagreement, against whom they have grievances and who themselves do challenge, sometimes radically, Christianity and the Christians'.[66] Difficulties inherent in such challenges need not, and did not, result in the rejection of dialogue. In fact, much of the success of these dialogical ventures, albeit focussed on relationship building and the addressing of a variety of social issues, that was actually achieved can be attributed to the close working relationship the OIRR had with an informal group of Muslim 'advisors' who assisted in the tasks of reflection, assessment, and planning. A dialogical programme, namely an international consultation on 'Inter-Religious Cooperation and Peace-Making in the Context of Inter-Communal Tensions', and involving Christians and Muslims together, took place in the form of two seminars during the mid-nineties.[67] The Christian–Muslim dimension of the work of the OIRR contributed also to other WCC programmes, especially those having to do with peace-making and education, and was involved in a range of collaborations with ecumenical partners at the regional level.[68] The resourcing

63 Mitri, in 'From Canberra to Harare', p. 8.

64 Ibid. Organisations and institutions that are named in this regard include: The Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO); The International Islamic Call Society; The International Islamic Council for Da'wa and Relief; The Institute on Muslim Minority Affairs; The Royal Academy of Islamic Civilization Research, Jordan; The Islamic World Study Centre, Valletta, Malta; The Islamic Centre for Strategic and Development Studies, Dubai, United Arab Emirates; Fondation Culturelle Islamique, Geneva, Switzerland; The Islamic Organization for Culture and Communication, Iran; The Association for Inter-religious Dialogue, Khartoum, Sudan.

65 Mitri, in 'From Canberra to Harare', p. 9.

66 Ibid.

67 Mitri, in 'From Canberra to Harare', p. 10.

68 Named partners included: The Christian Council (sic – s/b Conference) of Asia; The Advisory Group on Christian-Muslim Relations of the Middle East Council of Churches; The

of seminars, especially in Europe, the Middle East, and Francophone Africa, was also a feature of work during this period.[69]

In his assessment, given in 1997 ahead of, and in preparation for, the Harare Assembly of the WCC, Tarek Mitri acknowledged a number of problems requiring to be addressed, including leadership and initiative issues within the ambit of WCC structures in respect to wider interreligious dialogical concerns; the need for adequate support and resourcing of the Office in the face of increasing demands; and how might a balance be struck 'between being cumulative, initiative-taking, and somewhat "professional" in our work, and being "responsive" to visits, to other initiatives, requests?'[70] On the eve of the Jubilee Assembly (1998) it would seem that there were as many questions to be asked around the context and future of interreligious engagement as had ever been the case, perhaps even more so. As it happened, in October 1999 a consultation was undertaken as a continuation of the earlier (1994) religion, law and society dialogue. Under the title of 'Religious Freedom, Community Rights and Individual Rights: a Christian–Muslim Perspective' this conference also addressed the issue of Christian and Muslim missions, which was first raised at the 1976 Chambésy consultation. A Christian–Muslim dialogue advisory meeting, which took place in Cairo in February 1999, made an assessment of the major trends in Christian–Muslim relations and suggested priorities for future dialogue events. Evaluating the work of the OIRR in respect of Christian–Muslim relations – as with other areas – is no easy task as issues of criteria and perspective from which evaluations can be made are highly variable.

7 Conclusion: Cusp of the New Millennium

The focus on relational engagement with Islam that developed during the last decade of the twentieth century was due, in part at least, to the end of the Cold War. This led to Islam occupying 'for the Christian West the place that Communism had previously played as an antagonist'.[71] On the cusp of the new

Islam in Europe Committee of the Conference of European Churches and the Council of Catholic Bishops' Conferences in Europe; The Project on Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa. 'The OIRR was closely associated to the work of the Orthodox Centre of the Ecumenical Patriarch in convening, organizing and publishing the acts of a series of Orthodox-Muslim academic dialogue conferences'. Mitri, in 'From Canberra to Harare', p. 10.

69 Mitri, in 'From Canberra to Harare', p. 11.

70 Ibid.

71 Clare Amos, 'Vatican and World Council of Churches Initiatives: Weaving Interreligious Threads on Ecumenical Looms' in Paul Hedges (Ed), *Contemporary Muslim–Christian*

millennium there was certainly much dialogical engagement taking place. The year 2000 was particularly active with ecumenical Christian–Muslim conferences on 'Inter-Communal tensions' held in Beirut in March, and again in Cyprus in November. A significant bi-lateral consultation was convened under the auspices of the WCC, in November 2000, to review the work of Christian–Muslim dialogue events that had taken place since 1991 and, as a result, a document drawing together the questions, reflections and conclusions of almost a decade of work was later published.[72] Its Introduction notes the decade or so of discussions had included reflection on 'sometimes divisive issues of religion, law and society, human rights, religious freedom, community rights, mission and da'wah and communal tensions'.[73] As a result, and as noted above, in the latter stages of the twentieth century 'discussion between Christians and Muslims had therefore focused on issues of practical living rather than theological differences'.[74]

Indeed, in the course of the last three decades of the twentieth century, the nature of ecumenical engagement with Islam had shifted markedly from dialogue, especially theological discursive dialogue, to promoting good relationships in the quest for a greater experience of harmony and peaceful co-existence in the many lived situations in which Christians and Muslims find themselves in. While these are notable goals and values in themselves, the shunting of dialogical engagement and reflection to the side-lines arguably left a large gap. Indeed, I would contend the placing of dialogical engagement in the 'too hard' basket had an undermining effect even within contexts where positive interrelationships were being advocated and developed. Even as, on the one hand, the wider situation of Christian–Muslim encounter has steadily worsened in many places, on the other hand there has been a growing and, significantly, deepening Christian–Muslim dialogical engagement addressing theological issues either with, or even before, the addressing of social and political issues: a dialogical turn has arguably taken place. But more of that below, in Part 2. In the meantime, it is significant that even now, as Amos records, there is a notable absence of any formal WCC statement of the nature and goals of its interreligious work, certainly nothing that compares with the 'Nature and

Encounters: Developments, Diversity, and Dialogues (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 194.

72 'Striving Together in Dialogue: A Muslim–Christian Call to Reflection and Action'; see <http://www.oikumen.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/intereligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/interreligious-trust-and-respect/striving-together-in-dialogue> (Accessed 17 March, 2017).

73 Ibid.

74 Amos, 'Vatican and World Council of Churches Initiatives', p. 194.

Goals' statement of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID).[75]

Nevertheless, the work of the WCC during the latter part of the twentieth century in regards to interreligious dialogue in general, and engaging with Islam in particular, has created a considerable fund of collective wisdom, experience, and record. Amos reflects such an overview in her summation of the – at least implicit – objectives of the WCC's interreligious work to include providing theological advice and resource by 'exploring why interreligious engagement is important, indeed perhaps vital, for Christians in our contemporary world in which the reality of religious plurality cannot be ignored'; the building and sustaining of 'ongoing bi-lateral relationships with significant groups and organisations representing other religions'; and working 'collaboratively with representatives of other religions for the common human good, especially in concerns linked to peace and justice'.[76] Relationship building and facilitating cooperative endeavours have long been at the forefront of engagement with Islam. These pragmatic dimensions, which once eclipsed earlier initial discursive theological interests, have been since re-joined by theological reflection – something which marks the shift from the twentieth to the twenty-first century in terms of the ecumenical ethos of Christian–Muslim engagement, as well as interreligious dialogue more generally. However, before exploring such developments and initiatives we will examine, in the next two chapters, the role and activities of the RCC through the work and offices of the Vatican.

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75 Amos, 'Vatican and World Council of Churches Initiatives', p. 187.

76 Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

Vatican II: Catholic Groundwork for Dialogue

Vatican II, the Second Vatican Council (the first such council – Vatican I – having met in Rome in the late nineteenth century), was a twentieth century meeting of Catholic bishops from around the globe. Convened by Pope John XXIII, it met for several sessions at Vatican City, Rome, from 1962 to 1965. It was during this highly significant Council that the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) set its course for entry into the waters of interreligious dialogue.[1] The decrees and documents of this Council that addressed relationships with other religions, and a new understanding of the place of those religions within the Catholic theological worldview, marked the opening up of the Roman Catholic Church to dialogical relationship with peoples of other faiths. This development took place in the context of a then innovative and encompassing task: the 'building of a dialogical church'.[2] Embracing dialogue as a relational modality was applied not only with respect to interaction with other religions; it was part of a wider-ranging ecclesial reform and development.[3] So it is to Vatican II, and its epoch-making documentary outcomes that attention needs to be given as it laid the foundation for all that has followed, including the engagement of the Roman Catholic Church with Islam and Muslims.[4]

Of the many documentary outcomes from Vatican II that signalled quite remarkable changes, in a wide variety of areas of Church practice and doctrinal stance, there were some which both directly and indirectly paved the way for the engagement of the RCC in interreligious dialogue.[5] Since the epoch-

1 Cf. Douglas Pratt, *The Church and other Faiths: The World Council of Churches, the Vatican, and Interreligious Dialogue* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010).

2 Bradford E. Hinze, *Practices of Dialogue in the Roman Catholic Church* (New York & London: Continuum, 2006), p. 6.

3 For an important relevant study, see Ann M. Nolan, *A Privileged Moment: Dialogue in the Language of the Second Vatican Council 1962-1965* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006).

4 See also: Douglas Pratt, 'The Vatican in Dialogue with Islam: Inclusion and Engagement', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 21/3 (July 2010): 245-262.

5 These are: *Nostra Aetate* (*NA*), *Lumen Gentium* (*LG*), *Dei Verbum* (*DV*), *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (*AA*), *Dignitatis Humanae* (*DH*), *Ad Gentes* (*AG*), and *Gaudium et Spes* (*GS*). For a detailed discussion of the documentary productivity of Vatican II see, among others, Risto Jukko, *The Trinity in Unity in Christian-Muslim Relations: The Work of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

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making Vatican II, engagement in interreligious dialogue and interfaith relations has developed and expanded. Other faiths, previously and primarily the object of missionary outreach for proselytising purposes, have been reappraised as valued partners in dialogue. Islam, once regarded as the hostile 'other' to be held at bay became, aside from Judaism, the first among the faiths with which the Church engages in dialogue. In this chapter I outline and discuss initiatives taken to commence dialogical activities with other faiths more generally, together with the precipitating issue of relations with Jews and Judaism which, in similar fashion to the WCC, provides a key contextual background for the RCC's development of dialogue with Islam. Critical to the overall development of the interreligious work of the RCC are the pertinent principal and subsidiary documents of Vatican II. I review these closely, albeit succinctly, together with the particular impact of Pope Paul VI. I then give a brief consideration of early developments of a Catholic theology of dialogue, which substantially governs relations of the Catholic Church to Islam as well as other faiths to this day, and I close the chapter with a brief comment and observation on the Vatican's then emerging dialogical relations with Islam.

1 Initiatives for Dialogue

For centuries the RCC had lived, in effect, wholly within its own worldview framework; resistant to winds of change and slow to adapt. It had long been content with the status quo of received tradition within which any modification was carefully contained. And in this context any acknowledgment of a religious 'other' – even other Christian Churches – was, at best, decidedly muted. To the extent that any encounter with another religion might be entertained, for whatever reason, the official response was one of considerable caution. No salvific value was accorded to other religions, and the notion of establishing some kind of dialogical relationship with any religious 'other' was a fringe idea in the extreme. So it was that, prior to the Second Vatican Council, in respect of other faiths and any engagement with their followers, other than for purposes of evangelism,

> the attitude of the Catholic Church was usually one of prudence and hesitation. The feeling was widespread in the Church that it would be difficult to avoid forms of practical syncretism in such encounters, and

> that participation in multi-lateral organizations would in itself indicate an indifferentist or relativist approach to religion.[6]

Thus, up until the 1960s religious exclusivism held unassailable sway: the doors and windows of the Roman Catholic institutional edifice were fixed firmly shut. However, with the advent of the courageous and far-sighted Pontiff, Pope John XXIII (1958–1963), the windows of tradition were thrown open to allow a breeze of new thinking and fresh approaches to blow through. A new light of sensitivity then broke in to illuminate anew the doctrines and practices of the ancient institution. In consequence, doors once shut to relations with those of another faith were opened: a new era had dawned. How did it come about?

Not long into his five-year pontificate Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council which commenced in 1962.[7] However, he died in June 1963, long before the Council had concluded (1965). His successor, Pope Paul VI, soon took up the reigns of papal office and saw the Council through to its ending. Throughout his pontificate Paul VI was guided by, and stamped his interpretive refinement on, the directives and pronouncements that emerged from the deliberations of this Council. Significantly, it was this Pope who, even before Vatican II had concluded and, indeed, ahead of the promulgation of ground-breaking document *Nostra Aetate* that endorsed and spurred the new era of interreligious dialogue so far as Roman Catholicism is concerned (see more below), established the Secretariat for Non-Christians (SNC). This was to be the Vatican's office for interreligious dialogue, designed to give expression to the Church's desire for a new way of relating to people of other faiths, especially Islam. In his 'Message to the Faithful' on the Feast of Pentecost 1964, in which the announcement to establish the SNC was reiterated, Paul VI made reference to the wider application of dialogue as a motif of relational engagement pervading much of the outreach life of the Church, and he drew attention to 'the effort the Church is making to come closer to the members of other religions' whereby none 'will any longer be a complete stranger to this Rome'.[8]

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6 PCID, *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds which Unite Us: 16 years of Christian-Muslim dialogue* (Vatican City: PCID, 1994), p. 89.

7 Walter M. Abbott, S.J. (Gen Ed), *The Documents of Vatican II* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967).

8 Francesco Gioia (Ed), *Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church (1963–1995)* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media / PCID, 1997), p. 122. Note: For the sake of convenience, for the most part I have cited, or referred to, official documents as recorded in this work. A more recent edition – which does not affect the documents I cite herein – has since been published: Francesco Gioia (Ed), *Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the*

The SNC was charged with investigating and establishing dialogical relations with religions other than Judaism – that was accounted for elsewhere within the bureaucracy of the Church. A Commission for Islam was joined to the SNC virtually from the latter's inception. This resulted in a special adjunct office for the promoting of dialogical relations with Muslims. Dialogue with Islam not only took on a more prominent profile early on within the life of the Secretariat, it also came to take a prominent role within the cause of interreligious dialogue as such. Even as the SNC was being established, the Vatican issued, through it, a 'Greetings for Ramadan' message to Muslims to coincide with *Eid al-Fitr* which marks the end of the annual Fasting month. This custom has ever since continued. So it was that this most significant dimension of engagement in interreligious dialogue, relationship with Muslims and Islam, was quickly embedded at the centre of the dialogical life and work of the Vatican and has continued to be a major focus of work and energy to the present day.

Some years later, as we will see below, the Secretariat was re-constituted and renamed the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID). The 'Islam Desk' has remained a central component. The interreligious task vis-à-vis Islam has ever called forth a very specific and dedicated attention and response. Clare Amos notes that the establishment of this office of the Holy See – 'even if at that time with the not entirely positive title of Secretariat for Non-Christians' – nonetheless, in concert with the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate* a little over a year later, 'somehow helped give the WCC and its member churches courage eventually to establish the WCC's own office for interreligious dialogue'.[9] At this level, from the mid-1960s, Christian engagement with Islam has been truly an ecumenical journey. But it is, for both the WCC and the Vatican, a journey that is in some sense also linked or related to the question of relations with Judaism.

Catholic Church from the Second Vatican Council to John Paul II, 1963-2005 (Boston: Pauline Books and Media / PCID, 2006). All relevant documents can also be accessed via the Vatican website, <http://w2.vatican.va/>.

9 Clare Amos, 'Vatican and World council of Churches Initiatives: Weaving Interreligious Threads on Ecumenical Looms', *in* Paul Hedges (Ed), *Contemporary Muslim-Christian-Encounters: Developments, Diversity and Dialogues* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 185.

2 Relations with Judaism: A Dialogical Precursor

Although it was the question of relationship with Judaism which prompted the Second Vatican Council to take up the wider interreligious dialogue initiative in the first place, this arena of interreligious engagement, unlike the case of the WCC, was always treated as a special sphere of concern distinct from the office created to engage with all other religions. And it was in the context of this latter office that the particular focus of concern of the Vatican for dialogue with Islam was focussed. As noted above, the development of a dialogical stance toward other religions, and the inception of a new institutional structure to head that, came relatively late in the process of Vatican II. Indeed, as indicated, the institutional expression of this innovation lay outside the purview of Vatican II proper: the establishment of the SNC was by way of a direct decree of Pope Paul VI. But what prompted the emergence of this new interfaith direction?

The key to understanding lies in the aftermath of World War II and the vexed question of relations with Jews and Judaism. Antisemitism had long been, in effect, the default position of Christianity. Within the West it had reached its apex with the European Holocaust (*Shoah* – destruction) associated with the Second World War. The full scale of this horrendous event soon emerged to assail Christian sensibilities in the years immediately following the cessation of hostilities. As Daniel Madigan has pertinently noted: 'The horror of the Nazi attempts to exterminate the Jewish people during the Second World War had left many with a strong sense that the traditional teaching had played a role in fomenting the anti-Jewish sentiment that made the Shoah politically and practically feasible'.[10] Profound questions and theological implications concerning the outcomes of antisemitism and, *inter alia*, of what to do about interfaith relations with Jews began to be raised. All this comprised a pressing issue for Pope John XXIII and so was included in the agenda for the Council. The formulation of an appropriate statement in respect to this issue was entrusted to Cardinal Augustine Bea, head of the already established Secretariat for Christian Unity.[11]

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10 Daniel A. Madigan SJ, '*Nostra Aetate* and the questions it chose to leave open', *Gregorianum* 87/4 (2006): 782.

11 In 1960 the Pope asked Cardinal Bea "to consider how the topic of the Jewish people could be incorporated" into a draft document on ecumenism then in preparation for the forthcoming council. Bradford E. Hinze, *Practices of Dialogue in the Roman Catholic Church*, p. 222; cf. Edward Cardinal Cassidy, *Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2005).

Significantly, the pivotal Vatican II document, *Nostra Aetate* (*NA*), began as a declaration intended to articulate a new relationship of the Church to Jews and Judaism.[12] In the end, however, it was 'extended to cover Muslims and finally to include relations with all religions... Judaism, Christianity and Islam have closer ties with one another than with other religions. The person of Abraham provides the meeting point'.[13] It was not only the negative experience of Nazism and the Shoah that had prompted a re-think on the Church's relations to other religions, there was also by now 'an accumulation of positive relations with other religious believers and a more profound study of their traditions (which) had contributed to the growing sense that the way forward lay in a more explicit teaching of respect, which would in its turn make possible greater collaboration towards the common good'.[14] Nevertheless, in respect of its reference to Jews and Judaism, Gerhard Riegner, formerly Secretary General of the World Jewish Congress, identified *NA* as having established eight major principles, namely; 1) the 'spiritual bond between the Church and the Jewish people', 2) that the Christian Old Testament has been received 'through the people with whom God concluded the Ancient Covenant'; 3) that the roots of Christianity lie within Judaism; 4) that as God does not repent of gifts made and calls issued, therefore the Jews remain 'most dear to God'; 5) that the events of Christ's Passion 'cannot be charged against all Jews', neither all contemporaneously, nor all since as a people; 6) that the Jews 'are not rejected or accursed by God'; 7) that the Church repudiates all 'hatred, persecution, displays of antisemitism at any time and by anyone'; and 8) that 'mutual understanding and respect' are to be fostered via study and dialogue.[15] For Reigner, this closing note on mutual respect constitutes 'the guiding principle in interreligious relations' and, indeed, that the declaration itself 'constitutes a real milestone in Christian–Jewish relations and opens a new vision for the future'.[16]

In regards to the organisational and bureaucratic structures that obtain within the Holy See, the status of the Christian–Jewish 'Office' was soon boosted, for Paul VI established a Commission for Religious Relations with Jews to continue and further the work begun earlier on the basis of now being

12 Cf. Cassidy, *Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue*, esp. pp. 125ff.

13 PCID, *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds*, p. 102.

14 Madigan, '*Nostra Aetate*', p. 782.

15 See Marcus Braybrooke, *Pilgrimage of Hope: One Hundred Years of Global Interfaith Dialogue* (London: SCM Press, 1992), 200; see also Gerhard Reigner in *Fifteen Years of Catholic-Jewish Dialogue* 1970-1985 (Libreria Editrice Vaticana & Libreria Editrice Lateranense, Rome 1988) (n.6), pp. 277-78.

16 Reigner, *Fifteen Years*, p. 278, as cited in Braybrooke, *Pilgrimage of Hope,* p. 201.

'attached to but independent of the Secretariat for Christian Unity'.[17] Thus, rather than being subsumed within the purview of the Secretariat for Non-Christians, the matter of relations with Jews was addressed under a separate mandate, but linked to the work of the Vatican on Christian Unity. Marcus Braybrooke remarks that such elevation of status and redefined linking – as opposed, for example, to what might otherwise be deemed the logical choice of including the Commission within the responsibilities of the Secretariat for Non-Christians 'reflected a recognition of the close bond between the church and the Jewish people and the traditional view that the first schism in the church was the break with Judaism'.[18] Yet it needs to be noted that earlier ecumenical developments between Christianity and Judaism had not found favour with the Vatican. For example, in 1950, during the process of formation of the International Council for Christians and Jews (ICCJ), a directive was issued from the Vatican to warn Catholics from involvement with this new movement advocating détente and relationship between the Church and Jews. This caution was given on the grounds that such a movement represented 'an "indifferentist" organization, which tended to ignore or minimize the difference of religious faith and practice'.[19] The fear of relativism and syncretism, and concern for the loss of religious identity and authenticity, seemed to have predominated at this important juncture. While the Vatican would prefer an exclusively religious dialogue, Jews raised political issues, often ones related to Israel.[20]

3 Some Principal Dialogue Documents of Vatican II

The single most important document to come from Vatican II, so far as interreligious dialogue is concerned, was *Nostra Aetate* (*NA*), the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions. On the one hand, it 'marks the beginning of a fresh approach of the Catholic Church to members of other faiths'; on the other, the Council's thinking was not entirely new: 'the sensitive approach (already) suggested by some Catholic theologians was given official approval'.[21] This epoch-making, relatively short statement (only some 1200

17 See Geoffrey Wigoder, *Jewish-Christian Relations since the Second World War* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1990), p. 82.
18 Braybrooke, *Pilgrimage of Hope*, p. 198.
19 Braybrooke, *Pilgrimage of Hope,* p. 186.
20 Braybrooke, *Pilgrimage of Hope,* p. 198.
21 Braybrooke, *Pilgrimage of Hope,* p. 247.

words of text in its original Latin) 'laid the basis for a new field of theological thought and pastoral practice in the Catholic Church. ...(inasmuch as)...the Council Fathers decided to include in their deliberations a reflection on other religions and what can build unity among the followers of various faiths'.[22] Indeed, Cardinal Bea, who presented the document to the Council, is reported to have said 'Unless I am mistaken, this is the first time in the Church's history that a Council has in such a solemn manner enunciated principles with regard to (other religions)'.[23]

Promulgated in October 1965, the text is divided into five sections, or chapters.[24] The first comprises an introduction in which the motif of the timeliness of 'examining with greater care' the relationship of the Church to other religions, in the context of the commonality and transcendent unity of the human community which yet displays great religious diversity, sets the tone. This diversity is elaborated in the second section which makes mention, in particular, of Hinduism and Buddhism, and alludes to other religions more generally. Significantly, within this section there is found a pivotal passage which states: 'The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men (sic)'.[25] Very clearly an attitude of openness to the 'other' is here signalled. However, this significant, if somewhat general, indication of relational openness is followed immediately by a delimiting statement: 'Yet she proclaims and is duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). In him, in whom God reconciled all things to himself (cf. 2 Co. 5:18-19), men (sic) find the fullness of their religious life'.[26] Openness to other faiths, wherein is urged 'with prudence and charity...discussion and collaboration with members of other religions', is not absolute: it is rather a relative stance that insists on a clear perspective of identity and mission whence the Church's openness to interfaith dialogue is to proceed. As one commentator has noted, *NA* 'did not deal with the theological issues involved in relating to people of other faiths', rather 'it advocated openness to other religions *along*

22 PCID, *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds*, p. 6.

23 *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancta Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, Roma, 1970–77, vol. III, part viii, p. 650; see Madigan 'Nostra Aetate', p. 781.

24 See Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue*, pp. 37-40.

25 *NA* cl. 5; see Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue*, p. 38.

26 See Gioia, ibid.

with an uncompromising stand on the uniqueness of Christ'.[27] The question of the unspoken issues or 'silence' of Nostra Aetate, and so Vatican II, on significant theological matters pertinent to relations with people of other faiths, and indeed to any advance in interreligious détente as such, is discussed by Madigan who draws attention to recent critical reflection undertaken by Gavin D'Costa. In respect to whether or not other religions offer genuinely salvific ways or structures, 'the silence is not to be understood as leaving the question open, but that it should be interpreted rather as implicitly closing the discussion'.[28]

The third section of the declaration focuses on Islam wherein it speaks of the Church's 'high regard for the Muslims' and goes on to state:

> They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to men. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own. Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus as a prophet, his Virgin Mother they also honour, and even at times devoutly invoke. Further, they await the day of judgement and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this reason they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms-deeds and fasting.[29]

NA then acknowledges the 'many quarrels and dissensions' that have obtained in the past between Christians and Muslims, yet seeks to go beyond that past and urges 'that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding'.[30] The fourth section speaks at relative length of the relationship of the Church to Judaism. The essential Hebraic heritage of Christianity is acknowledged, going back to the indissoluble link with the patriarch Abraham. Further, a reminder is given that Jesus and the Apostles were all of them Jews. On the basis of 'a common spiritual heritage' the Vatican Council encouraged 'further

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27 Wesley Ariarajah, *Hindus and Christians: A Century of Protestant Ecumenical Thought* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi; and Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1991), p. 129 (*emphasis added*).

28 Madigan, 'Nostra Aetate', p. 783; cf. Gavin D'Costa, 'Vatican II and the status of other religions as salvific structures' in L. Bergin (Ed), *Faith, Word and Culture* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2004), pp. 9-24.

29 NA cl. 7, Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue*, p. 38.

30 NA cl. 8, Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue*, p. 39.

mutual understanding and appreciation'.[31] Significantly, *NA* states unequivocally that

> …neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during (Christ's) passion… (Although) the Church is the new People of God, yet the Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed… Indeed, the Church reproves every form of persecution…she deplores all hatreds, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism levelled at any time or from any source against the Jews.[32]

NA concludes with three short paragraphs that comprise its fifth section, entitled 'Universal Fraternity' – so echoing the motif of the Introduction: the common bonds of humanity by virtue of being created by God. And it adds, as a contextual rider to the call for dialogical relationship as a primary modality of encounter with peoples of other faiths, the clear reprobation of any form of discrimination or harassment 'on the basis of … race, colour, condition in life or religion'.[33]

The production of such a significant statement was by no means a straightforward affair. Indeed, a somewhat chequered history lies behind the final document.[34] It began with Pope John's desire that the Vatican Council issue a statement on the question of the Church's relations with Jews, as noted above. Initially, such a statement was to be included as a separate – fourth – chapter of the Decree on Ecumenism. However, as it happened, the second session of the Council had only enough time to give formal approval to the first three chapters of the drafted decree. By the time of the third session, at which the held-over chapters were to be formally approved, two counters to the original draft had been raised: on the one hand a perspective that a statement on Jewish-Christian relations lay outside the purview of ecumenism; on the other the concern that 'any statement about Jews would offend Arab countries, where Christians were a tiny minority'.[35] This latter proved a singular sticking point, but it was also a fulcrum enabling a wider consideration to take place. A revision was accordingly prepared and approved – the document that is *Nostra Aetate* – in which rather less was said about relations with Jews but

31 *NA* cl. 13, Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue*, p. 40.
32 *NA* cl. 14 & 15; Gioia, ibid.
33 *NA* cl. 19; Gioia, ibid.
34 See Risto Jukko, *The Trinity in Unity*, pp. 6-9, for a concise yet substantial discussion of the history of the development and promulgation of *NA*.
35 Braybrooke, *Pilgrimage of Hope,* p. 247.

considerably more about relations to other religious people including, in particular, Muslims.

At the time, NA may have occasioned some disappointment at what was left unsaid; but it nevertheless stands as a most significant document in Roman Catholic history – indeed of Western, and even global Christianity as such – for what it did say. In the event, NA proved a decisive turning point in relations between the Church of Rome and the Jews, and it marked a point of radical closure on centuries of a default position of hostility to both Jews and Muslims. Pope Paul VI actively promoted NA and in so doing opened up within the RCC a wholly new approach and attitude towards other religions in general, and to Muslims and the religion of Islam in particular. In his Christmas radio message of 1963, in which he spoke directly to Muslims and Jews, the Pope expressed 'feelings of respect and love' and wished them 'happiness and peace'. Such papal rapprochement was a welcome development and received most warmly within the Islamic world.[36] So, with NA, the first formal step by the Church of Rome to genuine and mutual dialogue with other religions was taken; an open attitude to other faiths was clearly encouraged by the Second Vatican Council. But, as it happened, in this regard NA is not the only relevant document. Other documents to emerge from Vatican II that had a bearing on the new stance of the Church towards other faiths and interreligious dialogical engagement included, in particular, *Lumen Gentium, Dei Verbum, Apostolicam Actuositatem, Dignitatis Humanae, Ad Gentes,* and *Gaudium et Spes*. Even before the promulgation of NA, Vatican II had made a significant overture to Muslims. Within the context of the 1964 document *Lumen Gentium* – the 'Dogmatic Constitution on the Church' – the salvific validity of other faiths, and especially that of Islam, is given high recognition. Braybrooke remarks in respect to the relation of *Lumen Gentium* (LG) to the NA Declaration that

> Although the Declaration recognizes a search for God in other religions and mentions dialogue and collaboration, no attempt is made to define it. It is set within the context of the search for human unity and the assumption that such unity is ultimately to be found in Christ, to whom the Church is called to witness. Whilst the approach to members of other religions is to be by way of friendship and co-operation, the Declaration does not imply any alteration of the Church's self-understanding, and indeed, should be read in the light of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*).[37]

36 Cf. PCID, *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds*, p. 7.

37 Braybrooke, *Pilgrimage of Hope*, p. 248.

The explicit noting of Islam within LG and its inclusion of Muslims within the divine plan of salvation constitutes the first significant documentary reference to Islam to emanate from Vatican II. The scene was thus set for a fuller development, which resulted in *Nostra Aetate*.[38]

Issued a year before NA, LG begins with an affirmation of the Church as the sacramental vehicle wherein humanity may attain 'full unity in Christ'[39] and speaks of the universality of the One People of God and, *inter alia*, the reconciling and in-drawing mission of the Catholic Church.[40] Yet the salvific validity of other faiths, and especially that of Islam, is given high recognition: 'the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place among whom are the Muslims: these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God'.[41] It is perhaps worth citing clauses 16 and 17 of LG in full, for they bring together the outreach of dialogical relationship to other faiths, on the one hand, with the missionary role of the Church, on the other. Clause 16 states:

> Finally, those who have not yet received the Gospel are related in various ways to the people of God. In the first place we must recall the people to whom the testament and the promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh. On account of their fathers this people remains most dear to God, for God does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues. But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator.
>
> In the first place amongst these there are the Muslims, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind. Nor is God far distant from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, for it is He who gives to all men life and breath and all things, and as Saviour wills that all men be saved.
>
> Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace

38 See PCID, *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds*, p. 5.
39 LG cl. 1; See Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue,* p. 41.
40 LG cl. 13; Gioia, ibid.
41 LG cl. 16; Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue,* p. 42.

> strive to live a good life. Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel. She knows that it is given by Him who enlightens all men so that they may finally have life.
>
> But often men, deceived by the Evil One, have become vain in their reasonings and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, serving the creature rather than the Creator. Or some there are who, living and dying in this world without God, are exposed to final despair. Wherefore to promote the glory of God and procure the salvation of all of these, and mindful of the command of the Lord, 'Preach the Gospel to every creature', the Church fosters the missions with care and attention.[42]

And Clause 17 follows through with:

> As the Son was sent by the Father, so He too sent the Apostles, saying: 'Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And behold I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world'. The Church has received this solemn mandate of Christ to proclaim the saving truth from the apostles and must carry it out to the very ends of the earth…

Within the context of holding together a tension between, on the one hand, a wish to affirm people of other religions and, on the other, an inherent and imperative of mission, a generous spirit of inclusivism pervades LG to the extent that those who have not heard and responded to the gospel message may yet be deemed, in accord with their own particular religious quest, to be imbued with value and truth that is either complementary to, or preparatory for, explicit knowledge of God through the mission of Gospel proclamation. The integrity of the religious other is respectfully affirmed, while the priority of the Christian salvific mission is yet asserted. This is made explicit in the clause that speaks of the missionary character of the Church as the task of incorporation into Christ,[43] and the concomitant clause on the nature of Christian vocation *per se* as the outworking of salvation by way of an active striving to incorporate all of humanity within the Body (so Church) of Christ.[44] Thus,

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42 *Lumen Gentium* – see: <http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html> (Accessed 17 March, 2017).

43 LG cl. 17; Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue,* p. 43.

44 LG cl. 48; Gioia, ibid.

even as dialogical openness to the religious other is being endorsed, its setting within the evangelising mission of the Church was being made clear. This would lead to a tension requiring further work of clarification and assessment; arguably this continues to be the case.

4 Subsidiary Dialogue Documents of Vatican II

An encyclical belongs to the teaching office – the *Magisterium* – of the issuing Pope and is to be distinguished from those documents of the Vatican Council itself which, to a greater or lesser degree, addressed the matter of the Church's new attitude toward, and possibilities of relationship with, other faiths. A number of such conciliar documents emerged from Vatican II apart from the two already mentioned (*NA*, *LG*). Two were issued in November 1965. *Dei Verbum* (*DV*) made reference to the task of preparing editions of Christian Scripture for use by non-Christians.[45] *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (*AA*) advocated, at a practical level at least, cooperation of the laity with the followers of other religions.[46] A stress placed on the universal value of religious liberty, asserting 'the right to religious freedom is based on the very dignity of the human person' and, by extension, the right of communities to live out their religious life without fear or favour, was advanced in the document *Dignitatis Humanae* (*DH*) issued in December, 1965.[47] This is arguably the most significant of the subsidiary documents as it sets the wider value and context which challenges religious exclusivism, namely the advocacy of religious liberty. The document *Ad Gentes* (*AG*), also issued in December 1965, addressed the matter of the mission of the Church in respect to the 'universal plan of God for the salvation of mankind', and includes also reference to dialogue as both method and task.[48]

The implicit invitation to other religions to engage in dialogical conversation is to be entertained alongside, and in the full realisation of, an uncompromising proclamation of Christian identity and witness: the Church's essential missionary calling is its *sine qua non*. Risto Jukko observes that, along with the warm recommendation of 'dialogue with non-Christian religions' given by Vatican II,[49] a perspectival duality and subordinate inclusiveness

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45 *DV* cl. 25; Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue,* p. 44.

46 *AA* cl. 27; Gioia, ibid.

47 See *DH* cl. 2, 3 and 4; see Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue,* pp. 44-47.

48 See Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue,* pp. 47-55.

49 Jukko, *The Trinity in Unity*, p. 3.

marked this new Vatican development: the 'possibility of salvation in the non Christian religions' was certainly allowed for but only within the context of an emphasis on 'belonging to the Church' as an essential 'condition of salvation'; for the Church is, in and of itself by divine warrant, 'the universal sacrament of salvation'.[50] Thus an inherent tension quickly emerged. On the one hand, there was an affirmation of genuine dialogical intercourse, with all that that portends, in respect to mutual acceptance and so on – an exercise in applying the 'Golden Rule' as found in most religions.

On the other hand there is the seemingly intractable assertion of Christian identity with its inherent impulse to evangelical proclamation and concomitant quest for conversion: the leitmotif of the Great Commission (Mt 28:16-20). How this tension, between 'rule' and 'commission', gets played out in the years since Vatican II and *NA* will be a recurring theme in the work of the SNC as well as for the wider Roman Catholic Church. Indeed, it continues a current and ever-pressing issue. Nevertheless, the importance of Vatican II for the Roman Catholic Church and Christian theology more generally in regards to the attitude of the Church to non-Christians cannot be underestimated: 'Through its documents – especially *Nostra Aetate* and *Lumen Gentium* – Vatican II made a positive official pronouncement vis-à-vis the non-Christian religions for the first time in the Church's history'.[51]

5 The Impact of Pope Paul VI

There were many occasions during his pontificate when Paul VI did one or other, or both, of two things: affirming interreligious dialogue as part and parcel of the Church's new directions in its life and mission post-Vatican II, and reasserting the priority of evangelistic mission in the context of which the scope and expectations in respect to interreligious dialogue were delimited. His initial encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam* (*ES*), addressed the then contemporary nature and mission of the Church. In this document can be found 'the theological and pastoral bases for a new commitment of the Church to meet and listen to other believers and to come to mutual understanding'.[52] The practice of dialogue is linked to the very heart of the Church's mission; indeed, the encyclical effectively reconfigures evangelistic mission as 'dialogue'. But this is a two-edged sword: such close linking arguably means dialogue is both habili-

50 Jukko, *The Trinity in Unity*, p. 5.
51 Jukko, *The Trinity in Unity*, p. 22.
52 PCID, *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds*, p. 5

tated and hobbled. Certainly a major issue is articulated; one which received close attention, yet it continued to be a lively and theologically contentious question down to the present day.

Interreligious dialogue – indeed, 'dialogue with the world' – is to be enjoined because of the message the Church is charged to bring to the world. Paul VI spoke of dialogue not so much as a goal or activity in itself, but as a modality of operation, or disposition, which marks the manner wherein the Church ought to engage in its multifarious mission. Admittedly, the encyclical did not seek to give a full treatment to interreligious dialogue *per se*. Rather it set out to signal direction and value to both dialogical method and development broadly conceived and applied. However, having spoken of the Church's dialogue with the wider world of humanity and noting the difficulty of attempting dialogical engagement within an atheistic context, the encyclical then focuses upon dialogue within the context of the 'circle of believers in God' in which regard special mention is made of Jews and Muslims, together with a muted reference to 'the great Afro-Asiatic religions'.[53] In his 'Message to the World' delivered on January 6, 1964, the Pope, having reaffirmed the unique claim of Christianity in respect to its message and mission – 'a mission of friendship in the midst of humanity, a mission of understanding, of encouragement' – greeted in particular 'those who profess monotheism and with Us direct their religious worship to the one true God'.[54] Although the focus was on those religions which, with Christianity, may be designated monotheistic – thus reflecting the beginnings of Catholic interreligious dialogue in respect to the mono-theistic milieu of Judaism and Islam – the point, nevertheless, was that Paul VI was articulating the validity and acceptability of the way of dialogue as the *modus operandi* of interreligious relations to, and on behalf of, the Catholic Church. Conversation with the religious 'other', especially with Jews and Muslims, had emerged as at least a functional alternative to the normative intent and mission activity of seeking the conversion of the other.

There are a number of other documents and encyclicals issued by Paul VI that also contain significant references or components relevant to Christian–Muslim dialogue. *Spiritus Paracliti* hints at the mission of the Church 'stretching out even beyond the confines of the Christian religion' albeit within the context of an inclusive hope.[55] Dialogue is also affirmed in the document *Populorum Progressio* as being centred upon human relationships; value is accorded to practical cooperative effort between Christians and non-Christians for the

53 *ES* clauses 107 & 108; see Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue,* pp. 78-79.

54 See Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue,* pp. 118-119.

55 Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue,* p. 63

common human good.[56] *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae* included a succinct statement concerning the structure and purpose of SNC and articulated the attachment of an Office for relations with Muslims to it.[57] As noted above, it was always the special province of the SNC to attend to the relationship of the Church with Islam and, without doubt, Paul VI dramatically advanced papal contact with Muslims and the Islamic world at both the personal and the diplomatic levels. Indeed, Paul VI is credited as being the first Pope 'to open the doors of the Vatican' to increasing numbers of Muslim delegations.[58] Throughout the 1960s Pope Paul VI made a number of visits during which he met formally with Muslim leaders. He spoke to a large public gathering of Muslims in Uganda in 1969, where he stated: 'You thus enable us to manifest here our high respect for the faith you profess, and our hope that what we hold in common may serve to unite Christians and Muslims ever more closely, in true brotherhood'.[59] What Pope John XXIII had initiated, Paul VI gave shape and substance and contributed much to the shaping of Catholic perspectives on dialogue.

6 Theology of Dialogue: initial developments

At the time of Vatican II there was no theological evaluation of other religions undertaken in any formal way by the Catholic Church. However, in the lead up to Vatican II a way forward had been signalled in terms of the anthropological theology of Karl Rahner and also the dialogical philosophy of Martin Buber that had influenced theologians such as Hans Urs von Balthasar.[60] As Nolan observes, by the time of the Second Vatican Council, 'dialogue' had emerged as a theological leitmotiv 'newly taken up from existentialist religious thought' and 'had become a word of great rhetorical power'.[61] The idea and application of dialogue was quite pervasive; it pertained to much more than the issue of relations to other faiths and, furthermore, its use within Vatican documents was arguably confused.[62] Issues of rhetoric and interpretation notwithstanding, it was Rahner who arguably provided the chief theological support for the

56 Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue,* p. 80
57 Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue,* pp. 80-81.
58 PCID, *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds*, p. 11
59 PCID, *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds*, p. 7
60 Cf. Nolan, *A Privileged Moment*, pp. 156ff.
61 Nolan, *A Privileged Moment*, p. 174.
62 Nolan, *A Privileged Moment*, pp. 175ff.

change of stance towards other religions to emanate from Vatican II. He advanced the view that people of other religions could be regarded as 'anonymous Christians' and that non-Christian religions could be seen as having a measure of theological validity by virtue of being 'ordinary ways of salvation', albeit in contrast to the unique and special way of Jesus Christ.[63] Dupuis notes that Rahner, 'on the basis of his philosophical and theological analysis of the "supernatural existential" innate in the very humanity of every human being', was able to assert 'that "elements of truth and grace" exist and may be found in every religious tradition… (and that)… their fullness is found in the incarnate Word'.[64]

Both the notion of the 'anonymous Christian' and the motif of *logoi spermatikoi*, or 'seeds of the word' – recognition of a measure of the presence of God in and through other religions – were key theological elements contributing to the early developments in Roman Catholic theology of dialogue.[65] However, such views were highly contentious, arousing perplexity and polemical reaction. If instituting the SNC implied a new theological position, or at least the possibility of one, what might that be? Vatican documents in themselves were not clear on this point: 'the renewed anthropology and ecclesiology of the Council…had yet to be assimilated by the Church'.[66] More to the point, a new theology of dialogue had yet to be articulated by and to the Church. An early decision was taken 'to build up an ideological base, drawn from biblical and patristic tradition and taking up the approach of the Council, a sum of solid indications on the situation of non-Christians before God and on the value of non-Christian religions'.[67] Arguably, behind the impetus of the Roman Catholic Church to engage in interreligious dialogue lay also a new acceptance of religious plurality – although certainly not the ideological stance of pluralism

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63 See, for example, Karl Rahner SJ, *Theological Investigations* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd), Vol. V (1966); Vol. VI (1969); Vol. IX (1972). See also: Karl-Heinz Weger, *Karl Rahner: an introduction to his theology* (London: Burns & Oates, 1980); William V. Dych SJ, *Karl Rahner* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1992); Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (Eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

64 Jacques Dupuis, S.J., *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books / London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2001), p. 8.

65 See Richard Friedl, OP, 'Character of Efforts at Dialogue in the Roman Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council', *Bulletin* No. 36 (XII/3) (1977): 151.

66 P. Rossano, 'The Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions from the beginnings to the present day: history, ideas, problems', *Bulletin* No 41-42 (XIV/2-3) (1979): 94.

67 Rossano, 'The Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions', p. 93.

as a conceptual framework for comprehending and valuing that plurality – together with a particular concern for Christian–Muslim relations.

7 Conclusion: Emerging Relations with Islam

With regard to the new directions signalled in respect of attitudes and stances towards peoples of other faiths, and Islam in particular, Ataullah Siddiqui has noted what he calls 'three broad patterns' that emerged…

> …from the Second Vatican Council's view on other religions, especially on Islam, showing that the Roman Catholics appeared to have discovered spiritual wealth amongst Muslim beliefs. Nonetheless, the perspective on beliefs is selective. The Council accepts the Islamic belief of one God as merciful, all-powerful; but that the same God could reveal with the Abrahamic covenant a new "revelation" clearly seems unacceptable.[68]

Siddiqui appears to have identified a critical problem: what, precisely, is 'unacceptable' and on what grounds? Was it the case that a limit on acceptability of another revelation had been set, or is the necessity to state clearly the position of Christian identity in the context of evincing dialogical openness misread as imposing hermeneutical limitation upon the position of the interlocutor? Siddiqui flags a sensitivity that will surface continually – and which, arguably, has yet to be dealt with adequately. As noted, the SNC was charged with investigating and establishing dialogical relations with religions other than Judaism. In consequence it was dialogue with Islam which not only took on a more prominent profile early on within the life of the SNC, but also came to take a *de facto* prominent role within the cause of interreligious dialogue as such.

The particularities of the theological and historical nature of Islam and its relationship to Christianity have meant that for the Roman Catholic Church, as for the WCC, this has called forth very specific and dedicated attention and response. Christian–Muslim dialogues, including organising reciprocal visits and establishing interfaith relations of various kinds, were actively pursued from the inception of the Secretariat. Following the Second Vatican Council 'there were special reasons for the Christian Churches of Europe to show interest in dialogue with Muslims. The years of the Council (1962-1965) coincided with the outset of the great period of immigration of Muslims to Western

68 A. Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the Twentieth Century* (London: Macmillan and NY: St Martin's Press, 1997), p. 38.

Europe'.[69] As noted, a Commission for Islam was joined to the SNC virtually from its inception and this resulted in a special adjunct office for promoting relations with Muslims.[70] Also, in that same year, the Vatican, through the Secretariat for Non-Christians, issued a 'Greetings for Ramadan' message to Muslims at the end of the Fasting month, to coincide with the *Eid-ul-Fitr* festival.[71] Beginning with an epochal Council the Roman Catholic Church, now for over half a century, has become highly engaged with Islam and relations with Muslims. The Groundwork laid in the 1960s has borne much fruit. We turn now to taste some.

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69 PCID, *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds*, p. 35.

70 Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution, Aug. 15, 1967. See Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue*, pp. 80f.

71 December 30, 2967. For the text of this message, see SNC publication *Bulletin*, No 7 (3/1) (March 1968).

CHAPTER 6

Catholic-Muslim Relations: Post-Vatican II

Although, as Clare Amos remarks, the 'Second Vatican Council did not resolve the dialectic between the demands of mission and evangelization and the imperative of interreligious engagement', nonetheless among the number of significant documents that have been produced by the relevant offices and organisations of the Holy See in the years since Vatican II, two produced by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) do in fact 'wrestle with this relationship between interreligious dialogue and mission'.[1] These are the 1984 milestone *The Attitude of the Church toward Followers of Other Religions* (*ACTFOR*), subtitled 'Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission', and the 1991 seminal *Dialogue and Proclamation* (*DP*) issued jointly by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and PCID. By contrast, *Dominus Iesus* (*DI*), the controversial document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued at the turn of the millennium, was widely regarded as pouring cold water on both ecumenical and interreligious relations. Although it did not resile from either sets of relations; it was mainly concerned to supply dogmatic correctives to perceived theological laxities within the Catholic fold. It was, in effect, a call to reassert the fundamentals of Catholic Christian identity and faith as both the basis of, and setting the discursive parameters for, interreligious dialogical engagements. Perceptions and perspectives may be debated; the place of interreligious dialogue, and within that priority for dialogue with Islam, is vouchsafed nonetheless. Arguably, behind the impetus to engage in interreligious dialogue lay the Catholic Church's implicit acceptance of the *fact* of religious plurality, or diversity, as something theologically valid – although not, we should note, endorsing the ideological stance of pluralism which is a conceptual framework for comprehending and valuing that plurality – together with a particular concern for Christian–Muslim relations, both pragmatically and in terms of theological coherence.

1 Clare Amos, 'Vatican and World council of Churches Initiatives: Weaving Interreligious Threads on Ecumenical Looms', *in* Paul Hedges (Ed), *Contemporary Muslim-Christian-Encounters: Developments, Diversity and Dialogues* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 189.

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1 Early Years of Dialogue

The first Christian–Muslim meeting under the aegis of the work of the Secretariat for Non-Christians (SNC) took place in Khartoum, Sudan, in January 1968. In 1969 Pope Paul VI made a number of visits during which he met formally with Muslim leaders. He spoke to a large public gathering of Muslims in Uganda where he stated: 'You thus enable us to manifest here our high respect for the faith you profess, and our hope that what we hold in common may serve to unite Christians and Muslims ever more closely, in true brotherhood'.[2] Considerable resources for the purposes of dialogical consultations were generated by the Secretariat and applied to the work of the Church, including the production of guidebook in 1969.[3] The SNC forged a working relationship with another Papal organisation based in Rome, the Pontifical Institute for the Study of Arabic and Islam (PISAI). A conference organised on the subject of Islam and Dialogue was held at PISAI in November 1971 at which Muhammad Talbi, professor of history at the University of Tunis, was the guest speaker. Talbi's was an encouraging voice championing a Muslim appreciation of the prospect for dialogue that squared with the hopes and aspirations emanating from Vatican II. From quite early on in its life the SNC participated in a host of organised dialogues throughout the world and worked in conjunction not only with other Vatican offices and organisations but also a number of Muslim groups, especially in respect of jointly organised ventures and promulgated outcomes. Furthermore, it was also involved with allied activities with the World Council of Churches (WCC). One such significant early event was a consultation held at Ajaltoun, in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1970 which, although it took place at the initiative of the WCC, nevertheless involved representatives from both the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches, together with representatives from ten other religions. A report on this consultation noted:

> Both the formal discussions and the private ones, and the opportunity of taking part in common prayer or meditations prepared by the different members of the various religions, contributed to the emergence of a deeper mutual understanding not only at a level of ideas, but also at a

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2 PCID, *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds which Unite Us: 16 years of Christian-Muslim dialogue* (Vatican City: PCID, 1994), p. 7.

3 Maurice Borrmans, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims,* trans. R. Marston Speight (New York: Paulist Press, 1990).

> level of experience and devotion…the meeting was for all an unforgettable experience.[4]

Throughout the 1970s there was increased Christian–Muslim encounter, especially at the initiative of the WCC, to which Catholic representatives, including officials of the SNC, were frequently invited to participate. Themes such as religious liberty and the freedom to make public profession of faith were among the first to be broached by Christian–Muslim dialogical encounters.

During the period 1966 to 1976 the Holy See established diplomatic relations with some 17 nations that were either Islamic states or had sizeable Muslim populations. The first higher level delegation of Muslims from Cairo was received in Rome in 1970. Contacts were established with the University of al-Azhar and a delegation from Saudi-Arabia was received. In these early years after Vatican II there was an air of hopeful expectation in regard to relations with Islam. To a visiting group of Saudi Ulama, in October, 1974, Pope Paul VI stated:

> This visit shows in fact that Muslims and Christians are coming to know each other better and to love each other more. We can only rejoice about this… We think also of the Muslim-Christian colloquia of the recent years. While always avoiding an inadmissible syncretism, these visits and seminars, little by little, make our spiritual forces converge. And we all feel the urgency, in this age of pervasive and oppressive materialism, to bear witness to God the Most Exalted, the Most Merciful, whose loving presence unceasingly surrounds us.[5]

In reply, the Saudis spoke of 'the encouraging evolution accomplished in relations between Christian and Muslim worlds following upon the Second Vatican Council…Islam has begun effectively to establish relations based on the noblest of ideas with regard to Christianity and Christians'.[6]

The Christian missionary duty of evangelisation and the Islamic imperative for *da'wah* were complementary themes of dialogue meetings in 1974 and 1976. A Hong Kong meeting in 1975 focussed on Muslim-Christian cooperation for the wellbeing of humanity. More overtly theological topics were broached in meetings held in Cordoba: the crisis of faith in the modern world (in 1974), and the examination of the place of Jesus Christ in Islamic faith and the Christian

4 Lopez Gay, SJ, 'Ajaltoun Meeting Report', *Bulletin* No 14 (July 1970): 77.
5 PCID, *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds*, p. 11.
6 PCID, *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds*, p. 12.

attitude towards Muhammad (in 1977). Although much good work was undertaken, and positive relations with the Muslim world engendered, there was one notable seminar on Christian–Muslim dialogue, held in Tripoli in 1976, which was limited in its success by virtue of references to Zionism made in its final declaration that were not acceptable to the Vatican.[7] The otherwise excellent summary of agreement between Christians and Muslims was deemed to be flawed to the extent that the insertion of two political clauses – largely at the urging of the Libyans – was inappropriate to the dialogue purpose itself. Interreligious dialogue is ever susceptible to the encroachment of political agendas. The report on this particular seminar noted the attitude of the Muslim interlocutors wherein 'Islam appeared constantly sure of itself, a perfect religion which has nothing to learn, aware that today it is in possession of the prestige weapon of raw materials ... proud of its religious heritage'.[8] Libyan hegemony and a certain amount of game-playing appear evident. The report concluded on the note that while the need for dialogue is even more evident and urgent, it is not an easy road, indeed it is one fraught with difficulty. But the quest for interpersonal relations in the cause of dialogue is affirmed as showing the way forward.

In an informative article Michael Fitzgerald presented a short apologetic discussion and noted some crucial distinctions that need to be borne in mind when approaching the question of dialogue with Islam. 'What is important' he said, 'is to try to grasp the particular message of Islam, the vision of Islam'.[9] By contrast, Jan Slomp noted that attempts to improve interfaith relations between Christians and Muslims 'have, on the Christian side, been obstructed by the false claim that the ecumenical movement promotes syncretism by means of dialogue, and on the Muslim side, by the baseless assertion that the Christians of to-day do not follow the simple religion of Jesus, but a corrupted version of it'.[10] The culprit of such corruption is named as St Paul, and the putative 'proof' is the so-called Gospel of Barnabas. However, although exposed as a forgery by Western scholarship it has, in recent times, been a best-seller in the Islamic world. Dealing with falsehood and prejudice emerged as a perennial task in the cause of interreligious dialogue, especially so in the arena of Muslim-Christian relations. By the late seventies Fitzgerald was able to note some particular difficulties encountered in the pursuit of Christian–Muslim

7 See PCID, *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds*, p. 10.

8 Report of 'Seminar on Islamic-Christian dialogue', Tripoli, Libya, February 1976. *Bulletin* No 31 (1976): 11.

9 Michael Fitzgerald, 'Islam and the Bible', *Bulletin* No 23-24 (1973): 137.

10 Jan Slomp, 'The pseudo-Gospel of Barnabas', *Bulletin* No 31 (1976): 69.

dialogue. He observed that progress is impeded by having 'too many participants…too great a diversity of topics…too many formal papers, leaving inadequate time for discussion…(and a)…lack of freedom of expression'.[11] Further, the choice of topics for dialogue must be made with care in order that they may 'help to bridge gaps of understanding rather than widen them'.[12] Fitzgerald's informative critique also notes difficulties encountered with language used within dialogue, and the concomitant need for the careful definition of terms used within dialogical discourse. Difficulties with many common theological and ideological key-words can easily arise. Misunderstanding can also occur 'from a lack of appreciation for methodological differences… (For example) biblical and quranic exegesis…the search for a social order based on faith… (and even)…the very notion of inter-religious dialogue'.[13] Fitzgerald is clear on the need for thorough preparation for dialogue; willingness to engage is not sufficient. He enunciates the aims of dialogue as growth in mutual understanding, the dissipation of prejudice, practical acts of co-operation, and the deepening of the already-held faith of each partner in the dialogical encounter. Fitzgerald closes with a caveat and an exhortation: 'Dialogue is a much-used word. There is a risk that it may become debased currency. If Christian–Muslim encounter is to continue to be true inter-religious dialogue it must be solidly grounded in faith in God, be sustained by a spirit of prayer and flow into common action'.[14]

2 Dialogue under John Paul II: 1978-1989

Pope Paul VI died in August, 1978. John Paul, his immediate successor, lived only 33 days after becoming Pope. A Polish Cardinal, Karol Wyotyla, was then elected Pope and took the name John Paul II. He quickly assumed the mantle of continuing the interreligious interests of his two immediate predecessors. Indeed, he 'lost little time in giving renewed impetus to the new openness in relations with Muslims that had been urged by the Second Vatican Council and exemplified in the actions of Pope Paul VI'.[15] The motif of a spiritual bond between Christian and Muslim was a favourite theme. In an address given to

11 Michael Fitzgerald, 'The Secretariat for Non-Christians and Muslim-Christian Dialogue', *Bulletin* No. 37 (1978): 10.

12 Fitzgerald, 'The Secretariat', p. 11.

13 Ibid.

14 Fitzgerald, 'The Secretariat', p. 14.

15 PCID, *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds*, p. 11.

Muslims in Ankara he remarked 'I wonder whether it is not urgent…to recognize and develop the spiritual bonds which unite us' and he urged his listeners to consider 'the profound roots of the faith in God in whom your Muslim fellow citizens also believe', all with a view to deriving from such consideration 'the principle of collaboration'.[16] So it was that, from very early on in his papal career, this uniquely peripatetic Pope met often with Muslims, emphasisng the theme of 'spiritual bonds' between Christians and Muslims and ever advancing the cause of collaborative relationship, marked by 'reciprocal esteem and the mutual desire for authentic service to humanity'.[17]

Five months into his Pontificate, John Paul II issued his manifesto encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis* (RH, 1979), which echoed and developed the *Ecclesiam Suam* encyclical of Paul VI. RH is regarded as 'one of the most important statements of the Church's teaching office on the question of how Christians are to relate to the followers of other religions'.[18] Both Muslims and Jews, in keeping with the mandate of Vatican II, are viewed 'as worthy of esteem on the part of Christians' and, indeed, 'dialogue, contacts, prayer in common, investigation of the treasures of human spirituality' were urged to be the order of the day in matters of interfaith relations.[19] Thus John Paul II called for 'a truly dialogical relationship where both sides give and both receive' wherein, he noted, 'strong beliefs and the moral values of the followers of other religions can and should challenge Christians to respond more fully and generously to the demands of their own Christian faith'.[20]

RH is but the first of at least eleven documents comprising the Magisterium of John Paul II, which in greater or lesser degrees touch on the matter of interreligious dialogue. He implored people everywhere to work urgently in the cause of peace and viewed the motif of the Church's mission inherently including both proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and interreligious dialogue.[21] The pre-eminent role of dialogue in creating a greater unity and friendship among Christians and the followers of other religions is urged, together with a necessary linking of mission and dialogue as complementary

16 PCID, *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds*, p. 15.

17 PCID, *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds*, p. 17.

18 PCID, *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds*, p. 13.

19 RH clause 6; see Francesco Gioia (Ed), *Interreligious Dialogue: The official teaching of the Catholic Church (1963–1995)* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media/Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 1997), p. 87.

20 PCID, *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds*, pp. 13-14.

21 See Donna Orsuto, 'On the Front Line: *Christifideles Laici* and Lay involvement in Interreligious Dialogue', *in* Chidi Denis Isizoh (Ed), *Milestones in Interreligious Dialogue* (Rome: Ceedee Publications, 2002), pp. 183-195.

activities. Pope John Paul II actively supported and promoted interreligious dialogue on many fronts. He affirmed truth and goodness found in other religions and asserted the need for the Church to be in dialogue with them. Engaging in dialogue for the sake of mutual understanding, practical collaboration, social justice, human rights, advancing moral values, the promotion of peace, and the advocacy of religious freedom were frequently recurring themes throughout this Pope's many addresses and communications. The motif of hospitality is a theme which also recurs. Interreligious dialogue involves the affirming of traditional values, identities and ideals, and utilising modern technology in the light of that so as to promote human dignity and to advance the cause of harmonious and stable community living. Dialogue, for John Paul II, is advocated as much as praxis in the service of high ideals for human existence as a methodology of theological interfaith engagement *per se*. He was very much an advocate of the dialogues of life and action: dialogue is the modality *par excellence* for engaging the quest for improved human community.

The rationale for Christian–Muslim dialogue was not in regard to any suggestion of need for reconciliation of the specifics of belief, nor the seeking of theological compatibilities as such, but rather with respect to certain fundamentals of faith that have to do with peaceful co-existence, on the one hand, and the service of God together through co-operative efforts in fostering the greater human good, on the other. In Ghana in 1980, for example, the Pope called for solidarity and friendship between Christian and Muslim in the cause of a joint service to humanity and the world. Early in 1981, during a visit to Pakistan, he commented on the 'bonds of dialogue and trust which have been forged between the Catholic Church and Islam' and went on to state:

> By means of dialogue we have come to see more clearly the many values, practices and teachings which both our religious traditions embrace…I pray that this mutual understanding and respect between Christians and Muslims, and indeed between all religions, will continue to grow deeper, and that we will find still better ways of cooperation and collaboration for the good of all.[22]

Pope John Paul II 'affirmed that the religious duty of hospitality was part of the common heritage that Christians and Muslims received from their forefather, Abraham'.[23] Elsewhere he averred that 'both communities must move beyond

22 PCID, *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds*, p. 21.
23 PCID, *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds*, p. 22.

dwelling upon and obsessively retelling the past offences each has suffered at the hands of the other; they must work to make the future different from the past'.[24] This Pope advanced a strong theological basis for 'unity of respect and purpose' as characterising the relationship that ought to obtain between Muslims and Christians. If he could be said to giving the major lead in respect to the Catholic Church's stance toward Islam and Christian–Muslim relations, the SNC was surely right alongside him and most active in the discharge of that lead.

In a significant article in which major Church documents that deal with Muslims and Islam were discussed, the SNC's Pietro Rossano identified three positions, one of which he deemed central to the Church; the other two he regarded as relatively 'collateral'.[25] His analysis not only derived from a study of the obvious major documents, but also from an investigation of a selection of other key documents, including significant letters from a variety of bishops with widely differing experiences of Islam. This well researched work is therefore of some significance. What, then, were the positions of the Church, at this time, as Rossano saw them? He identified as central that of innovation: the call for a renewal, for a fresh approach of the Church toward Islam, beginning with the recognition of a 'spiritual bond' – to echo the theme recurrent in the papal pronouncements – which unites each religion to the other. The theological basis for this is a common faith in God with a consequent common perspective on the human being 'as God's creature, equal, free, the summit of the universe, endowed with rights, subject to the divine law of good and evil, and called to reach God'. Thus are Christians and Muslims enjoined to an attitude of mutual respect and so, on that basis, enabled to enter into appropriate dialogue. The first of the collateral positions is an authoritatively positive stance 'which looks to co-existence, encounter and collaboration with the Muslims on a purely human level'. The second takes a completely different perspective, that of negative expectation, wherein 'attention is turned directly upon the Muslim as… someone whose faith holds him within such a harsh and rigid framework as to prejudice the very possibility of dialogue'. Here we see the reflection of an encounter with an intransigent and exclusivist Islam; a context where Muslims themselves, for whatever reason – whether theological, as Rossano infers, or political such that religio-political rationales overlay other relational dynamics – are inimical to any form of détente with Christians, or anyone else, for that

24 PCID, *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds*, p. 30.

25 P. Rossano, 'The major documents of the Catholic Church regarding the Muslims', *Bulletin* 48 (1981): 204-215.

matter. So the Church in this situation may, and often does, feel that the prospect of dialogical engagement is effectively ruled out.

Rossano concluded that whereas the central position represents the Magisterium of Rome, the so-called collateral positions reflect the limited temporal and contextual experiences of the local Church. He also spoke of some 'warning signs of theological problems which will little by little have to be worked out'.[26] In other words, it seems he was giving notice that there are certain theological issues that will require careful address and a measure of unequivocal resolution if, indeed, any substantive progress on dialogue with Muslims is to be achieved. Among the examples of such issues he cites the theological status of Islam, and that of Muhammad and his prophecy; the relationship of the *Umma* to the Church; the nature of the proclaimed 'spiritual bond' that binds Christian and Muslim; the nature of revelation applying to both Christian and Islamic contexts; and the implication for Christianity of the Islamic stress on *tawhid*, the insistent singularity of the unity of God. Rossano also remarked on the one-sidedness of the dialogical enterprise: it is the Church which takes the greater initiative. In effect, he provided a template of concerns that had become apparent at that time. Meanwhile, in an address given in Nigeria in 1982, Pope John Paul II stated of Christians and Muslims that

> …both believe in one God who is the Creator of all. We acclaim God's sovereignty and we defend the dignity of the human person as God's servant. We adore God and profess total submission to Him. In a true sense, we can call one another brothers and sisters in faith in the one God… Because of this faith, we have many things in common: the privilege of prayer; the duty of justice accompanied by compassion and almsgiving, and above all a sacred respect for human dignity, which is at the foundation of the basic rights of every human being.[27]

The spiritual bond that the Pope identified bears concrete theological resonance: from the shared referent of foundational belief to the expressive phenomena of the life of faith. It is such as this that gives impetus for, and credence to, Christian–Muslim dialogue. Apart from repeated encouragement given to Christians and Muslims to enter into this dialogue, which emerges as a particular arena of concern for John Paul II, he also elaborated on the Christian theological basis of dialogue, including that 'God's plan of salvation

26 Rossano, 'The major documents', p. 214.

27 PCID, *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds*, p. 42

encompasses all who acknowledge the Creator'; that dialogue is itself 'a witness of God's love for all humankind' which in the Islamic context is 'an expression of sensitivity and love for Muslims'; yet nevertheless the Christian position is always 'rooted in a firm and humble submission to the Word of Christ'.[28] The motif of enculturation surfaces as 'a firm basis for Christian–Muslim dialogue, as it enables both to understand each other's point of view' and, indeed, while 'the encounter with Muslims can be a catalyst for a deeper interiorization (sic) of faith' nevertheless it is vital 'that a Christian in dialogue with Muslims have a strong Christian identity'.[29]

In a 1985 address to Muslims John Paul II noted that common elements to the two faiths 'go much deeper than superficial points of contact; they determine, rather, the very way that both communities of believers approach God and respond to His will'.[30] Thus papal credibility to the notion of there being a significant measure of compatibility of faith (but not necessarily doctrine) between Islam and Christianity, at least in principle, is articulated. In August of the same year the Pope pulled off what has been described as a spectacular visit to Morocco. This was in response to an invitation from King Hassan II, and it culminated in an address to over 80,000 Muslim youth. In a wide-ranging address that reiterated themes of common belief in God, shared obedience to the will of God, an advocacy of mutual respect, and an interlinking of Christian and Muslim spirituality, John Paul II said:

> I believe that we, Christian and Muslims, must recognize with joy the religious values that we have in common and give thanks to God for them. Both of us believe in one God, the only God, who is all justice and all mercy; we believe in the importance of prayer, of fasting, of almsgiving, of repentance and of pardon; we believe that God will be a merciful judge to us at the end of time, and we hope that after the resurrection He will be satisfied with us, and we know that we will be satisfied with him.[31]

This was perhaps a high point in this Pope's reaching-out to the Muslim world.

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28 PCID, *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds*, p. 46

29 Ibid.

30 PCID, *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds*, p. 30.

31 Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue*, p. 303.

3 Engagement and Reflection 1990-2000

By the end of the 1980s the Secretariat for Non-Christians had been renamed and re-constituted as the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID). Mandated by the 1988 Apostolic Constitution, *Pastor Bonus*, the key purpose of the newly renamed organisation is listed as 1) 'To promote respect, mutual understanding and collaboration between Catholics and the followers of other religious traditions'; 2) 'To encourage the study of religions'; and 3) 'To promote the formation of persons dedicated to dialogue'.[32] In its work of fostering interreligious engagement, the 'foremost partners in dialogue' continued to be Islam and Muslims. Christianity and Islam represent universal communities of faith, each with its allied organisational and/or identifying construct – *ecclesia* and *umma* – which allows for dialogue to be enjoined at both local and international levels. Thus, for example, in response to a visit of representatives of the PCID to Tripoli in 1989, a return visit to Rome for a Dialogue on Mission and *Da'wah* was undertaken in January 1990 by members of the World Islamic Call (*Da'wah*) Society (WCIS). In an address given at a papal audience granted to the participants of the conference, John Paul II stressed the requirement of both Christian and Muslim to uphold 'the respect and the inalienable dignity and freedom of the human person created and loved by God'.[33] Interfaith difficulties were deplored and a challenge to overcome these 'in a spirit of justice, brotherhood and mutual respect' was urged. For Christian and Muslim to address, together, issues such as the carrying out of mission and *da'wah*, is to tackle something 'which is important both for religious and for social harmony'.[34]

When addressing the bishops of the Philippines on the occasion of their *Ad Limina* visit in 1990, the Pope remarked on the situation of Christian–Muslim relations stressing in particular issues of religious freedom, freedom of conscience, and the need for cooperative living between these two communities of faith. And in a statement to Muslims from Malta he reiterated familiar themes of the esteem of Islam and of Muslims expressing optimism for Christian–Muslim dialogue, asserting 'that all believers in the merciful and Almighty God should strive together to promote and safeguard, for all mankind, social justice, moral values, peace and effective and mutually applicable

32 Apostolic Constitution, *Pastor Bonus*, 1988. See Vatican Website: <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_pro_20051996_en.html> (Accessed 17 March, 2017).

33 Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue*, p. 429.

34 Ibid.

religious freedom'.[35] In Tanzania, emphasis was likewise given to freedom of conscience and the role of reason and free will in religious affairs. The possibility of Christians and Muslims co-existing peacefully was again encouraged. Followers of these two faiths 'can be partners in building a society shaped by the values taught by God: tolerance, justice, peace and concern for the poorest and weakest'.[36]

The Church's readiness to work with Muslims was a key theme in the 1991 message to Muslims given in the context of the annual world-wide *Eid al-Fitr* greeting. That the Pope should give this message personally – one which is customarily issued by the PCID President – was itself of some considerable significance. The annual greeting, given initially by the SNC and continued by the Council, had become a key fixture in terms of the development of the diplomatic and dialogical relationship between the Vatican and the Islamic world. The greeting had often found very warm reception within the Muslim world with 'thoughtful responses, discussing the points raised in the letter from an Islamic perspective' often received from appreciative Muslim sources.

> The letter has never been a simple greeting, but has always contained a message on some theme of common religious concern to Muslims and Christians. It is intended to be an expression of the spiritual sharing which can take place among those who have, in the words of Pope John Paul II, "the faith of Abraham in the one, almighty, and merciful God".[37]

In his own greeting the Pope drew a phenomenological parallel between the values and structure of the Ramadan and Lenten fasts: 'We Christians and Muslims share these values, according to our respective religious beliefs and traditions, and which we offer humanity as a religious alternative to the attractions of power, wealth and material pleasures'.[38] The way of peace, inherent to both religions, is exhorted, as is the need to strive to overcome those negative elements in life which promote separation from God. The greeting concluded with a quotation from Pope Gregory VII who, in a 1076 address to a Muslim leader, wrote:

> Almighty God, who wishes that all should be saved and none lost, approves nothing in us so much as that after loving him one should love

35 Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue*, p. 434.

36 Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue*, p. 441.

37 *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds*, p. 53.

38 Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue*, p. 452.

> his fellow man, and that one should not do to others, what one does not want done to oneself. You and we owe this charity to ourselves especially because we believe in and confess one God, admittedly in a different way, and daily praise and venerate him, the Creator of the world.[39]

If, in many contexts, John Paul II could be accused of perfunctorily reiterating support for interreligious dialogue, it is in the arena of Christian–Muslim engagement that a persistent passion is readily discerned. In an address to the Islamic Leaders of Senegal given at Dakar on February 22 1992, for example, he asserted the naturalness of believers in God meeting in friendship: being 'two religious communities who strive to submit ourselves without reserve to the will of God, we Christians and Muslims should *live together in peace, friendship and cooperation*'.[40] Christians and Muslims are to be peoples of dialogue for whom the first priority is the dialogue of life, here explained as 'a positive acceptance, interaction and cooperation by which we bear active witness, as believers, to the ideals to which God has called us'.[41] Collaboration for justice and working together for peace are key tasks demanding dialogical engagement. Mutual respect and freedom of conscience are the high aims. Personal commitment to, and interest in, the sphere of Christian–Muslim interaction was underpinned by the closing prayer offered by the Pope. His expressions of delight and pleasure on occasions of meetings with Muslims seem most sincere. Points in common between Muslims and Christians were again stressed by John Paul II on a visit to Benin in 1993. Piety; prayer; morality; the 'dignity of the human person open to the transcendent' together with reference to 'inalienable human rights' were among those things perceived to be held in common.[42] Christian–Muslim cooperation in the quest for peace and, *inter alia*, the need to eliminate poverty were stressed. Dialogue between Christians and Muslims was also affirmed as an everyday occurrence in the Turkish context where, yet again, the motifs of promoting peace and justice, human values and respect for the dignity of all were seen to be the reference points for dialogical engagement.

The development of dialogical engagement within the wider Catholic Church under the guidance of the PCID was discussed at some length in 1993 by Fr Tom Michel, SJ. He commented that the Council was 'convinced that the essence of dialogue is that which is carried out between the local Churches

39 Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue*, p. 453.
40 Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue*, p. 476 (emphasis in original).
41 Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue*, p. 476.
42 Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue*, p. 507.

and local Muslims' in relation to which the primary task was seen as 'the work of study' and the 'animation' of dialogical engagement.[43] At the same time, Michel notes that 'meeting Muslims at the international level and, in agreement with local Churches, taking part in national encounters with Muslims, are also important elements in carrying out our mandate'.[44] Michel was then responsible for the Islam desk within the PCID. Alongside and additional to this desk a Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims had been set up as a separate body, albeit also under the jurisdiction of the PCID. Michel was also a member of this new body. He noted that, in terms of its relations with Muslims, the PCID was working 'on the principle that dialogue should also be carried out with situations of ambiguity and even conflict. Dialogue cannot wait until good relations with Muslims are established throughout the world' and, furthermore, as interreligious dialogue 'is an aspect of evangelization carried out in hope; it is extremely difficult to determine the concrete results'.[45]

By the mid-nineties the upsurge of Islamism within the African continent was becoming ever more a concern, especially where 'foreign' Islamic elements and tendencies to violent activities were emerging within the otherwise indigenous Islamic population. In this context the Pope urged Catholic Christians to maintain their 'training sessions on Islam' in order to remain confident and secure in their 'dialogue of life' with their Muslim neighbours.[46] In an Apostolic Exhortation addressed to the Church in Africa in 1995 John Paul II affirmed dialogue as a relational modality with many spheres of applicability. Ecumenical relations were exhorted for the purpose of Christian witness; dialogue with Muslims as needful for the task of working together for justice and peace and the advocacy of the principle of religious liberty. Dialogue as a needful component in the cause of peace was also stressed in comments made to Jewish, Christian and Muslim participants in a conference on Peace. Together with the significant role played by papal visits and addresses in promoting relations with Islam and encouraging allied dialogical endeavours, the PCID engaged in many sole-initiated and joint activities during the 1990s as, for example, with the World Islamic Call Society and with the Al Abayt Foundation in Amman, Jordan. The Council, in concert with themes enunciated by Pope John Paul II, stated unequivocally that the

43 Thomas Michel, SJ, 'PCID Dialogue with Muslims since the Last Plenary', *Bulletin* 82 (1993): 34.

44 Ibid.

45 Michel, 'PCID Dialogue with Muslims', p. 44.

46 Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue*, pp. 523, 525.

> Catholic Church believes that the key dialogue is that which is carried out by Christians and Muslims who live, work, and study together in the same nation and society. All this activity of contacts, interchange and deliberation is aimed at forming these two communities of faith, who share life in so many parts of the world, into becoming a force for peace and social harmony, for promoting human and divine values, and for defending the rights of the poor and voiceless.[47]

Significantly, the implication of this stance is the 'commitment to accept multi-religious, multi-ethnic social and political systems and to work for harmony in them' which sets the advocacy of interreligious dialogue and wider interfaith engagement firmly within a context of plurality. The extent to which this is worked out theologically is, of course, an ongoing issue. Certainly the call for respect for the dignity and freedom of the human person is a recurrent theme which tends to weight the promotion of dialogue in the direction of diplomatic endeavours in order to secure greater acceptance of individualist and human-rights value sets. Although an impression can be easily given that it is the Christian side that is the driving force for dialogue, and Christian organisations such as the PCID which forever take the initiative, in point of fact Christian enthusiasm for dialogue is met by a reciprocal Islamic interest and initiative. Muslim initiatives, for example, have come from Jordan's Al Abayt foundation, Turkey's University of Ankara, the Centre for International Cultural Studies in Iran, The World Islamic League, Al-Azhar University in Cairo and the Centre of Economic and Social Studies and Research, University of Tunis, to name but some.

A 1994 Christian-Muslim seminar held at Pattaya, Thailand, involving participants from ASEAN countries was the third such regional-focussed meeting organised by Council. The first had been held in Assisi in 1988 with participants from Northern Africa; the second was in Ibadan, Nigeria, with participants from Anglophone West Africa. Commenting that such conferences are designed to 'encourage initiatives at the local levels in interreligious understanding', Cardinal Arinze, the PCID President, affirmed them as 'a chance for participants to move beyond national issues and relationships to compare similarities and differences in neighbouring countries'.[48] He acknowledged that 'interreligious dialogue is bound to be difficult', yet in order 'to live in peace and harmony, to remove discrimination and to build up their societies

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47 PCID, *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds*, p. 69.

48 Francis Cardinal Arinze, comment in 'Pattaya Report – Christian-Muslim Seminar, Pattaya, Thailand', *Pro Dialogo* (1994/2): 225.

together, instead of engaging in rivalry, allowing tensions to build up, or even outright conflict', it is necessary for Christians and Muslims to meet each other in a climate of 'deep mutual respect and esteem'.[49] Authentic dialogue 'grows among those who respect religious liberty' and it 'continues through cooperation': it is no one-way street, rather engaging in dialogue happens with a view 'to meet, to listen, to try to understand, and to work out together how to promote common goals'.[50]

Arinze also touched on generic themes of interreligious dialogue as such: it is not just for communal benefit and sociological reasons that dialogue should be enjoined. Rather, there is an underlying theological reason, namely the 'fundamental unity of the entire human race in God's plan. The same God is Creator, Saviour and final end of every human being. The entire human family has only one origin. Every man and woman bears in himself or herself something of this divine image and is created for the same goal, which is to see God as He is in heaven'.[51] The Christian theological rationale for interreligious dialogue, according to Arinze, has both ontological and eschatological dimensions. Of course, Muslims and Christians share particular beliefs, especially, Arinze asserts, 'in God who is one, creator, provider, merciful, all-powerful, and final judge of human beings'; and, for each, faith originates with Abraham 'though not exactly in the same way'. Alongside the commonalities of 'obedience to God's will', and value placed on the necessity of fasting, almsgiving and prayer, Arinze also notes the fact of significant differences; but he holds that divergence of belief is not to be ignored, although 'it is wiser to begin with what both share in common'.[52]

Arinze here articulated the four forms of dialogue that had emerged as the de facto standard Catholic understanding, namely the dialogue of life wherein participants 'live and work together and enrich one another through faithful practice of the values of religion, without the necessity of formal discussion'; the dialogue of action, or social engagement, which aims at 'cooperation for the promotion of integral human development and for the liberation of people'; the dialogue of religious experience wherein 'rooted in their respective traditions, partners in dialogue share their spiritual patrimonies, for instance with regard to prayer and meditation, faith and the ways of searching for God'; and discursive dialogue, or the dialogue of theological exchange in which specialist experts from both sides of the dialogical encounter 'exchange infor-

49 Arinze, 'Pattaya Report', p. 226
50 Ibid.
51 Arinze, 'Pattaya Report', p. 227.
52 Ibid.

mation on their respective religious beliefs and heritages and reflect together how the actual problems of humankind can be faced'.[53] Significantly, Arinze also echoed the recurrent theme of stressing the importance of the right to religious freedom and urging patience in the pursuit of dialogue. On the one hand prejudice and misunderstanding of the other can be addressed and overcome within the dialogical process; on the other hand participants in dialogue 'can rediscover some of the best values' in their own traditions. And while Arinze also averred that 'interreligious dialogue often leads to challenges that believers need to face jointly' he also, significantly, perceived dialogue, perhaps especially Christian–Muslim dialogue, as a process wherein each participant is opened to a 'greater conversion towards God'.[54]

4 Models of Dialogue with Islam

It was primarily through Roman Catholic developments that the now standard fourfold model for dialogical engagement – the dialogues of Life, Action, Experience and Discourse – was articulated. Nevertheless, I suggest that throughout the work of the Vatican in interreligious dialogue it is possible to discern another distinctive model that has been applied. The Vatican State engages in formal diplomatic relations. As an official Vatican organisation, the PCID most usually interacts with other religious communities at high level. The dialogue in which it is engaged is often between leaders or high-ranking representatives. The task of interreligious dialogue is a work of the Church at large, supported and nurtured by the Vatican, in particular through its interreligious Dicastery to which has been given 'the apostolate of promoting dialogue with the followers of other religions…and contributing to the formation of people who engage in interreligious dialogue'.[55] In the discharge of this work I suggest there are three distinct models of interreligious dialogical engagement in operation, namely, ambassadorial, propaedeutical and humanitarian.

Many countries have ambassadors accredited to the Holy See, and in turn the Vatican has ambassadorial representation and relationships around the globe. So it should not be surprising that the modality of ambassadorial dialogue is found to the fore in respect of interreligious relations: in many instances, of course, State and religious relations coincide. A mark of the

53 Arinze, 'Pattaya Report', p. 228.

54 Arinze, 'Pattaya Report', p. 230.

55 Francis Cardinal Arinze, 'Meeting Other Believers: Introduction to the Plenary Assembly, 1992', *Bulletin* 82 (1993): 17.

ambassadorial mode is that steps are taken to maintain long-term relationships: specific dialogical events may be themselves ad hoc, infrequent, and irregular. But the relationship between dialogical parties can be nurtured over time nonetheless. The annual goodwill message to Muslims throughout the world marking *Eid al-Fitr* at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan may serve as an example. Over the years there has been a steady increase in reciprocal greetings 'and expressions of gratitude' by way of response.[56] In the ambassadorial mode of dialogical relationship there is – or at least there is a presumption of – an encounter of equals; the establishment and maintenance of cordial and functional working relations is the order of the day. In this context the undergirding task is the patient and mutual self-presentation of one side to the other in the interest of fostering mutual authentic knowledge and respect. Arinze once stated that it 'is important for all who engage in interreligious dialogue to accept that such dialogue does not aim at convincing the other person to embrace the religion of the dialogue partner'.[57] Ambassadorial dialogue is the implicit precondition for any dialogue of action: co-operative ventures require, as a *sine qua non*, a context of mutual respect and functional communication.

The second model is that of propaedeutical dialogue. By this I mean the style or dimension of interreligious engagement that goes beyond the presenting of credentials to one of careful explanation of the self to the other. This occurs in the context of seeking to deepen relationship and interaction; it allows for a cautious openness to mutual invitation and responsive engagement. As with the ambassadorial mode, this modality is premised on the reciprocities and protocols of the host-guest relationship paradigm. But it tends to be undergirded by a sense – if not intention – of undertaking dialogical contact as a preparation for a yet further, or deeper, engagement; so the choice of the term 'propaedeutical' as the descriptive denominator. Inherent in this is the fact that much careful attention is paid to identity explanation, involving apologia and bearing witness, rather than simply informative self-presentation. Pains are taken to assert and explain what it means to be Christian, indeed to be Catholic, in the context of this dimension of engagement. References to it abound with the language of 'proclamation', 'mission', or 'outreach'. It is spoken in terms of clearing of the way for appropriate evangelical 'invitation and witness'. However, religion 'should be proposed, not imposed'.[58] Here there is a direct echo of the Quranic injunction of no

56 Arinze, 'Meeting Other Believers', p. 29.

57 Arinze, 'Meeting Other Believers', p. 40.

58 Arinze, 'Meeting Other Believers', p. 41.

compulsion in matters of religion. Establishing a climate of non-threatening openness to the other is critical for the success of dialogical engagement. The propaedeutical mode is a form of such engagement, premised on both respecting the integrity of the 'other' and upholding one's own assertions and truth references. However, unless the preparatory exchange and climate of openness allows also for considered self-reflection as a matter of response to the other, it is difficult to see how a genuine dialogue of discourse might proceed; it would rather seem excluded or at least severely limited if there is no going beyond the propaedeutical phase or model.

The third Vatican model may be broadly called humanitarian dialogue. This is found, in particular, with respect to the dialogue of action, where engagement is not so much attending to issues of identity, relationship and understanding – such as would be expected in the context of dialogues of discourse and religious experience, and implied within the dialogue of life – but rather in the coming together of two or more parties in the quest to achieve a common goal, or the commitment to joint action for the greater good of the human community, whether in a local or wider context. Such dialogue is to be found more particularly in the wider world of relational interfaith engagement as an expression of the local or regional church in action. For example, a number of PCID-sponsored dialogues, such as the conference on Jerusalem or various consultations on the Middle East have focussed on socio-political issues and allied humanitarian concerns and questions of justice, human rights, freedom and so on.[59]

5 Conclusion: Early 21st century engagement with Islam

It is clear that in the past fifty or so years since Vatican II the Catholic Church has moved from a position of aloof exclusion to one of intentional engagement with Islam. Vatican II began the process; the PCID has become very much now the stimulus and support to a wide raft of concrete engagements throughout the Catholic world. Religious Orders will often have interreligious experts and specialist arenas of interreligious engagement and some, such as the Missions to Africa (MAfr), have been at the forefront of Christian–Muslim dialogue on behalf of the Catholic Church for a considerable time. More recently there can be found, on the one hand, the example of deep engagement of a

59 Cf. Hans Ucko, *The Spiritual Significance of Jerusalem for Jews, Christians and Muslims: A Report on a Colloquium, Glion, Switzerland, 2-6 May, 1993*. (Geneva: WCC, 1994).

Catholic-Shi'a dialogue conference series[60]; and on the other, various Catholic engagements with, and responses to, the pan-Muslim *Common Word* letter inviting the Christian world to a renewed dialogical engagement (see also chapter 11 below).[61] The Vatican's Secretariat for Non-Christians began its work of engaging with Muslims by first preparing and equipping the wider church for the task of its dialogical engagement. It then engaged in a wide range of dialogical engagements with Muslims, and in diverse settings and contexts. The Vatican's interreligious dicastery with its Islam desk is not the sum of RCC engagement with Islam, but it does give a lead and point of reference for the many regional and local dialogical activities. Through its journal, *Pro Dialogo*, it disseminates reports, information, and theological resources pertinent to the wider work of engagement with Islam.[62] And at both the level of the Vatican dicastery, as well as in many regional contexts, such engagement is often undertaken jointly with the WCC or other ecumenical partners. To the extent the dialogue is diffused throughout much of the wider life and work of the Roman Catholic Church there has been success; to the extent that relations with Muslims and the issue of dialogical engagement between Christianity and Islam remain a priority, if not also a problematic, the need for sustained work remains.

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60 Anthony O'Mahoney et al. (Eds), *Catholics and Shi'a in Dialogue: Studies in Theology and Spirituality* (London: Melisende Press, 2004); Anthony O'Mahoney et al. (Eds), *A Catholic–Shi'a Engagement: Faith and Reason in Theory and Practice* (London: Melisende Press, 2006); Anthony O'Mahoney et al. (Eds), *A Catholic–Shi'a Dialogue: Ethics in Today's Society* (London: Melisende Press, 2008).

61 Cf. John Borelli (Ed), *A Common Word and the Future of Christian-Muslim Relations* (Washington DC: Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University Press, 2009).

62 See, for example: Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, 'Christians and Muslims in Europe: a common journey' *Pro Dialogo* (2009/1): 29-57; Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, 'The role of the Holy See in promoting World Peace in collaboration with the Muslim Scholars', *Pro Dialogo* (2009/2-3): 152-160; Michael Didi Adgum Mangoria, 'Members of different religious traditions in a Muslim-majority society', *Pro Dialogo* (2013/3): 29-57; Maurice Borrmans, 'Approches chrétiennes de l'islam', *Pro Dialogo* (2013/2): 63-75.

PART 2

Engagement Focussed: Developments and Initiatives

CHAPTER 7

Ecumenical Developments: The Twenty-First Century

The work of the WCC in interreligious dialogue, within which sits specific engagement with Islam, has gone through many organisational, administrative, and programmatic changes since the initial mid-twentieth century formation of a Dialogue Sub-unit. The opening decade of the twenty-first century has seen further such change, together with new directions and renewed urgency emerging with regards to dialogical relations with the world of Islam, including both Sunni and Shi'a, in a variety of contexts. In this chapter I shall first note some salient examples of the many meetings and allied events in Christian engagement with Islam that have taken place through the offices of the WCC during the first decade and a half of the twenty-first century. Engagements with Islam often take place in concert with other dimensions of wider interreligious work. I shall look a little more closely at some key ecumenical documents pertaining to engagement with Muslims and Islam, including the 2001 'Striving Together' paper, and documents from the reflective project concerning the impact of interreligious dialogical engagement *per se* upon Christian self-understanding. It is this development, more than anything else, which begins to demonstrate, in the ecumenical context, the emergence of a necessary and bona fide 'theology after dialogue',[1] that is perhaps already a hallmark of twenty-first century interreligious engagement more widely. My concern here, of course, is with respect to interreligious engagement with Islam. And while the focus of this selective review of ecumenical developments is with the work of the WCC, this work also often includes Vatican participation. A closer examination, separately, of ongoing PCID and related Vatican engagement with Islam, in distinction to that of wider ecumenical engagement, is not warranted at this juncture. RCC involvement with Islam in the early 21st C was noted at the conclusion to chapter 6 above. The object of

1 See for example my 'Theologie nach dem Dialog: Neue Wege christlich-muslimischer Beziehungen', in Mohammed Gharaibeh, Esnaf Begic, Hansjörg Schmid and Christian Ströbele (Eds), *Zwischen Glaube und Wissenschaft: Theologie in Christentum und Islam* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet 2015), pp. 237-253; and 'Theology after Dialogue: Christian–Muslim Engagement Today and Tomorrow', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 26/1 (January, 2015): 89-101.

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Part 1 has been to provide a perspective on the origins and development of the ecumenical journey of engagement with Islam. The ecumenical context is that which encompasses as wide a field of Christianity as possible, even if only representatively so. This is also the case with the four 'case studies' that follow, with all but one of them having their origin in the opening decade of the 21st century.

1 Into the New Millennium: An Overview

By 2002, following the infamous events of 9/11, the two staff members of the WCC's then Office for Interreligious Relations (OIRR) experienced an increased demand to participate in events and activities pertaining to rising concerns over Islam and Christian–Muslim relations. Such events were often conjoined with the 'Decade to overcome violence', a programme that had emerged out of the 1998 WCC Jubilee Assembly and which lead to the hosting of, and participation in, a number of consultations on religion and violence. In this regard the OIRR team was often working in and with other elements of the WCC, as well as with other ecumenical agencies such as the African PROCMURA (see chapter 8 below), and interreligious agencies such as the King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) based in Vienna. Engagement with Islam, as also with other religions, is often subsumed within wider social and religio-political agendas, as reflected in the programmatic priorities of the WCC set by the regular gatherings of the WCC Assembly. Nevertheless, the early years of the second millennium have seen huge changes in the wider consciousness of multi-religious realities and, with that, a renewed focus on and ecumenical energy for interreligious engagement *per se*, and a particular emphasis on engagements with Islam.

A Christian-Muslim conference on the theme of 'Religion and Globalisation' was held in Tehran in early 2002 together with, in Geneva that same year, an international consultation with the theme 'Christians and Muslims in Dialogue and Beyond'. At this latter event, Konrad Raiser, the General Secretary of the WCC, noted that

> Muslim-Christian dialogue, like all interreligious dialogues, is based on mutual respect and seeks to further mutual understanding. It is motivated for both partners in dialogue by a profound faith conviction and the acknowledgement of religious values. For Christians, the engagement in dialogue is a response to the teachings of the Bible which presents the

> commandment of love of neighbour as the supreme expression of God's will.[2]

He went on to state that

> Muslims and Christians share a long history of strained and often confrontational relationships as well as of experiences of mutual enrichment. Both communities have been engaged in spreading their faith and have contributed to the emergence of religious plurality in hitherto homogeneous societies. While there are many examples where Muslims and Christians have lived alongside each other for generations or centuries, sharing each other's lives and cooperating with each other for a common good, attention today is focused on contexts, especially in Asia and Africa, where Muslims and Christians have found each other locked in with communal conflicts which are aggravated by religious differences and rivalries.

For Raiser it was important that the Church engages with Islam because good interreligious relations can play a vital mediating role. In noting the way in which discrimination can operate, he commented that the 'mobility of people as refugees, migrants or in search of better opportunities has opened up hitherto homogeneous communities, giving rise to attitudes of xenophobia and exclusion'. Furthermore, globalisation and secularisation both greatly impact Christian–Muslim relations:

> In search for a meaningful common identity and for a viable order of community life, more and more people, Muslims and Christians, turn to their religious traditions. Islamism and Christian fundamentalism can be understood as responses and as ways of resisting the influence of the secular spirit of modernity and its global impact.

And, in a post-9/11 world, Raiser observed that formerly 'local conflicts involving Muslim and Christian communities are now being interpreted as expressions of a global confrontation where both communities feel threatened in their integrity and called upon to assist their affected brothers (and sisters) in their struggle for survival'. However, very often it is by virtue of the

2 Konrad Raiser, 'Reflections on the State of Muslim-Christian Relations: Perspectives from the WCC'. Paper presented to the International Consultation on 'Christians and Muslims in Dialogue and Beyond' (October, 2002).

intercession and actions of the WCC that religious leaders from the conflict zones can be brought together and progress made on re-establishing peace if not also facilitating processes of reconciliation. In the context of Christians and Muslims engaging together in the quest for better societal outcomes, he asks: 'What can we do together to foster equal citizenship and to uphold basic human rights? What are the ways to work together for establishing justice and overcoming violence? As Christians and Muslims, we share a religious obligation to work for the common good of all people and to resist the forces of disintegration and exclusion?'

Receiving visitors and delegations from various parts of the Islamic world features as a consistent element in the wider engagement of the WCC with Islam, along with various conferences and consultations involving Christian and Muslim participants and often with a specific constituency, such as Iranians, Turks, and Saudis, for example, in distinction from events involving a wider cross-section of Muslim participation. Among the many events that could be chronicled, the March, 2003, event wherein the WCC hosted an Iranian delegation at the Ecumenical Centre at Bossey, Switzerland, that featured a lecture given by the Iranian President, Mohammad Khatami, is noteworthy. Indeed, there have been a number of engagements with Shi'a Muslims from Iran with now over two decades of bilateral dialogue events held between the WCC and the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue in Tehran. Beginning in 1995, and held initially every two or three years, after a gap of a few years the sixth such meeting took place in 2012 (Geneva) and the seventh in 2014 (Tehran). The former had as its theme 'Interreligious Dialogue and Society: Ways, Means and Goals' and the latter had the theme of 'Spirituality and Modernity'.[3] The way of dialogue was affirmed at many levels, especially in the promotion of peace and justice, but also including the arena of theological and philosophical engagement.[4] A stress on the common reference of belief in one God, the need to attend to spirituality along with ethics in the quest for better relations between Muslims and Christians were also noted, among other elements, as important for the dialogical engagement.[5] Opportunities for Christian and Muslim women to engage together have also been part of WCC involvement

3 'Bilateral Dialogue between the World Council of Churches and the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue, Tehran'. *Current Dialogue* 56 (December 2014): 78-81.

4 Joint Communique of the 6th Meeting for Dialogue between the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue (CID) from the Islamic Republic of Iran and the World Council of Churches. See *Current Dialogue* 56 (December 2014): 78.

5 Joint Communique of the 7th Meeting for Dialogue between the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue of the Islamic Republic of Iran (CID) and the World Council of Churches (WCC). See *Current Dialogue* 56 (December 2014): 80.

with Islam as, also, opportunities for youth such as with the annual Bossey Interreligious Courses, held at the WCC's Bossey ecumenical centre, near Geneva and which is aimed specifically at young Christians, Muslims and Jews. Other short courses, often in conjunction with partner institutions such as the Henry Martyn Institute in Hyderabad and the University of Religious (sic) and Denominations in Qom, Iran, extend the sphere of ecumenical engagement with Islam.

In 2004 a significant working document – 'Religious Plurality and Christian Self-Understanding' – was tabled for discussion within the WCC organisation.[6] This identified challenges posed by religious plurality that require new ways of relating to peoples of other religions. The challenge is not only theological or intellectual: wider pastoral and faith dimensions are also involved, including the very significant issue of those who, in sincerity and integrity, 'seek ways to be committed to their own faith and yet to be open to the others'.[7] At the same time, issues of competing truth-claims, and confrontational clashes between religious communities, are persistent problems yet to find any lasting resolution. Islam, and the issues of relating to Muslims and, in the light of that, reconsidering what it means to be Christian, emerged as a significant element. However, this document was deemed as rather too controversial and not in fact accepted by the 2005 meeting of the WCC's Central Committee. Instead, it was used as a resource paper at the WCC's ninth Assembly in 2006.[8] At the same time a revised theological project was put in place, namely the undertaking of a series of consultations that explored Christian self-understanding in the context of specific religions, beginning with Islam in 2008.

In the meantime, one of the largest-ever interreligious consultations organised by the WCC took place in June 2005. With the theme of 'Critical Moment in Interreligious Dialogue',[9] over 130 participants, representing ten different religions, gathered in Geneva to reflect on the state of interreligious dialogue and prospects for its future development. The conference was unique because, in the words of Samuel Kobia, the then WCC General Secretary, it sought to assess 'the impact of dialogue in the last 30 years of the World Council of

6 See: 'Religious Plurality and Christian Self-Understanding', *Current Dialogue* 45 (July 2005): 4-12.

7 'Religious Plurality and Christian Self-Understanding', *Current Dialogue* 45, p. 5.

8 WCC Assembly 2006 resource paper, Religious Plurality and Christian Self-understanding: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2006-porto-alegre/3-preparatory-and-background-documents/religious-plurality-and-christian-self-understanding> (Accessed 15 March, 2017).

9 Hans Ucko (Ed), *Changing the Present, Dreaming the Future: A Critical Moment in Interreligious Dialogue* (Geneva: WCC, 2006)

Churches' involvement in this field'.[10] The hope was for the conference to be a time of stock-taking and seeing 'how best we can proceed to make interreligious dialogue the meaningful way of relating and cooperating in a world of religious plurality'.[11] The critical question – hence the theme of the conference – was 'Where to, and how, now?' and a leading Muslim participant, Tariq Ramadan, spoke of the need to combat the 'new ideology of fear' as a pervasive element of the present condition in which interfaith engagement takes place.[12] This conference was clearly very significant, reflecting the then intention that 'The World Council of Churches wishes to strengthen further its involvement in the interfaith field and make interfaith cooperation and dialogue a key priority in its programme plans'.[13] The conference proved both confirmation of and spur to the continued commitment of the WCC on the journey of interreligious dialogue including, in particular, with Muslims.

Not long after the WCC held its ninth Assembly, in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in February 2006. In response to concerns about the widespread inter-communal and interreligious violence that occurred as a result of the publication of the caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad, the Assembly called for mutual respect, responsibility and dialogue with people of other faiths. Engagement in interreligious dialogue was listed as one of the specific challenges and calls to action named in the text of the official Assembly message to the churches, which was agreed by consensus on the last day. In the event, the Assembly had presented an occasion for the WCC

> …to assess the present state of interreligious relations on a global level, look at how Christians are addressing the changing interreligious context in which they live, and focus on the common responsibility of Churches in fellowship and the various possibilities of increased cooperation between them in the area of interreligious dialogue and cooperation.[14]

In his key-note address to the plenary session that addressed the topic of Christian identity and religious plurality, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, spoke encouragingly of the promise and risk of interreligious dia-

10 Ucko, *Changing the Present,* p. 4.
11 Ucko, *Changing the Present,* p. 6.
12 Ucko, *Changing the Present,* p. 63.
13 Ucko, *Changing the Present,* p. 5.
14 WCC, 'Dialogue with other religions': <http://www.wcc2006.info/en/theme-issues/other-topics/inter-religious-dialogue.html> (Accessed 17 March, 2017).

logue.[15] Following the Assembly, the General Secretary issued a summary of programmes in respect of which 'a role in building an atmosphere of trust with peoples of other faiths so as to focus much more on cooperation than merely on dialogue alone' was advocated.[16] An emphasis on a wider context of interfaith engagement was clearly signalled. Pragmatic interests and practical outcomes are certainly the lead concerns: with respect to enumerating some of the new activities, the programme document asserts, without elaboration, 'a paradigm shift in inter-religious dialogue, with more attention to cooperation and real-life struggles of communities living in tension and persecution'. Theological reflection and engagement again appeared to be taking a backseat.

However, Muslim and Christian participants attended a multi-faith conference, held in May 2006, on the controversial interreligious issue of conversion, something of particular concern in the context of Christian–Muslim relations. The conference, jointly sponsored and hosted by the WCC's then Interreligious Relations and Dialogue (IRRD) office, the Vatican's PCID, and the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), averred that meaningful interreligious dialogue 'should not exclude any topic, however controversial or sensitive, if that topic is a matter of concern'.[17] It acknowledged differences, disagreements, and even the lack of an agreed understanding of 'conversion'. There was, accordingly, no final resolution; rather, a set of recommendations concerning freedom of religion, historical injustices, the rights of individuals to make choices, and the rights of religions to invite consideration were identified and conveyed as 'guidelines' to the religious communities represented at this dialogue event.[18] Significantly, the report concluded by articulating the need for an agreed code of practice with respect to activities leading to conversion.

A major ecumenical Christian–Muslim dialogue event took place in Geneva in November 2010. It was an international consultation entitled *Transforming*

15 R. Williams, 'Promise and risk of inter-religious dialogue' (2006): <http://www.oikumene.org/en/press-centre/news/archbishop-of-canterbury-promise-and-risk-of-inter-religious-dialogue> (Accessed 17 March, 2017).

16 Programme plans 2007-2013 – Summary. WCC Document GEN 05, Document Archive, World Council of Churches, Geneva.

17 Report from Inter-Religious Consultation on 'Conversion – Assessing the Reality', Lariano, Italy, May 2006. *Current Dialogue*, 50 (February 2008): 38.

18 See the published booklet, *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*. Jointly published by the WCC, PCID and WEA. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2006).

Communities: Christians and Muslims Building A Common Future jointly organised by the WCC, the Royal Jordanian Aal Al Bayt Institute and the World Islamic Call Society (WICS).[19] Clare Amos notes, rather trenchantly, that the

> …involvement of the Libyan-based WICS in this WCC meeting is a salutary reminder that the relationship between the WCC and the Muslim world is inevitably affected by shifts and changes in that world. The 'wooing' of WICS as a potential interreligious dialogue partner for the WCC came to an abrupt end in 2011 with the Arab spring and the radical changes in Libya and other parts of the Arab world… The events of the Arab spring have meant that interreligious engagement between Christians and Muslims both globally and in the Middle East can feel like an adventure whose rules are constantly being rewritten.[20]

Amos notes, furthermore, that as a direct result of this 2010 consultation a joint WCC and Muslim Leaders visit to Nigeria took place in May 2012 and this led to the development 'of a joint centre to monitor incidents of religious-based violence'.[21]

The interreligious personnel of the WCC are involved in a constant stream of engagements and activities, often of a multi-religious nature and so inclusive of Muslims. Nevertheless, particular attention continues to be paid to relations with the world of Islam. Furthermore, the issue of reflecting upon what the dialogical engagement with other faiths means for Christian self-understanding has also garnered considerable attention, as we will see below. Indeed, this has resulted in the production of a major document on Christian identity in the context of today's multi-faith world,[22] which was received and accepted by the Central Committee of the WCC in July 2014. Whilst a most significant document with respect to the wider field of interreligious relations and dialogue, and which reflects, and has bearing upon, engagement with Islam, it is not this document which is of primary concern here; rather the immediate focus is

19 See Transforming Communities website: <http://www.muslimsandchristians.net/> (Accessed 17 March, 2017).

20 Clare Amos, 'Vatican and World Council of Churches Initiatives: Weaving Interreligious Threads on Ecumenical Looms' in Paul Hedges (Ed), *Contemporary Muslim–Christian Encounters* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 199.

21 Amos, 'Vatican and World Council of Churches Initiatives', p. 198.

22 See 'Who Do We Say That We Are? Christian Identity in a Multi-Religious World', *The Ecumenical Review* 66/4 (December 2014): 458-501.

with Christian–Muslim relations *per se*. This is also the case with another recent and very significant document, produced as a booklet, advocating wide ecumenical engagement in interreligious dialogue.[23]

To be sure, *Called to Dialogue* notes, as part of the current context, the impact of the actions of Muslim extremists in recent years. Reference is also made to the term 'Abrahamic ecumenism' which 'has sometimes been used specifically to describe dialogue and relationships between Christians, Jews and Muslims because of their shared scriptural traditions and common reverence for the figure of Abraham, particularly viewing him as foundational in the development of monotheism'.[24] However, whilst the pedigree of the three-way dialogue (trialogue) is noted, so too the problematic use of the term 'ecumenism' in this context is commented upon. The booklet offers some biblical and theological support for interreligious dialogue more generally[25] and quite properly distinguishes intra-religious from interreligious goals. Throughout, the varying situations and contexts of relating with Muslims is referenced, for example, with respect to events in the Middle East that 'have affected quite strongly the *modus vivendi* that has existed there between Christians and Muslims, at least since Ottoman times, as well as affecting relationships, whether positively or negatively, between the Christian communities themselves'.[26] *Called to Dialogue* offers helpful practical guidance and examples of good practice, including that of the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa[27] (PROCMURA – see chapter 8 below), which can bear positively on the lived experience of contemporary engagement with Islam. But, as mentioned, there are other documents, dealing specifically with Christian engagement with Islam, that are the focus here and it is to them we now turn.

23 WCC, *Called to Dialogue: Interreligious and Intra-Christian Dialogue in Ecumenical Conversation. A Practical Guide*. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2016).

24 WCC, *Called to Dialogue*, p. 10.

25 Cf. Douglas Pratt, *Being Open, Being Faithful: The Journey of Interreligious Dialogue* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2014).

26 WCC, *Called to Dialogue*, p. 24.

27 See WCC, *Called to Dialogue*, p. 25.

2 Striving Together

In November 2000 a bi-lateral Christian–Muslim consultation undertook a review of WCC Christian–Muslim dialogue since 1991 (as noted in chapter 4 above). This resulted in the significant 'Striving Together' document, published in 2001.[28] The document begins by taking stock of the history of dialogue in a concise, but useful, way. Despite a history of largely mutual confrontation, Christian–Muslim relations as fostered by the work of the WCC had seen many advances in respect to dialogue, education, and scholarship support. Nevertheless, changing social and demographic circumstances and geo-political relations have also contributed, among other factors, to the possibility – even need – for a new modality of dialogical engagement. But this is not without difficulty and controversy: Muslim–Christian dialogue has faced 'both resistance and hesitation'. And still does. Five reservations and objections to such dialogue are identified in the document.

> There are those who insist that the local context of communal relations in a given society often makes broader dialogue irrelevant. Others suggest that dialogue may function as a cover for unequal power relations or as an ornament, concealing purposes different from those stated. There are also those who are weary of controversy and tend to be apprehensive of any mutual inquiry and questioning. Fourthly, one finds those who see dialogue as compromising the truth and a betrayal of the divine call to mission or da'wa. A fifth position argues that dialogue is, on the contrary, a more sophisticated form of mission or, even if that is not the intention of its initiators, leading to mission.[29]

Representative disparity, elitism and, ultimately, irrelevancy are also cited as objections to this arena of dialogical pursuit – if not to the whole business of interreligious dialogue as such. Nevertheless, the document claims that what has been learnt thus far 'lays the foundation for a continuing dialogue which is both hopeful and takes account of the contemporary realities'.[30]

The document goes on to explore current threats and opportunities. The interaction of local and global events, the shifting sands of politics and allied

28 Striving Together in Dialogue: A Muslim–Christian Call to Reflection and Action: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/interreligious-trust-and-respect/striving-together-in-dialogue> (Accessed 17 March, 2017).

29 Striving Together in Dialogue, Para 7, Section 1 (The History of Dialogue).

30 Striving Together in Dialogue, Para 9.

socio-political problems, macro-economic forces, demographic shifts and the march of globalisation generally are cited as among the key issues that confront religious communities. And where religion becomes exclusive by way of reaction and response to such issues, religion can be as much a factor in exacerbating problems as in resolving them. 'Religion speaks for some of the deepest feelings and sensitivities of individuals and communities; it carries deep historical memories, and often appeals to universal loyalties, especially in the case of Christianity and Islam'.[31] Socio-political and socio-cultural tensions are acknowledged in the context of Christian–Muslim relations to be a substantial area of concern. And as far as the Muslim world is concerned it is argued that, generally speaking, 'religion has regained its vigour, in resistance to Western domination and as an affirmation of the rights of Muslims and their competence to contribute to the making of a new world'.[32] The root rationale for engaging in Christian–Muslim relations is located, once again, in the cause of the counteracting of tensions and conflict: 'a culture of peace among religious communities is grounded in the culture of dialogue'.[33]

The fourth section of the statement addresses the renewal of common affirmations, which largely comprises a restatement of the basic principles of the *Guidelines to Dialogue*. Dialogue is a modality of Christian–Muslim co-operative living on a daily basis. Human diversity is 'a manifestation of divine wisdom' which begs the need for mutual respect and understanding.[34] Constructive dialogue does not require the compromising of basic belief, rather it is the case that through dialogical engagement 'the deepest meaning of what our scriptures say to us is opened up and speaks anew'.[35] The Qur'ān acknowledges that plurality 'is inscribed in God's design', that diversity of creation is within the purposes of God.[36] The intention of dialogue is mutual empowerment in the process of collaborative engagement; it 'implies a recognition of, and respect for, differences' whilst yet seeking 'to discover and appreciate common values'.[37] Dialogue is not to be confined to the realm of intellectual engagement, of course, but includes also the varied opportunities for practical engagement and interaction. In particular, 'Christians and Muslims can contribute, through dialogue, to a discourse on human rights that can help reconcile the truly universal principles and the culturally specific

31 Striving Together in Dialogue, Para 7, Section 2 (The Current Situation).

32 Striving Together in Dialogue, Para 8.

33 Striving Together in Dialogue, Para 11.

34 Striving Together in Dialogue, Para 2, Section 3 (Renewing Common Affirmations).

35 Striving Together in Dialogue, Para 4.

36 Striving Together in Dialogue, Para 5; cf. Suras 49:13, 21:07, 5:48, 7:85, 5:8.

37 Striving Together in Dialogue, Para 7.

claims'.[38] The missionary imperative of each faith does not need to result in a competitive praxis: there is a clear distinction to be made between proselytism and witness which 'is the basis for the recognition that people of faith can enjoy the liberty to convince and be convinced and, at the same time, respect each other's religious integrity, faithfulness to one's tradition and loyalty to one's community'.[39] The mutual perception of divine justice as a universal value gives grounds for the prospect of a common approach to issues of oppression and marginalisation and the upholding of human integrity and identity.

The statement ends with a section entitled 'Priorities for Action'. There is an acknowledgement of the repetitive nature of many recommendations that have emerged – which 'may well purport to emphasise their importance and remind Christians and Muslims that the task before them continues to be unfinished'.[40] That Christian–Muslim dialogue needs to have a broader impact and wider purview of engagement and that such dialogue 'retains uniqueness and urgency, locally, regionally and globally … (deserving)… to be the focus of continued attention and multiplied efforts' are among the highlighted priorities.[41] Suitable bi-lateral organisations, at both national and regional levels, need to be fostered and supported, especially where they might play a particular role 'in dealing with tensions and conflicts that affect Christian–Muslim relations and in ensuring that problems specific to one context do not spill over into others'.[42] Joint study and research, the promotion of educational programmes, and fostering positive and creative relations with the media are also noted as significant priorities for action.

3 Christian Self-Understanding: Impact and Implication of Dialogue with Islam

Following the 2006 Assembly of the WCC, changes were made to key personnel in the interreligious office which was re-configured as the Programme of Interreligious Dialogue and Co-operation. The team responsible for this programme comprised a Director and a Programme Executive for Christian–Muslim Relations, who was appointed in July 2007. As a result, a new set of projects were commissioned, including a one to strengthen interreligious trust and

38 Striving Together in Dialogue, Para 10.
39 Striving Together in Dialogue, Para 11.
40 Striving Together in Dialogue, Para 1, Section 4 (Priorities for Action).
41 Striving Together in Dialogue, Para 4.
42 Striving Together in Dialogue, Para 5.

respect through a variety of dialogical events to tackle topics such as religion and violence, and perceptions of 'the other'. Another was a project on Christian self-identity in the context of religious plurality, begun initially in 2002, which proceeded somewhat slowly at first, as noted above. Amos notes that 'the beginning of the 21st century has seen a rather more conservative climate reflected in the work of interreligious dialogue at the WCC'.[43] It was in this climate that the WCC embarked on a

> …major interreligious theological project…addressed not to the adherents of other religions, but to members of the churches themselves. It was not a theology of interreligious relations but rather an exploration of how 'Christian 'self-understanding' or Christian 'identity' were affected by 'religious plurality' or a 'multi-religious world'.[44]

In effect, the trajectory of ecumenical engagement in interreligious dialogue, including relations with Islam, had reached the point of requiring serious intra-Christian theological reflection. Dialogical engagement is ever a two-way street. Encounters with religious 'others', unless of an utterly superficial nature, must have some form of impact, both with respect to how the 'other' is perceived and understood and, significantly, what this might mean for one's self-understanding in relation to that other. For example, if dialogical encounter engenders a deep respect for the religious sensibilities, values, and aspirations of the 'other', does this require, or at least suggest, a re-evaluation of a Christian theology of that other? Are religious 'others', from a Christian theological perspective, lost souls awaiting the good news of Jesus Christ in order to be saved? Or are they already within the enfolding purpose of God, relating to God in a wholly other, but equally valid, way than that of Christian salvation?

Dialogical engagement inevitably leads to profound re-assessment of theological positions and pre-suppositions. And these days the implications of this are no more acute than in the realm of Christian–Muslim relations. So it was that, beginning with the 2002 consultation on the implication of religious plurality, the task of theological reflection was undertaken in the context of a number of projects that focussed on the issue of Christian self-understanding in respect to other specific faiths. This began with Islam in 2008 and was followed by Buddhism (2009), Judaism (2010), Hinduism (2011) and Indigenous religions (2012). Over the ensuing couple of years the overall project was

43 Amos, 'Vatican and World Council of Churches Initiatives', p. 196.

44 Ibid.

brought to a conclusion with the production of the WCC document 'Who Do We Say That We Are: Christian Self-Identity in a Multi-Religious World'.[45] What is of particular interest here, of course, is not the project as a whole, but rather the work engaged with respect to Islam.

Taking place just one year following the publication of the Muslim letter of invitation to Christians to engage anew in dialogue – the 'A Common Word' document (see below, chapter 11) – the WCC consultation on Christian self-understanding with respect to Islam, held in Geneva, 18-20 October 2008, not only began a larger project, as noted above, but was itself a significant point of 'stock-taking' with respect to the contemporary journey of ecumenical engagement with Islam. As Rima Barsoum, then Programme Executive, Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation, explains in her introduction to the Special Edition of *Current Dialogue*, it did so as a result of three key precipitating elements. These were the stimulus of the 2007 *A Common Word* (*ACW*) letter; an '*enabling ecumenical platform* established by the joint initiative of the Christian World Communions (CWC); the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) and the WCC to carry forward the journey of ecumenical theological reflection and interreligious dialogue'; and engaging specific contexts and their particular challenges as a means of providing '*an appropriate framework* for focusing the ecumenical discussion on specific contextual realities of Christian communities living in multi-religious societies, yet experiencing challenges related to their minority status, freedom religion, or being caught up in the middle of conflict'.[46] Barsoum further noted 'the presentations and discussions during the consultation corresponded to deepening theological conversations in relation to':

- understanding God's invitation to us to be good neighbours, especially in dialogue with Muslims;
- the importance of doing this ecumenically;
- 'living-in-community with Muslims' as the real objective of a frank and serious Christian–Muslim dialogue.[47]

Furthermore, she observed that

> Interreligious relations and theological articulations of faith have often been shaped in response to the context in which communities live and interact; the richness of theological approaches and statements of faith

45 See: WCC, 'Who Do We Say That We Are? Christian Identity in a Multi-Religious World', *The Ecumenical Review*, 66:4 (December 2014): 458-501.

46 Rima Barsoum, 'Introduction', *Current Dialogue* 52 (July 2012): 3 (emphasis in original).

47 Ibid.

> derived from a variety of ecumenical and interreligious contexts has nurtured and sustained the ecumenical family in its continuous theological endeavour as "faith seeking understanding."[48]

The full report of the event gives helpful and detailed insight into the process and outcomes of this consultation. Some 50 participants, including experts in Christian–Muslim relations and dialogue, leaders of a variety of major Christian groups, as well as Roman Catholic participants, engaged a wide-ranging ecumenical reflection on dialogue with Muslims. The report noted at the outset that the complex history of interaction 'has been characterized in many cases by constructive living together, but sometimes also marked by rivalry or war' and also that 'the practical living together of individuals and communities of the two faiths, and theological challenges, including both questions of Christian self-identity and self-expression in relation to Islam as well as questions relating to understanding the significance of Islam, have engaged Christians through the centuries'.[49]

The report noted initiatives emanating from the Muslim world which at that stage contributed to a climate of renewed interest in Christian engagement with Islam, included both the *A Common Word* letter and also the Global Initiative for Dialogue promoted by King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia and which had had meetings already in Madrid, New York and Geneva. Indeed, the highly ecumenical event of the Christian Self-Understanding in the Context of Islam consultation was in part a direct response to the *A Common Word* letter. However, instead of 'producing a written response to the letter by the Muslim scholars, the goal of the consultation was to provide a space for churches and communions of churches to share their initiatives and theological resources for engaging with Muslims, and to identify substantial issues for Christian theology in relation to Christian–Muslim dialogue'. Dialogical engagement with Islam was clearly a given; it was the impact and implications of that dialogue upon Christian thinking and self-reflection that was now being addressed. Thus the primary goals of this event were:

1. To seek mutual enrichment and commitment by providing space for churches and communions to share their initiatives, perspectives and specific theological resources for engaging with Muslims.

48 Barsoum, 'Introduction', p. 4.

49 Rima Barsoum, 'A Report of the Intra-Christian Consultation on Christian Self-Understanding in Relation to Islam. Geneva, 18-20 October 2008', *Current Dialogue* 52 (July 2012): 5.

2. To identify and discuss substantial issues concerning Christian self-understanding in relation to Islam.
3. To discern how best to respond to a new era in Christian–Muslim dialogue and opportunities for cooperation.[50]

These goals were to issue in a set of practical outcomes, including:

1. List theological issues that are pertinent to Christian self-understanding in relation to Islam and that are best approached ecumenically by Christians.
2. Consider ways for articulating a Christian theological understanding of dialogue with Islam and relationship with Muslims.
3. Propose ways and means to work cooperatively as churches, councils and communions in responding to the new opportunities for Christian–Muslim dialogue.
4. Popularize resources that help churches to deepen their self-understanding and their self-expression in relation to Islam.[51]

A mixed methodology was applied with respect to the active participants whose presentations and discussions were passively observed by a group of appointed 'listeners' who then provided a reflective report. The underlying intention was to map 'where the ecumenical family stands today in relation to this subject'.[52] Following a key-note lecture – 'Living as a Community with Muslims: Concerns, Challenges and Promises' – given by His Holiness Catholicos Aram I of Cilicia, the consultation focussed on four panel presentations that engaged confessional and contextual dimensions. The first two canvassed confessional Christian approaches to Islam and included papers presenting Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Reformed, Lutheran, and Evangelical perspectives. The third panel addressed contextual issues from the perspective of Christian theologians living in Islamic societies, while the fourth examined such issues but from the perspective of theologians from within situations of religious plurality. In their summary reflective response to what had transpired, the 'listeners' group concentrated upon 'substantial issues for Christian theology in relation to Islam and their implications for Christian–Muslim

50 Barsoum, 'A Report of the Intra-Christian Consultation', p. 6.
51 Barsoum, 'A Report of the Intra-Christian Consultation', p. 7.
52 Ibid.

dialogue in the 21st century'.[53] There was general agreement that more work of exploring 'theological issues pertaining to Muslim-Christian dialogue' was warranted and the WCC organisers were encouraged to arrange for and engage in such work. The panel presentations and discussions were set up so as to respond to three key questions, namely:

- What is the theological approach of your church/communion toward Islam?
- What are the resources your church/communion has developed about the issue?
- How was this theological approach expressed in the church / communion's response *to A Common Word?*[54]

For my present purposes I will endeavour to discern key elements of the presentations of the two 'confessional' panels, for they ostensibly represent at least some measure of relevant contemporary Christian approaches to engaging with Islam which, taken together, paint the broad ecumenical picture. An Orthodox perspective was given by Emmanuel Clapsis, representing the Ecumenical Patriarchate.[55] For the Orthodox world the contemporary issue of relations with Islam is set within the context of a wider challenge 'that invites Christian theology to refigure how faith in the triune God provides a transformative basis for life in its wholeness'.[56] We live in an era of irreversible plurality and so 'Christian theology must revisit its understanding how the particularity of the Christian faith relates to God's providence for all his creation once we have accepted the irreversibility of the pluralistic global world'.[57] Engagement with Islam and Muslims is set within the orbit of the quest for justice, peace, and a sustainability human *communitas*. Human dignity, from a theological perspective, is universal in being grounded in the action and imprint of the Creator upon creation. Clapsis does not elaborate upon an Orthodox approach to Islam *per se*, rather his is a wide-ranging theological contribution outlining distinctive motifs and emphases of Orthodox theology in relation to a world of religious plurality and what that means for Christian self-reflection. He argues:

53 Ibid.

54 Barsoum, 'A Report of the Intra-Christian Consultation', p. 9.

55 Emmanuel Clapsis, 'The Holy Spirit in the World: The Tension of the Particular with the Universal', *Current Dialogue* 52 (July 2012): 29-41.

56 Clapsis, 'The Holy Spirit in the World', p. 29.

57 Clapsis, 'The Holy Spirit in the World', p. 30.

> The irreversible religious plurality of the world, the conflicting claims of universality that different religions claim, as well as the potential conflicts that they generate because of exclusivity of their truth claims, give a sense of urgency to the need to reflect on whether Christianity is inherently exclusive of other religions as it has been generally proclaimed up to now.[58]

Elaborating on early Church experience, Clapsis makes the significant observation that 'the early Christian Church, while it unequivocally affirmed that in Jesus Christ God has fully and definitively revealed himself and has decisively acted for the salvation of the world, acknowledges that God's grace operated and continues to operate independently or apart from the Church because of God's providential love for the world'.[59] He adds:

> It also implies that while it affirmed Christ to be the definitive and full revelation of God, it did not exclude the possibility that God in his unconditional freedom and love has revealed himself to others, albeit not as fully and definitively as in Jesus Christ. Such imperfect or partial revelations of God in other cultures and religions can only be discerned and appreciated by what we know about God through our faith in Jesus Christ.[60]

And so early Christian 'denunciation and rejection of other religious systems, beliefs, and practices', while done so in light of a full and final affirmation of the efficacy of Christian salvation, for example, and the struggle to assert Christian uniqueness and truth in the context of the polyglot religiosity of the times, nevertheless 'constitutes a warning that not everything found in other religions or in the life of the world can be attributed to the presence and operation of God's grace in them'.[61] The Orthodox view is one that affirms the integrity of a critical theological assessment of the religious 'other'; dialogue is to be genuine engagement; a give-and-take of information, interpretation and evaluation. And this applies to the arena of Christian–Muslim relations as much as anywhere.

Professor Maurice Borrmans, representing the Vatican's PCID, gave a detailed reflection on the Roman Catholic Church's response to the *A Common Word*

58 Clapsis, 'The Holy Spirit in the World', p. 32.
59 Clapsis, 'The Holy Spirit in the World', p. 33.
60 Clapsis, 'The Holy Spirit in the World', pp. 33-34.
61 Clapsis, 'The Holy Spirit in the World', p. 34.

letter.[62] He noted a range of key texts of Vatican II and select Papal encyclicals, together with other significant guiding documents, which together provide both an overview and the substance of the Catholic perspective. The grounding affirmation that Muslims share in the divine plan of salvation, found in clause 16 of *Lumen Gentium*, together with the motif of holding Muslims in high regard as fellow-believers in, and worshippers of, the one God and Creator of us all that is articulated in *Nostra Aetate*, is clearly enunciated along with other supportive elements. Further Catholic documents, such as the 1984 'The Church and other Religions: Dialogue and Mission' and the 1991 'Dialogue and Proclamation', produced by PCID, were referenced, among others, as bearing elements of the Church's approach to, and attitude toward, Islam and Muslims. With respect to the *A Common Word* letter, Borrmans gave his own analysis and reflection and reviewed key Catholic responses.[63]

A Lutheran perspective was given by the Rev. Simone Sinn, of the Lutheran World Federation. She began with the assertion of an educational opportunity that encountering Muslims and reflecting on Islam presents for the Church today.[64] The initial response of the Lutheran World Federation to the *A Common Word* letter was positive, highlighting the 'spiritual significance of encounter between Jews, Muslims and Christians', notes Sinn.[65] From the Lutheran perspective, the life of faith 'involves an existential process of understanding God's grace in relation to one's own times and one's own life' which today 'includes actively engaging with Muslim communities, enabling direct interfaith encounter and listening to the questions that young people ask in their faith formation'.[66] Here, dialogical engagement is an extension of the life of discipleship. Lutheran Christians live and work in many different settings with regard to interaction with Muslims; there is no single pattern or approach that suits equally all contexts. Discipleship is contextual, as too the accompanying theological reflection. Sinn therefore sketched 'some basic theological ideas in relation to Islam and Christian–Muslim relations from a Lutheran perspective' not in a summary overview fashion, but for the purposes of engendering further discussion.[67] She elaborated five relevant themes: first,

62 Maurice Borrmans, 'The Roman Catholic Church and the Letter of the 138 Muslim Religious Leaders', *Current Dialogue* 54 (July 2013): 54-72; see also Barsoum, 'A Report of the Intra-Christian Consultation', pp. 9-10.

63 See also chapter 11 below.

64 Simone Sinn, 'On Lutheran Theology and Practice in Relation to Islam', *Current Dialogue* 52 (July 2012): 42-49.

65 Sinn, 'On Lutheran Theology and Practice', p. 42.

66 Ibid.

67 Sinn, 'On Lutheran Theology and Practice', pp. 42-43.

'the meaning and impact of relational ontology as presented in Martin Luther's theology'; second, 'the issue of adequate knowledge about one another … explored by pointing to Luther's own efforts'; third, emphasising interfaith cooperation 'as a joint responsibility in the worldly realm, with reference to Luther's distinction between the spiritual and the worldly realms'; fourth, proposing 'joint theological explorations into sacred scriptures and into understandings of freedom and responsibility'; and fifth, affirming 'the need for multidimensional engagement with Muslim neighbours as experienced by many Lutheran churches … and interpreted in relation to the Pauline triad "faith, hope and love".'[68]

Sinn argues relational ontology as a key insight into Lutheran theology: 'our identity as Christians cannot be explained by naming specific characteristics or properties, but by exploring the constitutive relationships in which we live'.[69] Her elaboration of this motif leads to the clear assertion of the 'rich spiritual and theological potential in reflecting on our relationship with God together with Muslims. We thereby deepen our relations with God and with one another. The theological insight into relational ontology is mirrored in lived experiences of dialogical relations.'[70] She goes on to elaborate the motif of seeking adequate knowledge about Islam and Christian–Muslim relations: allaying ignorance and prejudice through the attaining of both correct information and apposite understanding is a Lutheran hallmark of the Christian life which directly applies to the context of engagement with Muslims and Islam. This leads to the third element, that of promoting interfaith cooperation between Christians and Muslims for which Luther has a distinctive perspective that can inform Christian action today, namely the notion of two 'kingdoms' or 'realms' whereby 'the distinction between the worldly and the spiritual realms gives space to live together with people who have different worldviews. As faithful individuals, we might not agree on theological issues, but as citizens we live together, work together and jointly promote the common good of society'.[71] Here 'diapraxis', a Lutheran term denoting the dialogical relationality of pragmatic or applied interfaith cooperation, comes to the fore. Sinn remarks:

> Lutherans are involved in interfaith cooperation with Muslims in manifold ways: highly organised cooperation in humanitarian relief work,

68 Sinn, 'On Lutheran Theology and Practice', p. 43.

69 Ibid.

70 Sinn, 'On Lutheran Theology and Practice', p. 44.

71 Sinn, 'On Lutheran Theology and Practice', p. 45.

> strategic advocacy work for citizenship rights, spontaneous care for people in need, groups from the margins that challenge traditional structures and more. The question for us Lutherans is how these intense experiences in the worldly realm affect our images of the spiritual realm. If we are serious about the idea that these two realms are distinct but not separated, we need to reflect on their relationship with regard to interfaith matters.[72]

The fourth element Sinn elaborates is that of promoting joint theological explorations. As she notes, for both communities 'God's Word is a key notion in their faith understandings' however, it is 'conceptualised differently. This affects how we read sacred scriptures and construe hermeneutics'.[73] But, of course, this becomes the source of motivation and encouragement to enjoin mutual theological dialogue and Sinn helpfully canvasses a number of such dialogues undertaken between Lutherans and Muslims. 'In conversation with Muslims, Lutherans have discovered engaging with questions of freedom and responsibility to be a fruitful common issue'.[74] Finally, Sinn addresses the element of encouraging the deepening of relationship with the Muslim neighbour. In noting that, for 'Christian-Muslim encounters, faith, hope and love are intertwined' she points out that these interconnecting dimensions of 'relationship to God, the relationship to the future and the relationship to fellow human beings' offer an alternative dialogical way to that whereby it is assumed, instead, that 'we have to concentrate on joint social action and to avoid theology and spirituality in interfaith relations'.[75] Here the Lutheran perspective highlights a distinctive Christian view that is, itself, by no means exclusive. It undergirds the relationship of theological thinking to practical action as two sides of the coin of Christian engagement with Islam. Questions raised, and challenges posed by and to the Lutheran Christian family feed into the wider ecumenical perspective, and appropriately so.

Rev Dr Johnson Mbillah, representing the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), presented a Reformed perspective which, he acknowledged, is not itself a singular magisterium but an ongoing internal dialogical process that, based on non-negotiable principles derived from the Reformation, throws up a smorgasbord of viewpoints. Common characteristics hold the Reformed family of churches together. Yet when it comes to the question of this family's

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72 Ibid.

73 Sinn, 'On Lutheran Theology and Practice', p. 46.

74 Ibid.

75 Sinn, 'On Lutheran Theology and Practice', p. 47.

relation to, and perspectives on, Islam, Mbillah noted that, in practice, the wider ecumenical context often means that theological approaches overlap: there is 'no absolute theological position that remains the preserve' of one tradition only.[76] The distinctive mark of Reformed churches is that they should be constantly reforming – *semper reformanda* – in response to contemporary contexts and the epoch in which Christians find themselves. Thus, without obfuscating the evangelical task of bearing witness to the gospel, 'Reformed theology in the context of relationship with Islam and Muslims should uphold the value of human relations as a family, and at the same time recognize that such relationship involves sharing: a give and take'.[77]

An Anglican perspective, presented by way of a dialogue between Clare Amos and David Thomas, began with the acknowledgement of the three-fold foundation of Anglican theological reflection – Scripture, the Christian Tradition as mediated by the great ecumenical councils, and reason. These reflect both applied rationality and the conscience of the faithful. To this theological foundation there is now added, in respect especially to relations with Muslims, the 2008 resource *Generous Love* which offers an Anglican theology pertaining to interreligious relations. Indeed, its purpose is to root interreligious encounter 'firmly in the heartlands of Christian believing. Its approach rests on the conviction that religious diversity poses challenges to the Church not only at the political and social level, but in the area of theology'.[78] Grounded in a distinctive trinitarian theology, the biblical motif of hospitality, and deep reflection on the lived experience of 'relating to people of other faiths in a variety of contexts, and taking seriously the reality of the Other',[79] the Anglican perspective might be said to be one of dynamic engagement and reflection both on and about the 'Other' – in this case, Islam and Muslims – and also about what the fact of, and relationship to the Other calls forth in terms of self-understanding. As Amos herself remarked: 'we cannot think about Christian-Muslim engagement without thinking theologically about what is there within our tradition that requires us to have that engagement'.[80]

An Evangelical perspective was supplied by Thomas Schirrmacher, representing the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA). Noting in particular the history of discord, at times violence, between Christianity and Islam, and that between them they today represent over half the population of the globe, he noted that

76 Barsoum, 'A Report of the Intra-Christian Consultation', p. 10.
77 Barsoum, 'A Report of the Intra-Christian Consultation', p. 11.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 Cited by Barsoum, 'A Report of the Intra-Christian Consultation', p. 11.

whereas some 80% of Christians who belong to the WEA grouping of churches 'live in the South and do not see Christianity as a Western religion', nevertheless, 'from an Islamic point of view Christianity is seen as a Western religion, and therefore Christianity is sometimes seen as responsible for military or political actions taken by secular western governments'.[81] The importance of apposite contextualising of dialogue and relational engagement was thus signalled, as against the tendency, in some quarters, to essentialise either or both religions. Further, Schirrmacher noted that the understanding of what Christianity is about, which Muslims derive from references to it in the Holy Qurʾān, is not in line with how most Evangelical Christians understand their own faith. The two religions also differ quite widely 'when dealing with issues concerned with the relationship between religion, society and state' and all too often the dialogue between Christians and Muslims is dominated by the almost daily agenda of relationships between 'Islam' and 'the West'.[82]

The Evangelical response to the Muslim *A Common Word* invitation to a new dialogue is focussed on the 'counter-call' to 'seek forgiveness that is only found in Jesus Christ; this call in particular comes in response to the invitation expressed in the Muslim letter which was perceived by WEA as a call to Christians to follow God according to Islam'.[83] However, in respect to the dominant 'love of God; love of neighbour' motif of the letter, the Evangelical perspective 'aims to put love into practice and therefore presents the personal relationship with Muslims as the key to solving many problems that cannot be solved in conferences and meetings, but by how millions of Christians and Muslims live together'; nevertheless, a specific Christian theology undergirds this practice: 'Christian love is not a command given by God but the very essence of God'.[84] Advocacy of religious freedom – and so, in the case of the lack of that with respect to Christians in some parts of the world of Islam, bearing witness to the need of this freedom for all, and inter alia, 'standing in solidarity with the persecuted church' – is another strong Evangelical element. Four key points were highlighted by way of summarising the WEA approach to Islam and Muslims:[85]

1. Mission and peace can go together, as it is expressed in 1 Peter 3: 15-17, which has become the rationale for WEA to witness and answer every

81 Barsoum, 'A Report of the Intra-Christian Consultation', p. 12.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
85 See Barsoum, 'A Report of the Intra-Christian Consultation', p. 13.

question, including those asked by Muslims, but in gentleness and respect, without violating the human rights of other peoples, and with respect to this their beliefs.

2. Witness is always related to the biblical notion of martyrdom and persecution, especially (because) almost 50 percent of WEA members live in areas where they are in danger of persecution. This reality prompts Evangelicals to develop a "theology of persecution" to show that martyrdom and persecution are integral parts of their faith; nevertheless this does not give Evangelicals the right to react using violence against their persecutors, but to trust that they are in God's hand.
3. Personal relationship and hospitality to people of other faiths have been the source of strength of the WEA movement … (which has led to many conversions into this branch of Christianity)…
4. In the relationship with Muslims it is very important for the WEA to distinguish between the question of witness to the gospel, and the political issues that are handled by governments, especially issues of human rights and religious freedom. For WEA, these are two separate matters. (Thus) persecuted evangelicals should not react to persecution in any violent way; at the same time they are encouraged to use their legal rights as given in the legal system of their countries to stop this persecution.

4 Conclusion

Ecumenical engagement with Islam in the twenty-first century has thus far demonstrated a deepening and widening of relationships and dialogical activities. Some very significant developments have occurred; others are still underway. What has been canvassed above is but a taste of the range of engagements undertaken, but hopefully sufficient to give a sense of the flavour of them, and a hint of hope for the future. Furthermore, as well as concrete engagements with Muslims, in many different contexts, the reflective theological task consequent upon dialogical engagement continues. And it is clear that, today, many interfaith issues which had previously registered as of tangential concern to the Christian community globally now impact with considerable severity, the more so in some parts of the world than others. This is acutely the case with respect to Christian–Muslim relations and the cause of ecumenical engagement with Islam, and continues to be so. We now turn attention to four very specific developments, the first of which commenced in

the middle of the twentieth century. The others are quite novel twenty-first century initiatives. They represent something distinctive about Christian–Muslim engagement this century, namely evidence of a sense of deepening intentionality to engage in dialogue and a demonstrated commitment to go deeper into the dialogical conversation. Throughout we see that theological issues, questions, dimensions and reflections previously glossed or set aside are now very much to the fore.

CHAPTER 8

An African Journey: PROCMURA

PROCMURA – the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa – is a pan-African Christian organisation whose aim is to stretch 'a hand of friendship to the Muslim communities in and around Africa' and 'constructively relate with Muslims for peace in the wider society and peaceful co-existence between adherents of the two religions'.[1] It embodies an attempt at ensuring 'Christians and Muslims from generation to generation grow to appreciate that Christianity and Islam … remain part and parcel of the African religious heritage'.[2] PROCMURA is today a registered Civil Society Organisation (CSO) under the Kenyan legal system and a member organisation of various National Councils of Churches in Africa. It collaborates and co-operates with like-minded organisations in the discharge of its mandate. The present General Adviser (CEO) notes that 'PROCMURA is the sole Christian organisation in Africa that is dedicated to building bridges of understanding and promoting mutual respect between Christians and Muslims in the entire continent'.[3] It operates in twenty countries in sub-Saharan Africa today and has contacts and carries out occasional workshops in at least ten other countries 'with the hope of eventually bringing such countries into the PROCMURA fold'.[4] Its vision is to promote life on the African continent 'where faith communities in spite of their differences work together for the holistic development of the human family'.[5] Where and how did this organisation arise? In what way does it represent and contribute to the wider ecumenical journey in Christian–Muslim relations? This chapter is by no means a comprehensive step-by-step history – that would warrant a full book. While PROCMURA has produced a number of reports and books, there are as yet no book-length analyses and discussions about the programme, nor its history, although it does receive mention in

1 PROCMURA Strategic Plan 2014-2018, p. 1. See also www.procmura-prica.org

2 Ibid.

3 Johnson Mbillah, What PROCMURA is and what it stands for. *Programme for 50th Anniversary Celebration (19th-24th November 2009)*. Nairobi: PROCMURA, 2009. See also archived variants of the same paper.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

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some books and other studies.[6] For the most part these have a rather more limited or focussed purview that what I attempt here.

My aim is rather to identify, review, and critically discuss key elements and developmental contours of PROCMURA by attending to original source and archived documents. This research suggests four phases of life and work so far. They demarcate an historical trajectory and usefully frame an exploratory discussion with the intention of understanding what has happened and why, and enabling some appropriate assessment and perspective. The first phase was, to a large extent, that of a European Mission-driven project (1959-1970); the second (1970-1987) is marked by the work being controlled through an African Council with European and American support. This ended with a re-assessment of purpose and a resulting change of name. The third phase (1988-2000) is one of largely local consolidation and development consequent upon the name change, and its terminus coincides with the ending of European leadership. The fourth phase (2000-2015) is marked by the leadership of the first African General Adviser, Dr Johnson Mbillah, and a shift in strategy and allied organisational arrangements. In 2003 a small but significant modification to the name – from 'Project' to 'Programme' – took place, indicative of the new *modus vivendi* that was emerging. What began life as a missionary project, implying a sense of finite operation oriented toward a specified temporal goal, underwent institutional consolidation and programmatic expansion. It is now a permanent feature of the African religious landscape and a locus of Christian–Muslim relational aspirations and activities. Following a discussion of origins, and the review of the four phases, the chapter will close with some analytical comment and evaluation. As Ellingwood notes, 'There is much to be said … about an organization that has evolved from the last days of Western Christian missionary activity in Africa to the present-day era of interfaith relations between African Christians and Muslims'.[7]

6 See for example, Prince Sorie Conteh, *Traditionalists, Muslims, and Christians in Africa: Interreligious Encounters and Dialogue*. (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2009). This work concentrates on Sierra Leone and is by no means comprehensive of Africa. See also, for example, Effungani Margarate Salli, 'A Historical analysis of the reasons behind the suspense (sic) of PROCMURA in Cameroon and steps towards its sustainability' (Unpublished MA thesis, 2015, University of St Paul, Digital Repository). Jane Ellingwood offers a useful complementary perspective in her article, 'The Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA): An Evolutionary Perspective', *The Muslim World*, 98/1 (January 2008), 72-94.

7 Ellingwood, 'Evolutionary Perspective', 72.

1 A Project Commences

During the 1950s, even as dialogical engagement with Islam had hardly yet become an identifiable part of the interfaith agenda of the WCC, and certainly before the developments of Vatican II that spurred interfaith work of the RCC with respect to Islam, the question of the relationship of the Christian Church to Muslims and Islam within Africa had emerged in ecumenical and missionary circles. To be sure, Islam and Christianity had been engaging with each other on the African continent for many centuries. But in the course of the first half of the twentieth century, at least, each had effectively gone its own way without any significant mutual acknowledgement or interaction. There may have been the odd instance of dialogical relationship of sorts, as was certainly the case with Catholic missionary groups such as the Missions to Africa (MAfr).[8] This society has long pursued an apostolate of engaging with Muslims on the African continent. But for the most part Church Missions, and especially Protestant ones, focussed on the potential conversion harvest to be gained from the vast field of African traditional religions and cultures. Islam was a rival mission and religious community that was deemed by and large impervious to Christian missionary outreach. In other words, for the first half of the twentieth century the *modus vivendi*, if not also *operandi*, of Christian mission in Africa was a continuation of the 19th century.

However, new ecumenical and emerging interfaith sensibilities resulted in the establishment, in 1959, of the Islam in Africa Project (IAP) today known as the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (for Francophone Africa, *Programme des Relations Islamo-Chrétiennes en Afrique*) or, simply, PROCMURA (PRICA). This organisation, established by mainly Protestant and Anglican churches in Africa, with support of partner churches in Europe and North America, has been guided from the outset by a dual purpose of bearing responsible witness to the Christian faith and at the same time building bridges of understanding between Christians and Muslims. This stance presents evidence of a changed vision and mood from within some of the African Christian church communities in respect to Islam and, in particular, to Christian regard for and relations with Muslims. For the 1950s were, for Africa, no early 'post-WWII' reconstruction era, as was the case for Europe. Rather it was a significant decade where cries for independence were being heard, leading to preparations for the post-colonial era consequent upon the ending of that war. In this context, Christianity was often identified as the religion of the colonists, and

8 In French, the *lingua franca* of the Order, it is known as the *Société des missionnaires d'Afrique* (SMA).

missionary presence identified with colonialism. Modern independent African nation-states were being brought to birth. But not only the nations; African Churches also sought their independence. Old orders were giving way to new. Old patterns of behaviour, perception, and values were being challenged and changed across many dimensions of social and political and religious life. By contrast, internationally, the place and role of religion in the public sphere was submerged, with secular and political discourse dominant. In Africa there were some in the Church and Christian mission communities who recognised that religion – in particular Christianity and Islam – was a dominant force in public life. There had emerged, on the part of Christian leaders, an awareness that the presence of Islam and Muslims demanded Christian–Muslim rapport in order to advance nationalist post-colonial aspirations. In this context early proponents of the Islam in Africa Project (IAP), as it was first called, wished to avoid any repeat of historical attitudes, perspectives and values that might provoke confrontations and conflict. The project was regarded as a way of discouraging false witnessing against the Muslim neighbour, and of being at the same time a means of faithful witness to the Gospel. An educational and theological gap was soon identified: the need for expertise to combat ignorance and prejudice such as the image of Islam as a religion of violence, with Muslims as enemies of Christianity, which was inclined to linger. Furthermore, preparing for Christian mission in relation to Muslims had not been part of theological training; rather Christian missionary outreach was focussed on the propagation of the gospel to, primarily, adherents of African Traditional religions.

It was at the November 1957 meeting of the International Missionary Council (IMC) in Accra, Ghana, that African churches signalled the need to study Islam in Africa and to form an action plan in respect to the approach of Protestant Churches to Muslims. Islam was now on the agenda in a way it had not been previously. Just two months later, in January 1958, and following on from the Accra IMC meeting, the All Africa Church Conference (AACC) held in Ibadan, Nigeria, gave attention to the issue of engaging Islam. Discussions focussed on 'how Christians in Africa needed to interpret the Gospel in a more meaningful way to Muslims without violating the principle of good neighbourliness'.[9] The Ibadan conference affirmed that 'the Church in Africa, in its bid to bear witness to Christ, should avoid medieval responses to Islam that led to polemics and eventually contributed to the Crusades. Avoidance of confrontation … required an adequate and objective study of Islam and informed knowledge of the history of Muslims in the continent'.[10] Around the same time the Missionary

9 Mbillah, 'What PROCMURA is and what it stands for'.

10 Ibid.

Society of the Netherlands Reformed Church offered expert assistance to the Church in Africa with respect to engaging Islam and Muslims.

In September 1958 the IMC facilitated a conference in Oegstgeest (in the Netherlands) that saw some twenty missionary leaders from different countries in Europe formulating a plan of action to have a fact-finding mission take place in early 1959. The purpose was to 'consult leaders of Protestant and Anglican churches and missions in Africa on practical steps that could be taken to assist them in equipping the Christian community in Africa for its stated task of Christian approach to Islam'.[11] This eventually occurred (see below) with the formal inauguration of the Islam in Africa Project at a meeting in Accra in late 1959, supported by the European Liaison Committee that had been formed by and from the missionary representatives who attended the Oestgeest meeting. Also in 1958, at a meeting held at Harvard, Connecticut, a supportive group of North American partner churches was formed. Mbillah has neatly summed up the overall process: 'the seed of IAP, now PROCMURA, was sown in Accra in 1957, watered in Ibadan in 1958, nurtured in Oegstgeest in 1958, and transplanted as an African continental organisation at Accra in 1959'.[12] The hope was that IAP 'would enhance the principle of good neighbourliness – an African as well as a Christian virtue'.[13] The new African states would predominantly comprise, in varying proportions, Christians, Muslims, and practitioners of African Traditional Religions and, indeed, 'Christianity and Islam were likely to be the best or worst of rivals since both are missionary in character'.[14] Hence, from the commencement of the IAP there was fostered an approach to Islam and Muslims devoid of polemical traits, an approach intended to ensure that Christians constructively related with Muslims such that conflicts which might arise would be addressed in a non-violent manner. Cooperation and collaboration for peace and peaceful co-existence has ever been the underlying goal.

Sigvard von Sicard suggests three reasons for the establishment of the project, namely political, religious, and 'ecclesio-missiological considerations'.[15] He notes the International Missionary Council was aware that, politically, up to the late 1950s 'missions had had a good innings and support under various colonial regimes' but that this was 'coming to an end and there was an uncer-

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Arnold C. Temple & Johnson A. Mbillah (Eds), *Christianity and peoples of other faith communities* (Nairobi: AACC Africa Challenge Series, 2001), p. 2.

14 Mbillah, 'PROCMURA: What it is and what it stands for'.

15 Sigvard von Sicard, personal email correspondence, Sept. 2015.

tainty as to how the new regimes would look at mission work'. One outcome was that medical and educational work, formerly the provenance of Christian missions, was taken over by the new states, whilst there was often also pressure for change being brought to bear by non-Christian citizens who had been influenced by other ideologies, such as communism and socialism vying, among others, for supremacy within the emerging nations. And, importantly, there was by mid-century a 'growing awareness of the presence and revival of Islam', of which von Sicard notes:

> Up to this point missions had been aware of a Muslim minority in Ethiopia, along the East African coast; a scattering in South Africa, Cameroun, Northern Ghana; a substantial minority in Nigeria and majorities in the Maghrib and Sahel, all of whom had been kept in check by the colonial powers or the Emperor of Ethiopia. The not inconsiderable strength of the Coptic Church in Egypt was 'favoured' under the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium.[16]

But it was perhaps the 'ecclesio-missiological' element that is most telling for, as von Sicard puts it:

> A *mea culpa* syndrome was evident in some mission leadership circles in that, so far, everything had been in mission hands with little preparation of the members of the African churches to take on *their* responsibility for the churches to which they belonged in the emerging situation. The missions may actually have been more conscious of this than the colonial governments when they had to hand-over power to a leadership with limited national political nous.[17]

At the time, von Sicard recalls European mission directors had sensed that the development and stability of the emerging nations, with their multitudinous ethnic compositions, needed help to grow as nations in a creative and peaceful manner. In the event, the European committee which was driving the emerging re-think on mission strategy in Africa commissioned its secretary, the Rev Pierre Benignus of the Paris Evangelical Mission,[18] to conduct a short and intensive exploratory visit to the continent in early 1959. The aims of the journey were set as (1) to discern and arouse 'concern, interest and support with

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 *Société des missions évangéliques de Paris*

church and mission bodies and Christian countries with the areas visited'; (2) to establish 'contact with persons of special competence already working on the approach to Islam in Africa to secure their collaboration and discuss the whole project with them'; (3) to discern 'what church and mission bodies should and can become participants … (and) … find the most favourable locations for pilot projects … and begin local consultations as to the nature of the work that might best be undertaken' and (4) to 'make contact with training institutions which should be related to this concern'.[19] African countries were categorised into three types, namely those where Islam was clearly entrenched, those which presented as non-Islamic, and those that manifest as 'situations of maximum fluidity' insofar as the potential for Christian–Muslim relations was concerned.

From January to April 1959, beginning in Morocco and ending in Tanganyika, some 27 locations were visited. For Benignus it was not that the gospel required to be adapted 'to suit our times'; rather the means of communication and interrelating the mission of the gospel required a new strategy for a new age: 'our traditional methods, our plans ought to be revised constantly'.[20] He noted a lack of educational and informative resources and observed, rather trenchantly, that the

> African Church has a number of complexes in regard to Islam, which can be explained either by ignorance or by real fear of "the advance of Islam", or very often by both together … Everywhere there is more or less complete ignorance both of orthodox Islam and of the special types of Islam in one region or another.[21]

Initial locations for an operation within West Africa were identified in Sierra Leone, Nigeria (both North and West), Ghana, and Togo. Benignus also noted 'a certain similarity between the situation in East Africa and that in the West, at least as far as the varying types of Islam are concerned' and further observed that here the 'problem seems to be less acute, but the degree of ignorance is certainly the same'. The Christian Council of Kenya then provided funds to resource a three-month fact-finding study by Sigvard von Sicard, then a young Lutheran pastor and student of Islam working in a missionary post in Tanganyika. The study was to focus on Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika. As far

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19 Pierre Benignus, *1959 IAP exploratory journey report* (Undated booklet), p. 1.

20 Benignus, *1959 IAP report*, p. 8.

21 Benignus, *1959 IAP report*, p. 21.

as Benignus was concerned: 'Everything depends on the result of this enquiry'.[22] So, from an initial suggestion concerning the provision of specialists in Islam and Christian–Muslim relations, albeit to function in a partnering modality, together with the establishment of a contextually appropriate infrastructure, there soon arose a programme staffed in the first instance by ex-pat European 'advisers' operating within a regional or area structure vis-à-vis the churches. How did it develop?

2 Phase I (1959-1970): Islam in Africa (IAP) Launched

Von Sicard, together with Bethwell Kiplagat, duly undertook a survey of Islam in Kenya in April and May 1960. Their focus was on African Muslims in distinction from Arab and Indian Muslims, and they also noted the presence of Ahmadiyyah and Ismaili communities, together with indicators of continuing pre-Islamic traditional practices that continue among African Muslims. In short, in Africa then – as now – Muslim communities, and so Islamic identities, are highly diversified and diffuse. Following the typology articulated by Benignus, coastal Islam was classified as of the 'entrenched' type, that is, where the population and those in power are Muslim and the whole fabric of society – religious, political and social – bears an overarching Islamic stamp. In these locations the Church tends to take a defensive attitude with the result that the issue and challenge of Muslims and Islam are avoided. At best, the two religious communities are distant from each other, exercising a polite and tolerant mutual ignoring. On the other hand, in countries where the majority happens to be Christian, there is often a bigoted and suspicious attitude toward Muslims and Islam, or else an attitude of benign non-concern: the Islamic 'other' is simply ignored: a mission to Muslims as such was not entertained, even in context of a relatively relaxed pluralism such as might be found in the large cities. The report at the same time stated that

> …many Muslims encountered during the survey showed lack of knowledge and understanding of Islam not unlike the state of knowledge and understanding found among Christians in regard to their faith…Islam as seen during this survey gave the impression of being a religion of practice, of performance and specified acts; a religion which expresses itself in outwardly visible signs and symbols.[23]

22 Benignus, *1959 IAP report*, p. 28.

23 S. von Sicard, with B Kiplagat, 'Survey of Islam in Kenya' Report (PROCMURA, 1960), p. 18.

The report also noted that understanding African Islam requires understanding African ethnic culture and context. It advocated a two-fold basis for the dynamic of dialogical outreach, namely a 'deep and penetrating understanding and knowledge as well as a personal experience of the Christian faith' and a 'deep and loving understanding of the Muslim and his background'.[24] Although the imperative for the project was missionary driven, the report was at pains to point out that 'we do not study Islam in order to enable us to beat the Muslim on his own ground in argument or public discussion', nor for the sake of invidious comparison.[25] Rather, education for enhanced respect for Muslim sensibilities, values and protocols, was advocated as something implied by gospel values. Christian witness was to occur in the context of dialogical sharing.

The initial mandate of the IAP was to establish a training centre in Ibadan, Nigeria, for equipping those appointed by the churches to this new task of dialogical engagement by way of deepening their understanding of both Islam and their own faith. The Centre, initially named the Pierre Benignus Study Centre, and later renamed the Study Centre for Islam and Christianity, closed in 1975 due to financial and administrative issues. The Centre was also the location of the Central Office of the IAP. The first workers in the field – two 'Area Advisers' – travelled widely and established contacts with local church leaders who would be in a position to encourage some of their members to become involved. In the beginning it was only a small group of European missions who supported the IAP, although the original vision was that it would be an integral part of local councils of churches. As the project developed, more missions and churches, and Christian Councils, joined in and supported it. From the outset the role of advisers has been to connect with existing church structures, addressing annual church conferences, regional and parish councils, retreats and theological and teacher training colleges, and so forth. Travelling 'road shows', workshops, seminars and other public relations' activities have also been engaged, including mosque and other visits especially in order that Christians could talk *with*, and not just about, Muslims. In speaking later of the work of the Advisers, Wim Bijlefeld notes little was given by way of direction, let alone 'job description': this was to be a new pioneering work that had necessarily to pay close attention to the concrete realities of local contexts. Nevertheless, 'the informative-educational dimension was given the highest

24 Von Sicard & Kiplagat, 'Survey of Islam, p. 23.

25 Von Sicard & Kiplagat, 'Survey of Islam, p. 26.

priority'.[26] Teaching Muslims about Christianity and Christians about Islam was the mutual dialogical starting point. However, despite the desire to be properly contextualised, when teaching Christians about Islam the reality was that those charged with the task had little or no local knowledge, nor the provision of time or resource to obtain it. Thus the default position was to talk about 'basic' Islam, or Islam in general.[27]

In 1964, following the untimely death of Pierre Benignus, who had been the driving force of the IAP, Wim Bijlefeld, one of the first Area Advisers, was appointed the first 'General Adviser' (GA) whose role was to help with the profile, development, and functioning of the project's operations. The need for such a position – that of an overall leader figure – had emerged out of the first few years of experience; indeed it 'has developed over the years into what has effectively become that of Chief Executive'.[28] The title was chosen on account of the decentralised character of the IAP and the advisory nature of the Central Office in relation to the Area Committees and Area Advisers. Serving in this role until 1966, Bijlefeld was followed by John Crossley (1966-1970) who had been another of the first area advisers appointed in 1959. Crossley notes that by the end of his term there were just thirteen IAP workers, whether full or part-time, across Africa.[29] Indeed, in this first phase, the functional structure that had emerged focussed on the activities of just a handful of Area Advisers and Regional Co-ordinators. These were – and are still – supported by regional and area committees appointed by and accountable to respective Councils of Churches. Among issues and activities engaged were situations of mutual hostility and denigration, on the one hand, and of open and constructive relationship on the other. As Crossley comments: 'In both kinds of situation the Islam in Africa Project tried to be of service'.[30] In the Francophone region the work under Benignus was shouldered by the Rev. Claude Molla, a contemporary of Bijlefeld and Crossley. One of the earliest IAP publications was *Au seuil de l'Islam: Questions et Responses* by Claude Molla, the first Francophone regional adviser.[31]

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26 W. Bijlefeld 'The Project's Beginnings' in S. von Sicard, D. Bone & J. Mbillah (Eds), *Procmura at 50: 1959-2009. Where we came from. Where we are today. Where we go from here* (Nairobi: PROCMURA, nd), p. 32.

27 Cf. Bijlefeld 'The Project's Beginnings', p. 33.

28 David Bone, 'PROCMURA: Its Context, Origins and Development' in von Sicard et al., *Procmura at 50*, p. 134.

29 John Crossley 'Working alongside Muslims' in von Sicard et al., *Procmura at 50*, p. 37.

30 Crossley 'Working alongside Muslims', p. 39.

31 Yaounde: Editions CLE 1966, under the pseudonym Abd el-Massih. English Edition – *Islam and Christianity: 90 questions and answers* (Ibadan: Daystar Press 1966).

The modus vivendi of these early years – and indeed underlying the project and programme as a whole – is indicated in the words of one who has been associated with it from the outset. In his own theological formation von Sicard had been 'appalled by the attitude reflected regarding Muhammad and Islam' that came through much of the required reading of his day. He recalls:

> However the one book that stood out and drew me to a deeper study of Islam was T. Andrae's *Mohammed, Sein Leben und Sein Glaube* (Göttingen 1932). [English translation by T. Menzel, *Mohammed. The Man and His Faith* (London 1936, 1966)]. Andrae presented a psychological and theological picture which convinced me that what I had read previously was nothing short of an antithesis of the commandment "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour" (Ex. 20:16). There and then I was called and committed to what Cragg in *The Call of The Minaret* (OUP 1956), Ch. 9, later called 'retrieval'. I saw my call not as a call to a literary crusade against what I perceived as false statements written at other times under different conditions, but as a call to live and befriend Muslims in thought, word and deed striving for a richer, deeper relationship based on a common commitment to *al-maslaha al-`amma* (the common good) and the glory of God.[32]

Following an incarnational understanding of ministry and mission, von Sicard's experience encapsulated the new relational mood that was to change the face and approach of Christian engagement with Islam: 'I lived with Muslim students in Cairo, I associated with Muslims in East Africa. We were invited to their homes and we had them in ours. It had nothing to do with conversion, but living out the faith in an ongoing search for an ever deeper understanding of the mysteries of faith'.[33] This is echoed in the words of another worker in this field, Rev. Cokkie van't Leven, when she speaks of the project inspiring and urging 'all church families to make the effort to know Islam better and connect to Muslims in their neighbourhood' adding that the 'golden principle behind this

32 S. von Sicard, personal email correspondence with the author, October 2015. Von Sicard has ever been a regular attender of the ELC meetings since 1960 and promoting 'the importance of enabling African Christians to relate to their Muslim neighbours in a constructive Christ-like manner'. Following time in Africa he has spent much of his active ministry as a lecturer at the Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham, UK, and was a founding member of the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations (CSIC) there. Many of the IAP/ PROCMURA advisers and other workers within the field of Christian–Muslim relations in Africa pursued higher degree work through the CSIC.

33 Ibid.

movement has been its broad ecumenical approach and the systematic effort to train local Area Advisers on an academic level'.[34] Indeed, the two guiding principles of the project that emerged from the beginning and have sustained it since are those of faithful Christian witness and Christian–Muslim Engagement for Peaceful Coexistence.[35] On the one hand, faithful and responsible Christian witness to the Gospel in an interfaith environment of Christians and Muslims that respects the spirit of good neighbourliness implies the educative need for deeper understanding of Muslims and Islam coupled with a respectful and empathetic attitude towards Muslims as fellow human beings and, throughout, the affirmation that these inhere to what is meant by exercising Christian 'faithfulness'. On the other hand, the motif of Christian constructive engagement with Muslims for peace and peaceful coexistence for the holistic development of the human family requires actively working to promote good neighbourliness, mutual respect and tolerance, engaging with Muslim communities to resolve conflicts non-violently whilst remaining focussed on and faithful to Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

3 Phase II (1970-1987): From IAP to PROCMURA

The second phase is marked by some notable shifts. The first was the decisive turning point of establishing the IAP Council with its own Constitution with the effect of shifting responsibility for the project from the European Liaison Committee (ELC) to the new Council. This 'organizational landmark' saw the completion of the shift of controlling power, or governing involvement, from the European partners to the 'General Council of PROCMURA as the organization's decision making body'.[36] The African-based General Council of elected Church representatives included an Executive Committee. Thus at the end of its first decade, the IAP was very much in the hands of African churches with financial and other tangible support provided by the ELC together with North American Partners. John Crossley was the GA who saw through the transition from the first to the second phase, followed by Peter Ipema (1972-1979), James P. Dretke (1979-1984), and Johannes Haafkens (1984-1996). During the almost two decades of this phase the work of the project ebbed and flowed

34 Rev. Cokkie van't Leven, Goodwill Message, *Programme for 50th Anniversary Celebration (19th-24th November 2009)* (Nairobi: PROCMURA, 2009).

35 Cf. D. Thomas with C. Amos (Eds), *A Faithful Presence. Essays for Kenneth Cragg* (London: Milisende Press, 2003).

36 Klaus Hock, '15 out of 50: A Personal Reflection' in von Sicard et al., *Procmura at 50*, p. 4.

with various outcomes and degrees of success. Dretke observes that the environment in which the IAP functioned was 'always unpredictable, sometimes bitterly hostile, at other times surprisingly friendly, always mentally, emotionally, and spiritually challenging'.[37] Prior to becoming the GA, Dretke had served as Member and Secretary of the Ghana Area committee (1962-1967), Ghana Area Adviser (1968-1978) and West Africa Regional Coordinator (1974-1978). His GA successor, Haafkens, likewise had a life-time involvement in the IAP.

In the discharge of its main aims, the project focussed on building capacity in the churches in order that they may engage in Christian–Muslim relations and have an improved knowledge of Islam. A programme aimed at bringing together Christian and Muslim women so that they may address social, health and cultural issues in common began as a pilot project in 1970, languished due to slow development of area committees under which the women's programme operated, but was revived 1987 and has continued since as an important element of the overall work. By the mid-80s conceptual development with respect to 'issues relating to Islam and its politics in Africa', namely the 'close interrelationship of Islam and political power' which 'since then became some kind of *basso continuo* underlying all efforts in Christian–Muslim relations, specifically in West Africa' had become evident.[38] Throughout, educational activities of the IAP such as seminars and workshops for the most part involved Muslims 'who were given the opportunity to present Islam as their religion'.[39]

The IAP mandate was to 'keep before the churches in Africa their responsibility for understanding Islam and the Muslims in their region in view of the church's task of interpreting the Gospel of Jesus Christ faithfully in the Muslim World, and to effect the research and education necessary for this'.[40] But it was made clear that bearing faithful witness to the gospel within the Muslim world is NOT the same as seeking to convert Muslims from Islam to Christianity. Responsibility for the project rested with the churches; the IAP, in being a *project*, was regarded as a relatively short-term activity aimed at a specific end which, once achieved, would spell its end. But this was not to be. The name change that occurred, marking the end of this phase, happened because 'Islam in Africa Project', as a denominator, neither reflected the Project's affiliation to Churches nor to Christianity, and did not reflect the Project's quest to build

37 James p. Dretke, 'Walking and working in three different worlds: reflecting on a 21 year IAP experience', in Von Sicard et al., *Procmura at 50*, p. 49.

38 Hock, '15 out of 50', p. 5.

39 Johnson A. Mbillah, 'PROCMURA: A Pioneer in Christian Constructive Engagement with Muslims in Africa' in Von Sicard et al., *Procmura at 50*, p. 18.

40 Mbillah, 'PROCMURA: A Pioneer', p. 17.

bridges of understanding between Christians and Muslims in Africa. Despite all the good work throughout the 28 years of operation thus far, the full momentum that the project portended was not yet realised: it was as if a brake had been left on. The new name – Project for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa – set in place the English acronym (PROCMURA) and better reflected what the project was about. In Francophone Africa it was known as SRICA – *Service des Relations Islamo-Chrétiennes en Afrique*. The momentum began to build, and it was enhanced by a further significant shift. Heretofore the Project had been headquartered in Nigeria. Now it was to be in Nairobi, Kenya. The reasons and detail surrounding this change need not detain us here.

4 Phase III (1988-1999): Consolidation and local development

Predominantly a period of consolidation, the pattern of activities that had been previously set continued during what I identify as being the third phase, albeit with evidence of recurring regional challenges and issues. At the commencement, the GA was Johannes Haafkens and he was succeeded by Stuart E. Brown (1996-1999), a Canadian who had been previously the WCC's Programme Secretary for Christian-Muslim Relations and Relations with followers of Primal Religions. As it turned out, Brown was the last non-African appointed to this key role. One significant early activity was the 1990 West Africa Regional conference that had full Roman Catholic participation. Collaborative efforts with the Catholic Missions to Africa (MAfr) order were a feature of this phase, together with a further advance of the project into Francophone West Africa. Supporting advanced education became a significant dimension, involving PROCMURA funded scholarships to CSIC (Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations) at the Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, UK, and to the Duncan Black Macdonald Centre at Hartford, CT, in the USA. Later some African students also attended the Pontifical Institute for the Study of Arabic and Islam (PISAI) in Rome and its campus in Cairo. An ongoing quest to find and promote appropriate training courses in African University institutions was also a feature of this period.

As well as hosting its own activities, PROCMURA participated in a number of WCC-sponsored Christian–Muslim meetings in Africa. The project was by now a fully ecumenical affair and recognised as such. At the 1994 Special Synod of Bishops for Africa, Cardinal Arinze, PCID President, in addressing the need for further Catholic efforts for Christian–Muslim relations commended PROCMURA as a Protestant project and urged closer ecumenical cooperative engagement in the field. Furthermore, Angèle Dogbé notes that, after an initial

commencement in the early 70s, the Women's programme had languished until, in the late 80s, 'women argued that in order for PROCMURA to effectively achieve its goal among the churches in Africa, there was need to include women in the implementation of some of its plans' if only because 'there were issues … which needed the concerted effort of both Christians and Muslims and that when they concern women, such issues can only be effectively addressed by the women themselves'.[41] This particular programme was to be led by Christian women theologians who had specialised in studies in Islam and Christian–Muslim relations. Eventually it was Dogbé herself who was appointed to be the Women and Education Programme Coordinator, although because of engaging in preparatory further education, she could not take up her appointment as until late 2003. These positive developments notwithstanding, discontinuity at the regional leadership level, a shortage of trained experts in the field, and a lack of organisational stability have all been cited as weighing in on the life of the project.[42] And during the 1990s other developmental changes had begun to take place. These reflected uncertainty surrounding funding stability from European and North American partners, and questions as to how and where PROCMURA should focus its energies and resources. The scene was set for the significant change and advances heralded by the fourth phase. One element in this was that Area Advisers were becoming increasingly aware that PROCMURA was not a short-term operation. Another derived from the 1997 evaluation of the Project which had raised a number of issues concerning its sustainability. The job was not yet done – but how would it continue?

In 1999 the ELC and the General Council were presented with an 'evaluation implementation document' which was approved and mandated for action. Indeed, at the 1999 General Council meeting, 'the major issue on the agenda was the appointment of an African coordinator who would continue with the work among women'. As it turned out, Dr Johnson Mbillah was appointed – the first African GA. New plans for a re-focussed and sustainable long-term operation were also laid. And all this development prompted the question of the appropriateness of the term 'Project' as the denominator of something now evolving into its own, continuing, institutional format. Christian–Muslim relations in Africa were becoming increasingly complex; no short-term 'project' would be adequate to the task and the challenges raised.

41 Angèle Dogbé, 'The Women's Programme' in von Sicard et al., *Procmura at 50*, p. 244.

42 Cf. Klaus Hock, '15 out of 50', pp. 4-14.

5 Phase IV (2000-2015): From Project to Programme

The appointment in 2000 of Johnson Mbillah as the first African General Adviser, who indeed has served throughout this fourth phase, signalled not only a 'coming-of-age' moment for the project, as it was then known, but also the advent of a new era of strategic management and institutional integrity commensurate with the needs, aspirations and real-world context of 21st century Africa. It will be the task of others to assess in more detail the impact of Mbillah's leadership and the significance of the many changes and developments that have taken place to and within PROCMURA during this period which, in 2003, had a small but important modification made to its name. In the years since the major change from 'Islam in Africa Project' to 'Project for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa' it had become abundantly clear to all involved that engaging in Christian–Muslim relations in Africa was no short, or even medium term, 'project'. Indeed, the term 'project' connoted for some Muslims the idea that the Christians yet had an underlying goal or aim superimposed upon the otherwise open-ended and dialogical relational focus of activities. The fostering and promotion of Christian–Muslim relations requires rather a long-term commitment and an embedded intention with respect to ongoing activities. Indeed, it had become part of the 'business as usual' scenario for the Church in Africa. So 'Project' became 'Programme' – the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (in French, *Programme des Relations Islamo-Chrétiennes en Afrique*, or PRICA).

Interestingly, in July 2002 the first Area Advisers and African Christian Islamicists consultation, involving 23 participants from 12 African nations on the theme 'Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities', took place. The underlying concern was on advancing the existing constructive engagements for peaceful co-existence together with addressing situations of destructive engagements 'that turn Christians and Muslims into bad neighbours and sometimes ultimate enemies'.[43] Mbillah noted the difference in the 'drum-beat' of Christian–Muslim relations in parts of Northern Nigeria 'where the *Shari'a* debate has produced grave suspicions between Christians and Muslims' together with the Sudan 'where ethno-religious complicated divisions have created… (a)… gulf between the largely Arab and Muslim North and the largely Christian and Black African South'.[44] These contrast with 'the drum-beat of Christian–Muslim relations in the Senegal and the Gambia where Christians and Muslims live in harmony with little or no suspicion of each

43 Report in *PROCMURA Quarterly Newsletter*, 55-56 (Jan-June 2003), p. 1.

44 Report in *PROCMURA Quarterly Newsletter*, 55-56 (Jan-June 2003), p. 2.

other's intentions'.[45] The growing difficulty of engaging Christian–Muslim relations in a context of globalised Islamism and allied extremist violence was also noted. Yet it is within this wider context, and its African variations, that PROCMURA continued with its commitment to organise and host – either solely, or in harmony and co-operation with other agencies – workshops in various formats for Church and Muslim leaders, women and youth, ever driven by the theological imperative of actively promoting peace as a mark of witness and fidelity to Christ, 'the Prince of Peace'.

Although since 1991 there had been a literature consultant within the organisation, by 2002 a Literature and Communication Secretary responsible for dissemination of information, promoting the role of PROCMURA and the ideals it espouses, and engaging a wider PR role with the community at large, was appointed. This reflected a deepening of the commitment to the educational aspects of the work of PROCMURA, a commitment which included supporting the development of an MA programme in Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations at St Pauls United Theological College (now University), Limuru. Organisational development also saw, in October 2004, the opening of the central office building in Nairobi, Kenya, a move which gave greater stability and presence to the Programme's operations. And during the first decade of the 21st century these operations extended and expanded with an increased focus on pressing social, communal, and health issues. 2005 saw the inaugural Christian and Muslim youth training programme on HIV / AIDS. Yet although tackling a non-religious issue as such, Mbillah noted that despite the practical focus with a caveat to not engage in theological or doctrinal discussion (as the preserve of 'specialists') nevertheless 'discussions sometimes degenerated into doctrinal and theological issues which we could not avoid'.[46] In the face of a common concern it also opened up opportunities for discussions of deeper human issues. It is a curious comment, belying the fact that for many young people of faith it is, indeed, religious issues, questions and perspectives which come very naturally to the fore. It gives context for living life, including how to respond to real challenges arising from sexuality. For in the same report Mbillah makes the significant and salient point that, in respect to Christian–Muslim encounter in Africa,

> …there may be areas of emphasis that require action, and which one group may wish to focus on, but no area can be regarded as no-go areas. Otherwise we will be operating on the philosophy of "let us forget our

45 Ibid.

46 Report in *PROCMURA Quarterly Newsletter*, 63-64 (Jan-July 2005), p. 2.

> differences so that we may live in peace" instead of a philosophy of "let us understand our difference that we may live with them in peace". Conversely, we may be operating on a philosophy of "let us ignore any similarities we may have because they may lead us to think we are the same" instead of a philosophy of "let us recognise our similarities since they will help us to appreciate where we meet and where we part".[47]

Workshops on the HIV / AIDS issue, organised especially for Christian and Muslim youth leaders and as part of the ongoing women's programme, have since been a main feature along with a variety of educational activities at both national and regional levels. At times there has been need to respond to specific events and situations such as inter-ethnic and violence between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria, or rebutting the prejudicial nonsense spouted by Libya's leader, the late al-Qadhafi, in relation to his charge of Christians using a false bible.[48]

By 2008 PROCMURA operated through an Area Committee structure in 18 countries across three regions: six in Anglophone West Africa, five in Francophone West Africa, and seven in East and Southern Africa. These were served by 16 Area Advisers: six in Anglophone West Africa, four in Francophone West Africa, and four in East and Southern Africa with a programmatic focus on church leaders, both lay and ordained, women and youth. Three of the advisers also served as regional co-ordinators and Mbillah's report for that year observed the need for more advisers. Identifying the right personnel, attending to matters of training, the logistics of time, location and availability were also noted as ongoing challenges, together with some internal ecclesial issues such as the then division within the Lutheran Church in northern Nigeria. The lack of women appropriately trained in the Christian–Muslim relations field was also raised.[49] This issue reflected also the fact that attempts to establish and promote academic centres of education in Islam and Christian–Muslim relations had been meeting with mixed success, with a lack of suitable local staff identified as a critical matter.

One significant organisational development during this fourth phase has been the establishment of a pattern of Strategic Plans and Reviews. The plan for 2006-2010 noted the main focus of the programmes of PROCMURA as 'capacity building' and 'awareness creation' targeting Church leaders in the first instance, and also regular programmatic activities involving women and youth.

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47 Ibid.

48 Cf. *PROCMURA Quarterly Newsletter*, 75-76 (Jan-June 2008).

49 Annual Report of the General Adviser (2008), p. 2.

The educational dimension throughout is paramount, supported by personnel development and research, the provision of a central archive and library resources and work in the area of literature and communication. Undergirding these activities is the arena of finance and administration which received considerable attention and developmental energy with a view to securing the long-term functioning of the organisation. In the Foreword to the 2007/8 – 2011/12 strategic plan the PROCMURA General Council Chairperson, the Most Rev. Josiah Idowu-Fearon, noted that by all measures

> PROCMURA has made major strides in forging Christian-Muslim relations in the African continent. The achievement and strengths of PROCMURA are hinged on the development of a human resource within the churches that understand Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations. The pool of experts … and the increasing capacity of Church leaders and women knowledgeable on issues of Islam and Christian-Muslim relations, as well as the inclusion of Islamic studies at theological colleges are evidence of PROCMURA's contribution.[50]

However, despite the evidence of positive advance in the field, a number of key issues and risk-dimensions were also identified, namely 'the role of religion in conflicts and the anti-terrorism campaign that impact on Christian–Muslim relations in Africa by proxy' together with 'the increasing role of religion in the mapping of people's identities and therefore potentially polarising communities'. Further, 'Some Christian methods of presenting the gospel and some Muslim methods of carrying out Islamic mission (*da'wah*) are known to be polemical and confrontational and thereby create conflict between the two communities'. Significant challenges provide also significant opportunities, and PROCMURA does not work alone, as noted above. In this Plan it was recorded that collaborative ecumenical and church related 'stakeholders' now included the All African Council of Churches (AACC), the Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa (FECCLAHA), the Organisation of African Instituted Churches (OAIC), the World Student Federation – Africa Region (WSCF), the International Movement of Catholic Students (IMCS) and International Young Christian Students (IYCS). To these were added a number of inter-faith organisations, namely Interfaith Action for Peace in Africa (IFAPA), World Conference on Religions for Peace (WCRP), the Interfaith Youth Peace Initiative (IYPI) and the United Religions Initiative (URI) with Life Challenge Africa noted as a parallel operation.

50 PROCMURA Strategic Plan 2007/8 – 2011/12, p. v.

The distinctive and comparative advantage of PROCMURA was cited as longevity and history of experience in the field, it being the only African Christian organisation dedicated to Christian–Muslim relations, and a clear focus of 'target constituencies and programmes'.[51] The key challenges of this period include confrontational situations of religio-political and ethnic conflicts, terrorism and terrorist ideologies on the one hand, and multiple religious and inter-religious organisations 'flooding the continental agenda of dialogue'.[52] Indeed, it seemed a distinctive ongoing problematic element is that of 'competing world civilizations that want to own the African mind'.[53] External and economic drivers impacting the context within which PROCMURA operates included shifting donor-funding priorities, poverty of both people and the local churches, and urban drift depleting rural populations and exacerbating problems besetting large cities. Furthermore, religion as such was emerging as an increasing 'hard' definer of identity. PROCMURA, as a Christian organisation, was increasingly confronted by evangelical modalities hostile to dialogical détente. Indeed, despite PROCMURA's long-standing relations with the Evangelical Alliance in Africa (EAA), aggressive Christian and Muslim organisations were emerging as counters to its ideals and work. One consequence was that its activities were not adequately prioritised, if at all, within the programme work of most National Councils of Churches. Yet, within this problematic context regular work addressing the HIV / AIDS pandemic, for example, and programmes addressing issues of interfaith – Christian/Muslim – marriage and families continued, along with many focussing on issues of peace and development.

The most recent strategic plan (2014-2018) notes the growing complexity of intra-Christian and intra-Muslim relations that impact Christian–Muslim relations, and the fast-changing context of intractable political, economic, social and cultural manoeuvrings that seek to make religion an ally to achieve their goals. This is the contemporary problem of the 'politicisation of religion and religionisation of politics'.[54] Unethical methods of recommending the Christian and Muslim faiths together with growing religious intolerance fomented by radicalism that breed on extremist politico-religious ideologies were identified as particular components of the current context in which PROCMURA operates. Issues and challenges are changing and becoming much more polarising. In response, the work of PROCMURA, as well as continuing its

51 PROCMURA Strategic Plan 2007/8 – 2011/12, p. 15.

52 PROCMURA Strategic Plan 2007/8 – 2011/12, p. 17.

53 Ibid.

54 PROCMURA Strategic Plan 2014–2018, p. vii.

regular programmes for capacity building and education of leaders, women and youth, sets out to engage ecumenical and church organisations on Christian self-identity vis-à-vis Islam and relationships with Muslims; to promote ever more intensively constructive Christian–Muslim engagements for peace and development as well as cooperating and collaborating with the African Union and regional bodies with regard to conflict prevention and so forth.[55] This latest plan also enunciates the core values and guiding principles that guide the work.[56] These include understanding and respecting religious differences, upholding religious freedom, cultivating hope and joy as integral to development aspirations, collaboration with others of like intent, and advancing gender equality within the core programmes. The undergirding value is the promotion of peace: 'seeking to uphold God's inclusive call to promote the dignity of all human beings' and communities 'based upon right relations'.[57] Designated programmes and projects were listed as conflict prevention and transformation; peace and reconciliation for development; capacity building on gender issues in Christian–Muslim relations; collaborative action on HIV/AIDS; collaborative action environmental challenges; and advocacy and religious diplomacy towards peace and development.

6 An Evaluation

PROCMURA is a unique initiative in Christian–Muslim relations. Conceived and born in an era of new 20th century ecumenical developments and initiatives in interreligious dialogue, it grasped the nettle of emerging new possibilities for Christian engagement with Islam. From small beginnings it is now well established with a cadre of trained personnel in some twenty African countries and it is visible in some ten others. It is and remains the oldest and sole pan-African Christian organisation dedicated to Christian and Muslim constructive relations. Its focus is clear: Church leadership capacity and awareness; Women; Youth; education with the provision of resources, information and research; personnel development including the support of upper-level graduate education. A raft of regular programmes and short and medium-term projects continue the main thrust of the mission of PROCMURA as well as allow for responding to contemporary contingencies. Its core mandate is given as:

55 See PROCMURA Strategic Plan 2014–2018, p. viii.
56 See PROCMURA Strategic Plan 2014–2018, p. 4.
57 Ibid.

> To promote among the Churches in Africa, faithful and responsible Christian witness in an interfaith environment of Christians and Muslims that will promote and not unduly jeopardise the spirit of good neighbourliness;
> To promote Christian constructive engagement with Muslims, so that together, members of the two communities can work towards the promotion of peace and peaceful coexistence, and embark on joint actions on issues that militate against the development of society.[58]

Its theology of Christian–Muslim relations is grounded upon a 'belief that Christian witness is part of Christian identity and therefore obligatory, and that the Christian vocation of working for peace and peaceful co-existence is also mandatory'.[59]

Challenges to Christian–Muslim relations in Africa, as elsewhere, abound. Fundamentalism and ignorance on both sides, both of each other and often, also, of their own wider history and religious thinking, is clearly one such challenge and noted as such.[60] Islamophobia is another challenge that is being addressed by Christians and Muslims independently as well as together, as is the vexed issue of militant Islamism and related terrorist activities. To be sure, strategic issues identified in the 2014-2018 plan are apposite and remain pressing. In many places – and not just Africa – ecumenism is regrettably under threat and denominational churches find themselves more and more in 'survival mode' with no capacity for interfaith interests *per se*. Christian self-identity – an issue identified, as we saw, in the context of recent WCC interreligious and Christian–Muslim relations work – is widely problematic and impacts on the capacity of Christian communities to engage in Christian–Muslim relations. In 2014 PROCMURA identified the aspirational quest for better education about, and mutual understanding of, each other as a strategic priority, along with the need to address issues of regional co-ordination of its work, especially the matter of travel costs. Economic realities so often curb relational engagement and allied missional expectations. Rising to the challenge of political trends emerging in the wake of the so-called Arab Spring; economic trends and challenges, including the problem of high (especially youth) unemployment, and a smorgasbord of matters and issues to do with climate change and environmental trends also fall within the strategic orbit of PROCMURA's concerns.

58 PROCMURA Strategic Plan 2014–2018, p. 2.

59 Ibid.

60 Cf. *PROCMURA Quarterly Newsletter* 75-76 (Jan-June 2008).

In October 2014 PROCMURA held a meeting in Dar Es Salaam of Christian and Muslim leaders. The gathering enjoyed widespread national support and received material support from various European agencies in Germany, Norway, Denmark and Switzerland. In his Introduction to the resultant report, Mbillah noted Tanzania as an African model of respected religious diversity. Although social fragmentation can be found, it 'should not be allowed to militate against the cause of peace in any diverse society since peace is essential for human and social development and transformation'.[61] Noting the need for local contextualisation in respect to the seven regions of the country, plus Zanzibar, the conference had been convened 'to discuss disturbing developments that appear to threaten peace in society and peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims' and also 'to lay the foundation for countrywide regional interfaith (Christian and Muslim) gatherings that will replicate the Dar Es Salaam initiative'.[62] The conference itself, and its report, reflects the tenor of the work of, and challenges faced by, Africa and PROCMURA. With joint Christian and Muslim moderation, the methodology of the gathering involved paper presentations, interfaith discussions, intra-faith (caucusing) discussions; joint planning sessions and seminars, and a closing joint statement. Key issues to emerge included the role of religion in public life, the manner of conduct of religious outreach activities, the manner of display of public symbols etc., the need for mutual tolerance, and the question of how, indeed, to collaboratively carry out advocacy as religious leaders. As Mbillah asserts:

> It was recognised that the greatest influence was attained when religious leaders were able to speak with one voice, based on common positions that had been developed jointly by consensus … (and) … when separate advocacy efforts were made there should still be communication between and across religious groups, so that all sides understand the strategies that were being used, and the rationale.[63]

The ecumenical and interfaith engagement of PROCMURA bears undoubted witness to a vocational commitment on the part of those who saw and responded to the originating need and circumstance, and to those who have

61 J. Mbillah, L.G. Ezekiel and D. Madsen (Eds), *Dar Es Salaam Report – Tanzania Christian and Muslim Religious Leaders' Initiative for Peace and Peaceful Coexistence* (Dar Es Salaam, 6-9 October 2014) (Nairobi: PROCMURA, 2014), p. 3.

62 Ibid.

63 Mbillah et al., *Dar Es Salaam Report*, p. 17.

pursued the ever-challenging path of promoting positive relations between Christians and Muslims. From an era when the backdrop to this activity was community building in the light of emerging new national states, the context today is broadly one of ongoing diverse political challenges sharpened by outbreaks of religiously driven conflict, exclusionary claims, and even terrorism. In part the shift in context could be described as going from peaceful and cooperative community building to one of cooperating for community peace-making. But there is more to the context of Christian–Muslim relations in Africa than even that. Cooperative engagements in the issues and needs of the day, such as the HIV / AIDS pandemic and its aftermath, have provided an opportunity for Christian and Muslim collaboration and constituted a site for interfaith relating. This has also been the case as women, and youth, from both faiths have come together under the umbrella of PROCMURA activities and programmes.

7 Conclusion

Although evolving a necessarily sophisticated organisational structure that seeks to function with a high level of integrity and in pursuit of best practice models, its *modus vivendi* is one of service outwards and downwards. The CEO is the 'General Adviser' not the 'General Manager', even though managerial functions are inherently part of the role. The point is, the organisation in its very structural and administrative arrangements, as in its programmatic focus and delivery, is modelling and enacting a facilitative serving role. It speaks of a theology in action; of goals that are relationally proscribed; of commitment to a quality of life and willingness to be and share with the neighbour who is Muslim. Indeed, PROCMURA's 'Middle Way Theology' has been articulated as an 'imperative for Christians to witness to their faith amidst the Muslim presence and yet at the same time foster good relations with Muslims for peace and peaceful coexistence'.[64] Over the years PROCMURA has gained a high level of credibility both within and beyond the shores of Africa, recognised as 'a primary interreligious organization in Africa and primary source of information and action in Christian–Muslim Relations'.[65] Convening many meetings and workshops of Christian and Muslim leaders, PROCMURA has been engaged in a variety of situations involving mediating political conflicts; mitigating inter-ethnic conflicts; holding forums on resolving conflicts caused by itinerant

64 See *PROCMURA Quarterly Newsletter* 75-76 (Jan-June 2008).

65 PROCMURA Strategic Review 2007-2012, p. iv.

and polemical Christian and Muslim preachers, and so on. For the most part PROCMURA activities have pursued a peace-making and peace-building agenda.[66]

The success and impact of PROCMURA may in part be measured by the fact there are now in Africa Church leaders of high calibre who are also knowledgeable in Islam and respectful of Muslims and who can intervene with integrity and confidence when faced with situations of Islamist extremism and Christian counters of extreme reaction. One such is Bishop Josiah Idowu-Fearon, long-time PROCMURA Chairperson.[67] Indeed, according to Mbillah the success story of PROCMURA 'is founded on its principle of making sure that its field workers (Area Advisers) go through formal education at least to the Masters level in Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations' with at least one benefit, that they can then 'avoid the usage of inconsiderate or offensive language in their bid to constructively relate with Muslims'.[68] Although focussing on Christian–Muslim relations, attention has been paid also to wider interfaith relations.[69] With its focus on the two major religions of the African continent and a clear identity as a Christian organisation, its well-trained and informed personnel supported by a functional and efficient infrastructure and guided by competent and well-defined decision making processes, this agency of Christian–Muslim relations looks set to continue well into the 21st century the trajectory begun by a distinctly far-sighted 20th century initiative.

66 Cf. Johnson A. Mbillah (Ed), *A Journey of Peace*. Report of Conference on Religion and Conflict Prevention, Peace building and Reconciliation in Eastern Africa. Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, 2008 (Nairobi: PROCMURA, 2008); Johnson Mbillah (Ed), *Peace Building in Sudan*. The Peace and Reconciliation Workshop for Church Leaders in the Upper Nile State of Southern Sudan, Malakal, 18th May, 2009 (Nairobi: PROCMURA, 2009); Johnson Mbillah with Robert Mwanyumba (Eds), *Addis Ababa Report*. Africa Christian and Muslim Leaders' Conference on Peace and Development. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, January 8th-13th, 2012 (Nairobi: PROCMURA, 2012); Johnson A. Mbillah (Ed), *Maroua Report*. Francophone West and Central Africa Regional Conference for Christian and Muslim Religious Leaders on Peace and Development. Maroua, Cameroon, 6th-10th January 2013 (Nairobi: PROCMURA, 2013).

67 Bishop Josiah Idowu-Fearon, served a five-year term as Archbishop in Nigeria and is now the General Secretary to the Anglican Communion, based in London, continuing as Chair of PROCMURA.

68 Mbillah, 'PROCMURA: What it is and what it stands for'.

69 For example, the December 2000 consultation 'Christian Dialogue with Peoples of Other Faith Communities'. See Temple and Mbillah, *Christianity and peoples of other faith communities*.

CHAPTER 9

Building Bridges: An Anglican Ecumenical Initiative

In January 2002 Archbishop George Carey, together with Prime Minister Tony Blair and HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan, hosted thirty-eight Christian and Muslim scholars at Lambeth Palace, London, for a seminar entitled *Building Bridges: Overcoming Obstacles in Christian-Muslim Relations*. The aim was to establish an environment for bridge-building in the sense of 'creating new routes for information, appreciation and respect to travel freely and safely in both directions between Christians and Muslims, Muslims and Christians'.[1] Participants 'came from many different countries and from a variety of traditions and backgrounds' and manifested 'a strong commitment to deepen the dialogue and to broaden the understanding and cooperation between our two great faiths'.[2] So began a unique, interesting, and challenging journey of Christian ecumenical engagement with Islam in the 21st Century, albeit a journey which was not so much an entirely new venture, rather 'a road more and more travelled in recent years and many of the participants were already experienced wayfarers'.[3] Each year a group of invited Muslim and Christian scholars has met for three days of deliberation on a theological theme by means of public lectures, closed plenaries, and small-group sessions. In this chapter I will range over the almost decade and a half of this dialogical venture. It is not possible to examine equally and in depth each of the annual meetings, rather I attempt, drawing primarily on the texts emanating from this endeavour, to give a sense of what the overall intention, aims, and engagement has focussed on and produced, paying more detailed attention to some along the way.

1 The Inaugural Seminar, 2002

The first of five general topics to be addressed at the initial meeting was the place of Christians and Muslims relative to each other, to the world, and to God. This was followed by the challenge of learning from the many centuries

1 Michael Ipgrave (Ed), *The Road Ahead: A Christian-Muslim Dialogue* (London: Church House Publishing, 2002), p. 1.
2 Ipgrave, *The Road Ahead*, p. ix.
3 Ibid.

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of interaction between the two faiths; identifying problems and opportunities each community faces in a pluralistic world that includes great religious diversity; exploring contemporary challenges which transformations in societies pose to each religion; and finally the task of setting a joint agenda for future dialogue and common action. Carey regarded the potential for the seminar as achieving greater understanding, building relational bridges, and attaining fuller recognition of 'responsibilities as religious leaders and scholars to help our communities live together in ways which do not suppress our own identities but open us up to the riches which the other offers', including working to overcome suspicion and apprehension as well as hatred and intolerance, and to address 'the serious challenge that there are many around us who believe that the world would be better off without faith and all its apparent capacity to generate division, hatred and violence'.[4] And the Archbishop concluded with an exhortation to 'play our part in trying to ensure that the wider world may reap the best – not fear the worst – or what our faiths have to offer'.[5]

The intention to embark upon a pattern of regular seminar engagements was promptly identified, and a road-map for the journey's agenda articulated. It is perhaps salutary to note this agenda identified at the outset, and keep it in mind, and asks: to what extent and how well has the seminar series discharged its grounding vision of its raison d'être? Certainly it included a focus on the dimension of the local and regional, as well as the global and universal aspects of Christian–Muslim relations. With regard to the former, input from the context of Africa – paying particular attention to issues of Islamisation there – featured at this first Building Bridges meeting. Rabiatu Ammah took as her starting point the premise that

> Muslims and Christians are called to engage in ecumenical dialogue in witness to the faith in God which they have in common, so that they can work together in fulfilling their mutual responsibility of seeking peace on earth through obedience to the divine will. The desire for community – a community of harmony and peace – is common to both Islam and Christianity.[6]

She went on to note that the 'fundamental human question of justice needs to be addressed, since it lies at the core of religion' and it is often contexts of manifest injustice which abet religious fundamentalism and the propensity of

4 Ipgrave, *The Road Ahead*, p. x.

5 Ibid.

6 Rabiatu Ammah, 'Building God's peace and justice together', in Ipgrave, *The Road Ahead*, p. 96.

that to lead to extremism.[7] Attention to the theme of justice within and between the two religious communities is needful both for the common good of the wider society but also in the discharge of core religious principles and values which, in theory, should lead to the promotion of peaceful intercommunal harmony.

A second contribution identified a range of common themes and issues that have global significance. Tarek Mitri, a Lebanese Christian with many years' experience in Christian–Muslim relations with the WCC, noted the pervasive influence of the 'culture of suspicion' that often works against dialogical détente.[8] He made an important point:

> The attempt to set a common agenda owned by Muslims and Christians is not meant to suggest that statements such as 'there will be no peace among nations unless there is peace among religions' and 'wars in the name of religion are wars against religions' are irrelevant, but rather to articulate together a few important questions, not shying away from the thorny issues of our time. These questions need to be formulated in a manner that facilitates speaking, at the same time, together and to each other.[9]

Mitri identified mutual learning, redressing inaccurate media images, and rectifying false and misleading perceptions, and also the 'way in which Christians and Muslims perceive each other's understanding of the relation between religion, society and state'[10] as important agenda items. He noted, too, the need for distinguishing 'between political movements that may be genuinely inspired by religion and those that use religion as a convenient legitimization for political agendas based on quite non-religious interests'.[11] The interplay of religion, culture and ideology are also significant complex interactions as, too, are the 'principles of co-citizenship, equality, the rule of law and human rights (which) have been at the heart of the "dialogue of life" between Christians and Muslims'.[12] The dynamics of the relationship that obtains between local or regional-level contexts, on the one hand, and global or universal perspectives on the other, constitute further areas of consideration that bear upon the dia-

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7 Ammah, 'Building God's peace', p. 99.

8 Tarek Mitri, 'Dialogue between Christians and Muslims today', in Ipgrave, *The Road Ahead*, p. 102.

9 Mitri, 'Dialogue', p. 103.

10 Mitri, 'Dialogue', p. 104.

11 Mitri, 'Dialogue', p. 105.

12 Mitri, 'Dialogue', p. 106.

logical journey of the two faiths. Counteracting the tendency to globalise otherwise regional situations – a tactic of extremist ideologues on both sides – is vital, because 'Christian and Islamic beliefs and convictions can then constitute a basis for critical engagement with human weakness and defective social and economic orders in a common search for human well-being, dignity, social justice and civil peace'.[13] Allied to this, Mitri sees need for addressing the issue of the legitimation of violence 'in religious thought and in the practice of religious communities'.[14] Addressing the issue of a future agenda for Building Bridges, Michael Nazir-Ali noted the need 'to identify those principles and values which can help Christians and Muslims live together'.[15] He went on to identify issues of reason and revelation – 'both faiths are committed to seeking a dynamic consonance of reason and revelation'[16] – together with the fact that the world is increasingly plural 'with many religions, ideologies and world-views jostling each other and even competing for a hearing'[17] as critical agenda issues, complemented by the building of a civil society wherein Christians and Muslims, each from their own perspective, may remain faithful and yet complementary contributors without fear of discrimination. A contribution from Gillian Stamp concluded the agenda-setting process.[18] She noted the mutual challenges of secularism, assimilation and isolation, and the interpretation of scripture as key components.

The foundation piles for this particular dialogical bridge were thus firmly established. And from the tentative beginnings of this first seminar there quickly arose a commitment to make these conversations regular events, and that they should alternate between Christian- and Muslim-majority venues from one year to the next which has indeed been the case. Archbishop Carey retired in October 2002. His successor, Rowan Williams, made the Building Bridges series a priority of his Archbishopric. Since this inaugural meeting the themes and topics that have constituted the work of Building Bridges has included approaches to reading scripture; understandings of prophecy; the 'Common Good' in relation to faith and national identity; justice and rights; being human; issues of revelation, translation and interpretation; the interface between science and religion; religious authority and conceptions of freedom; prayer; issues of death and eschatology; the community of believers; sin, forgiveness and reconciliation; human action and divine creation.

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13 Mitri, 'Dialogue', p. 108.

14 Ibid., p. 108.

15 Michael Nazir-Ali, 'Looking forward together', in Ipgrave, *The Road Ahead*, p. 109.

16 Nazir-Ali, 'Looking forward', p. 110.

17 Nazir-Ali, 'Looking forward', p. 111.

18 Gillian Stamp, 'And they returned by another route', *in* Ipgrave, *The Road Ahead*, pp. 112-18.

2 A Decade of Dialogue: 2003-2012

Following the inaugural meeting of the Seminar, a decade of meetings was hosted and led by Archbishop Rowan Williams.

2.1 *Scriptures in Dialogue*

The second meeting, in 2003, convened in Doha, Qatar, had a distinctly scriptural focus. Prior to their attendance participants were requested to prepare a response to the question: 'When, where, how and with whom do I read scripture?'[19] This involved a combination of close engagement with biblical and Quranic texts and presentations on major themes, including the way Christians view and interpret the bible, the importance of 'listening' to God as something inherently Quranic as well as considering the Qur'ān as theophany; contemporary challenges of modernism, post-modernism, and fundamentalism.

2.2 *Prophecy*

The 2004 seminar, which considered Christian and Muslim perspectives on the nature of prophecy,[20] was held at Georgetown University in Washington, DC, thus marking the commencement by this institution of a sustained hosting and supportive commitment to the series. Sub-topics included the calling of prophets and apostles, prophets and their peoples, the place of Jesus and Muḥammad in prophetic religion, and the completion of prophecy. A clutch of pre-seminar public lectures analysed the emerging Building Bridges methodology by addressing the question: What is dialogue? Rowan Williams, presented a provocative approach to the topic by way of an analysis of atheism – exploring the significance on non-belief, or even un-belief, for faith and dialogue.[21] Mustansir Mir also asserted that a credible Qur'ān-based 'post-prophetic theology of inter faith dialogue' is both necessary and possible.[22] Significantly, Miroslav Volf applauded what he regarded as the seminar series 'methodological sophistication' with its 'very simple but momentous decision to organize

19 Michael Ipgrave (Ed), *Scriptures in Dialogue: Christians and Muslims studying the Bible and the Qur'ān together* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004).

20 Michael Ipgrave (Ed), *Bearing the Word: Prophecy in biblical and Qur'anic Perspective* (London: Church House Publishing, 2005).

21 Rowan Williams, 'Analysing atheism: Unbelief and the world of faiths', in Ipgrave, *Bearing the Word*, pp. 1-12.

22 Mustansir Mir, 'Scriptures in dialogue: are we reckoning without the host?' in Ipgrave, *Bearing the Word*, pp. 13-19.

the seminar around reading the sacred scriptures together'.[23] He went on to note three distinct advantages to this methodology: such reading opens up otherwise fixed positions; it provides a resource for tackling the vexed question of 'identity and otherness' that enables a balanced approach to dealing with commonalities and differences; and to counter the history of using scriptures in the service of mutual antipathy. The concluding chapter of the published record comprises two personal reflections on the Building Bridges' dialogue. Teresa Okure, in noting that a solid bridge is one built from both ends and meets in the middle, identified the mid-point of Christian–Muslim bridge building to be 'the God in whom we all believe as Christians or Muslims, and toward whom we all tend', asserting that in the beginning was 'God, not us or our scriptures. If in our view our God is not bigger than our scriptures, we may be in serious trouble and bondage to our books. The Christian tradition believes that first was the life, not the book…The books themselves are interpretations of lives first lived and of revelations first received from God'.[24] Ipgrave's own concluding contribution[25] focusses 'on the vocation to be bearers of the divine Word which pre-eminently belongs to the prophets, yet which in some sense is shared by all whose faith is built on attentive obedience to the message they deliver'.[26]

2.3 *Common Good*

The fourth seminar, in 2005, was hosted jointly by Catholic, Orthodox, and Muslim institutions in Sarajevo. The undergirding theme was the Common Good and the seminar addressed topics of faith and national identity. Case studies from Bosnia-Herzegovina as well as British, Malaysian, and West African contexts explored issues of citizenship, religious believing and belonging, and the relationship between government and religion. A feature of this meeting was the concluding public reception that attracted a large gathering, addressed by the Archbishop of Canterbury and three senior Bosnian leaders. The Building Bridges seminar was clearly influential in the wider bridge-mending process of the region. Indeed, the Common Good theme registered with the participants of the seminar in a very particular way: They 'had brought home to them the particular poignancy and relevance of this global theme in

23 Miroslav Volf, 'Hospitable readings: Comments on *Scriptures in Dialogue*', in Ipgrave, *Bearing the Word*, p. 24.

24 Teresa Okure, 'Building Bridges: A personal reflection from a Christian', in Ipgrave, *Bearing the Word*, p. 117.

25 Michael Ipgrave, 'Bearing the Word: Prophecy in Christian and Islamic Scriptures', in Ipgrave, *Bearing the Word*, pp. 124-140.

26 Ipgrave, *Bearing the Word*, p. 116.

the Bosnian context' given that, a decade before, 'Serbian Orthodox, Croatian Catholics, and Bosniac Muslims had all been engaged in a series of bitter conflicts where religious belonging had been implicated with ethnicity and culture in a complex nexus of contested identities', but were now jointly challenged with the task of 'building a nation and civic society' focussed on the common good.[27] Three key questions were addressed, namely how believers of different faiths and mixed societies may together approach the common good; what it is about religious faith that motivates the seeking of the common good and how the pursuit of that sits with religious world-views and models of governance and expectations of justice; and how the disorder that is the lot of the contemporary world may be responded to in the light of the respective religious traditions, and how that is to be sustained and projected into the future. These were – and are – significant issues of community relations, political praxis and social justice. As Ipgrave remarks: 'It is precisely because their motivations are so deeply rooted in their different spiritual visions of the world that Christians and Muslims need to act together in practical ways to call human society back to God's purpose for its common home'.[28] In his conclusion to the published proceedings of this seminar, Ipgrave notes the association of the image of 'building bridges' with the circumstances of the famous Old Bridge of Mostar. The original, erected in 1557 and designed by an Ottoman architect, had been destroyed in 1993. A remark at the time – 'We will build a better bridge and an older one when we are finished' – attributed to the military General responsible for its destruction can now, and in light of the replacement built in 2004 that re-unites the previously divided communities of that town, pose something of a potent challenge 'to all involved in building partnerships between Christians and Muslims today'.[29] As Ipgrave puts it:

> Can we build bridges that are better than their predecessors and older? Better, in that they are more resilient in standing up to our testing times of division and enmity, and better also, in that they are more useful in serving the public good of communication. Older, in the sense that the theological foundations for our relationships reach deeper into the historic cores of the Christian and Muslim faiths.[30]

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27 Michael Ipgrave (Ed), *Building a Better Bridge: Muslims, Christians, and the Common Good* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008), p. 1.

28 Ipgrave, *Building a Better Bridge*, p. 131.

29 Michael Ipgrave, 'Conclusion', in Ipgrave, *Building a Better Bridge*, p. 175.

30 Ibid.

2.4 *Justice and Rights*

The fifth Building Bridges meeting took place in 2006 at Georgetown University in Washington, DC, with the theme 'Justice and Rights – Christian and Muslim Perspectives'. Views of divine justice as found in scripture, the development of traditions of interpretation and application within both religions with a focus on political authority, and contemporary issues of rights and religious freedom were topics of discussion. In addition to Bible and Qur'ān passages, the writings of Augustine, al-Ghazālī, Martin Luther, and Ayatollah Khomeini, as well as the historic *Barmen Declaration* promulgated by the Confessing Church of Germany prior to World War II, and the 1960s Vatican II document *Dignitatis humanae* (The Declaration on Religious Freedom), as well as modern Islamic declarations on human rights, were all utilised. The discussion of texts other than scripture was a different experience from the 'scripture-dialogue' pattern that had thus far predominated. In his Introduction to the published record of this seminar, Ipgrave notes:

> Given the way in which the societies of Christendom and of the Islamic world have developed over the centuries, and given also the way in which both faiths have throughout their history exhibited many different patterns of relationship with political power, it did not seem possible to treat the subject adequately without reference to texts beyond the scriptures.[31]

The published proceeding is in three parts, reflecting the structure of the seminar itself. The first contains three chapters on the topic of scriptural foundations – presentations from a Muslim and Christian contributor each of whom 'emphasize both the centrality of justice as a criterion for recognizing the nature of God and the urgency of justice as a divine command to be realized in the world'[32], and a collection of four items on specific texts, two from each faith (Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament; Qur'ān and hadith collections) that explore the relationship of the 'divine characteristic and imperative of justice to the human exercise of power in society'.[33] For Islam and Christianity justice can be seen to be both 'a concept and a vocation grounded in their scripturally shaped understanding of who God is and what his purposes are for

31 Michael Ipgrave (Ed), *Justice and Rights: Christian and Muslim Perspectives* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), p. x.

32 Ipgrave, *Justice and Rights*, p. 1.

33 Ibid.

humanity…It is at once descriptive of the Creator and prescriptive for the creature'.[34]

Part Two, 'Evolving Traditions,' follows a similar pattern with respect to a focus on political dimensions of scriptural interpretation. For both religions it was intra-religious conflict rather than considerations of an external 'religious other' that galvanised developments in respective understandings of justice and rights. For example, the discussion of a text from St Augustine highlights his theological response to a major early Christian schism (Donatism) and the text from al-Ghazālī showed how he sought to recognise and delimit 'the scope of heresy within a fiercely contested Islamic space' while the passage from Luther shows up his attempt 'to identify the role under God of political government in a Christendom whose unity is shattered by the Reformation'.[35] In general, for both religions, 'the urge to define and contain heresy or schism, the challenge of relating political and religious authority, and … the felt need for that unity to be apparent'[36] were motivating factors in the intellectual development applied by each as they developed their orthodox identities and normative doctrines. Part Three, 'The Modern World', comprises one chapter discussing human rights and the freedom of religion and a second containing four items – two Islamic, two Christian – on a series of apposite contemporary texts. Ipgrave rightly notes that human rights' discourse has come 'to dominate the way that justice is understood in many human societies and globally' even though the roots of this 'can be traced further back in both religious and secular thinking'.[37] The single presentation of this section traverses tensions and challenges of applying the widely affirmed idea that freedom of religion is a human right into the specific situations of concrete religions and the contexts of religious practice. The four sets of texts examined in the final chapter – including the *Barmen Declaration* and *Dignitatis humanae* on the Christian side, and some writings of Ayatollah Khomeini and two declarations of human rights on the Muslim side – 'address in different ways the relationship between religious commitment and state power, and the grounding of the language of rights in religious faith'.[38] Once again it could be said that whereas the details of each reflect the deep differences of historical context and *Sitz-im-Leben* whence they arise, it is perhaps the underlying dynamic of what it is that is being addressed, and how, which is of deeper import to Christian–Muslim dialogue.

34 Ibid.

35 Ipgrave, *Justice and Rights*, p. 49.

36 Ibid.

37 Ipgrave, *Justice and Rights*, p. 107.

38 Ibid.

2.5 *Being Human*

The theme of 'Humanity in Context' the focus of the sixth seminar, held in Singapore in December 2007. It was initially scheduled to be held earlier that year in Malaysia but, as a result of certain difficulties with some Malaysian Islamic authorities opposed to the very idea of dialogical détente with the Christian world, a switch of host location was made. The subject matter was Christian and Muslim understanding of what it is to be human. Three questions were posed, with the aim of focussing upon theological responses to them: What does it mean to be human? What is the significance of the diversity that is evident among human beings? What are the challenges that humans face in living within the natural world? Whereas previous seminars explored contested issues within the field of Christian–Muslim relations, the focus in this case was on 'a shared sense of common purpose in addressing issues that affect us equally and inseparably'.[39] Thus the seminar addressed common concerns of identity, diversity, and stewardship that confront both Christians and Muslims but which produce highly variegated responses. Relationship to the wider environment was a key sub-topic. The seminar approached the theme of human diversity from a number of perspectives, but not that of religious diversity as such, as that had already surfaced previously. Rather the 'indices of difference'[40] which were addressed included race, culture, and gender. In some ways, while understandable in the context of the unfolding of the seminar series itself, absenting religious diversity was something of a paradoxical omission. For it is, in fact, the issue of this diversity – both within as well as between religions – which is so much entwined with many other indices of human diversity, as well as being of critical import itself in respect to any context of interfaith relationship and interfaith encounter.

A particular innovation took place at this seminar, namely that 'for the first time in the seminar series, some Quranic texts were introduced by Christian scholars, and some biblical texts were introduced by Muslim scholars'.[41] As noted by the editors, this 'cross-reading' of one another's texts 'can be seen as a sign of the collegiality that is possible when faithful believers who have grown to trust and respect one another meet in openness in the presence of their respective scriptures'.[42] In many respects this seminar signalled a deepening of the dialogical relationship as a fruit of the regular, consistent, and deeply intentional nature of this particular example of Christian–Muslim dialogue.

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39 Michael Ipgrave and David Marshall (Eds), *Humanity: Texts and Contexts: Christian and Muslim Perspectives* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), p. xvi.

40 Ipgrave and Marshall, *Humanity*, p. xvi.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

And in his Afterword, Williams noted that 'what human beings believe about themselves' lies at the heart of most contemporary global issues and crises with, as an extreme yet widespread conception, the idea of humanity as

> …essentially identical with its own will to domination, as though to be human (is) to be involved in a struggle to become more and more completely emancipated from "nature" and free to exercise the choice to be (and do) whatever we will… Most dramatically, this mindset stands behind our environmental crisis, but it is also visible in some of our mythology about technology and its capacity to free us from humiliating limits, a mythology that operates in the medical world as well as the world of management of what lies around us.[43]

It is this contested arena of human self-understanding that the Singapore meeting sought to address. In drawing upon texts and addressing contexts, the seminar, and its resultant record, bears witness to the fecundity and possibility of profoundly good Christian–Muslim dialogical engagement and, at the same time, provides a fine resource capable of being taken up and used by Christians and Muslims for both educational and dialogical purposes. Indeed, Ipgrave remarks in his Introduction that whereas this seminar's book cannot convey the depth and diversity of the exchanges that took place during the seminar itself, nevertheless it is hoped that 'the wealth of material presented here will stimulate a like dialogical engagement among and between the book's readers. If this mirrors the experience of Singapore, that dialogue will often be as intense between Christian and Christian, or Muslim and Muslim, as between those of different faiths'.[44]

2.6 *Scripture in Focus*

Just five months later, in May 2008, the seminar held in Rome had as its primary task the wider consideration of scripture. Revelation, translation and interpretation in the two traditions were closely considered. By way of being a departure from the normal pattern, this meeting was entirely private – there were no public events as such. Lectures and small-group scripture study facilitated discussion of the historical particularity and universal significance of revelation; the possibility of continuing revelation; issues of translating the Word; and passages in which scripture itself reflects on how scripture is to be interpreted. David Marshall notes the salient point that, for Christians,

43 Rowan Williams, 'Afterword: Reflections on Humanity in Text and Context', in Ipgrave and Marshall, *Humanity*, p. 145.

44 Ipgrave and Marshall, *Humanity*, p. xv.

'scripture is generally understood as witnessing to the primary revelation of Christ, whereas for Muslims scripture is in itself the primary revelation'.[45] The section on methods and authority in interpretation featured a discussion of scriptural interpretation in the context of interfaith engagement with respect to *Generous Love*, a theology of interfaith relations prepared in early 2008 by the Anglican Communion Network for Inter Faith Concerns (NIFCON),[46] and also the concluding section of *A Common Word* (*ACW*) – the Jordanian-initiated Muslim call for dialogue promulgated in October 2007.[47] The record of this seminar includes an insightful summary of the discussions. Some useful indicators of lines of thinking are given concerning what Christians and Muslims might mean 'by speaking of scripture as revealed or inspired'.[48] Here the Muslim perception of the Qur'ān as recording the direct speech of God contrasts with the Christian view of the Bible as a record of divinely inspired, but nevertheless human authored, diverse literary genres that bear witness to, rather than directly being, the Word of God.

One significant question posed was: 'How can a transcendent God speak in a created language without being diminished in status?' David Marshall comments on the oft-made point 'that the centrality of the Qur'ān in Islam corresponds to the centrality in Christianity not of the Bible but of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh' that in fact 'not all Christians approach this point in quite the same way; those holding a doctrine of biblical inerrancy have a view of scriptural revelation that may have some affinity with that held by Muslims'.[49] A further useful note is sounded in respect to translation: 'the different instincts…together with the different practices that Christians and Muslims have developed, arise from their contrasting fundamental premises about the revelation of the divine Word in flesh and as book'.[50] Yet within each there is an extensively sophisticated set of traditions concerning how scriptural texts are to be interpreted and applied. And although the motif of abrogation can be found in either, it has taken on considerable significance within Islam 'in terms both of the interpretation of different passages of the Qur'ān in relation to each other and also of the relationship of Islam as a whole to earlier religious

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45 David Marshall (Ed), *Communicating the Word: Revelation, Translation, and Interpretation in Christianity and Islam* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), p. xii.

46 Michael Ipgrave, 'The Use of Scripture in *Generous Love*', in Marshall, *Communicating the Word*, pp. 142-52.

47 Reza Shah-Kazemi, 'The Use of Scripture in *A Common Word*', in Marshall, *Communicating the Word*, pp. 153-162. See also Chapter 11 below.

48 David Marshall, 'Conversations in Rome', in Marshall, *Communicating the Word*, p. 164.

49 Marshall, 'Conversations in Rome', p. 166.

50 Marshall, 'Conversations in Rome', p. 167.

traditions'.[51] The question of the fundamental theological rationale for engaging in dialogue was addressed from the perspective of love for the other as mandated from within both sets of scriptures, together with their normative traditions of interpretation and understanding. Here, love was viewed not as denoting an emotional sentiment but a fundamental disposition issuing in hospitable relatedness: 'Hospitality and courtesy can be seen as stemming from this fundamental loving disposition, which can then develop into a deeper love based on increased knowledge of the other'.[52]

2.7 *Religion and Science*

Held at a university in Istanbul, the eighth Building Bridges seminar in June, 2009, took place in the anniversary year of Charles Darwin and so focussed on the interface between science and religion. Observing that Darwin's legacy 'is by no means uniformly hostile to religious faith' Williams argued that 'we need to understand better the whole nature of the challenge that scientific research poses to theology'.[53] In an attempt to do just that, this meeting once again attended to selected classical non-scriptural authors.[54] Other more recent and contemporary texts, from sources as diverse as Darwin and Dawkins on the one hand, and Pope John Paul II and Sayyid Qutb on the other, were also discussed. Both the Muslim and the Christian surveys of the respective relationships of science and religion disavowed any single normative relation: 'There is no such thing as *the* relationship between science and religion' in either case.[55] There are rather many facets, possibilities and options, and in dialogue some of these were explored. With respect to more contemporary issues impacting on this field, challenges were raised by the three modern mentalities of postmodernism, New Atheism, and fundamentalism. In respect of postmodernism, the emphasis placed on the manifest co-existence of multiple narratives 'which lends itself to some useful ways of relating scientific, religious, and other forms of knowledge', was helpfully noted.[56] New Atheism

51 Marshall, 'Conversations in Rome', p. 169.

52 Marshall, 'Conversations in Rome', p. 172.

53 Rowan Williams, 'Building Bridges in Istanbul', in David Marshall (Ed), *Science and Religion: Christian and Muslim Perspectives* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), pp. 1-4; p. 3.

54 These include: al-Ghazali (*Deliverance from Error*), Ibn Rushd (*The Inconsistency of the Inconsistency*), Basil of Caesarea (Homily 1 from *Hexaemeron*), Gregory of Nyssa (*On the Making of Man*), Augustine (*The Literal Meaning of Genesis*) and Thomas Aquinas' commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*.

55 Marshall, *Science and Religion*, p. xi.

56 Denis Alexander, 'Science and Religious Belief in the Modern World: Challenges and Opportunities', in Marshall, *Science and Religion*, p. 38.

is less of a novel critique of religion as it is a popularised contemporary cultural expression of an age-old antipathy to religion: 'Religion is the enemy that must be attacked by any means. Emotional assertions take the place of rational arguments' and furthermore 'the new atheists defend scientism and seek to invest science in general and evolution in particular with the rhetoric of atheism'.[57] The particular aspect of fundamentalism that is addressed is crude creationism that (mis-)reads the biblical Genesis narrative as if it were scientific fact. Indeed, it was observed that 'New Atheism and creationism provide mirror-image fundamentalisms'.[58] On the whole, for both Christians and Muslims the phenomenon of modern religious fundamentalism has had a deleterious impact for the science and religion debate, as it acts to misdirect attention and confuse the real dialogical issues.

2.8 *Tradition and Modernity*

Building Bridges came to Georgetown University in the USA for a third time, in May 2010, for its ninth seminar. With 'Tradition and Modernity' as the theme, changing patterns in religious authority and different conceptions of freedom emerging in the modern world were considered, along with the writings of some outstanding Christian and Muslim modern thinkers. The relationship between tradition and modernity was seen to be 'a natural continuation of discussions at earlier Building Bridges seminars, notably on the interface of science and religion in 2009'.[59] Among the opening lectures, Vincent Cornell provided an excellent discussion of primitivism in Islamic thought and scripture. 'Primitivism' names an ideological set – there are a number of variants enumerated – that opposes modernism. Whereas chronological primitivism 'places the best condition of human life, the best state of society, or the best condition of the world at some point in the past',[60] cultural primitivism holds that there is one culture, or religion, which is the true and best, in distinction from which all others are false or in some way deficient. Cornell examined various forms of primitivism found in the Qurʾān and Hadith then looked at the forms of primitivism that underpin the ideologies of both Salafi and Shi'i Traditionalists, on the one hand, and Modernists on the other. He paid particular attention to Sayyid Qutb, Ayatollah Khomeini and 'Ali Shariati. However, lest it be thought that primitivism predominates Muslim thinking, Cornell

57 Alexander, 'Science and Religious Belief', p. 40.

58 Alexander, 'Science and Religious Belief', p. 42.

59 David Marshall (Ed), *Tradition and Modernity: Christian and Muslim Perspectives* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), p. 1.

60 Vincent J. Cornell, 'Tradition and History in Islam: primitivism in Islamic thought and scripture' in Marshall, *Tradition and Modernity*, p. 9.

reminds readers of the example of 16th century Morocco as providing evidence of Muslim capacity to 'foster creativity and innovation'.[61]

Janet Soskice provided a reflection upon the meaning and concept of 'Tradition' from a Christian perspective, and two papers – one Muslim, one Christian – were given on the issue of authority in light of the impact of modernity. An interesting observation is here made: whereas it was the arrival of the printing press that ushered in the age of modernity, it is the arrival of the age of digital media that signals the shift to postmodernity. In both cases changes to the nature, extent, and relative speed of communication and the dissemination of ideas precipitated profound challenge – both explicit and implicit – to received orthodoxies and structures of authority. Abdullah Ahmed An-Na'im discussed freedom of speech and religion within an Islamic context, noting that as 'there is no logical possibility of religious belief without equal possibility of disbelief, denying the right to disbelieve is denying the right to believe … the purpose and meaning *of* freedom of religion includes freedom *from* religion'.[62] The heretic and apostate have as much right to be, as does the believer; and the right to no religion is not to be at the expense of those inclined to be religious. Thus, a secular state is 'one that is neutral regarding all religions without being hostile or indifferent to any religion, as the necessary location for mediating competing claims about freedom of speech and religion'.[63] An-Na'im advocates 'civic reason' as the mediating modality. David Hart provided a corollary paper in which he contrasted modern notions of freedom as libertarian autonomy with the premodern understanding that the human being requires the divine in order to be.[64] The dialectic of modern autonomy and premodern heteronomy has many facets and is perhaps not so much a matter of polar opposition as contrastive reference points on a continuum.

The selection of thinkers whose work was the focus of small group discussion at the seminar is most interesting.[65] Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) had a

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61 Cornell, 'Tradition and History in Islam', p. 8.

62 Abdullah Ahmed An-Na'im, 'Freedoms of speech and religion in the Islamic context', in Marshall, *Tradition and Modernity*, p. 57.

63 An-Na'im, 'Freedoms of speech and religion', p. 58.

64 David Bentley Hart, 'Christianity, Modernity, and Freedom', in Marshall, *Tradition and Modernity*, pp. 67-78.

65 On the Christian side excerpts from *The Idea of a University* (1852) by John Henry Newman (1801-90) and his *Apologia pro vita sua* (1865) and *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk* (1875) were included. From Lesslie Newbigin (1909-98) there a compilation of excerpts was made from a number of his books, together with a single substantial excerpt from a chapter entitled 'The Virtues, the Unity of a Human Life and the Concept of a Tradition' taken from Alasdair MacIntyre's (1929-) major work, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (1981). The final Christian author was Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1938-) with two significant

range of his texts discussed; Vincent Cornell wondered if Abduh was in fact a Sufi-inspired modernist. Excerpts from Sayyid Abu Mawdudi (1903-79) provided an opportunity to touch on Islam and secularism, human rights in Islam, the rights of non-Muslims in an Islamic State, and the Qurʾān and the place of women. From Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1933-) there was sequence of excerpts from two of his books, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man* (1975) and *Traditional Islam in the Modern World* (1987) that were closely discussed. The last Muslim writer whose works were considered is the renowned contemporary Islamic intellectual Tariq Ramadan. Excerpts from three of his books,[66] were the subject of analysis and discussion. In his 'Afterword', Williams stressed the importance of avoiding 'an assumption that these two words, "tradition" and "modernity," are in all circumstances natural opposites' and he noted the paradox latent in several of the seminar's lectures 'that it is modernity of a certain kind that makes it possible to talk about tradition as we do.'[67]

2.9 *Prayer*

Building Bridges returned to Qatar in 2011 for its tenth seminar, albeit meeting on the campus of Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service. The Georgetown link to Lambeth Palace in respect to the organisational and hosting dimensions of the seminar had by now developed to a very close working relationship indeed, although it was still the case of maintaining an alternating pattern between Christian and Muslim host countries. In a memo to invitees to this particular seminar, Williams pointed out that since the topic was prayer, this meeting, more so than in any previous year, would take up matters of personal faith, practice, and experience alongside academic questions. In preparation, each attendee wrote briefly on 'What does prayer mean to you?'; these personal reflections on prayer were an exercise in imagining responding to someone claiming to not know what prayer is, and who asks what prayer means. What do you tell this person? The inclusion of these reflections within the published record of the seminar means that not only in keeping with previous volumes in the series which present the main prepared papers, discussions and responses as an academic record, there is also very much a stamp here of something deeply personal, even intimate. In setting the scene for the seminar, Williams noted that, throughout the decade over which Building Bridges has

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excerpts, one from *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (1983) and another from *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesia-logy of Liberation* (1993).

66 *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (2004), *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation* (2009), and *What I believe* (2010).

67 Rowan Williams, 'Afterword', in Marshall, *Tradition and Modernity*, p. 221.

taken place, 'again and again, we come back to the challenge, when we meet, of seeing one another praying. So it seemed very natural that at some point we would have to address the question of what we understand by prayer'.[68] He added: 'Prayer is about the way in which a relationship is realized and sustained. Prayer is about the way in which the self-giving outgoing of God becomes real in us and for us, so as to transform our own sense of ourselves, of what is possible for us, of what is owed to one another, of how we look at the world'.[69]

Prayer can be – and is – discussed rationally, theologically and objectively; it is also an intensely subjective, personal and spiritual matter. Prayer is the universal bridge that links the human to the divine. And along with these mini-essays the scripture selections and excerpts from a broad range of classical and modern Christian and Muslim writings about prayer that were the focus of consideration are part of the seminar's resource anthology. For a seminar on prayer offered, as Williams commented, an opportunity to 'reflect not simply on one isolated subject in Christian or Muslim discourse,' but rather

> …on what it is for a human creature to be related to the Creator…As we enter more deeply into that mystery we enter more deeply, surely, into an understanding of all those other topics we have discussed such as justice, human nature, tradition and modernity, religion and science. We put all those discussions into a new and greater context.[70]

The practice of prayer, and what prayer means, within each religion was addressed. Both theological and experiential perspectives were brought to bear. A Christian perspective was given on Muslim prayer and, conversely, a Muslim perspective given on Christian prayer. The Muslim contributor, for instance, noted the Christian understanding of the sacraments might suggest there is perhaps more in common with the five pillars of Islam than might be typically otherwise thought. The Christian noted of Muslim prayer its 'robust masculinity' and rich physical expressiveness, coupled with its naturally public nature. A response by Rowan Williams suggested five key themes pertinent to the understanding and practice of prayer that may be discerned: friendship, knowledge, desire, protest and unity – both of God (God is One) and with God (we are one in God).[71]

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68 Rowan Williams, 'Preface', in David Marshall and Lucinda Mosher (Eds), *Prayer: Christian and Muslim Perspectives* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), p. xvi.

69 Williams, 'Preface', in Marshall and Mosher, *Prayer*, p. xvii.

70 Ibid.

71 Rowan Williams, 'Response', in Marshall and Mosher, *Prayer,* pp. 73-76.

With respect to the relationship between prayer and scripture, the Lord's Prayer and *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* were discussed at some depth. In her exploration of the prayer taught by Jesus, Susan Eastman focussed on the naming of God as 'Our Father', the coming of the Kingdom, surrender to the Will of God, references to bread, debt and the economy of God, and deliverance from evil. She concluded that the meaning of the Prayer is found 'in the shape and direction of Jesus's own life, and in Jesus's identity as Emmanuel, God with us' and that it 'expresses the central movement of his life: surrender to God's will and deliverance from evil for all humanity'.[72] Rkia Elraoui Cornell asserted that *al-Fātiḥa* is both the 'opener' and the validation of all Muslim prayer: omit it, and Islamic prayer is invalidated, for it is 'through prayer that the believer's commitment to God is validated'.[73] *Al-Fātiḥa* serves as a reminder and affirmation of the abundant mercy and absolute praiseworthiness of God; of the sovereignty and singular unity of God; and that it is to God first and foremost that the human being looks for guidance. This brief prayer 'sums up the message of the Qur'ān, which embodies the Islamic faith as a whole'[74] and, Cornell suggests, is focussed on three conceptual points: the divinity, lordship and limitless mercy of God. How Christian and Muslim believers learn to pray was another subtopic which included issues of childhood experiences of formation and 'approaches to growing in prayer, and methods and disciplines adopted by those seeking to develop deeper lives of prayer'.[75]

Timothy Wright evocatively comments that 'prayer is a love affair in which words, gestures, and memory all come into play'.[76] He sketched four elements, or 'pillars' of Christian prayer, namely: *lectio divina*, which is a form of reading and pondering or meditating upon texts of scripture; the use of silence; the use of non-scriptural spiritual texts; and the daily cycle of prayer, which remains part of Christian practice in many church traditions. Alongside the Christian reflection, Timothy Gianotti shared his reflections and lessons of growing in prayer as a Muslim, touching on themes of tests and difficulties; the quality and scope of prayer; the focus and implications of prayer.[77] Williams 'Afterword' identifies two key themes. On the one hand 'the inescapable recognition in both Christian and Muslim reflection on prayer that it is not enough to think

72 Susan Eastman, 'The Lord's Prayer', in Marshall and Mosher, *Prayer,* p. 89.
73 Rkia Elraoui Cornell, 'Al-Fatiha', in Marshall and Mosher, *Prayer,* p. 92.
74 Cornell, 'Al-Fatiha', p. 97.
75 Marshall and Mosher, *Prayer,* p. xiii.
76 Timothy Wright, 'Growing in Prayer as a Christian', in Marshall and Mosher, *Prayer,* p. 141.
77 Timothy J. Gianotti, 'Growing in prayer as a Muslim: reflections and lessons of a struggler', in Marshall and Mosher, *Prayer,* pp. 147-157.

of praying as something we do'.[78] It is that; but more than that – and the doing of it requires discipline and attentiveness to the word or utterance of God: 'We speak God's Name and so make our utterance and utterance of God's revealed identity; we pray by declaring who God is…We desire to say nothing but the echo of what God has said and done'.[79] On the other hand, there is the theme of remembrance. 'Prayer is a moment of mindfulness'.[80] It is a constant note throughout the Qurʾān as well in both Muslim and Christian practices of prayer. Prayer is not about attracting God's attention for our benefit, nor is it 'to be thought of in isolation from an entire and habitual mindset; prayer arises from a steady habit of seeing our environment against the background of God's ordering and sustaining of everything'.[81]

2.10 *Death and Destiny*

The eleventh seminar, in 2012, had as its theme 'Death, Resurrection and Human Destiny'.[82] This event was, unusually, held over two locations and it was the last seminar hosted by Rowan Williams as he soon thereafter relinquished his role as Archbishop of Canterbury. The first location was King's College, London, where three pairs of public lectures on death, resurrection, and human destiny in relation to scripture, the Christian and Islamic traditions, and the notion of 'dying well' were given. N.T. Wright commenced with a discourse on biblical perspectives pertaining to death, resurrection and human destiny and also gives reply to the Muslim response provided by Reza Shah-Kazemi. A substantive Muslim contribution paying similar attention to Islamic texts, and ranging over the same topics as Wright, is provided by Mona Siddiqui with Jane Dammen McAuliffe giving a Christian response. Rowan Williams identified six themes to arise from the discussions and papers, beginning with some practical and pastoral questions around the topic of death and dying, particularly the idea of the 'ownership' of death – to what extent are individuals empowered to make determinations concerning their own death and the process of dying? Given that personal self-control, and so individual responsibility, is a *sine qua non* of adult existence, Williams notes that in both traditions there are lines of thought and insight concerning conscious and gracious relinquishment of control that can be 'a challenge both to the dying person and to

78 Rowan Williams, 'Afterword', in Marshall and Mosher, *Prayer*, p. 175.

79 Williams, 'Afterword', p. 175.

80 Williams, 'Afterword', p. 176.

81 Ibid.

82 See David Marshall and Lucinda Mosher (Eds), *Death, Resurrection, and Human Destiny: Christian and Muslim Perspectives* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2014).

the medical caregiver'.[83] Religion is no necessary reactionary blockage, nor the advocate of a carte blanche approach, to issues of personal determination and the freedom to choose the when and how of our death. And both traditions also provide provocative insight into the way we live by way of a 'cluster of questions represented by the idea of dying before you die'.[84] Talk of ultimate destiny, with notions of putative eternal termini encapsulated in the terms 'heaven' and 'hell', may be seen as an orientation to how the life of faith is lived in the here and now.

This line of reflection led to Williams' third theme, namely whether and to what extent as individuals we have responsibility for, or can in some way obtain by our own merit, our ultimate salvific end. There are many, often mutually exclusive, views on this. One of these takes Williams to his fourth theme – whether in some sense religion offers a mode of surviving death. This places the meaning of ultimate destiny on the continuation of some sensible personal identity that maintains a pattern of, albeit sublime, enjoyment (heaven) or else never-ending punitive torment (hell). Williams suggests that in both Muslim and Christian faiths matters of ultimate destiny are more about God and the quality of relationship and response to God than 'about some insecure bit of us that somehow manages to survive the annihilating experience of death'.[85] Of the two other themes raised by Williams, one has to do with the generic question of what it means for each to die as a member of their respective religious community. Does this provide corporate context and meaning to what is otherwise a singularly personal and individual event? As Williams' remarks: 'that we do not die alone remains important for both our traditions'.[86] The final theme has to do with the very origin of death. For Christianity this is linked to the theological concept of 'Fall' arising from the biblical aetiological myth, implying that death itself is a blot on the divine intention for creation. Contrariwise, there is also a strong element within the Christian tradition that sees mortality and finitude as inherent to the design of creation and hence the intention of the Creator. Is the sting of death in its very facticity, or in our fear of it because of disconnectedness from the transcendent reality, in which our finite lives otherwise best find their true context and meaning? Williams does not presume to provide answers but rather provokes further lines of thought and question to stimulate the Christian–Muslim encounter.

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83 Rowan Williams, 'Reflections', in Marshall and Mosher, *Death, Resurrection, and Human Destiny,* p. 117.

84 Williams, 'Reflections', p. 117.

85 Williams, 'Reflections', pp. 119-20.

86 Williams, 'Reflections', p. 120

Two days of closed small group sessions in Canterbury followed the day of lectures in London. Texts discussed were drawn from scripture, medieval classics, including excerpts from al-Ghazālī's *Revival of the Religious Sciences* and portions of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, and select contemporary writings. 1 Corinthians 15 was the Christian scriptural text chosen, together with a range of appropriate *ayat* selected from the Qurʾān. One session included discussion and response to presentations on funerals in the Church of England, on the one hand, and Islamic practice, on the other. This was notable in that the selected texts and discussion 'illuminated current funeral practice among Christians and Muslims'.[87] In the volume of proceedings each selected text is followed by an essay from one of the participants and the book itself draws to a close with an overview of the conversations held at Canterbury, a reflective Afterword by Williams, and a moving selection of 'Personal Reflections' on death, albeit presented anonymously, that participants were asked to write prior to the seminar. This was in response to the question: 'In your experience, what resources has your faith given you for responding to the deaths of others and/or the prospect of your own death?'[88] As a result, the volume of the 2012 seminar, as with that from the 2011 seminar on Prayer, is marked by something deeply personal and intimate. It allows privileged access to something both profoundly intellectual and movingly spiritual. But the book does not end with these reflections.

3 A New Phase Begins

The theme of the twelfth seminar, held in Doha in May 2013, was 'The Community of Believers: Christian and Muslim Perspectives'[89] and this occasion marked the beginning of the new era with Georgetown University at the helm. The seminar considered topics such as the Church as the mystical body of Christ as against the Church as 'proclamation'; together with an exploration of the origins and use of the term *ummah* among other topics pertinent to an exploration of the theme of community as it applies to the two faiths including the nature and purpose of the community, unity and disunity in the life of the community, the theme of continuity and change, and general reflections. In 2014 the thirteenth seminar, chaired by Professor Daniel A. Madigan, SJ, was

87 David Marshall, 'Introduction', in Marshall and Mosher, *Death, Resurrection, and Human Destiny,* p. xviii.

88 Marshall, 'Introduction', p. xix.

89 Lucinda Mosher and David Marshall (Eds), *The Community of Believers: Christian and Muslim Perspectives* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2015).

again hosted at Georgetown University. The focus of the meeting had to do with concepts and interconnections of sin, forgiveness and reconciliation.[90] The nature and meaning of sin, and the divine forgiveness offered in relation thereto, have long constituted points of theological contention between Muslims and Christians. This meeting canvassed perspectives from the two faiths, with a notable interlinking of personal and corporate, or communal, dimensions, including peace building and conflict resolution. Three sets of paired Christian and Muslim essays anchored discussions around the core concepts of sin, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The proceedings includes the set of three 'scripture dialogues' comprising a pattern of a discussion of a biblical text, a Quranic text, and of comparative texts from the Bible and the Qur'ān. Linda Mosher draws the record to a close with a reflective discussion of the overall dialogical conversation that took place, thereby 'providing the reader with a sense of the tone and level of engagement among the participants'.[91]

The seminar in 2015, the fourteenth in the series thus far, had as its theme the nature and purpose of human action, set within the context of divine creation. This was a relatively novel topic in that 'there are no clear lines of disagreement about it between the Christian and Muslim traditions writ large. Rather, within each tradition can be found a range of viewpoints and explanations for the relationship between divine and human agency'.[92] As of writing, the record of this seminar is in preparation. It will include overview essays addressing the broad topic, and a sequence of paired papers, with accompanying 'scripture dialogues', focussing upon the sub-themes of 'God's Creation and Its Goal', 'The Dignity and Task of Humankind within God's Creation', and 'Human Action with the Sovereignty of God'.[93] The fifteenth Building Bridges seminar, held 2016, had as its topic 'Monotheism and its complexities'.[94] This seminar engaged very directly with what lies at the heart of each tradition's textual record of revelation: the very concept of deity. Each professes monotheism; divine unity is paramount; there is only one God. Yet each holds a different, and *prima facie* conflicting, ontological understanding of deity.

90 Lucinda Mosher and David Marshall (Eds), *Sin, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation: Christian and Muslim Perspectives* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2016).

91 Mosher and Marshall (Eds), *Sin, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation*, p. xiv.

92 Event details on Building Bridges website: <http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/events/fourteenth-building-bridges-seminar-human-action-within-divine-creation> (Accessed 27 February 2016).

93 Lucinda Mosher and David Marshall (Eds), *Human Action within Divine Creation: Christian and Muslim Perspectives* (*forthcoming* – in preparation).

94 I am grateful to Lucinda Mosher who has provided helpful information on the forthcoming 2016 seminar, and the proceedings in preparation from the 2015 seminar.

While a comparative exploration of the 'oneness' of monotheism is to be the underlying pattern, it remains to be seen, for example, just how this seminar tackles the resolution of Trinity and *tawhid*.[95]

4 Conclusion

As previously noted, following the retirement of Archbishop Rowan Williams Georgetown University, in Washington, DC, took on the key organisational and hosting role in place of Lambeth Palace. Georgetown professor, Daniel Madigan SJ, assumed the chairing role in accordance with William's suggestion. Madigan himself notes the significant role played by David Marshall in respect to much of what has occurred during the entire span of the series, including the organisational changeover from Lambeth to Georgetown.[96] Formerly chaplain and interfaith adviser to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Marshall had become the academic director of Building Bridges, now ably assisted by Lucinda Mosher.[97] The baton of Anglican initiative, handed on to Catholic care, continues to be a fully ecumenical venture. From the outset, together with Anglicans and others representing a range of Christian traditions including Orthodox, Coptic, Lutheran, Methodist, and Reformed, significant numbers of Roman Catholics having participated. Although predominantly Sunni, the Muslim side has also included Shi'a and the seminars have always included a substantial proportion of Christian and Muslim women scholars. In all, over 200 persons, roughly half Muslim and Christian, have taken part in the seminars. Participants do not represent a geographical or national constituency; rather they bring their own specialist perspective to the discussion. One important criterion is that the participants' expertise is situated within, or has to do with, their own religion: Building Bridges is no talk-fest for Christian experts on Islam or vice versa; it is a dialogue of Christian and Muslim theological scholars.

The seminars have been described as an exercise in 'appreciative conversation' during which one remains rooted in one's own tradition 'whilst at the same time reaching beyond it'.[98] In being so described, the 'appreciative conversation' motif has much in common with David Lochhead's definition of the dialogical relationship: openness and trust which is clear, unambiguous, and

95 Cf. Douglas Pratt, 'Christian-Muslim Theological Encounter: the priority of *tawhid*', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 7/3 (1996): 271-284.

96 Daniel Madigan, personal email correspondence, February 2016.

97 Georgetown University hosts the online presence of seminar materials, for instance.

98 Gillian Stamp, 'And they returned by another route', in Ipgrave, *The Road Ahead*, p. 113.

has no other purpose than itself.[99] By the same token, Rowan Williams has noted that Building Bridges 'was brought into being to fill what was thought to be a gap; a gap not at the diplomatic or political level but a gap of a lack of opportunity for serious, reflective, and fairly loosely-structured encounter between Christian and Muslim scholars'. [100] And Madigan notes the depth of 'engagement with each other over disputed issues and diversities of theology' with 'pre-judgements that remain in place for some of the participants even after the seminars'.[101] Such depth of engagement cannot presume resolution of differences, but may lead to deeper mutual acceptance, appreciation and understanding. Indeed, a significant dimension of such level of engagement is that, as Rowan Williams is reported to have remarked, it leads to 'improving the quality of our disagreements'.[102] Understanding more nuancedly and precisely the nature and reason for disagreement can lead to an enriched understanding of each other's position, and of the item about which disagreement exists. Disagreeing need not vitiate dialogue; indeed, it can be quite the reverse. Thus Building Bridges falls into the category of dialogical projects marked by religious conviction and academic rigour, in this case following a style of 'working together, studying sacred texts together, and above all learning to listen to one another speaking to God and also to watch one another speaking to God. It is a style which has been patient, affirming, and celebrating'.[103] Building Bridges remains a work in progress,[104] as is the German Christian-Muslim Theological Forum, to which we now turn.

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99 David Lochhead, *The Dialogical Imperative: A Christian Reflection on Interfaith Encounter* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988).

100 Rowan Williams, 'Remarks at dinner to mark the Fifth Building Bridges seminar,' 28 March 2006. <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1275/justice-and-rights-fifth-building-bridges-seminar-opening-remarks>.

101 Daniel Madigan, personal email communication.

102 Ibid.

103 Rowan Williams, 'Preface', Marshall and Mosher, *Prayer,* p. xv.

104 Cf. Lucinda Allen Mosher, 'Getting to Know One Another's Hearts: The Progress, Method, and Potential of the Building Bridges Seminar', in Douglas Pratt, Jon Hoover, John Davies and John Chesworth (Eds), *The Character of Christian-Muslim Encounter: Essays in Honour of David Thomas* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2015), pp. 512-526.

CHAPTER 10

Christian-Muslim Theological Forum: A German Journey

Initiated by Hansjörg Schmid, then a young scholar in Stuttgart, a group of young German theologians – namely Schmid, together with Andreas Renz and Jutta Sperber – interested in fostering dialogue with Muslim scholars began a process in 2002 that led to the founding of the *Theologisches Forum Christentum – Islam* (hereafter: the Forum). The chief motivation was to facilitate an academic theological dialogue between Christians and Muslims in the German language on the supposition that such dialogue could make a significant contribution to the common life of Muslims and Christians within Germany. Such an encounter was to be balanced and equal in terms of both level of engagement and the expertise of the interlocutors. Initially involving Catholic and Protestant scholars, at the early planning stage the Forum was conceived as an ecumenical venture so far as the Christian side was concerned. Once underway, the intention was to be broadly inclusive with respect to the presence of diverse forms of Islam (Sunni and Shiʻa) within Germany, and to strive for a balance of gender participation as well. Sperber notes that 'from the start we envisioned a Christian-Muslim *theological* dialogue, knowing that this would have to be prepared carefully'.[1]

From the outset it was realised that such a venture, in order to be successful and capable of development, required an operational and organisational base, and the security of administrative continuity. This was gained in having a committed organising group, and a home-base provided by the Academy of the Catholic Diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart. This has proved to be a very hospitable location and much appreciated by all participants. There was clear and early recognition of the need of intentionality and commitment to a long-term project, and so appropriate action was undertaken. The originating concept was of specialist symposia comprising invited participants only. There was a sense that something had to be carefully nurtured. In this chapter I discuss the early developments – the 'Gentle Beginnings' – and then survey the first ten years (2005-2014) of Forum activities (the annual meeting – Tagung), ending with some concluding observations of this most distinctive journey of contemporary ecumenical Christian engagement with Islam.

1 Jutta Sperber, personal email communication, March 2016.

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1 Gentle Beginnings

This German initiative began rather more cautiously as compared to the Building Bridges seminar series. Whereas the latter began with fanfare and a high-profile event, the Forum commenced with a phase of ecumenical conversation and reflection before any reaching out to Muslim dialogue partners was undertaken. Thus two preliminary Christian-only conferences – in March 2003 and 2004 – were held with an ecumenical group of Christian participants who had particular interest or speciality in Islam and Christian–Muslim relations. In April 2004 a further meeting with a group of Muslim scholars was held to develop the programme and the organisational structure for the ongoing Forum and its activities. This resulted in the establishment of a joint Christian–Muslim core group to attend to conference arrangements and resultant publication responsibilities. A relatively consistent working and conference structure was developed and the commitment to publish the conference proceedings was made; a commitment that has been consistently honoured. To ensure dialogical integrity it was important that Muslim voices spoke for Muslim perspectives, as Christian voices did for their perspectives, rather than one side speaking for the other.

The purpose of the preceding Christian-only gatherings was for reflection and discussion about the process of, and theological rationale for engaging in, dialogue with Muslims. The Christian interlocutors were concerned to know what they were getting into and why; and to approach the venture of dialogue with Islam with integrity and intentionality. One ancillary aim, identified at the early stage of development, was that the Forum should allow younger and new scholars an opportunity to share the results of their research. This was to be intentionally forward-looking; an academic discursive exercise engaging the emerging generation of scholars and leaders in the field. Indeed, the Forum was to prove a seed-bed for new and emerging scholarship in the area of Christian–Muslim dialogue more widely as well as contributing to the development of Islamic theological scholarship within the German context, including the establishment of Chairs and departments for Islamic studies and teaching within German universities.

The publication arising from the first preliminary conference, attended by some twenty-five German Protestant and Catholic theologians, sets the scene for understanding the context and drivers for the inception and formation of the Forum.[2] Hansjörg Schmid, in outlining the background context,

2 Andreas Renz, Hansjörg Schmid and Jutta Sperber (Eds), *Herausforderung Islam. Anfragen an das christliche Selbstverständnis Theologisces Forum Christentum – Islam*. Hohenheimer Protokolle, Band 60. (Stuttgart: Akademie der Diözese Rottenburg-Stuttgart, 2003).

underlying concerns and the guiding concepts, discussed the situation of Christian–Muslim dialogue and the theological perception of Islam in Germany at the beginning of the 21st century, and the intention of the Forum to be a meeting place for theological interchange.[3] Elsewhere, he notes that Christian theologians who had previously dealt with Islamic themes were in many cases considered somewhat 'exotic', on account of Islam having taken a back seat in German academia for a long time and, further, there had ever been only a few Muslim scholars available as potential dialogue partners in any case.[4] Schmid also explains the rationale for linking the Forum, as a structural expression of Christian–Muslim dialogue, to an institutional base that can adequately support and nurture it. He also usefully indicates the key issue of this first meeting: what the existence and implication of Islam means for Christian self-understanding.[5] This first Christian-only meeting addressed issues of the fundamental terms and models of dialogical engagement; concrete challenges posed in relation to Christian theological positions including questions concerning revelation, education and politics; and practical and pastoral challenges arising out of Christian encounters with Islam – what this means for the believer, the Church, and wider society. The editors conclude the volume arising from the first preliminary meeting with a reflection upon the prospect and future of the Forum as a new initiative in dialogue with Islam.[6] Such dialogue is a point of reference for self-understanding as much as it is an occasion for and of understanding and engaging with the 'other'.

The second preliminary Christian-only conference, with some 40 academic participants, took place in March 2004 and discussed the theme of the relationship between God and humankind, expressed in terms of 'salvation' in Christianity and 'right guidance' in Islam.[7] Once again the aim was to allow for

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3 Hansjörg Schmid, ‚Das „Theologisches Forum Christentum – Islam“: Kontexte, Anliegen, Ideen‘ in Renz et al., *Herausforderung Islam*, pp. 9-24.

4 Hansjörg Schmid, 'Das Theologische Forum Christentum-Islam: Eine Initiative für Christlich-Islamische Studien', *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 89 (2005): 147-149.

5 ‚Was bedeuten Existenz und Anspruch des Islam für das Selbstverständnis christlichen Glaubens?‘ – Schmid, ‚Das „Theologisches Forum Christentum – Islam“‘, p. 22; Cf. The recent work of the WCC in respect to Christian self-understanding in relation to Islam as recorded in *Current Dialogue* No. 52 (July 2012); see also chapter 7 above.

6 Andreas Renz, Hansjörg Schmid & Jutta Sperber, ‚Neue Initiative zum Dialog mit dem Islam. Erste Fachtagung des Theologisches Forums Christentum – Islam‘, in Renz et al., *Herausforderung Islam*, pp. 161-168.

7 See Andreas Renz, Hansjörg Schmid and Jutta Sperber (Eds), *Heil in Christentum und Islam. Erlösung oder Rechtleitung? Theologisches Forum Christentum – Islam*. Hohenheimer Protokolle, Band 61 (Stuttgart: Akadedmie der Diözese Rottenburg-Stuttgart, 2004).

a wide-ranging discussion among Christian theologians in order to probe the issues, limits, and prospects for an eventual dialogue with Muslims. Papers exploring issues of the divine-human relation as expressed in different facets of Christian and Muslim life, and addressing fundamental questions pertaining to the concept of 'salvation' in both religions were presented, along with discussions of predestination and freedom in the two faiths, contemporary issues pertaining to common themes of rationality and relationship with the world, and a discussion of the impact of the terrorist events of 9/11. Such topics indicate the extent and range of concerns, and so potential topics for dialogue.

A concluding section on future prospects and proceedings of the Forum featured reflections from the ecumenical specialist, John B. Taylor, and an exposition of hermeneutical conditions pertaining to Christian–Muslim dialogue offered by the Orthodox theologian, Assaad Kattan. The necessity and value of solitary scholarly study requires the complementarity of concrete dialogical engagement. Taylor spoke of the value of dialogue 'to sharpen – or blunt – language and check predilection or prejudice'.[8] To understand the other requires submitting to the challenge of genuinely hearing and engaging with the other: 'One must avoid at all costs the tendentious and polemical comparisons of the best in one's own tradition with the worst in one's neighbour's tradition'.[9] Taylor noted that as well as the example, challenge and inspiration that can be found in the respective scriptures, there are also many 'testimonies of communal solidarity, or mystical experience, or of devotional piety' with which both faiths are replete and which have the potential to contribute to a fruitful dialogical encounter. There is much to be mutually offered from out of the riches – past and present – of Christian and Muslim traditions, and therefore much that can be mutually probed, interrogated, and encountered afresh. For Kattan, the key interpretive terms and concepts pertinent for this dialogue are to do with relational dynamics, pluralist realities, and points of common contact.[10] He articulated a key question for Christian engagement: 'How may we develop a sensitivity to Islam from a Christian perspective without thereby ceasing from our Christian perspective?'[11] The challenge of dialogical

8 John B. Taylor, 'Salvation or Right Guidance? Some reflections on the "Theological Forum Christianity – Islam"' in Renz et al., *Heil in Christentum und Islam*, p. 229.

9 Ibid.

10 Assaad E. Kattan, ‚Dynamisch – Pluralistisch – Gemeinsam. Thesen zu den hermeneutischen Bedingungen des christlich-islamischen Dialogs' in Renz at al, *Heil in Christentum und Islam*, pp. 233-36.

11 See citation by Andreas Renz, Hansjörg Schmid, & Jutta Sperber, ‚Heilsverständnis und Gott-Mensch-Beziehungen: Zweite Fachtagung des Theologischen Forums Christentum – Islam' in Renz et al., *Heil in Christentum und Islam*, p. 244: ‚Wie können wir eine

engagement brings with it the challenge of fidelity, of being open to the other while yet remaining faithful to one's own religious identity.[12] Thus a major theme to emerge out of these preliminary conferences was that mutual internal plurality leads to diverse interreligious relations: each religion manifests multiple internal diversities, so there is a multiplicity of possible relationships between them. The lived reality is that there is no one Islam and no singular Christianity that dialogically engage – there are rather many Christianities and many Islams. It is Muslim and Christian individuals, each not only representing particular traditions and communal identities within their respective religions but, furthermore, each with their own particular understanding, interpretation, and so specific identity within that, who engage in dialogue and allied conversational relations. Christian–Muslim dialogue takes place in the context of a matrix of various Christian–Muslim relationships and settings.

2 Ten Year Thematic and Chronological Overview: 2005-2014

In the following section I review the first decade of the Forum, noting its modus operandi, principles and aims, and discuss some key aspects of the themes that each annual meeting has addressed. Topics addressed have included issues of identity, suffering and pain, ethics, hermeneutics, mission and conversion, God, prophecy and prophethood, the community of believers, how theology is understood, poverty and justice, and issues to do with the topic of blasphemy. In March 2005 the first symposium of the Forum proper – that is, involving Christians and Muslims together – was held, with prayer in the two religious traditions as its theme.[13]

2.1 *Prayer*

Key guiding principles and values – namely, self-critical awareness, multi-perspectival approaches, mutual consultation and learning, the application of interdisciplinary hermeneutical-critical scholarship, and interreligious learning and study as the grounding paradigm of interaction – were also formulated

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Sensibilität für den Islam entwickeln mit unseren christlichen Augen, ohne dass sie aufhören, christliche Augen zu sein?'

12 Cf. Douglas Pratt, *Being Open, Being Faithful: The Journey of Interreligious Dialogue* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2014).

13 See Andreas Renz, Hansjörg Schmid and Jutta Sperber (Eds.), *"Im Namen Gottes …" Theologie und Praxis des Gebets in Christentum und Islam* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2006).

at the first Forum.[14] Underlying aims and hopes were also articulated, including the fostering of a network of scholars, broadening perspectives on Christian and Islamic theology, and contributing to the emergence of German-language Islamic theology. In the aftermath of the Balkan's war in the late 20th century, an important role of the Forum was to function as an academic bridge to Bosnia, a factor that assisted in securing regular funding support from the German Federal Ministry for the Interior for the annual meetings and associated activities. A clear aim to impact wider society through publications and, importantly, the development of youth interest focussed on an annual study week (which commenced in 2007), were also affirmed at the first Forum meeting. Annual book publications have been regularly produced and reflect the structure of the meetings, as well as the subject matter discussed. The general pattern includes a collection of papers, from most often an equal number (2 or 3) of Muslim and Christian scholars, providing an overview perspective on the set topic, followed by a varying number of paired papers, one by a Christian, one by a Muslim, on a specific topic or issue within the compass of the Forum's focus, accompanied by an Observers' report (*Beobachterbericht*) that both responds to the papers and captures something of the discussion that took place. A concluding section generally carries a Muslim and a Christian closing perspective plus a summary discussion of the overall proceedings given by the editors of the volume. As well as being a compendium of the prepared papers, the resultant book of each Forum reflects also something of the discussion and issues traversed in the dialogical engagement of the event itself. In their introduction to the first, the editors noted that the Forum as a dialogical event was to be a distinctively new thing, not a repetition of other and earlier forms of Christian–Muslim dialogical engagement. The intention is specifically to have an academic theological orientation.[15]

With respect to the substantive theme, prayer, of the first Forum, it was asserted as something central to both Christianity and Islam. It encompasses spiritual orientation and action with respect to both individual and corporate dimensions of the religious life. For both faiths, prayer, and the forms and texts of prayers, 'are important sources for understanding God, humanity and the Divine-Human relationship'.[16] Fundamental questions pertaining to prayer in both religions were traversed, and these are reflected in the five sections of the resultant book. Fifteen substantial contributions provide the focus around

14 See Renz et al.,*"Im Namen Gottes"*, p. 12.

15 See Hansjörg Schmid, Andreas Renz & Jutta Sperber, ‚Gebet als Thema christlich-islamischer Reflexionen: zur Einführung' in Renz et al.,*"Im Namen Gottes"*, pp. 11-17.

16 Schmid et al., ‚Gebet als Thema', p. 13: ‚Gebetstexte sind wichtige Quellen für Gottesverständnis, Menschenbild und Gott-Mensch-Beziehung in beiden Religionen.'

which the 50 or so Christian and Muslim attendees engaged in a probing dialogical discussion. The first, addressing basic questions of Christian and Muslim prayer, featured the redoubtable Kenneth Cragg's opening paper concerning Muslim reflection on prayer.[17] There follows a Christian exposition on prayer 'between delimitation and openness'[18] and a Muslim exposition of prayer as the 'theology of the heart'.[19] Other papers addressed the sense and purpose of prayer. Questions such as to what extent is God influenced by prayer, and a recognition that prayer as more than merely words were canvassed along with the issue of prayer and religious identity in secular society and the question of common or corporately shared prayer. The concluding reflection observes that the theme of prayer is an excellent starting point for dialogue as it lies at the heart of both theology and religious practice.[20] Indeed, the subject of prayer is so rich and varied that one dialogue event on the topic comes nowhere near exhausting its possibilities.[21]

2.2 *Boundaries and Borders*

The second Forum, in 2006, had as its title 'Boundaries and Borders: Identity through Difference?' and was attended by some 90 participants.[22] The aim was to explore the notion of knowing identity through knowing boundaries.[23] An

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17 Kenneth Cragg, 'Mit Muslimen über das Gebet nachdenken: Theologie als Vorhof der Anbetung', in Renz et al.,*"Im Namen Gottes"*, pp. 21-35.

18 Michael Bongardt, ,"Unser Lobpreis kann deine Grösse nicht mehren": Christliches Beten zwischen Abgrenzung und Offenheit', in Renz et al.,*"Im Namen Gottes"*, pp. 36-53.

19 Hamideh Mohagheghi, 'Theologie des Herzens. Im Gebet Liebe und Nähe Gottes erfahren…' in Renz et al.,*"Im Namen Gottes"*, pp. 54-70.

20 Andreas Renz, Hansjörg Schmid and Jutta Sperber, ,Menschliche Hinwendung zu Gott – göttliche Nähe zum Menschen: Zusammenfassende Reflexionen und Thesen' in Renz et al.,*"Im Namen Gottes"*, p. 238: ,Das Thema Gebet hat sich den Erwartungen entsprechend al sein äusserst geeigneter Ausgangspunkt für eine theologische Reflexion zwischen Christen und Muslimen erwiesen, geht es hier doch um die Mitte jeglicher Theologie und religiösen Praxis.'

21 Ibid., p. 243: ,Das Thema Gebet im christlich-islamischen Kontext ist so reich und vielfältig, das eine Tagung allein nicht ausreicht, es auch nur annähernd erschöpfend zu behandeln.'

22 See anonymous report: 'Theologisches Forum Christentum – Islam: Congress about the Role of the Reciprocal Demarcations between Both Religions, Stuttgart – Hohenheim (March 3rd – 5th, 2006)', *Islamochristiana* 32 (2006): 246-47. This journal carries regular reports of activities and reviews of the books from the Forum.

23 Hansjörg Schmid, Andreas Renz, Jutta Sperber and Duran Terzi (Eds), *Identität durch Differenz? Wechselseitige Abgrenzungen in Christentum und Islam* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2007).

important point was to pursue this without, in the process, devaluing others. This Forum endeavoured to take Christian–Muslim dialogue from its history of mutual opposition into the sphere of contemporary ideological debates, embracing issues of identity demarcation and differentiation and the new discussion about social and systemic demarcations.[24] It was recognised that identity can never be something static and essentialist, but is rather dynamic, open to learning and subject to processes of change. Taking account of the historical context that produced identity demarcations, not with a view to diminishing their importance but rather to take proper notice of them, was stressed by an Orthodox theologian, on the one hand, whilst, on the other, Abdullah Takim, the first Muslim holder of a Chair for Islamic theology in Germany (Frankfurt), was at pains to stress 'that Muslims should study the Jewish and Christian religions not only in the light of the Koran, but first and foremost on their own merits'.[25] Identity is forged through concrete interpersonal relationships, and this applies to religious identity as much as to any other form of identity. The Forum focussed on issues of the hermeneutics and theology of demarcation, or differentiation (*Abgrenzung*), together with Quranic and biblical perspectives, the effect of the Crusades for the history of differentiation and demarcation between Christianity and Islam, the influence of fundamentalist discourses of demarcation and identity in both religions, and new perspectives for an appropriate Christian–Muslim relationship. Muslim scholar Bülent Ucar discussed the vexed issue of the death penalty for apostates as mandated in Shari'a, contrasting traditional attitudes with some new interpretations in an attempt to resolve a sharp issue of Muslim differentiation and demarcation.[26] The Orthodox Christian theologian, Assaad Kattan, then discussed the contrast of emphasising 'difference that separates' as against the prospect of a 'conciliatory synthesis'.[27]

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24 Hansjörg Schmid, Jutta Sperber & Duran Terzi, 'Das christlich-islamische Verhältnis – Abgrenzungen ohne Ende? Zur Einführung' in Schmid et al., *Identität durch Differenz?* pp. 11-18.

25 Report: 'Theologisches Forum Christentum – Islam', *Islamochristiana* 32 (2006), p. 246.

26 Bülent Ucar, 'Die Todesstrafe für Apostaten in der Scharia: Traditionelle Standpunkt und neuere Interpretationen zur Überwindung eines Paradigmas der Abgrenzung', in Schmid et al., *Identität durch Differenz?* pp. 227-244.

27 Assaad Elias Kattan, 'Trennende Differenz verus versöhnende Synthese? Überlungen zu euner weniger abgrenzenden Identitätsbestimmung', in Schmid et al., *Identität durch Differenz?* pp. 245-253.

2.3 *Suffering and Pain*

In 2007, the third Forum dealt with the sensitive topic of suffering and pain in Christianity and Islam. It attracted nearly 100 participants, both from within Germany and elsewhere.[28] In light of the ubiquitous experiences of pain and grief, the undergirding task was to explore possibilities of analysis and interpretation, from the perspectives of the two religions, in respect to the realities of human suffering.[29] Understanding suffering as some form of divine punishment is no longer dominant in theology. Accordingly, reflections and discussions sought to elucidate other interpretive approaches. A key point to emerge was that only through a differentiated and contextualised exploration of suffering is it possible to effectively oppose political and religious abuse and the allied issue of suffering. The point was also made that both religions have a special responsibility to critically reflect on this theme.[30] A wide-ranging exploration of fundamental theological questions in relation to suffering – its challenge to the monotheistic concept of God, Muslim perspectives and debates on theodicy (some Muslims accept the notion; others do not), the association of Christ with suffering in biblical and theological perspectives, the Muslim attitude toward suffering as falling between resignation and active acceptance – was followed by a range of specific topics and sub-themes. These included reflections on suffering in everyday experience as well as in historical contexts; a particular comparison of Shi'ite and Christian perspectives on the one hand, and a comparative exploration of mystical traditions on the other; faith in God in the face of suffering; and a closing foray into some new perspectives. As was noted, this was indeed the first time, at least within the German-speaking realm, that a wide-ranging academic Christian–Muslim theological dialogue on suffering had been undertaken.[31] It was a significant

28 Andreas Renz, Hansjörg Schmid, Jutta Sperber and Abdullah Takim (Eds), *Prüfung oder Preis der Freiheit? Leid und Leidbewältigung in Christentum und Islam* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2008).

29 Renz et al., ‚Vorvort', *Prüfung oder Preis der Freiheit?* p. 9.

30 Hansjörg Schmid, Jutta Sperber & Duran Terzi, ‚Leid deuten im Gespräch zwischen Christen und Muslimen. Zur Einführung' in Renz et al., *Prüfung oder Preis der Freiheit?* pp. 11-18; cf. p. 15: ‚Muslime wie Christen tragen beim Thema Leid eine besondere Verantwortung, da sich gerade die religiösen Deutungssysteme dazu eignen, Leid zu legitimieren oder religiösen zu überhöhen.'

31 Andreas Renz, Abdullah Takim & Klaus Koch, ‚Christen und Muslime vor der Herausforderung einer leidsensiblen Theologie und Praxis: Zusammenfassende und weiterführende Reflexion' in Renz et al., *Prüfung oder Preis der Freiheit?* p. 255: ‚Es war wohl das erste Mal ..., dass sich Christen und Muslime auf theologisch-wissenschaftlicher Ebene mit Deutungen und theoretischen wie praktischen Versuchen der Bewältigung menschlichen Leids einschliesslich der Theodizeefrage dialogisch beschäftigten.'

topic and the dialogue itself proved the value of the guiding principles and protocols of the ongoing Forum meetings.

2.4 *Ethics in Practice*

The fourth Forum, in 2008, explored the subject of ethics in the two faith traditions under the theme of 'Responsibility for Life'.[32] Given that at the heart of theological anthropology and ethics in both Christianity and Islam there can be found the basis for responsibility for one's own life, as well as that of the foreigner, the stranger, who is much a neighbour in today's world as the person next-door, Muslims and Christians today face global crises on the one hand and, on the other, new ethical issues arising from scientific advances in medicine and technology. In their introduction, the editors of the book arising from this Forum remark that

> …to make ethics the topic of Christian-Muslim conversation is a complex undertaking since it must require initially an adequate degree of situational, or contextual, awareness, followed by a review of the respective traditions, methods and ways of decision-making, in order ultimately to discern ways of implementing joint ethical decisions and actions.[33]

Attracting over 100 participants, including over 40 Muslims, this Forum gave opportunity to focus on the rationality of ethics in Christianity and Islam not in order to subvert the sources of revelation as such, but to employ methods of rational argument in open discourse so as to provide non-religious reasoning and consideration of the findings of modern natural, social, and human sciences. Although each religion subscribes to a fundamental ethical principle – to do good and to avoid evil[34] – the realm of ethical behaviour and moral norms is complex and encompassing. Taking responsibility for one's own life,

32 Hansjörg Schmid, Andreas Renz, Abdullah Takim und Bülent Ucar (Eds), *Verantwortung für das Leben: Ethik in Christentum und Islam* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2008).

33 Hänsjorg Schmid & Kays Mutlu, 'Christen und Muslime in ethischer Verantwortung: Zur Einführung' in Schmid et al., *Verantwortung für das Leben*, p. 11: ‚Ethik zum Thema eines christlich-muslimische Gesprächs zu machen, ist ein komplexes Unterfangen, da es zunächst um eine angemessene Situationswahrnehmung, sodann um eine Sichtung der jeweiligen Traditionen, Methoden und Wege der Entscheidungsfindung und schliesslich um Perspektiven für die Umsetzung ethischer Entscheidungen und gemeinsames Handeln gehen muss.'

34 Andreas Renz & Abdullah Takim, ‚Christen und Muslime in der gemeinsamen Verantwortung für das Leben: Zusammenfassende und weiterführende Reflexion' in Schmid et al., *Verantwortung für das Leben*, p. 257: ‚Christliche und islamische Ethik haben gemeinsames formales ethisches Prinzip: Das Gute tun, das Böse meiden…'

as well as for others is fundamental to theological anthropology and ethics in both faiths. Ethical issues are thrown up by scientific advances in fields as diverse as technology and medicine and a plethora of contemporary crises and concerns, of global proportion and impact, confronts the followers of each religion in today's world.

In the light of such factors and issues, the question of a theological foundation for an ethics of life, perhaps common to both Islam and Christianity, is worth pursuing. This was one facet of this Forum, along with addressing issues of ethical differences, variations in ethical motivations, and engaging the context of secularity and also non-theological ethical perspectives. Other topics traversed included the anthropological and theological bases for ethical responsibility; responsible living together in the contexts of partnerships and family life; responsible action in government and politics; responsible economic actions; ethical responsibility in the field of biomedicine; and a discussion of Christian and Islamic responsibility within a general social context. Broad agreement was evinced with respect to both religions being non-exclusive in terms of social systems – Christianity and Islam exist and function within diverse socio-political contexts – and they each profess a universal ethic of human values. Thus it is possible that these two faith communities could register a mutual commitment of responsibility before God and towards humanity 'to the value of life in biological sciences, in economics, and in politics' for example.[35] From a Muslim perspective the compatibility of Islam with individual human rights was asserted, although there are limits to what may be understood as constituting human autonomy. An Islamic critique of the Western Christian susceptibility to adapting religious values to secular concepts was also given.

2.5 *Scripture and Interpretation*

Scriptural interpretation in Islam and Christianity was the theme for the fifth conference, held in 2009.[36] These two religions are confronted with comparable difficulties and issues with respect to the interpretation of their scriptures. On the one hand, in both religions there has been a monopoly of interpretation that has displaced contextual hermeneutics and has also been rather inclined to misogynistic views. On the other hand, in both faiths, there can in fact be found great variety of interpretation and hermeneutical method. There

35 See anonymous report: 'Christians and Muslims together for an "Ethics of life": Meeting of the Theological Forum Christianity – Islam (Stuttgart, 2 March 2008)', *Islamochristiana* 34 (2008): 220.

36 Hansjörg Schmid, Andreas Renz and Bülent Ucar (Eds.), *„Nahe is dir das Wort …" Schriftauslegung in Christentum und Islam* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2010).

are extensive parallels between the Bible and Qur'ān that the wider public knows little of. The Forum theme is reflected in the title of the resultant book, which commences with the opening phrase of Deuteronomy 30:14 (NRSV) – '(But) the Word is very near to you' and which goes on to add, 'it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it', and this is echoed in Paul's letter to the Romans (Rom. 10:8). The point is well made that, whilst the textual reference is to the Mosaic Law, nonetheless the proximity of the divine word is derived from the recitation and memorisation of it.[37] The divine 'nearness' is mediated through the encounter with the Word in reading, listening, and reciting. Furthermore, the literary insight of the role that the reader plays in the construction of textual meaning also comes into play in the context of a dialogue on hermeneutics.[38] Accordingly, the Forum addressed the issue of the comparison of biblical and Quranic texts, critically examining presuppositions as to interpretive approaches and assumptions of meaning.

The historical-critical method, for example, attempts to locate the meaning of scriptural statements within their proper historical and contextual settings. Following a reflection on the Christian–Muslim dialogue in Germany,[39] various basic or foundational elements of hermeneutics (*Hermeneutische Grundlagen*), including the way in which the process of understanding text is engaged in by both religions, the tension between human words and the Divine Word, revelation and applied hermeneutics, and an exploration of parallels between biblical and Quranic hermeneutics, were addressed, along with issues of translation, feminist interpretations of scripture, and interdependent modes of interpretation. One the one hand, each scriptural text contributes to an understanding of the other; on the other hand the unity of the religions of revelation may be seen in and through the function of biblical narratives in the Quran.[40] The issue of monopolising interpretations, or interpretive frame-

37 'Die Nähe des Wortes, womit hier das mosaische Gesetz bezeichnet wird, ergibt sich aus der Rezitation (Mund) und dem Auswendiglernen (Herz als Ort des Gedächtnisses).' Hansjörg Schmid & Bülen Ucar, ‚Christen und Muslime als Leser heiliger Schriften: Zur Einfuhrung', in Schmid et al., *„Nahe is dir das Wort"*, p. 11.

38 See Schmid & Ucar, ‚Christen und Muslime als Leser', p. 12: 'Nähe entsteht durch die Begegnung mit dem Wort im Hören, Lesen und Rezitieren. Eine Vertiefung und Radikalisierung findet diese Aussage in der literaturwissenschaftlichen Einsicht, dass die "Leser" auch eine zentrale Rolle für die Bedeutungskonstitution von Texten spielen, welche erst in der Aktualisierung durch die Leser zum Text werden. In der hermeneutischen Diskussion beider Religionen wird darauf zurückgegriffen.'

39 Wolfgang Schäuble, 'Zusammen in Deutschland: Zum Dialog zwischen Christen und Muslimen', in Schmid et al., *„Nahe is dir das Wort"*, pp. 21-28.

40 Stefan Schreiner, 'Der Koran als Auslegung der Bibel – die Bibel als Verstehenshilfe des Korans', in Schmid et al., *„Nahe is dir das Wort"*, pp. 167-183; Abdullah Takim, ‚Offenbarung

works, was also covered. A Muslim theologian from Sarajevo, Enes Karic, explored the idea of a contemporary common hermeneutics,[41] and Klaus von Stosch discussed the quest for common interpretive criteria.[42] In their closing reflection Renz and Takim acknowledge hermeneutics as a key question in Christian–Muslim dialogue and go on to draw together a number of main points to have emerged from the presentations and discussions of this Forum.[43] These include a range of asymmetries in respect to revelation and the understanding of scripture, both within and between the biblical and Quranic records; mutual accusations of falsifying of texts; the need for a multi-dimensional approach to scriptural understanding; the need for ideological-critical approaches to interpretation matters; and questions pertaining to comprehensive criteria appropriate for scriptural interpretation.

2.6 *Mission and Conversion*

In 2010 the interrelated topics of mission and conversion were addressed at the sixth Forum.[44] Attended by some 140 Christian and Muslim academics, the meeting acknowledged that, fundamentally, conversion is only possible by the activity of God, not because of human efforts or strategies. The introduction to this Forum's resultant book acknowledges the difficulty for dialogue posed by this topic.[45] Mission is foundational for Christianity, as is *da'wah* for Islam; it is a point of common reference and a locus of mutual fear for, *prima facie*, it implies non-acceptance of the other as validly other and, instead, presupposes the other to be a potential candidate for conversion. And in this context, dialogue is likely viewed as superfluous if not inherently inimical. But against this default and widely popular supposition within both faith communities, it may

als „Erinnerung“ (ad-dikr): Die Einheit der Offenbarungsreligionen und die Funktion der biblischen Erzählungen im Koran‘, in Schmid et al., *„Nahe is dir das Wort“*, pp. 184-196.

41 Enes Karic, 'Eine gemeinsame Hermeneutik der Verständigung für unsere gegenwärtige Zeit', in Schmid et al., *„Nahe is dir das Wort“*, pp. 235-243.

42 Klaus von Stosch, 'Wahrheit und Methode: Auf der Suche nach gemeinsamen Kriterien des rechten Verstehens heiliger Schriften', in Schmid et al., *„Nahe is dir das Wort“*, pp. 244-260.

43 Andreas Renz & Abdullah Takim, 'Schriftauslegung in Christentum und Islam: Zusammenfassende und weiterführende Reflexionen' in Schmid et al., *„Nahe is dir das Wort“*, pp. 261-275.

44 Hansjörg Schmid, Ayse Basol-Gürdal, Anja Middlebeck-Varwick, and Bülent Ucar (Eds), *Zeugnis, Einladung, Bekehrung: Mission in Christentum und Islam* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2011).

45 Hansjörg Schmid, Ayse Basol-Gürdal, Anja Middlebeck-Varwick & Jutta Sperber, ‚Mission – ein schwieriges Thema des christlich-islamischen Dialogs: Zur Einführung‘, in Schmid et al., *Zeugnis, Einladung, Bekehrung*, pp. 11-21.

be argued that Christian and Muslim theologians are together called to undertake a self-critical approach to their faith communities in respect to conversion and also the wider problematic aspects of the history of missions. Are dialogue and mission necessarily oppositional? In delivering a welcoming address on behalf of the Evangelical Church in Germany, Dr Martin Affolderbach expressed the hope that the work of the Forum on this topic may be a beacon lighting a new way toward a common 'Mission' of Muslims and Christians together bearing witness to a credible faith in one God reflected in common cause action for understanding, tolerance and respect, and cooperatively working for peace and justice in our globalised world.[46]

The key terms Zeugnis (Witness), Einladung (Invitation), and Bekehrung (Conversion) give the clue as to the key dimensions addressed by the Forum, which traced concepts and comparisons and the way mission has been addressed globally in other dialogical situations together with taking account of the specific European and German language contexts. Some basic hermeneutical issues and theological questions, bringing to bear perspectives from the scriptures and historical traditions of the two faiths, were explored. Specific historical examples and comparisons; the context and impact of pluralism – both with regard to the fact of plurality within and of societies, and pluralism as a hermeneutical perspective on that fact – comprised other topics closely discussed, along with the relationship of mission and da'wah to religious freedom, and the relationship of mission and da'wah to conversion *per se*. To what extent, and in what sort of contexts, might conversion be a legitimate goal of one religion in respect of the other? The final Part comprises two papers discussing mission, da'wah, and dialogue from a Muslim and a Christian perspective,[47] and a closing paper recapping and reviewing the overall discussion of this Forum.[48] The theme of mission and da'wah attracts a multitude of perspectives in respect of interpretation, understanding, and so modes of

46 ‚Vorwort', Schmid et al., *Zeugnis, Einladung, Bekehrung*, p. 9: '...die Laterne voraustragen möchte und Wege aufzeigen will, zu einer gemeinsamen ›Mission‹ von Muslimen und Christen zu finden, den Glauben an den einen Gott glaubwürdig zu bezeugen und zu leben, für Verständnis, Respekt und Toleranz einzutreten und Frieden und Gerechtigkeit in den vielfältigen Spannungen und Konflikten einer globalisierten Welt zu fördern.'

47 Bülent Ucar, ‚Dialektik von Mission und Dialog: Theologische und aktuelle Perspektiven' in Schmid et al., *Zeugnis, Einladung, Bekehrung*, pp. 249-262; Christian W. Troll, ‚Mission und Dialog: Eine katholische Perspektive' in Schmid et al., *Zeugnis, Einladung, Bekehrung*, pp. 263-274.

48 Klaus Hock & Abdullah Takim, ‚Mission in Christentum und Islam: Zussamenfassende Perspektiven', in Schmid et al., *Zeugnis, Einladung, Bekehrung*, pp. 275-290.

practice or engagement.[49] In the context of Christian–Muslim relations, this theme has ever proved controversial, often evoking much anxiety and even hostility, as noted elsewhere above. But the point is well made that Christian mission and Muslim da'wah are not precisely the same phenomena.[50] There are some overlaps in terms of meaning and practice – especially where the aim is to promote conversion – but there are also quite profound differences in terms of underlying theological meaning, interpretation, and goal. In regards to the prospect of a shared or common mission, issues traversed by the Forum including plurality and mutual accountability, 'home' and 'foreign' mission, conversion as both an opportunity and a challenge, the question of whether religious conversion is a 'free' act or the consequence of divine guidance, the ethos of mission, mission and dialogue, and resolving contradictions were all ably summarised and discussed. And a simple word from a child concluded the proceedings, provoking perhaps the most profound challenge to Christian Muslim dialogue: 'If Mohammed and Jesus had lived at the same time, they would certainly have become friends'.[51]

2.7 *God*

The two virtually classic theological topics of God and Prophethood were the focus, respectively, of the Forum meetings in 2011 and 2012.[52] The former, premised on the perspective that the reality of God 'is always greater than all our ideas, images and concepts' had the focal belief item of monotheistic religion – God – as the subject of discussion and reflection for the seventh Forum, held in March 2011.[53] Christianity and Islam each believe in there being only one God, but conceptual differences, in particular the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, have ever been divisively problematic. To what extent can it be said these faiths believe in the same God if the God-concepts are at odds? How

49 ‚Christentum und Islam haben dazu im Laufe ihrer Geschichte zahlreiche Standpunkte entwickelt.' Hock & Takim, ‚Mission in Christentum und Islam', p. 276.

50 Cf. Hock & Takim, ‚Mission in Christentum und Islam', p. 277: ‚Die Tagung hat nochmals ganz grundsätzlich deutlich gemacht, dass die Begriffe Mission und daÝwa nicht gleichgesetzt werden können, zumal wir dann Gefahr liefen, damit auch die konnotierten Inhalte für identisch zu halten, was zu erzerrungen der jeweiligen Religion führen würde.'

51 'Wenn Mohammed und Jesus zur gleichen Zeit gelebt hätten, wären sie sicher Freunde geworden.' Hock & Takim, ‚Mission in Christentum und Islam', p. 290.

52 See Andreas Renz, Mohammad Gharaibeh, Anja Middelbeck-Varwick and Bülent Ucar (Eds), *Der stets größere Gott. Gottesvorstellungen in Christentum und Islam* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2012); Anja Middelbeck-Varwick, Mohammad Gharaibeh, Hansjörg Schmid and Aysun Yaşar (Eds), *Die Boten Gottes. Prophetie in Christentum und Islam* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2013).

53 ‚Vorwort', Renz et al., *Der stets größere Gott*, p. 9.

might Christians and Muslims speak to each other appropriately of God – of divine 'otherness' and 'presence', for example? Can a comparison of mystical traditions offer a way forward? Such questions were addressed by some 120 participants, including approximately equal numbers of Christians and Muslims. On this occasion three speakers addressed fundamental theological and hermeneutical questions with each followed by a discursive response. Two keynote presentations spoke of the God-human relationship from the perspective of mercy. Biblical exegesis was applied in the quest for deeper hermeneutical understanding, with emphases placed on the motifs of creation, redemption and reconciliation. An Islamic stress on compassion as the essence of God underscores the divine action of sending the message (of the Qurʾān) as itself an act of mercy.

The motif of God acting through the medium of human agency, which is itself an expression of obedience to God's commandments, leads to deepening and extending the concept of revelation and provides a basis for the anthropological and ethical dimensions of both Islamic and Christian theology with, for Islam in particular, the human response to the perception of divine mercy issuing in acts of compassion. Further sub-topics included mystical experiences of God, comparing specific examples from each religion in regard to the vision of God, and discussing the language of mysticism. A Christian motif of the 'spiritual drama' of the soul ascending to the divine is juxtaposed with a contrast of Sufism and Sunni traditionalism. The issue of oneness and Trinity was tackled from the Christian side with a focus on relational dynamics[54] and from the Muslim side with a discussion of transcendence and immanence.[55] For one, trinitarianism is not just about describing or defining the being of God but is as much about the relationship of the believer to God, experienced in a particular three-fold manner. Importantly, the Christian 'confession' of trinitarianism does not vitiate monotheism but rather indicates something of the 'non-exclusiveness' of the divine reality.[56] For the other, the issue of comprehending the nature of God is a matter of discerning the relationship of transcendence and

54 Felix Körner, ‚Vater, Sohn und Heiliger Geist: Das Bekenntnis der Dreifaltigkeit', in Renz et al., *Der stets größere Gott*, pp. 129-139.

55 Abd el-Halim Ragab, ‚Gott zwischen Transzendenz und Immanenz: Zum Gottesbild aus islamischer Perspektive', in Renz et al., *Der stets größere Gott*, pp. 140-150.

56 ‚Die eingangs gestellte Frage, warum Christen das Dreifaltigkeitsbekenntnis nicht mit einem ausschließenden Monotheismus ersetzen wollen, lässt sich nun so beantworten: Weil Gott der Menschheit nur durch die Christusgeschichte die Gottesgemeinschaft eröffnet hat, also gezeigt und ermöglicht hat. Einheit Gottes ist damit als nicht ausschließend erkannt, sondern als einbeziehende Einheit; als Einbeziehung des freien Gegenübers in die eine Wirklichkeit der Liebe.' Felix Körner, ‚Vater, Sohn und Heiliger Geist', p. 139.

immanence with respect to the 'picture' of God. Indeed, it begs the very question of how God may be spoken of and thought about. Theology does not take place in an intellectual vacuum; historical, social, political and other contextual factors apply. Tensions between overemphasising transcendence on the one hand, and an anthropomorphic overemphasis, on the other, are found in the history of Islamic thought. For Islam, God is not remote in absolute transcendence; for God is Creator and is in ongoing relationship with creation – a relation that is almost suggestive of familial intimacy. But not quite; and on the distinction between Muslim and Christian relational perspectives there arises the possibility of fruitful Christian–Muslim dialogue.[57] Two stimulating exploratory papers addressed the issue of gender constructions in respect to the concept and image of God.[58] These were followed by a discussion God and Violence (Gott und Gewalt) in which an exploration of biblical texts that deal with the so-called 'dark side' of the concept of God[59] were contrasted with an Islamic perspective.[60] Finally, the God-human relationship was explored in the two faith perspectives followed by a summary and reflection: the 'ever-greater God' is the God who relates to humankind ever mercifully.[61]

2.8 *Prophecy and Prophets*

The theme of prophecy and the messengers of God attracted some 115 participants to the eighth Forum meeting, which took place in March, 2012. Addressing the issue of conflicting prophetic claims, and comparing differing prophetic traditions and various understanding of prophecy across the two religions, the Forum reflected on the prophetic task of Christians and Muslims today. The introduction to the resultant book sets the scene: prophetic religions in the

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57 See Ragab, ‚Gott zwischen Transzendenz und Immanenz', p. 150: ‚Liest man den koranischen Schöpfungsbericht einfühlsamer, bekommt man den Eindruck, Gott hätte fast zu Adam gesagt: »Du, mein Sohn!« Aber das wird nicht gesagt. Nur wenn man diese Unterschiede beachtet und stehen lässt, ist interreligiöser Dialog zwischen Muslimen und Christen möglich.'

58 Rabeya Müller, »Allahs« weibliche Seite oder das »wahre« Geschlecht Gottes: Eine islamische Perspektive', in Renz et al., *Der stets größere Gott*, pp. 159-167; Helga Kuhlmann, ‚Der Herrgott und ihre Geistkraft: Zum Verhältnis von Gott und Geschlechtlichkeit in christlichtheologischer Perspektive', in Renz et al., *Der stets größere Gott*, pp. 168-180.

59 Ulrike Bechmann, ‚Gottes dunkle Seiten: Gewalt in biblischen Texten', in Renz et al., *Der stets größere Gott*, pp. 187-198.

60 Kemal Ataman, ‚Anmerkungen zum Verständnis der »dunklen« Seite Gottes: Eine islamische Perspektive', in Renz et al., *Der stets größere Gott*, pp. 199-210.

61 Andreas Renz & Mohammad Gharaibeh, '»Der stets größere Gott« als der sich barmherzig zuwendende Gott: Zusammenfassende und weiterführende Reflexion', in Renz et al., *Der stets größere Gott*, pp. 241-256.

context of contemporary secularism.[62] Once again basic issues and questions are first addressed, in this case including the relationship of Jesus and Muhammad and the relation of both Christian and Muslim perspectives to the Jewish prophetic tradition. There then follows examinations of Moses as a prophetic figure in Islam and Christianity, theological and pedagogical perspectives on the prophetic vocation in the two religions, the prophetic claims of Jesus and Muhammad, and the theme of prophecy in relation to justice. The final section, with the heading of 'Prophecy as a connecting element between Islam and Christianity', features a reflection on the prophetic task of the Church today[63] together with a challenging paper on the prophetic role in times of revolutionary change. In this latter, the author interestingly juxtaposes revolutionary tendencies of Albert Camus and Michel Foucault with Muhammad and the prophetic role, and touches upon the approach of liberation theology.[64] The concluding summation of this Forum's presentations and discussions notes the significance of the quest for precise definitions and understanding.[65] There are a number of perennial issues for which it remains difficult to obtain clarity of meaning and common understanding; the dialogical task relating to prophecy continues, and the question of the contemporary relevance of prophecy within the two faith communities remains.

2.9 *Communities of Faith*

The 2013 meeting, the ninth Forum, took the community of believers – Church and Umma – as its focal theme.[66] The topic of 'faith communities' as such is not a particularly popular or usual focus for Christian–Muslim dialogue, which often simply presupposes the existence and nature of the communities that

62 Hansjörg Schmid & Aysun Yasar, 'Christentum und Islam als prophetische Religionen in säkularen Kontexten' in Middlebeck-Varwick et al., *Die Boten Gottes*, pp. 11-20.

63 Christiane Tietz, 'Die prophetische Aufgabe der Kirche heute', in Middlebeck-Varwick et al., *Die Boten Gottes*, pp. 207-222.

64 Mark Chalil Bodenstein, 'Der Prophet in der Revolte', in Middlebeck-Varwick et al., *Die Boten Gottes*, pp. 223-235. Bodenstein begins with the contextualising observation of the times in which we live (p. 223): ‚Zweifelsohne leben wir in Zeiten des Umbruchs und der Revolte, und dies nicht nur in den muslimischen Staaten, wo dies allzu offensichtlich ist, sondern auch in Europa und Deutschland'.

65 Mohammad Gharaibeh & Anja Middlebeck-Varwick, 'Die Boten Gottes – Auswertung und Ausblick in dialogischer Perspective', in Middlebeck-Varwick et al., *Die Boten Gottes*, pp. 236-262; Cf. p. 236: ‚Bestimmend für die Tagung war die Suche nach einer präzisen Definition der Verstehens- und Wirkweisen von Prophetie'.

66 See Hansjörg Schmid, Amir Dziri, Mohammad Gharaibeh and Anja Middelbeck-Varwick (Eds), *Kirche und Umma: Glauensgemeinschaft in Christentum und Islam* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2014).

engage in dialogue over other matters – 'faith communities are not an end in themselves but exist for the service of God'.[67] Nonetheless, a discussion of what is meant and understood by 'church' on the one hand and 'ummah' on the other provides both the unique focus as well as a stimulating challenge. This Forum concluded that both religions need to find their place anew in contemporary pluralist societies in order to meet the challenges of globalisation.[68] The issue of a hermeneutical framework for a theological comparison of 'faith' and 'community' as a preliminary task required for engaging the substantive themes was a major focus and included a discussion on the function and identity of a faith community as such, religion-specific and comparative discussions, and cross-disciplinary perspectives reflecting religious and political studies, along with the theological disciplines. The theme of 'Faith community between diversity and the ideal of unity' was addressed with one paper exploring Christian heterogeneity and the 'old dream of unity'[69] and the other discussing diverse dimensions of the Muslim community.[70] The idea of 'Church' and 'Ummah' in relation to the motif of 'People of Israel' was the topic of another two-paper section, with 'The political mandate of the faith community' the subject of the third section. Here, Ludger Weckel discussed the political necessity of God's 'Good News' for the world,[71] and Assem Hefny examined the distinction between religion and politics within Islam.[72] This was followed by a discourse on the constitutional setting and relations of faith communities in Germany. A further two papers addressed the subject of globalisation as the 'horizon' of the contextual setting for faith communities today. This sub-topic is brought to a close, inclusive of a summation of the Forum's discussion, with a discussion of Church and Umma as 'communities of witness'.[73] The Forum

67 'Glaubensgemeinschaften sind kein Zweck in sich selbst, sondern stehen im Dienste Gottes', Schmid et al., *Kirche und Umma*, p. 9.

68 'Sie müssen ihren Ort in pluralen Zivilgesellschaften neu finden und sich den Herausforderungen der Globalisierung stellen – so lauteten Ergebnisse der Diskussionen', Schmid et al., *Kirche und Umma*, p. 9.

69 Ulrich Dehn, 'Christliche Heterogenität und der alte Traum von Einheit', in Schmid et al., *Kirche und Umma*, pp. 115-127.

70 Mouhanad Khorchide, 'Von der Umma der Muslime zur Umma der Menschheit: Politische, theologische, normative und identitätsstiftende', in Schmid et al., *Kirche und Umma*, pp. 128-142.

71 Ludger Weckel, 'Gottes frohe Botschaft für die Welt ist notwendig politisch', in Schmid et al., *Kirche und Umma*, pp. 179-190.

72 Assem Hefny, 'Das Göttliche und das Menschliche: Zur Trennbarkeit zwischen Religion und Politik in Islam', in Schmid et al., *Kirche und Umma*, pp. 191-201.

73 Amir Dziri and Andreas Renz, 'Kirche und Umma als Bezeugungsgemeinschaften: Zusammenfassende und weiterführenden Reflexionen', in Schmid et al., *Kirche und Umma*, pp. 272-288.

theme was quickly shown to be not amenable to any foregone conclusion: within each religion there is both ambiguity of understand and variability of theological relevance. The question of the place of individual belief as against that of the faith community is identified as an underlying theme, along with issues pertaining to the relationship of a faith community with other communities or communal dimensions.

2.10 *Believing and Knowing*

The tenth anniversary gathering, held in March 2014, addressed the broad theme of how theology is understood and engaged in from within the perspective of the two religions, as well as registering a celebratory element, having completed a full decade of these annual gatherings. It included also a measure of 'looking ahead',[74] and a measure of critical self-reflection upon the decade thus far of the Forum's activities: What has been achieved?[75] So, together with a wide-ranging examination of theology in dialogue, the opportunity was taken to engage in some intentional self-critical reflection concerning process and achievements. This included an external evaluation exercise[76] along with work-group activities in respect to undertaking a process of theological evaluation.[77] Theology is an intellectual activity that sits cognitively in a zone of tension between faith (belief) and knowledge (rational cognition; science). The title of the book to emanate from this anniversarial Forum flags that zone of tension: *Zwischen Glaube und Wissenschaft*. The introduction reminds us that the grounding impulse for the Forum was to provide a place for academic theological dialogue (*wissenschaftlich-theologischen Dialog*) to occur.[78] But this was to be no 'narrow' theological dialogue series. Over the decade of its life, the Forum's agenda has included social issues and interdisciplinary

74 See Mohammed Gharaibeh, Esnaf Begic, Hansjörg Schmid and Christian Ströbele (Eds), *Zwischen Glaube und Wissenschaft: Theologie in Christentum und Islam* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet 2015).

75 Gharaibeh et al., *Zwischen Glaube und Wissenschaft*, p. 9: 'What have they been doing all these years, then?' (Was hat man denn all die Jahre über sonst gemacht?).

76 See Gritt Klinkhammer & Tabea Spiess, ‚Evaluation des Theologischen Forums Christentum – Islam', in Gharaibeh et al., *Zwischen Glaube und Wissenschaft*, pp. 273-286; see also Gritt Klinkhammer and Tabea Spiess, *Dialog als „dritter Ort". Zehn Jahre Theologisches Forum Christentum – Islam: eien Evaluation* (Bremen: Universität Bremen, 2014).

77 See Arnulf von Scheliha, Hamideh Mohagheghi, Miachael Bongardt & Mohammad Gharaibeh, 'Theologische Auswertung und Reflexion der Tagungsbände des Theologischen Forums Christentum – Islam', in Gharaibeh et al., *Zwischen Glaube und Wissenschaft*, pp. 287-311.

78 Hansjörg Schmid & Esnaf Begic, 'Theologie im Dialog zwischen Christen und Muslimen: Zur Einführung' in Gharaibeh et al., *Zwischen Glaube und Wissenschaft*, pp. 11-19.

engagement as well as tackling theological subject matter as the survey and review contained in this chapter demonstrates.

The first part of this anniversarial Forum's book comprises four papers that examine fundamental historical and theological questions, especially in respect to the interaction of Christianity and Islam in specific periods and contexts. There follows topics of theology and religious experience in which the correlation between successful and unsuccessful creation of identity, on the one hand, and theology on the other, is discussed, along with an exploration of that theme in respect to the situation of Muslim identity and theology in Germany today.[79] The subjects of revelation and reason, tradition and tradition criticism, and methods and modes of thinking, comprise other sub-foci reflecting the breadth and depth of the work of this Forum. Three papers dealt with different aspects of interreligious and societal dimensions of theology, including a forward-looking element. The book from this Forum closes with an analysis of the ten years of its existence and includes two critiques together with a closing summary. The final sentences are worth citing in full:

> Theology works at the intersection of the past and the present, and at the interface of the natural and supernatural. Theology is about the relationship of all modes of understanding to the very basis of understanding as such. In this sense theology today is, and can only be, a matter of both faith and knowledge.[80]

3 Conclusion

From the outset the Forum organisers identified as measures of success of the dialogical enterprise the development of inter-personal friendship between Muslim and Christian participants, the establishment of functional networks of scholars and others, and engagement in the dialogue process as equals in the context of an intentional theological mode and level of discourse. To these were added the need for a secure location for meetings and the consistency of

79 See 'Theologie und Glaubenserfahrung' section, Gharaibeh et al., *Zwischen Glaube und Wissenschaft*, pp. 99-127.

80 'Theologie arbeitet an der Übersetzung zwischen Vergangenheit und Gegenwart, and der Schnittstelle von Übernatürlichem und Natürlichem. Es geht der Theologie um das Verhältnis aller Verstehensvollzüge zum letzten Grund von Verstehen überhaupt. Damit ist Theologie heute – und kann sie nur sein – Glaube und Wissenschaft.' Mohammad Gharaibeh & Christian Ströble, 'Glaube und Wissenschaft: Zusammenfassende Perspektiven', in Gharaibeh et al., *Zwischen Glaube und Wissenschaft*, p. 321 (*My translation*).

core personnel and the structure of the gatherings with the aim of assured outcomes, sound public relations, and the development of appropriate ancillary activities such as the Christian–Muslim study week. On all counts these key indicators have been well met. Further, the Forum has played a pioneering role as a catalyst and advocate for the establishing of Islamic-theological studies in German universities. In his speech of welcome to participants of the fourth meeting (2008), the Catholic bishop of the Diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart, Dr. Gebhard Furst, declared the Forum as demonstrating the success of Christian–Muslim dialogue and the fact of Muslim presence and scholarship now embedded in German society.[81] However, there was still a long way to go before Islam in Germany had an equivalent social and educational standing as Christianity, and in this respect the Forum could play a positive role. Certainly, considerable strides have since been made in this regard, with the influence of the Forum clearly felt with respect to both advancing the cause of serious academic Islamic theological studies and also, most particularly, serious Christian–Muslim theological and other allied academic engagement. Indeed, that university chairs in Islamic theology have now been established in parallel fashion to the long-standing tradition in German universities of both, or either, Protestant and Catholic chairs in Christian theology, is in no small measure due to the experience and influence of the Forum. These new chairs are in contrast to chairs in Islamic Studies (*Islamwissenschaft*) or Islamic specialisations within religious studies (*Religionswissenschaft*), which already exist in some universities.

Whereas the annual conference has ever been a closed affair, in that participation is by invitation only, since 2009 the commencing (and other) keynote lectures have been open to journalists who, since 2010, have also been permitted to attend for the full duration of each Forum. Since its inception the Forum has attracted considerable media interest, with interviews taking place and Press conferences also being held. The Forum quickly aroused considerable public as well as academic interest, and has continued to do so. However, as Sperber has observed, 'In the beginning it was very important to have a framework where things could be discussed without appearing in the media next day'.[82]

All conferences and meetings have been hosted at the Catholic Diocesan Academy in Stuttgart-Hohenheim. From the outset Christian participation has been fully ecumenical. Although Muslims were initially in the minority, numbers of Muslim attendees has steadily grown since 2005. This growth has also been reflective of the wider diversity of Islam in Germany. In 2005 there were

81 See 'Vorwort' in Schmid et al., *Verantwortung für das Leben*, p. 9.

82 Jutta Sperber, personal email communication, March 2016.

only 53 invited attendees and the proportion of Muslims participating was just 13.2%. In 2010, Muslims amounted to 44.6% of the 139 invited participants. Today the balance of Muslim and Christian, men and women, is close to 50:50. From the outset, however, the combined organising steering group (*Steuerungsgruppe*) has had equal participation of Muslim and Christian members, as also has been mostly the case with respect to editors of each of the annual volumes of proceedings. There has been equal input and oversight in respect to preparing for each year's conference and, importantly, choosing the topics to be addressed.[83] The originating initiative may have come from the Christian side; the success of the ongoing venture is in no small measure a reflection of a co-equal dialogical climate grounded in equal organisational input.

This comparatively brief summarising overview cannot do justice to the range and depth of engagement that has taken place at each meeting of the Theologisches Forum Christentum-Islam and their contribution to the wider field of Christian engagement with Islam.[84] Fortunately, the annual publications contain a very full record and comprise a rich source for investigating the work of the Forum and the topics that have been engaged by it. Following on from the first decade of engagement, the journey of this dialogical initiative over the next few years will focus more on socially relevant themes and common external challenges. The 2015 meeting thus had poverty and justice as its theme.[85] In 2016, the theme of the Forum had to do with a comparative and dialogical inquiry into themes of criticism, contradiction and blasphemy.[86] The impact and success of this initiative in Christian–Muslim dialogue certainly reaches well beyond Germany and the annual gatherings themselves.

83 I am grateful to Hansjörg Schmid for this information (personal email correspondence, March 2016).

84 See Christian W. Troll, 'Theologisches Forum Christentum – Islam. Its significance for the development of the 'Dialogue of Theological Exchange' and for Christian-Muslim studies', in Catarina Belo and Jean-Jacques Pérennès (Eds), *Mission and Dialogue: Essays in Honour of Michael L. Fitzgerald* (Louvain: Peeters, 2012), pp. 223-234.

85 See Christian Ströbele, Anja Middelbeck-Varwick, Amir Dziri and Muan Tatari (Eds), *Armut und Grerechtigkeit. Christliche und islamische Perspektiven* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2016).

86 Kritik, Widerspruch, Blasphemie – Anfragen an Christentum und Islam, 4-6 March 2016.

CHAPTER 11

The 'Common Word' Letter: Christian Response to a Muslim Initiative

In October of 2007 an 'Open Letter and Call from Muslim Religious Leaders' was issued to the Christian Church. This seminal letter, signed by 138 Muslim clerics and academics, was addressed to Pope Benedict XVI; the Patriarch of Constantinople, His All-Holiness Bartholomew I, and a further 19 named heads of Eastern (Orthodox) Churches; together with the Archbishop of Canterbury and four heads of Western Churches including the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches and, indeed, 'Leaders of Christian Churches, everywhere'.[1] Entitled '*A Common Word between Us and You*' (*ACW*), this is a significant document both with respect to the mere fact that it happened, as well as to its substance and what it has since precipitated in terms of response and allied activities. What is at the heart of this initiative, and what lies behind it? What might it portend for the immediate and longer-term future of Christian relations with Islam? On the basis of an invitation to consider the common 'word' that interconnects Islam with Christianity, and also with Judaism, what is the prospect of a renewed theological dialogue with Islam?

Following a flurry of initial reactions and responses, more measured considerations have been undertaken. These include various colloquia and conferences in Europe, North America, the UK and elsewhere. The fifth anniversary document noted that 'ACW has generated a huge amount of debate, a multitude of articles and conferences and given rise to a host of other initiatives' and goes on to observe how it has contributed to other initiatives such as the UN Resolution with respect, from 2011, to observing World Interfaith Harmony Week at the beginning of February each year, and the formation of the Christian-Muslim peace delegation to Nigeria in May 2012.[2] The task of reception of this epoch-making Muslim text is steadily progressing. The Muslim invitation to dialogue has been well taken up, with deep interest in the field

1 *A Common Word between Us and You: An Open Letter and Call from Muslim Religious Leaders* (Amman, Jordan: The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2007CE / 1428AH), p. 1.

2 *A Common Word between Us and You: 5-Year Anniversary Edition*. MABDA English Monograph Series, No. 20 (Amman, Jordan: The Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2012), pp. 9-10.

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very evident.[3] This chapter will present a summary and analysis of the letter, review of some key responses to it, and note some of the major events the letter has spawned. A critical examination of issues and challenges that are raised by the document, and which are implicit in any theological response to it, will be also included.

1 Summary and Analysis of the Letter

The document is in two sections: a Summary and Abridgement of little over a page; then the substantive letter of some thirteen pages and which is divided into three parts – (I) Love of God (II) Love of the Neighbour, and (III) Come to a Common Word Between Us and You. This is followed by over four pages of Notes together with the list of 138 signatories, given in alphabetical order, covering some further eight pages. The opening paragraph of the Summary gives the pressing context for the letter: the pursuit of peace. Specifically it asserts 'The future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians'.[4] Comprising, together, over half of the globe's current population, the letter is premised on the moral and theological responsibility of these two global faith communities to live up to their own precepts, especially in the context of the critical need for peaceful resolution to contemporary mutually divisive and destructive situations. And the basis for such resolution is to hand in 'the very foundational principles of both faiths: love of the One God, and love of the neighbour'. These principles, which thread throughout their respective scriptural texts – two examples of which are given from the Holy Qur'ān (*Al-Ikhlas*, 112:1-2; *Al-Muzzammil* 73:8) and one from the New Testament (*Mark* 12:29-31) – form the basis of 'the common ground between Islam and Christianity'. Furthermore, the Summary of the letter makes pivotal reference to the Quranic injunction to Muslims to engage dialogically with Christians as well as Jews by virtue of all three being 'Peoples of Scripture', in order to arrive at 'a common word between us and you…' in matters of fundamental theological values (*Aal 'Imran* 3:64). This dialogical call and its justification are interlinked to the view

3 Cf. C.W. Troll, H. Reifeld and C.T.R. Hewer (Eds), *We Have Justice In Common: Christian and Muslim Voices from Asia* (Berlin: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2010); W. El-Ansary and D.K. Linnan, *Muslim and Christian Understanding: Theory and Application of 'A Common Word'* (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2010); M. Volf, Ghazi b. Muhammad and M. Yarrington, *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2010).

4 *A Common Word*, p. 2.

as proffered in the letter that the two commandments of love expressed by Jesus in his citation of Torah – love of (or for) God; love of (or for) neighbour – are also embedded within Islamic scriptural text and theological sensibility. Hence the summary concludes: 'in obedience to the Holy Qur'ān, we as Muslims invite Christians to come together with us on the basis of what is common to us, which is also what is essential to our faith and practice'. Love – of God and neighbour – is the basis for dialogue and the foundation of peaceful coexistence. The substantive letter then spells this out.

The letter's title is preceded by the invocation of the *bismillah*.[5] This standard preface of Muslim piety is no sop to tradition: in all things the name of God is to be remembered and recalled; all endeavours are couched within the frame of acknowledgement of our ultimate dependency on the mercy and compassion of God. Following the title, the full text of Sura *Al-Nahl* 16:125 – the call to Muslims to engage in dialogue with their co-religionists – is cited. Three sections then follow, commencing with 'Love of God' explored first in respect to Islam (over four pages) then in respect to the Christian Bible (two pages). The Muslim exposition commences with reference to the two clauses of the *Shahadah* that comprise the *sine qua non* of Islamic belief: 'There is no god but God' and 'Muhammad is the messenger of God'. Their affirmation establishes essential Islamic identity; their denial signals exclusion from this identity and from membership of the Muslim community. The first of these is extolled by Muhammad as 'the best remembrance' – that is, it is the key to the essential message, or expression of *deen* (ideational essence) of theistic religion as such. To the locution 'no god but God' there is added a set of theological values and perspectives, each found in various locations within the Holy Qur'ān, but brought together by Muhammad in summary fashion, as recorded in Hadith: that God is alone; without any 'associate', to whom belongs sovereignty and praise, and who possesses 'power over all things'.[6]

The summarising Hadith are expounded in the letter and form a critical point of hermeneutical reference – occupying the single largest subsection within the letter, over three pages – at once seeking to establish the basis of common ground and so the call for a 'common word' of dialogical engagement, yet at the same time presenting a clear theological challenge: are these 'values' equally or differently understood across the two religions? The point is to assert the totality of Muslim devotion and attachment to God, which is also given as the key example that the Prophet Muhammad left for Muslims to follow whereby, in so doing, the Muslim may be assured of God's love. Thus, for

5 'In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful'.
6 *A Common Word*, p. 4; also note (iii) on page p. 17.

Muslims, the 'call to be totally devoted and attached to God…is in fact an injunction requiring all-embracing, constant love of God'.[7] The concluding sub-section to the exposition of the *Shahadah* is to assert that this 'best remembrance' is explicated in and through the Hadith that says, in full, 'There is no god but God, He Alone, He hath no associate, His is the sovereignty and His the praise and He hath power over all things' and this is understood to inculcate, through its ritualised repetition and by the grace of God, the devotional response of 'loving and being devoted to God with all one's heart, all one's soul, all one's mind, all one's will or strength, and all one's sentiment'.[8] It is thus a prompt for the realisation of love in and through all. This is what being a Muslim is about.

The lengthy explication of Love of God (namely of the human *for* God, as opposed to God's love *of* or *for* humanity) within the Islamic framework of theological reflection and praxis is followed by a shorter, but quite apt, presentation of this Love of God in respect to the Bible, specifically referring to the 'first and greatest commandment', namely the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4-5. Acknowledging its source within Jewish text and liturgy, its Christian usage is validated with reference to a citation from the Gospels (Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-31) in which Jesus recites the *Shema* in answer to the question: 'What is the greatest commandment in the law?' And to this first Jesus adds the quintessential second – also drawn from Torah – 'you shall love your neighbour as yourself'. Thus Torah, endorsed by the Gospel of Christ, reinforces the love of God fully – 'with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength' – as the first and greatest commandment. This is a universal injunction, re-echoed within Islam; it is the bedrock of common ground and the call to a common word between Muslim and Christian. Further textual references from the Bible are given to reinforce the point. The conclusion drawn is that the expressions of Muhammad as given in Hadith – and which constitute a précis of Quranic perspective – namely, the expansion of the 'best remembrance' (as also testified by all preceding Prophets, including Jesus) that there is but one God, is understood to mean that the singularity ('alone'; 'no associate'), the inclusive scope ('sovereignty'), the worshipfulness ('His the praise') and the omnipotence ('power over all') of the divine Being are materially identical – or at least showing effective similarity in meaning – to the biblical first commandment. Parallelism of formulas is taken to infer equality of meaning, namely the 'primacy of total love and devotion to God'.[9] To be

7 *A Common Word*, p. 7.

8 *A Common Word*, p. 8.

9 *A Common Word*, p. 10.

sure, this is a provocative suggestion which could open up some interesting and potentially fruitful dialogical engagement.

The second substantive section of the letter addresses in a brief one-and-a-half pages the motif of 'Love of Neighbour'. Once again, the first sub-section looks at love of neighbour as a motif within Islam, and then within the Bible. In Islam, love is closely associated with mercy; mercy is a quality, or expression, of love. The letter simply notes the association and asserts love of neighbour as an essential corollary to love of God: 'without love of the neighbour there is no true faith in God and no righteousness'.[10] Two sayings of Muhammad, as recorded in Hadith, together with two citations from the Holy Qur'ān (*Al-Baqarah* 2:177 and *Aal 'Imran* 3:92) both underscore the point and, significantly, highlight the link of this love to righteous behaviours of 'generosity and self-sacrifice'. The second great dominical commandment, as already cited in Matthew 22:38-40, is reiterated together with noting its pedigree in Torah (Leviticus 19:17-18) and the assertion that the biblical injunction to love one's neighbour likewise demands righteous actions of generosity and self-sacrifice. The view that the two great love commandments – love of God and of neighbour – are pivotal to the Abrahamic religious tradition (the Law and the Prophets) as such is re-emphasised.

The third and final substantive section, spanning four pages, expounds the dialogical call: 'Come to a Common Word between Us and You'. There are three sub-sections: 'A Common Word', 'Come to a Common Word!' and 'Between Us and You'. Noting that there are real and formal differences between the religions of Islam and Christianity, the letter nonetheless asserts that the basis of dialogical engagement between them is the commonality of the two greatest commandments that interlink Qur'ān, Torah and the New Testament. Further, the letter asserts that these commandments, with respect to their being found in both Torah and Christian scripture, in each case arise out of the oneness or singularity – the letter says 'Unity' – of God. Hence the letter boldly states: 'Thus the Unity of God, love of Him, and love of the neighbour form a common ground upon which Islam and Christianity (and Judaism) are founded'. The message brought by the Prophet Muhammad is affirmed as adding nothing new to that which had been previously conveyed – and that observation is itself attested within the Qur'ān (Suras *Fussilat* 41:43 and *Al-Ahqaf* 46:9). Hence the 'common word' – that which underlies true religion as such and is the basis for dialogue – is none other than the eternal truths or theological values of the reality of the one God, the response of love and devotion to God (love of and fidelity to the One God and so the spurning of 'false gods'), and the necessary

10 *A Common Word*, p. 11.

corollary of justice in respect to fellow human beings (love of the neighbour). Love is no mere sentiment; it is a call to right living and action.

Having established the substantive content of the ‘common word’, the letter goes on to expound the motif of invitation: ‘Come to a Common Word’. The principle Muslim reference is to Sura *Aal ‘Imran* 3:64 that exhorts Muslims to invite Christians and Jews, as fellow peoples of the Book, to the worship of the One God, the preservation of the Unity of God (‘ascribe no partner unto Him’), and the maintenance of theological fidelity (‘none of us shall take others for lords’). Along with the assertion of the unicity of God, this call is regarded as having embedded in it the essence of the ‘First and Greatest Commandment’ – the total and unsullied love of God. And with reference to the authoritative Quranic commentary by Al-Tabiri, the letter affirms that ‘Muslims, Christians and Jews should be free to each follow what God commanded them’[11]; that is to say, in matters of religious identity and practice there is to be openness and freedom. This is endorsed by citing Sura *Al-Baqarah* 2:256: ‘Let there be no compulsion in religion’ together with the viewpoint offered that this openness and freedom in matters of religion is consonant with the second dominical commandment, the love of neighbour – and that implies the exercise of justice and the freedom of religion.

The argument is clear and compelling. In inviting Christians to be mindful of the dual dominical commandment – love God; love neighbour – the Muslim signatories to the letter proclaim their positive outreach to Christians: ‘we are not against them…Islam is not against them’.[12] Difference of theological outlook and the fact of religious plurality are acknowledged in the context of asserting the value of mutual respect and forbearance. And the rhetorical question is thus posed: ‘Is Christianity necessarily against Muslims?’[13] In the context of recognising differences in exegetical and theological interpretation – especially in respect to understanding the person of Jesus Christ – Christians are nevertheless firmly invited ‘to consider Muslims *not against* and thus *with them…*’.[14] This sub-section ends with a further invitation to Christians to join with Muslims in dialogical engagement on the basis of ‘the common essentials of our two religions’ as found in the Holy Qur’ān (*Aal ‘Imran*, 3:64), namely the worship of the One God; that God is alone God, and God alone (‘*ascribe no partner unto Him*’); and the loyalty and fidelity to the One God (‘*none of us shall take others for lords beside God*’) as earlier explicated. Citing in full *Al-Baqarah*,

11 *A Common Word*, p. 14.

12 Ibid.

13 *A Common Word*, p. 15.

14 *A Common Word*, p. 15; italics in original.

2:136-137 with its intimation of theological plurality between the Abrahamic faiths, and with reference to Matthew 22:40, the letter boldly states: 'Let this common ground be the basis of all future interfaith dialogue between us, for our common ground is that on which hangs *all the Law and the Prophets*'.[15]

The third and final sub-section – 'Between Us and You' – returns to the motivating theme of the epistle: dialogue is not to be limited to a polite exchange of the elite. Rather, noting that the two faiths between them comprise some 55% of the global population, a stark truth is enunciated: if the people of these two faiths are not at peace with each other, 'the world cannot be at peace'.[16] The intertwining of Christians and Muslims in terms of global social realities and international relations means the arena of Christian–Muslim dialogue is not simply a matter of interreligious nicety: 'our common future is at stake'.[17] The eschatological motif is indeed deepened. As well as pressing practical realities and issues of inter-communal, even global, peace the suggestion – reinforced by Quranic and biblical reference – is that the future and integrity of both Christians and Muslims is in jeopardy lest 'we fail to sincerely make every effort to make peace and come together in harmony'.[18]

The letter concludes on a hortatory note – let differences not be the cause of strife; let the pursuit of 'righteousness and good works' be the only just basis of rivalry and comparison; let mutual respect, fairness, justice and kindness rule in the quest for peace, harmony and reciprocal goodwill. And this is summed and capped by the quoting of *Sura Al-Ma'idah*, 5:48 – religious plurality is a consequence of God the Creator who could have chosen to make everyone the same, but did not; yet all difference and variety is, in the end, resolved by virtue that God is both our common beginning and our encompassing end. The letter itself is not particularly long; it is not some massive tome. It is an invitation; a foretaste; an announcement of being open for the business of dialogue. As such it is an event that has occasioned much interest and reaction – the overwhelming majority of which is fully positive. And so a trajectory of the phenomenon of reception of this text is now emerging in its own right.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 *A Common Word*, p. 16.

18 Ibid.

2 Some Key Responses to the Letter

The official *ACW* website is an interactive repository of response documents and related material.[19] It includes formal Christian responses from leaders, organisations, and individuals together with some Jewish responses and hundreds of recorded news items, audio-visual items, and personal comments recorded. Furthermore, the original 138 signatories to the letter have now substantially increased – to several hundred. Clearly the letter and its reception has become already a land-mark event in terms of Christian–Muslim relations. It is also a signal event in terms of the interaction of Islam with the wider world more generally. In order to review and comment upon the Christian responses, I have grouped them into four categories: (1) the Vatican and other Catholic responses (the letter arose primarily out of the earlier reaction to the now infamous 'Regensburg' address given by Pope Benedict XVI, and he is the figure to whom it is initially and primarily addressed); (2) Orthodox Church responses; (3) Other Christian Churches, institutions and councils, including the formal response by the Archbishop of Canterbury; (4) sundry responses from various organisations, groups and individuals.

2.1 *Catholic Responses*

A number of responses are listed from Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. They include his immediate reaction of welcoming the letter as a 'very encouraging sign' and 'an eloquent example of dialogue among spiritualities' among other comments and press releases.[20] At the same time, he is on record as portraying something of a cautious attitude in respect to noting very real hermeneutical difficulties and the limits to dialogue. But I suggest this is a mark of interfaith realism; dialogical engagement is a process not a panacea, and the Vatican has clearly welcomed this new Muslim initiative for the process. Indeed, the gratitude of Pope Benedict XVI for the letter was formally given by the Secretary of State, Tarcisio Cardinal Bertone, on November 19, 2007 in which the Pope's appreciation for the 'positive spirit which inspired the text' is conveyed.[21] Belief in the one God – though differingly understood – is at the core of the quest for the common 'word' between Christians and Muslims. The principle that 'without ignoring or downplaying our differences as Christians and Muslims, we can and therefore should look to what unites us' was clearly expressed. Pope

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19 See A Common Word website: <http://www.acommonword.com/>.

20 *ACW* website <http://www.acommonword.com/>, *Responses – Christian Responses* (*CR*) #7

21 See: <http://www.acommonword.com/lib/downloads/letter-from-the-vatican.pdf>.

Benedict's remarks to Muslim representatives, given at Cologne on August 20, 2005 were also included: 'I am profoundly convinced that we…must affirm the values of mutual respect, solidarity and peace. The life of every human being is sacred, both for Christians and for Muslims. There is plenty of scope for us to act together in the service of fundamental moral values'. By March 2008 an agreement had been reached to establish 'The Catholic-Muslim Forum' with the first seminar to be held in Rome in November 2008 at which some 24 religious leaders and scholars from each side participated.[22] The overall seminar theme was 'Love of God, Love of Neighbour' with the sub-themes 'Theological and Spiritual Foundations' and 'Human Dignity and Mutual Respect' being specifically addressed.

The Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI), a leading Catholic institution in respect to relations with Islam and Muslims, recorded its appreciation of the Muslim leaders' letter.[23] This response states that the 'long an diligent association with the cultural and religious patrimony of Islam, as well as our regular contacts with members of the Muslim community enables us to take note of the originality of this gesture and entitles us to draw attention of non-Muslims to its qualities'. Among a number of salient positive observations made in respect to the text of the letter, the PISAI response comments in particular on 'the special treatment (given) to the supreme point of reference that undergirds "the other" as Jew or Christian, namely, the dual commandment of love of God and neighbour… The willingness to acknowledge another person in the deepest desire of what he or she wants to be seems to us one of the key points of this document'.

A number of leading Catholic scholars have also made individual responses, among them Professor Daniel Madigan SJ, at that time of the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims. He sets the Muslim letter, and its Catholic response, in the context of Vatican II and its pivotal document, *Nostra Aetate*, which marks the commencement of the search for 'a common word' from a Catholic point of view. Madigan notes the letter 'forms part of a larger project, focussed in Jordan, to develop an authoritative consensus on what it means to be Muslim in our time' and that the intent of the letter is to promote a peace building process.[24] Furthermore, the Muslim letter clearly regards 'the reactionary and intransigent ideologies that drive terrorism and puritanical repression are not drawing on the whole of the Islamic tradition, but rather a truncated and impoverished reading of it'. An internal Islamic cri-

22 Press Release of the Vatican, March 5th, 2008.

23 *ACW* website, *Christian Responses* (*CR*) #24.

24 *ACW* website, *Christian Responses* (*CR*) #42.

tique that is here signalled bodes well for a dialogical process that seeks to address issues of peace and social harmony. Madigan also makes the point that although a rationale for the letter and its invitation is peace between the two great religions of Islam and Christianity – qua avoidance of hostility – in fact each religion 'has had its own internal conflicts that have claimed and continue to claim many more lives' than has occurred with respect to any hostility between them.

2.2 *Orthodox Responses*

A number of responses to the Muslim letter have been forthcoming from various senior figures within the family of Orthodox Churches. They include, for example, letters from the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia[25], from the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch[26], and a statement of endorsement supported by a number of Arab Orthodox Christian leaders – Coptic, Marionite, Melkite, Armenian and Syriac.[27] There is a moving acknowledgement of the very long-standing relation between Armenian Christians and Muslims – positive with respect to Arab Muslims; negative with respect to Turkish Muslims of the Ottoman Empire – given in a letter on behalf of His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians[28]. This response asserts:

> We therefore deem it imperative to begin a true dialogue among the monotheistic religions, the aim of which should be the strengthening of eternal and common human values, the reinforcement of relationships between different faiths, and the protection of all that God has created. We also remain hopeful that this would contribute to better understanding each other, including strengthening mutual respect for one another's spiritual, national and cultural traditions and heritage.

His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of Cilicia in the Armenian Orthodox Church, and a former Moderator of the World Council of Churches, gives voice to a widely-felt positive response to the Muslim letter. He affirms the prospect of Christians and Muslims dialogically engaged for the greater good and so

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25 *ACW* website *Christian Responses* (*CR*) #55

26 *ACW* website *Christian Responses* (*CR*) #44

27 *ACW* website *Responses – Christian Responses* (*CR*) #43. This statement – the Final Communiqué of the Third International Conference, 'Coexistence and Peace Making' held in Jordan in January, 2008, also bears the signatures of Roman, Syriac, Coptic and Melkite Catholic Patriarchs.

28 *ACW* website *Christian Responses* (*CR*) #52.

stresses the theme of common humanity and community: 'We belong to one humanity and one world under one sovereign God'.[29]

2.3 *Other Christian Church Responses*

There is a raft of responses now recorded from leaders, councils, and institutions, both denominational and ecumenical. Among the more substantial is a carefully considered response by the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams. After an initial positive message of response in a Press Release[30] in which he 'welcomed the letter as a clear reaffirmation of the potential for further development of existing dialogue and common action between Christians and Muslims and other faith communities', Williams undertook a wide-ranging ecumenical consultation before composing his formal reply. The Archbishop's document – entitled 'A Common Word for the Common Good' – is addressed to 'the Muslim Religious Leaders and Scholars who have signed *A Common Word between Us and You* and to Muslim brothers and sisters everywhere'.[31] Interestingly, this Anglican response was endorsed by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches,[32] which suggests Williams was, in effect, speaking on behalf of a wider ecumenical constituency than simply that of his own Communion.

Williams notes the Muslim letter's spirit of 'a helpful generosity of intention'[33] and interprets the Muslim invitation to Christians as not seeking a facile quick accord but the more modest quest to 'find a way of recognising that on some matters we are speaking enough of a common language for us to be able to pursue both exploratory dialogue and peaceful co-operation with integrity and without compromising fundamental beliefs'.[34] Indeed, the Muslim invitation is 'a powerful call to dialogue and collaboration between Christians and Muslims' for which the 'very wide geographical (43 countries) and theological diversity represented among the signatories…provides a unique impetus to deepen and extend the encounters'.[35] He identifies five areas for further exploration: i) understanding 'the love of God'; ii) practical implications of 'love of neighbour'; iii) the nature, interpretation and use made of respective scriptural texts; iv) relating from the basis of humble piety – 'from the heart of our

29 ACW website *Christian Responses* (CR) #46.
30 Press Release from Lambeth Palace, Thursday 11th October, 2007; ACW website *Christian Responses* (CR) #2
31 ACW website *Christian Responses* (CR) #58
32 ACW website *Christian Responses* (CR) #60
33 Williams, 'A Common Word for the Common Good' (ACW website), p. 1.
34 Williams, 'A Common Good', p. 2.
35 Williams, 'A Common Good', p. 15.

lives of faith before God'[36]; v) the common awareness that, despite real differences, there is a shared 'responsibility before God that we shall seek to hold before us as a vision worthy of our best efforts'.[37]

The two substantive sections of Williams' document echo the structure of the Muslim letter. The first – 'The One God Who Is Love' – incorporates a Christian apologia of Trinitarian theology as being 'all the more important for the sake of open and careful dialogue (in) that we try to clarify what we do and do not mean by it'.[38] Here Williams asserts that for Christianity love, as demonstrated and realised through the Christ event, is the essence of the Divine reality. Thus it is of the essence of faith that there is a response to the gift of divine love which involves love of neighbour. On this latter point, Williams anticipates a focal theme of further in-depth dialogical discussion: 'We support the clear affirmation in your letter, through texts from the Qur'ān and the Bible, of the importance of love for the neighbour. Indeed, your letter can be considered an encouraging example of this love'.[39] Gospel examples that challenge any narrow definition of 'neighbour' are touched on, giving evidence that the love of neighbour is, indeed, premised on the love of God: 'Where love replaces enmity we can recognise the work and way of God'.[40] This leads into the second main section in which Williams touches on aspects of 'Seeking the Common Good in the Way of God'. He commences with a discussion around, and extending, the Muslim letter's references to 'peacemaking, religious freedom and the avoidance of violence'.[41]

> Religious violence suggests an underlying religious insecurity. When different communities have the same sort of conviction of the absolute truth of their perspective, there is certainly an intellectual and spiritual challenge to be met; but the logic of this belief ought to make it plain that there can be no justification for the sort of violent contest in which any means, however inhuman, can be justified by appeal to the need to "protect God's interests".[42]

Williams observes that

36 Williams, 'A Common Good', p. 3.
37 Ibid.
38 Williams, 'A Common Good', p. 5.
39 Williams, 'A Common Good', p. 10.
40 Williams, 'A Common Good', p. 11.
41 Williams, 'A Common Good', p. 12.
42 Ibid.

> …the more we as people of genuine faith are serious about the truth of our convictions, the more likely we will be to turn away from violence in the name of faith; to trust that God, the truly real, will remain true, divine and unchanging, whatever the failures and successes of human society and history. And we will be aware that to try and compel religious allegiance through violence is really a way of seeking to replace divine power with human; hence the Quranic insistence that there can be no compulsion in matters of religious faith (*al-Baqarah*, 2:256)… What we need as a vision for our dialogue is to break the current cycles of violence, to show the world that faith and faith alone can truly ground a commitment to peace which definitively abandons the tempting but lethal cycle of retaliation in which we simply imitate each other's violence.[43]

With reference to the four-fold typology of interfaith dialogues – life, action, theological exchange, religious experience – Williams enunciates three imperatives for dialogical engagement between Christians and Muslims: to strengthen practical programmes; intensify intellectual endeavours by way of research and colloquia; to foster deeper mutual appreciation to the life of faith of each other. He goes on to identify three possible outcomes: 1) maintaining and strengthening momentum for engagement; 2) the creation of safe dialogical discursive space to enable the problematic deep divergences to be explored; 3) that such engagements need to have a wide impact of relevance – they are not just the edification of participants. 'Seeking the common good is a purpose around which Christians and Muslims can unite'; at the same time this quest is likely to lead 'into all kinds of complex territory as we seek to find ways of acting effectively in the world'.[44] The applied focus with which Williams draws his paper to an end affirms mutual education, the continued engagement in living practical issues, and the commitment to a long-haul process as being of the essence of the practical response to the Muslim letter: thus 'to your invitation to enter more deeply into dialogue and collaboration as a part of our faithful response to the revelation of God's purposes for humankind, we say: Yes! Amen'.[45]

The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA provides another ecumenical response that welcomes the intent of the Muslim letter 'to engage seriously with Christians in dialogue…grounded in the authentic religious con-

43 Williams, 'A Common Good', p. 13.
44 Williams, 'A Common Good', p. 17.
45 Ibid.

victions of our respective communities'.[46] This response highlights themes of hospitality and peacemaking as expressions of neighbourly love. The experience of Christian ecumenical dialogue opens out to interfaith dialogue and the quest for building upon common theological ground: 'we can walk forward together with mutual appreciation in acceptance of the commandment to love God with our whole being, and in belief that love for God leads to and is demonstrated in love for one another'. A stress is placed upon the Christian doctrine of Trinity as expressive of both the inherent relationality of God and also the relational interaction between humanity and God; among the human family; and within the whole of creation: 'Because communion with God and God's people and God's creation is ultimately the content of salvation, as human beings sojourn in this life we are driven by an inner impulse to reach out in community to one another'. Practical expressions of Christian–Muslim engagement and mutual education are noted and encouraged. Most significantly and challengingly is the recognition that the Muslim letter affirms that Muslims are not necessarily against Christians; indeed, Christians may consider Muslims as '*with us*, and that this togetherness bears upon the state of the world ... we similarly affirm that Christianity is not against Islam'.

By contrast, the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), in response to the Muslim call, interpreted as implying that Christians ought 'to become Muslims by worshipping God without ascribing to him a partner', reciprocated by inviting Muslims to put their 'faith in God, who forgives our opposition to him and sin through what his son Jesus Christ did for us…' because 'we are as convinced of the truth of our faith as you are'.[47] This response goes on to assert that the deep theological divergence over God (Trinity) means 'we cannot accept your invitation' but at the same time the Alliance urges Muslims 'to consider joining us in … discussions' aimed at resolving theological misunderstandings.

Organisations such as the Danish National Council of Churches[48], the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) Britain Yearly Meeting[49], the Monastic Interreligious Dialogue[50] organisation and the Mennonite Church, USA[51], are among those Christian responses which expressed very positive responses to the letter and evinced an openness towards Muslims in terms of potential

46 *ACW* website *Christian Responses* (*CR*) #62

47 World Evangelical Alliance 'We Too Want to Live in Peace, Freedom and Justice', page 2, pdf accessible at: *ACW* website *Christian Responses* (*CR*) #51.

48 *ACW* website *Christian Responses* (*CR*) #53.

49 *ACW* website *Christian Responses* (*CR*) #30.

50 *ACW* website *Christian Responses* (*CR*) #14.

51 *ACW* website *Christian Responses* (*CR*) #28.

outcomes. And the highly influential publication, *The Christian Century*, proclaimed in a lead article on November 13, 2007: ‘The most impressive thing about (the Muslim letter) is that it exists. The second most impressive thing is the economy of its argument. The scholars resist the innate desire to touch on everything pertinent to Christian–Muslim dialogue and instead invite Christians to remember Jesus’ words about loving God and neighbour’.[52] Finally, in a letter of March 2008 the then General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Rev Samuel Kobia, expressed his positive response to the Muslim letter on behalf of the WCC. Kobia stated that he read the letter ‘as a representative expression of the Muslim will to engage with the Christian community in dialogue for the sake of justice and world peace’.[53]

2.4 *Sundry Responses*

A range of sundry organisations, groups, and individuals have made their own responses to the Muslim letter, of which I note here only a few representative examples. Peter Ochs, Co-founder of the Society for Scriptural Reasoning, and Sir Sigmund Sternberg on behalf of the Three Faiths Forum, represent two Jewish voices joining the Christian chorus of overwhelmingly positive responses and reflections.[54] Support and endorsement was also forthcoming from the joint Evangelical Christian-Muslim Dialogue conference held in Tripoli, in January 2008. In February 2008 the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations made their reply and, in March, The World Community for Christian Meditation gave theirs. There are many others available on the official website of *A Common Word*. Perhaps one of the more intriguing is the paid advertisement placed in the *New York Times* (Nov 18, 2007) in which some 300 Christian scholars and leaders published their agreed text in full.[55] The text concludes:

> Given the deep fissures in the relations between Christians and Muslims today, the task before us is daunting. And the stakes are great. The future of the world depends on our ability as Christians and Muslims to live together in peace. If we fail to make every effort to make peace and come together in harmony you correctly remind us that “our eternal souls” are at stake as well.

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52 See Christian Century website: <http://www.christiancentury.org/article.lasso?id=3808>; also see *ACW* website *Christian Responses* (*CR*) #27.

53 *ACW* website *Christian Responses* (*CR*) #12.

54 *ACW* website *Jewish Responses*

55 See: <http://www.acommonword.com/lib/downloads/fullpageadbold18.pdf>.

> We are persuaded that our next step should be for our leaders at every level to meet together and begin the earnest work of determining how God would have us fulfill the requirement that we love God and one another. It is with humility and hope that we receive your generous letter, and we commit ourselves to labor together in heart, soul, mind and strength for the objectives you so appropriately propose.

John Esposito, the renowned American scholar of Islam, in his letter of endorsement stated of the Muslim document that it 'is a crystal-clear message of peace and tolerance'.[56] David Ford, Regius Professor of Divinity at the University of Cambridge, England, affirmed the supreme importance of the Muslim initiative. He stated of the Muslim letter that its 'significance is not that it offers anything novel but that it selects so wisely from the riches of both scriptures and opens them up in a way that is highly relevant to the present situation' and he goes on to confess:

> I found myself deeply moved by its vision of what it calls "the all-embracing, constant and active love of God" and "the necessity and paramount importance of love for – and mercy towards – the neighbour", and by its concern not only for that half of the world's population who are Muslim or Christian but also for every single other person and the whole of creation.[57]

Among the many other individuals who have responded that of the widely-respected author, Karen Armstrong, is worth noting. She wrote in October 2007:

> The initiative of the Common Word is sorely needed by the entire world. All too often, religion is associated with violence and intolerance, and the compassionate ethos, which lies at the heart of every major faith, gets pushed to the sidelines. The assertion of the principle of love, which is so central to both the Muslim and the Christian traditions, should be paradigmatic of the religious response to the fearful realities of our time. We must reclaim our traditions from the extremists. Unless the major faiths emphasize those teachings which insist upon the absolute holiness of the "other", they will fail the test of the 21st century. The coming together of

56 *ACW* website *Christian Responses* (*CR*) #19.

57 *ACW* website *Christian Responses* (*CR*) #1.

> Muslims and Christians, who have such an unhappy history of hostility, is a beacon of hope and an example to the whole of humanity.[58]

Finally, mention must be made of the joint response issued by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Chief Rabbis of Israel in the context of their second meeting, in Israel, on October 31, 2007.[59] For them, the Muslim letter signals 'very positive developments which are a clear sign of determination to create structures that can advance principled cooperation and moral solidarity among the Christian, Jewish, Islamic and other religious communities' and they stated:

> The 'Common Word', though addressed to Christian Churches, also makes clear its respect for Hebrew scripture in citing directly from the Book of Deuteronomy and in acknowledging the inspiration that this provided for their understanding of the Quranic teachings on the unity and love of God and of neighbour. In promoting these values we commit ourselves and encourage all religious leaders to ensure that no materials are disseminated by our communities that work against this vision. We have agreed that in responding to the Common Word, it will be important to consider carefully together how the perspectives of Christians and Jews are properly held together.

From these different responses to the letter, I turn now to other categories of activities prompted or inspired by this Muslim initiative.

3 Events and Publications emanating from the Letter

The Common Word website records a variety of major events and publications that examine, expound, and discuss the text of the letter and what it portends. A few of the more significant are worth noting and commenting upon. In March 2008 a delegation of the letter's signatories met at Vatican City with representatives of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) and agreed to establish 'The Catholic-Muslim Forum' with its first seminar to be held in Rome in March that same year focussing on the theme of 'Love of God and Love of Neighbour'. So far, a total of three such gatherings have been held. The second was held in Jordan in 2011, at the purported site of the baptism of

58 *ACW* website *Christian Responses* (*CR*) #25.

59 *ACW* website *Jewish Responses*

Jesus and discussed the theme of Reason, Faith and the Human Person. Reason and Faith were equally affirmed as God-given capacities with human dignity a key motif of what it means to be created by God.[60] The third was in November 2014 at which issues of 'working together to serve young people, enhancing interreligious dialogue, and service to society' were addressed.[61]

A major dialogue event in response to the release of the Common Word letter was hosted by Yale University Divinity School in July 2008. It features as the first public conference as such on the letter, and it involved a broad range of Christian and Muslim participants. A statement was issued with the following points highlighted:

1. Muslims and Christians affirm the unity and absoluteness of God. We recognize that God's merciful love is infinite, eternal and embraces all things. This love is central to both our religions and is at the heart of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic monotheistic heritage.
2. We recognize that all human beings have the right to the preservation of life, religion, property, intellect, and dignity. No Muslim or Christian should deny the other these rights, nor should they tolerate the denigration or desecration of one another's sacred symbols, founding figures, or places of worship.
3. We are committed to these principles and to furthering them through continuous dialogue. We thank God for bringing us together in this historic endeavour (sic) and ask that He purify our intentions and grant us success through His all-encompassing Mercy and Love.
4. We Christian and Muslim participants meeting together at Yale for the historic *A Common Word* conference denounce and deplore threats made against those who engage in interfaith dialogue. Dialogue is not a departure from faith; it is a legitimate means of expression and an essential tool in the quest for the common good.[62]

The Yale conference was followed by one at Cambridge University, England, in October 2008. It was hosted by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, in partnership with the Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme and the Royal Aal Al-Bayt Foundation. The Common Word letter's motif of mutuality

60 Cf. 'Final Declaration' of the Second Muslim Catholic Forum 2011 (*ACW* website – Major Events).

61 The Third Catholic-Muslim Forum (*ACW* website – Major Events).

62 See: <http://acommonword.com/lib/documents/Yale%20draft%20statement.8.pdf> (*ACW* website – Major Events).

in the context of a globalised world was reflected in discussions which stressed the celebration of 'shared values of love of God and love of neighbour'.[63] This conference, which in itself represented at the time one of the most significant gatherings of international Muslim leaders to have taken place in the UK, attempted to engage the Muslim invitation to dialogue at some depth.

In October 2009 a conference held in Washington DC brought together Georgetown University's Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding and Jordan's Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought (RABIIT) to probe the themes and implications of the Common Word letter. This event included a thoughtful reflective piece by Seyyed Hossain Nasr entitled 'A Common Word Initiative – *Theoria* and *Praxis*'.[64] A year later, a high-level dialogical 'Islam, Christianity and the Environment' Symposium was hosted by RABIIT (September 2010) while in November that year a major dialogical consultation was hosted by the World Council of Churches in Geneva. With the theme 'Transforming Communities: Christians and Muslims Building a Common Future' the consultation sought to 'build bridges of respect between the two faith communities, identify common concerns and provide relevant guidance, and to develop 'faith-inspired approaches to joint Christian Muslim action'.[65] In October 2012 Regent's Park College, University of Oxford, hosted a two-day symposium to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the issuing of the Common Word letter that had as its focus the motif of love in the Abrahamic religions. Accordingly, it featured an Islamic presentation from H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad of Jordan; a Jewish perspective from Professor Melissa Raphael of the University of Gloucester; and a Christian viewpoint given by Professor Miroslav Volf of Yale Divinity School. Barely a fortnight later the London Jesuit institution, Heythrop College, held another anniversarial symposium that featured a range of Christian and Muslim speakers from within the UK, including Professor Tariq Ramadan (Oriental Institute, St Antony's College, Oxford). Similar events were held in Europe, for example a Munich based (Hochschule für Philosophie) symposium on a week-night basis for four evenings during November and December that not only addressed the content of the Common Word letter but also sought to explore its implications and prospects for future dialogue, especially between Jews, Muslims and Christians.

63 Communique of the Cambridge Common Word Conference, 12-15 October 2008 (ACW Website – Major 'A Common Word' Events; See: <http://acommonword.com/en/a-common-word/16-conferences/16-communique-from-a-common-word-conference.html>).

64 See ACW Website – Major 'A Common Word' Events.

65 Ibid.

In December 2013 the Mater Dei Institute of Education, a College of Dublin City University, Ireland, held a conference with the theme: 'A Common Word' and the future of Muslim-Christian dialogue. It focussed on the contribution of the 'Common Word Initiative' to the history of Christian–Muslim relations, as well as addressing the letter's core principles of love of God and love of neighbour. It examined patterns of reception of the letter along with engaging a philosophical and comparative-contextual analysis of it. It posed the question: 'Is the Common Word regarded as successful and, if so, why?' together with: 'What does it have to say to Muslims and Christians today living in the Western world in the shadow of what is known as post modernity?' Many other events, both of a dialogical engagement type and also of a reflective non-dialogical type, are recorded on the website. They speak of a widening pool of responsive activities prompted by the initiative of the Muslim letter, and they also are indicative of a growing body of literature about, and allied to, the Common Word letter.

A perusal of the category 'Publications' on the Common Word website is most illuminating, even though it only records some of the relevant published output for just the first five years (2008-2012) since the letter was issued. These include a work of critical discourse analysis,[66] a record of a conference that features voices from sub-Saharan Africa as well as South and Southeast Asia,[67] and other texts that examine the letter and its implications.[68] Of particular interest and practical application is a book that targets parishes and mosques – the letter and its message packaged for a much wider reception.[69] Many books are listed that contain chapters or other extensive writings on or about the Common Word letter, together with reviews and journal articles. Dialogical activities alongside academic and practitioner reflection continues.

4 Challenges and Issues

Having analysed the content of the letter, and outlined some of the responses that have been made to it, what may be said further by way of a critical

66 Joseph Nnabugwu, Analyzing A Common Word Between Us Muslims and You Christians (ACW website).

67 Troll, Reifeld & Hewer, *We Have Justice in Common.*

68 For example, El-Ansary and Linnan, *Muslim and Christian Understanding*; J. Borelli (Ed), *A Common Word*; Peter Colwell, Above Us and Between Us: An Introduction and Resource on the Letter 'A Common Word Between Us and You' (ACW website).

69 Lejla Demiri, A Common Word – Text and Reflections: A Resource for Parishes and Mosques (ACW website).

comment and assessment? What are the challenges and issues arising from this letter? The first thing I notice, and that seems to suggest cause for a hopeful future of dialogue between Christians and Muslims – and by implication, and direct allusion made, a wider dialogue between Jews, Christians and Muslims – is the fact that (a) it does not start from the premise of Abrahamic commonality but rather (b) it highlights indisputable theological principles and values as the bedrock of interreligious connectedness and so the basis of dialogical engagement: love of God and love of neighbour. On this basis the call to 'come to a common word between us' – which is not a call to surrender distinctive understanding and identity, nor an invitation to reductive unanimity – is certainly well-grounded and invites, by way of response, careful and respectful consideration and reply. *Inter alia*, it is inescapably the case that the preface and qualification of 'Unity', with which Islamic discourse imbues its theological articulation, requires some unpacking and consideration for, *prima facie*, it could be taken as a hegemonic hermeneutic embedded within the terms of an irresistible invitation. Teasing out a response to the stress upon the unity of God as representing a key reference point for the presumption of commonality needs to occur both as part of a Christian response to the letter, and as a signal to further work as part of the theological agenda that could be pursued within the context of any dialogical 'coming to a common word'.

Of course, Christians affirm with Islam that there is but One God. The sentiment *Say: He is God, the One!* (*Al-Ikhlas* 112:1) when taken at face value poses no theological problem in principle for Christians. There is only one God. And, yes, God is also a unity within God's self: Divinity is neither divided nor divisible. Once again, in terms of primary metaphysical principle, a Christian would concur. Indeed, this would be well attested by way of the doctrine of Divine Simplicity as well as a thoroughly understood doctrine of the Trinity – the 'tri-unity' of God, not a tri-theism. The Word of God which Muslims apprehend through the Qurʾān, Christians have apprehended through Jesus the Christ: the revelation of God is manifestly communicated, received, interpreted and so believed, differingly across our two faith communities. Upon the singularity or essential 'oneness' of God Christians and Muslims certainly agree; to that extent the unity of God necessarily precedes and proscribes any reflective and responsive development of understanding the nature and being of God.[70] But the manifestly different ways in which the revelatory 'word', or 'message', of the One God has been responded to in terms of structures of belief, teaching and doctrine, requires also to be acknowledged. It is important that, in the context

70 Cf. Douglas Pratt, 'Christian-Muslim Theological Encounter: the priority of *tawhid*.' *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations*, Vol 7/3 (1996): 271-284.

of any dialogical engagement, the quest to comprehend that 'common word' is not foreclosed by theological presumption from one side toward the other.

Christians and Muslims believe, worship, and submit to the One and the Same God, yet that One God is differently revealed and responded to. Thus in the very differentials of response to God there is likely both the basis and initial agenda for meaningful theological dialogue. Theological differences must be addressed in dialogue alongside, and in mutual deepening of, the common understanding and affirmations we otherwise assert. Thus the singularity of God can issue in an affirmation of ontological integrity upon which Christians and Muslims may agree – God does not exist as a member of a divine community (polytheism) nor in some sort of federated association (there are no partners and associates as such; no subordinate ranks in partnership) – but it also may issue in an existential and theological integrity (the agentive expression of divine compassion, mercy and love that signals the relational initiative which properly lies with God reaching out to, and connecting with, the lived history of the peoples of God) that allows us to speak, conceive, and know God in manifold ways. And here the words of the Qur'ān, as with the words of the Bible, need to be carefully weighed and interpreted such that the essential integrities are seen to be maintained and enhanced, not undermined and devalued.

The Muslim letter rightly draws attention to the exhortation of piety – that intentional devotion to God – which preserves loyalty and fidelity: we worship but One God, the Creator and Lord of All. There is no dispute here; there is rather a strong case for the grounding of further dialogue. And this urging of piety is reflected in eschatological and soteriological awareness (cf. p. 5). We share awareness – perhaps even orientation – within the bounds of the 'common word' motif; yet there is also between us, and within our wider faith communities, nuanced difference of interpretation and conceptuality concerning these. They need not be downplayed for the sake of discerning the deeper common word; rather, once again, there is signalled within the letter likely lines of dialogical agenda. Attention to piety is also reflected in and through references to the fear of God; ways in which the term 'fear' is interpreted and received could well prove a useful focus of fruitful dialogical engagement. Understood as responsive respectful awe, it signals one modality of submission. Regarded as a cowering concern to avoid retributive justice, it may well signal another mode of submission. The motif of the fear of God is perhaps less about God than about our response to, and relation with, God. Yet this flagging of likely difference does not diminish the import of the invitation embedded in the letter; it rather strengthens the prospect of a genuine and theologically fruitful encounter arising in consequence of accepting the

invitation. In similar fashion, the depiction of the soul as the locus of 'three main faculties' (p. 6) is not so much an assertion of a necessary psychology as an illustration of the complex dynamic relationship that obtains between the Creator and the creature. In the comprehension of the dynamic there may be room for nuanced understanding and application such that what appear at first hand to be substantive differences are resolved as mutually acceptable variability of particularities that yet coherently express and manifest an underlying divine commonality. The fear of God may be equally regarded as the premise for submission to God, and the basis of active loving of both God and neighbour. And both premises are arguably compatible with each of Christianity and Islam. But it would take careful dialogical engagement to put that to the test. This need not deter or detract from dialogue; rather it flags yet another strand of a prospective theological agenda for dialogue. Pietistic concerns expressed in terms of both the fear and the love of God may perhaps be regarded as intimations of an intentionally focused faith. Dialogue challenges shallow nominalism on either side; another good reason for responding positively to this invitation.

There is much in this letter, in terms of both its underlying intention and the substantive content which is framed as a dialogue between textual sources, that is quite encouraging. Indeed, I suggest the principal element of the Muslim letter, which signals a hopeful future for Christian–Muslim dialogue, is that it does not start from the premise of Abrahamic commonality but rather from indisputable theological principles and values that thread through both religions. These form the basis of dialogical engagement. The letter also reflects the need for such dialogue; the call to come to a common word between us cannot be discharged by one side only. It is within the context of genuine theological dialogical encounter that the Quranic call can be truly honoured. And it is only as Christians and Muslims together search their respective scriptures and related traditions of interpretation and appropriation that the essential dynamic of deity – the graceful Will of God – can be apprehended in and through the differing details of textual record and interpretative tradition. And much good progress has been made in respect to the various 'Common Word' conferences and seminars that have taken place, as well as the growing number of studies and research investigations into what is often now referred to as the phenomenon of the 'Common Word Initiative'.

CHAPTER 12

Conclusion

I began this study with an overarching review of the broad history of interaction between Muslims and Christians, then explored in a little more detail the trajectory of ecclesial ecumenical engagement up to the early 21st century and alighted upon a selection of significant developments and initiatives. These are not the only significant engagements taking place today, but they certainly represent some of the best examples of continuing contemporary dialogical relationships illustrating ongoing ecumenical journeys of Christian engagement with Islam. However, in an age when there is constant news of violence and extremism associated with the Muslim world, and an increasing number of reactionary responses that do nothing to ameliorate accompanying concerns and anxieties, rather quite the reverse, a focus upon such dialogical relationships may appear somewhat quixotic. I suggest, in the light of this, that despite today's political rhetoric advocating tightening of borders and the erection of barriers to keep out a threatening other – mostly, though not always, identified as Muslim – it is vitally important that positive dialogical relationships of any kind, and especially between Christians and Muslims (and where possible, including also Jews), are advocated, celebrated and studied. For much can be learned from them. And it is not a case of trying to replace dark glasses of despair with rose-tinted spectacles of naïve optimism – if nothing else, the long history of Christian–Muslim relations reminds us that there is a deep vein of mutual suspicion, negation and enmity that cannot be easily dismissed or resolved. The wider experience and record of Christian–Muslim encounter has been largely one of mutual, often quite hostile, competition. The presumption of conversion as the goal of interaction has often been to the fore on either side – with the inherent assumption that says, in effect: in order for my faith to be true, yours must be false. Therefore, in order for you to have access to the truth, you should convert to my religion, my viewpoint. What is needed rather, is the clear lens of realism that is neither hostage to the patterns of the past nor naively optimistic about the future but rather open to new ways of being, thinking, and doing.

Although competitive rivalry and enmity have cast a long and sometimes oppressive shadow, this has never prevented instances and opportunities of exploring mutual affinity and inquiry in the quest to transcend – but not deny – real differences. Rather the quest for a way of practical and cooperative coexistence, and to discern therein a deeper context of understanding of both

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self and other, constitute the wings of a dove of peace that ever seeks to take flight. In the process of such positive dialogical engagement the reality of difference and distinction is no longer regarded with threat or suspicion but affirmed as the warp and woof of life's rich tapestry. And, from a theistic perspective, the accompanying affirmation of the Divine Weaver whose tapestry it is.

Overall, the ecumenical journey of Christian engagement with Islam is, I suggest, rather like the progress of a spiral thread. There is a sense of forever going round in a circle; yet there may be shifts in understanding and perspective that suggest a measure of forward developmental progress nonetheless. Although there are age-old issues and matters which seem never amenable to that ultimate solution whereby they would never need re-visiting, nevertheless by being raised and addressed in a new era, a new context, and perhaps with fresh energy and a different slant, some form of mutual advance is achieved. Collectively and cumulatively the journeys that have been examined herein arguably do paint a picture of progress and development, at least in recent decades. These journeys are by no means exhaustive of the many dialogical journeys undertaken by Christians and Muslims during the past century, nor of those which are pursued today. They do, however, give a substantial indication of the how and why of contemporary Christian engagement with Islam, as well as the developing nature, style and substance of the dialogical conversations and relationships taking place. The picture they paint provides a perspective of encouragement for the future, even though many issues and challenges remain. Indeed, despite the contemporary problem of various forms of Islamic extremism and allied tensions that have impacted Christian–Muslim relations in many parts of the world, Christian dialogical engagement with Islam continues to be a locus of fruitful encounter in many quarters still. The witness of dialogical activities whose origins lie in the twentieth century, together with the witness of new initiatives in the twenty-first, bear adequate testimony to that.

There is much which is occurring that is positive, encouraging, and hopeful. Nevertheless, it remains a fact that in many quarters in the world today Islam is perceived as a threat. One reaction to something perceived to be a threat is that of fearful concern; of anxiety about an unknown quantity. It is a response that is open to the influence of prejudice propagated through media bias and popular distortion, the seed-bed of much Islamophobic reaction.[1] A more positive outlook is possible and there is good evidence also for it – Islam presents a

1 Cf. Douglas Pratt and Rachel Woodlock (Eds), *Fear of Muslims? International Perspectives on Islamophobia* (Switzerland: Springer), 2016.

challenge religiously, ideologically, politically and culturally. A threat is something that evokes a defensive response, even hostility and reactive aggression. A challenge is something to be met, and the first step is to understand, to allay anxiety and fear through proper knowledge, sympathetic investigation, and accurate portrayal. Proper empathetic knowledge of the other is the vital first step toward dialogue. The next step is active engagement in concrete dialogical conversations. Both these have been well demonstrated in and through the examples of dialogical engagement examined above. It is one thing to gain knowledge from afar, to construct a mode of understanding at a distance, to pursue an intellectual encounter in abstraction. The deeper challenge is that of taking the plunge of face-to-face encounter whereby each exposes themselves to the scrutiny and response of the other. This, too, has been the case with a number of the journeys discussed, especially those that have arisen during the opening decade of the twenty-first century.

1 Review: The Engagement Thus Far

Charles Kimball has observed that 'the history of the interaction has been characterized by mistrust, misunderstanding and mutual antipathy'.[2] Not only have theological debates and discussions internal to each religion been hotbeds of high emotion and deep dissent, but any similar engagement between them has been equally – if not more so – contentious and fraught. I suggested above (chapter 2) some key terms that describe dominant motifs of Christian–Muslim interaction. The epochs of encounter may be denoted by terms such as 'expansion', 'equilibrium', 'exhortation', 'enmity', and 'exploration', but along with suggesting historical phases they also, perhaps more importantly, indicate aspects or dimensions of relationship that continue to apply. Expansion can be seen to be indicative of the 'expansiveness of self-confidence' – religion in an expansion mode is determined and assertive, and this is a contemporary feature of both Islam and Christianity. But the sense of 'equilibrium', which refers to a hesitancy to be overly self-assertive, and an inclination to humility and measure of openness to the religious 'other', is also arguably a component of contemporary relationship, at least in some quarters. The contemporary reality of mutual exhortation, including criticism and judgement, proclamation and witness, which, in more extreme forms, seeks to declare an exclusive truth and engage with the 'other' only in order to win,

2 Charles Kimball, *Striving Together: A Way Forward in Christian–Muslim Relations* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books), 1991, p. 37.

certainly abounds as well. This is the continuing mark of a competitive praxis, of seeking victory through conversion. Likewise, propensities toward dismissive, derogatory, and deprecatory prejudice that mark a climate of enmity are extensively abroad today, manifesting in various situations and contexts. However, these rather negative elements notwithstanding – and they are by no means the whole picture – perhaps the motif of 'exploration' in the sense of mutual positive engagement, which now appears also to be gaining as a feature or mark of contemporary Christian–Muslim interaction, needs to be affirmed and fostered further. The work of the Vatican and the WCC in this respect can be seen as fostering a new context of regard and openness toward Islam and Muslims. The wider ecumenical journey, and the many specific engagements such as those discussed above, underscore both the reality of the dialogical challenge and also its possibilities and prospects. Before reflecting further on the future, however, a further moment of dwelling on the past is in order.

As noted above, missionary elements within the Christian Church had begun, by the early twentieth century, to question the tradition of exclusivist attitudes and negative assumptions with respect to other religions. The long-held stance of antagonism that viewed any other religion as necessarily false has given way to an approach of respect and appreciation, and accompanying opportunities for dialogue and other modes of relational engagement. Ever since the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference and the beginnings of the ecumenical movement, the question of the proper relation of Christianity to other faiths has continued to be raised and addressed. Whilst there are some churches and Christians that still place a priority upon conversion as the goal of evangelical outreach, within ecumenical circles Christian mission has largely broadened to engage also mutual and respectful dialogical relations. From the time when Islam first appeared in history, the nature of the relationship between Muslims and Christians has been marked, arguably, by three fundamental dynamics: mutual antipathy, mutual affinity and mutual inquiry. The first, antipathy, has certainly been rather predominant, especially as Islam and Christianity most often engaged with one another in the context of political, and at times military, encounters and clashes. The epoch of the Crusades stands out, of course; but from early on, as Islam shaped up to be a genuinely alternative theistic religion, Christian reactions were largely negative, with many regarding the new faith as heresy and heaping all sorts of negative opprobrium onto Muhammad. Such portrayals and assessments exist still today. But negativity is not the only or last word. At the very beginning of the Muslim story, when the nascent community in Mecca was increasingly ostracised and under attack from fellow Arabs, the Christian emperor of Abyssinia gave the

first Muslims shelter and succour. For him, Muhammad was in the line of God-fearing prophets and quite clearly proclaiming a form of faith in God which, if not in the mode of Chalcedonian orthodoxy, certainly positioned Muhammad and the Muslims as not alone in being on the margins of that orthodoxy. An initial Christian perception of nascent Islam was that it was a variant of heterodox Christianity.

By the seventh century, at the time when historical Islam was in formation, Christianity was painted on a broad canvas and with many hues. Being Christian even then was no simplistic black-and-white affair; Christian belief and identity went beyond shades of grey and could be seen in terms of a multi-coloured palette. And the same is very much the case today. Diversity within religions, whilst often downplayed by pundits of the respective religious orthodoxies, reveals an essential truth of religion as being subject to highly variegated and nuanced tropes of interpretation and so to variability of representation, self-understanding and identity. So it was that among the earliest interactions between Muslims and Christians, mutual affinity – that is, of seeing in each other something of 'the same', or at least 'the similar', in terms of belief disposition and religious orientation – has enabled threads of mutual respect, cooperation and inter-communal harmony to weave their way into the overall picture of Christian–Muslim relations down through the centuries. But there is yet the third element – mutual inquiry – which is also a long-standing dynamic of Christian–Muslim engagement. Found in the shared interest concerning narratives pertaining to Muhammad's pre-prophethood commercial travels within the ancient Near East; emerging also during the great dynastic era when the burgeoning Islamic empire needed the involvement of both Christians and Jews in the development and maintenance of the affairs of government; and coming into sublime prominence during the golden centuries of Muslim-ruled Spain with its fruitful scholarly intercourse between Muslims, Jews and Christians, it is perhaps in the modern era, and certainly since the mid-twentieth century, that a sense of genuinely mutual inquiry – of seeking, together, to understand each other, learn about each other, and strive together for the greater good of one another and the common world we together indwell – has re-emerged and become active. Such inquiry is born out of the sense of affinity and given urgent impetus by the realisation of the negative consequences of allowing antipathy to gain the upper hand. It is something of the spirit of inquiry that has been a driver to the distinctive twenty-first century initiatives – Building Bridges, the Christian-Muslim Theological Forum, and responses to the Common Word letter.

There are some interesting and salutary lessons to be drawn from the review of the two Christian initiatives. Each has had a different trajectory of development and yet each required equally determination, commitment, and an organisational base. An intentional and carefully planned effort was applied, with attention paid to ensuring equality of participation and quality of contribution. The result has been that the events themselves, and their published outputs, are a substantial product with high-grade integrity and so long-lasting value. And, in both cases it is clear that a measure of consistency of interlocutors and modus operandi has allowed for the building of quality relationships – surely one of the primary fruits of any dialogical enterprise – and the capacity to incorporate new attendees and to process appropriately the agendas or themes that each of these dialogical enterprises has chosen to pursue. There has been an evident coherence of dialogical substance and style. This has enabled highly intentional theological engagement to be undertaken successfully by these initiatives. And the 'Common Word' Muslim letter to the Christian community is an invitation to engage dialogically on the premise of a common revelatory thread, shared concerns to promote common theological values, and a common desire for peaceful co-existence. In this case, textual authority is the clear starting point; hermeneutical priority is signalled as the context for dialogical engagement. For despite the acknowledgement of common scriptural reference and parallel textual authority, differences in interpretation and concept that are applied suggest that dialogue will quickly reduce to the performance of parallel monologues unless proper critical attention is given to hermeneutics. Difference in the nature and content of the respective scriptures yields significant differences in theological position and principal beliefs that no amount of commonality affirmation can overcome.

2 Critical Perspectives on Christian–Muslim Dialogue

One element that links all three 21st century dialogical initiatives discussed above is respect for the authority of scriptural texts as a source and ground for dialogical engagement, together with a measure of adventuring in respect to interpretive engagement with these texts.[3] The history of both faiths is replete with debates and developments concerning the interpretation of scripture.

3 See also Douglas Pratt, 'Textual Authority and Hermeneutical Adventure: Three 21st Century Christian-Muslim Dialogue Initiatives' in Douglas Pratt, Jon Hoover, John Davies and John Chesworth (Eds), *The Character of Christian-Muslim Encounter: Essays in Honour of David Thomas*. (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2015), pp. 559-578; and Douglas Pratt, 'Necessary Non-

And the scriptural record, especially the Holy Bible (and also the Holy Qur'ān, although differently in terms of range) contains many different modes of language, from direct statement to poetic allusion, and much else besides. Christians and Muslims take their holy texts seriously. The necessity of interpretation, that has perforce accompanied the reception and application of sacred text in both Christianity and Islam, is a function not of any human limitation to hear and respond to the word of God but rather evidence of the priority of interpretation that a proper reception and application of the text demands. Indeed, taking scripture seriously requires the text to be interpreted in order to be understood and apprehended. It is, in fact, of the essence of revelation to need interpretation: revelation occurs within the frame of an interpretive act, a lens that enables revelation to be apprehended in the first place. This neither downplays nor negates the importance of the revelatory text as such: its authority remains sacrosanct. It does, however, give room for new and deeper meaning, a new understanding, to emerge in and through the dialogical engagement. And it is this prospect, perhaps, that constitutes the driver of quiet expectation that enables the dialogues to continue.

Dialogue demands close attention to and respect for the authority of scriptural texts but also, in order to advance mutual understanding, there is a requirement for openness to the possibilities inherent in hermeneutical adventuring. This gives dialogue its sharp edge of relevance and its critical role in addressing the thorny issues and problematic interactions that presently beset the worlds of Christianity and Islam and relations between them. These initiatives in dialogue exemplify, and indeed require, the twin towers of textual authority and an adventuring in hermeneutics. Arguably, by attending to hermeneutical issues and questions, and recognising that non-apodicity applies across all revealed scripture, differences can be put into proper perspective. The prospect of ameliorating the effects of difference, by way of the discerning deeper truth or revelation that transcend the differences that time, history, and theological developments have thus far given rise to, would appear possible. Perhaps this gives a clue as to future directions of dialogical engagement. Certainly, this sort of direction and depth seems evident in much of the discussions and output of the twenty-first century initiatives. In any case, theological dialogue is very much to the fore.

At this juncture it may be instructive to observe that Heidi Hirovonen, in the conclusion to her recent study, notes that there has been 'an abundance' of suggestions and guidelines with regard to the nature, aims and methods that

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Apodicity: Hermeneutic Priority and Textual Authority in Christian-Muslim Dialogue', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* Vol. 20/3 (2009): 291-303.

could be, or have been, employed.[4] Further, she observes that: 'In the context of Muslim-Christian dialogue, different theological positions vis-à-vis the other religion have different consequences for how the nature of dialogue is perceived – whether it is acknowledged that something can be learned from the other, and to what extent the real difference the traditions is accepted.'[5] She usefully critiques the application of any dogmatic situating of dialogue within the framework of the standard theologies of religion (exclusivist, inclusivist, and pluralist), for 'all positions have their particular dilemmas … there is no neutral starting point; all approach religious diversity from the viewpoint of their own convictions. When this is acknowledged, it can be accepted that dialogue is possible from diverse positions on theology of religions'.[6] Hirvonen also makes an insightful observation with respect to difficulties encountered in Christian–Muslim dialogue with respect to understanding divine revelation, given they each share basic ideas of revelation and prophecy: 'it can be argued that it is not so much ignorance of the similarities but rather lack of acceptance, or even perception, of the differences that makes Christian–Muslim discussion about divine revelation problematic'.[7] Presuppositions are assumed as axiomatic. Thus each side often expects that the other will concur at this level, so resolving outstanding issues of difference by recourse, in effect, to the normativity of one over the other: 'one's own presuppositions are forced on the other in dialogue'.[8] This leads to a dialogical impasse and, Hirvonen adds, to the atrophying of theological dialogue.

> Apart from the preliminary matter of acquiring correct mutual knowledge, the principle dilemmas in Muslim-Christian discussion about divine revelation include appraisals of each other's scriptures and conceptions of revelation, as well as the Christian attitude towards Muhammad. The traditional Islamic view of the Judeo-Christian scriptures combines the ideas of their original revelatory nature and later textual corruption, which leads to ambivalent Muslim appraisals of the Bible… As for Muslim assessments of the particularly Christian conception of revelation, God's self-revelation in Christ through incarnation is contrary

4 Heidi Hirvonen, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Perspectives of Four Lebanese Thinkers*. (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2013), p. 305.

5 Ibid., p. 306.

6 Hirvonen, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, p. 307.

7 Hirvonen, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, p. 308.

8 Ibid.

> to basic Islamic convictions and Muslims cannot be expected to accept it and still remain faithful to their own religious tradition.[9]

This observation, arising in the context of a specific Lebanese study, can be readily seen to apply elsewhere, and more generally. It provides something of a foil and point of contrast against which to assess elements of the dialogical journeys traversed herein. So, for instance, Hirvonen observes that whereas the Christian attitude to the Qurʾān has traditionally been negative, today appraisals of Islamic scripture 'are characterised by their variety, reflecting as they do the diverse Christian approaches to other religions'.[10]

Religious discourse ever has the capacity to generate more heat than light. Although there is perhaps more goodwill and readiness for relational and dialogical encounter today than has ever been the case previously (with the exception, perhaps, of Spain during the relatively settled centuries preceding the *Reconquista*), dialogical engagement remains largely spasmodic, somewhat *ad hoc*, and of limited appeal in the wider schema of Christian–Muslim relations. Nevertheless, one of the critical areas of dialogical interaction today is, it would seem, that of theological encounter – an area that has most encouragingly come to the fore in the work of the Building Bridges and Christian-Muslim Theological initiatives. This arena is crucial, but it is also exceedingly difficult. Much good interaction and dialogue can take place between Christians and Muslims in respect of other areas of concern, of course – moral, socio-political, economic, ecological – to name but a few.[11] Thomas Michel, for example, speaks of a plethora of usually overlooked transnational Muslim movements which

> …are actively working for peace, interreligious dialogue, minority rights, education and development, religious freedom, and gender justice in the Islamic world. … (They) unequivocally and emphatically reject and condemn violence and even incline toward a radical Quranic pacifism … (and they) … shape the vision, motivate the commitment, and inspire the social and educational projects of millions of Muslims… They represent some of the most energetic and influential forces that are shaping the outlook and vision of Muslims, and point the direction that the

9 Hirvonen, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, p. 309.

10 Hirvonen, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, p. 310.

11 Cf. Thomas Michel, SJ, 'Peaceful Movements in the Muslim World' in Thomas Banchoff (Ed), *Religious Pluralism, Globalization, and World Politics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 229-251.

> worldwide Islamic community is heading far more accurately than do the increasingly isolated circles of those who are involved in terrorist fringe organizations.[12]

Today, around the globe, interest in Islam is high. The stakes are high. If global warming is a cause for concern, the idea of an interreligious meltdown between Islam and Christianity – which between them encompass the majority of the entire population of the world – let alone between Islam and what we loosely call 'the West', cannot be lightly brushed aside, especially given the upsurge of so-called 'fundamentalist' ideologies and related assertive, even terrorist, activities. In the modern world there are two very specific issues and challenges to address, namely the tension between the value and pursuit of dialogical détente, on the one hand, and the increasing propensity to radicalised exclusivist religious identities and positions on the other.[13] In other words, just as the rewards of the modern dialogical age, especially in respect of Christian–Muslim relations, are about to flow, there appear within quarters of both faiths ever-strident expressions of religious particularity and exclusivism that eschew relationship with the 'other'. This constitutes the contemporary paradoxical challenge *par excellence*. There is ample evidence of growing levels of resistance, within both the Muslim world and many Christian communities, of acceptance of the other as an equal. And in some quarters there are increasing levels of renewed antipathy, as the media quickly and stridently portrays. So, paradoxically, when modern media and communications can enable the free-flow of information and ideas as never before, it is the voices of resistance, rejection and prejudicial stereotyping that tend to dominate. In this context, the voices and many examples of good dialogical engagement and positive relationships remain all too often muted, if not silenced altogether.

The intensifying reactions fed by mutual extremisms are giving rise to what elsewhere I refer to as 'reactive co-radicalization'.[14] By this I mean a new form of religious extremism that portrays itself as a counter to the extremism of another religion perceived as a real and imminent threat. The perceived or presumed antipathy of one toward the other is reciprocated, and so the discontent is mutual. The criminal actions of the Norwegian Anders Breivik and the quix-

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12 Michel, 'Peaceful Movements in the Muslim World', p. 229.

13 See Douglas Pratt, 'Fundamentalism, Exclusivism and Religious Extremism', in David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt and David Thomas (Eds), *Understanding Interreligious Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 241-261.

14 Douglas Pratt, 'Reactive Co-Radicalization: Religious Extremism as Mutual Discontent', *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion*, 28/1 (2015): 3-23.

otic Swiss minaret ban are two examples emanating from the Christian and secular West with respect to Islam *per se* perceived and presumed to be a real cultural and religious threat.[15] In each case, they give evidence of an extreme reaction to a perception of the threat of Islamic extremism. And in the process they each reflect, and draw support from, a widespread rising antipathy towards Islam and Muslims, which has become a distinct feature within contemporary Western, globalised and secular societies. In light of such negative dimensions of relationship with Islam, or rather between Muslims and contemporary secular society, and between some quarters of Christianity and some elements of Islam, the question that is sometimes raised is: Does dialogue make a difference? Does relationship building produce any real beneficial effects? The sceptical reaction tends to call the dialogical enterprise into question: what is the point of it? This critique cannot go unanswered. It throws up a further challenge and contributes a particular dimension to Christian–Muslim relations. In this regard Richard Bulliet has attempted to make the case for a fresh re-think of the relationship between the so-called Christian West and the world of Islam – a timely counterpoint to the standard and somewhat pessimistic appraisals of this most critical of international relations.[16] And the renowned Muslim scholar, Seyyed Hossein Nasr has remarked that

> Islam is an inalienable and inseparable part of the Abrahamic family of religions and considers itself to be closely linked with the two monotheistic religions that preceded it. Islam envisages itself the complement of those religions and the final expression of Abrahamic monotheism, confirming the teachings of Judaism and Christianity, but rejecting any form of exclusivism.[17]

Here are two scholars – one Muslim, the other Christian – who would wish to see the issue of Christian–Muslim dialogical engagement cast in a positive light. Contentious issues are real enough; that does not mean the attempt to reconcile, resolve or otherwise ameliorate a history and context of negative interaction is vitiated from the outset. Bulliet is one who advocates understanding, and so re-thinking, the essential relationship between the two reli-

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15 Douglas Pratt, 'Islamophobia as Reactive Co-Radicalization', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 26/2 (April, 2015): 205-218.

16 Richard W. Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

17 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* (New York: HarperSanfrancisco, 2002), p. 42.

gio-civilisation blocs as one of a dynamic symbiosis, rather than the received tradition of inherent and unchanging antipathy, even hostility. He rejects the rhetoric of Samuel Huntington's famous 'clash of civilizations' and is critical of the presumption that casts the question of the relationship between the world of Islam and the Judeo-Christian, and now secularised, world of the West in terms of something having gone fundamentally wrong with the Islamic side. Bulliet tilts at the windmills of received tradition about the nature of the relationship of the West and Islam, especially that which predominates in the corridors of modern American power. His notion of an Islamo-Christian civilisation is a profoundly challenging concept given the current climate wherein it is the differences which are insisted upon – differences that imply irreducible otherness and so the impossibility of rapprochement or reconciliation. In fear of Islamic imposition, a predominant contemporary response of the West, for instance, is to insist on its imposition of a western form of socio-political ordering with regard to targeted Islamic countries. Western Christendom's Islamophobia is historically well attested. But need that be the final word? Bulliet thinks not, and nor do I.[18] Certainly, I suggest, without advances in theological reconciliation between Christians and Muslims, the legacy of suspicion and hostility will continue to fester. Any substantial discussion of theological challenges pertaining to Christian–Muslim dialogue leads to the matter of the underlying conceptual or interpretive element in theological dialogue.

Indeed, one concern I have is to identify the place and function of theological reflection in the dialogical encounter process. Here the analogy of light and prism comes to mind. Both Islam and Christianity proclaim the oneness of God and the oneness of the Truth of God. I contend that, in the process of theological dialogue, what is offered to each other is a refracted perspective – unique, distinctive, and valuable as such. It is potentially open to complementarity from the perspective of another's refraction. Also, in dialogue, the possibility exists that such complementarity may yield mutually illuminating, if not also practically beneficial, insights. For certainly the theological, or ideological, dimension of the engagement is no mere abstruse intellectual adventure of ideas. The role of religion in contemporary social and political contexts and, with that, the impact of religious extremism that has led to untold suffering and the precipitation of perhaps the largest displacement of refugees in modern times, cannot be underestimated. Addressing such matters within the context of Christian–Muslim engagement is not simply a case of having a social and/or political dialogue agenda. The deep driver, and the only lasting

18 Cf. Douglas Pratt, *The Challenge of Islam: Encounters in Interfaith Dialogue* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005 / Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).

resolution, lies within the realm of religious sensibilities, presuppositions and values – the theological and ideological dimension of each faith. If evidence of the contemporary hardening of religio-political identities and attitudes, together with a deepening of religious extremism and a worsening of religiously sanctioned violence, is anything to go by – especially within and between certain quarters of the Christian and Muslim worlds – the need for sustained intentional theological dialogue sufficient to build deep relations and tackle, resolutely, profoundly divisive issues, has never been more urgently needed. This is the pressing dialogical challenge of today; it is the route to dealing with many issues facing the world.

3 Future Prospect: Where Might the Engagement Be Heading?

Historically, vast complexes of concept and doctrine have been produced by Muslim and Christian thinkers seeking to fathom and express the truth of their own faith. As a consequence, the heritage of theological encounter is largely one of competing claim, counterclaim and, in the end, mutual dismissal of the other's viewpoint. The conceptual and interpretive element is arguably critical to Christian–Muslim dialogue: it functions as the gatekeeper – to change the metaphor – which determines what, or who, shall be admitted, and what is to be turned away. Theological dialogue can be entered into creatively and with integrity to the extent we are open to careful and critical scrutiny, and genuinely radical rethinking of the intellectual constructs whereby we express our faith and belief. It is my contention that, spurred by the example and advances in this field that have taken place in the opening decade and a half of the twenty-first century, and drawing upon the resources that have now emerged from them, and which continue to do so, there is scope for considerably extending and deepening the dialogue. As well, and from a Christian perspective at least, a rethinking of doctrinal formulation that is nevertheless consonant with the origins, foundations and essential dynamics of the faith, may yet enable fruitful theological intercourse between Christianity and Islam to proceed further. The extent that issues such as these are addressed, or not addressed, will determine whether theological dialogue will be a matter of deep engagement or superficial encounter. One offers the possibility of moving beyond the parameters of past expectation and traditional limitations; the other at best continues friendly communication at a comfortable level, albeit little more than that.

Fundamental beliefs and principle expressions of faith, which are those things that signal the bedrock of worldviews, need to be seriously and

sensitively addressed. For instance, it is the portrayal and understanding of, respectively, Jesus and Muhammad, together with the critical issue of the definition and understanding of God, which gives sharp focus to theological dialogue between Muslims and Christians. It is key issues such as these that not only undergird key areas of conceptual difference, they demarcate profound distinction of religious identity. Jesus and Muhammad have often been the subject of dialogical agendas in the journey of encounter between Muslims and Christians, often perhaps contrasted and compared on the basis that they are presumed, as historical figures, to function as equivalents. But this is misleading and has resulted, for example, in at times the use of the mistaken appellation of 'Mohammedans' for Muslims – on the assumption that Muhammad is to Islamic identity and worship as Christ is to Christianity and Christians. On the other hand, from the Muslim side, each figure has been proscribed by the term 'prophet'. Madigan suggests that, in the context of dialogue, the terms of discussion have often been determined from an understandable Islamic perspective by reference to the Quranic view of prophet and, indeed, Muslim understanding of scripture as, in essence, a dictated message from God. However, 'this structure leads to category mistakes that leave each side at best puzzled, at worst scandalized by the theology of the other… There is no satisfactory way out of such mutual miscomprehensions, and it is essential to recognize that they result from using the same terms in very different ways'.[19]

In point of fact the ideological context of the function of the founder figure is different in each case. For Christianity, Jesus functions as 'saviour'. Often the more usual ascription is 'Messiah' derived from the Judaic understanding of the particular figure that God will send to effect salvation. The Greek translation of 'messiah', *Christos*, gives rise to the naming of Jesus as 'the Christ' and so eventually 'Jesus (the) Christ'. But if the function of saviour is pre-eminent, it is not the *sole* function ascribed to this figure. By contrast the Islamic perspective on its founder-figure, Muhammad, is that he was a prophet – first and last. And he fulfilled that role as none before him had done. But clearly he did more than just that. Exploring in dialogue what all this means for Christian and Muslim thought, and what it might portend for mutual understanding, is undoubtedly of great value. For instance, a Christian reading of the Islamic account of Muhammad might detect the motif of exemplar – *par excellence*. Also the motif of teacher, the motif of enacting a divine – that is, divinely willed and sanctioned – mission which resulted in the establishment of a theocratic

19 Daniel Madigan, SJ, 'Christian-Muslim Dialogue', in Catherine Cornille (Ed), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue* (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), p. 253.

community wherein is proclaimed and promoted the way of a saving faith. An Islamic reading of the Christian account of Jesus might conclude that, in the Christian record, there is evidence of unique and particular submission to the Will of God – the gospel records as among Jesus' last words the petition 'Not my will be done, but Thine'. Indeed an Islamic reading of the Christian record of Jesus (as opposed to an Islamic reading of the Quranic record of Jesus) may form a worthwhile dimension of cross-hermeneutical engagement within the context of a theological dialogue.

By carefully working through the ideological dimension it may be possible to deconstruct the accretions of dogma and hagiography sufficient to find a bedrock of unique function that allows each religion to co-equally affirm and honour the other's central historical figure in a way that has hitherto been impossible to achieve. Something of this has been suggested by Kenneth Cragg.[20] If the prime distinction between Christianity and Islam had to do with the understanding of their respective founders alone, then there would likely be little real gulf between Christian and Muslim. But this is not the case. The real theological point at issue between Christians and Muslims, I suggest, is not so much to do with perceptions about Jesus and Muhammad – important though those are – but has to do with the question of the concept of God and, in particular, with what might be called the theological problematic of the unity (*tawhid*) of God.[21] What for Muslims is no issue at all – the priority of *tawhid* is paramount – for Christians has always been a mystery of the Divine Being. Paradoxically, in the context of affirming divine Oneness, Christian faith asserts two forms of metaphysical plurality: trinitarianism in respect of God *per se* and two-natures in respect of Christ, who is also one person of the Trinity. It is in the context of Christian–Muslim theological dialogue, however, that the resolution of perceived fundamental differences in the concept and understanding of God takes on some urgency. The question of the 'oneness' of God, expressed as both 'unity' and 'trinity', if left unresolved impinges significantly, and at times quite negatively, upon Christian–Muslim relations. In theory Christianity ought to be able to concur with the Muslim affirmation of *tawhid*. In practice how might this be so? The challenge of theological dialogue is to go beyond the language parameters of the received traditions and into a deeper understanding and mutual appreciation of what it is the traditions attempted to express in the first place. Fresh expressions may well be called for,

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20 Kenneth Cragg, *Muhammad and the Christian: A Question of Response* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999).

21 Cf. Douglas Pratt, 'Christian-Muslim Theological Encounter: the priority of *tawhid*.' *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 7/3 (1996): 271-284.

and may well allow a theological dialogue to clear away the dross of mutual misunderstanding. Arguably, however, much of the way Islam and Christianity pronounce and act in respect to worldly and spiritual matters, comes down to an extension of fundamental principles and the application of basic beliefs. If deep discord and misunderstanding over such beliefs remains unresolved, the likelihood of being able to arrive at and sustain mutually acceptable cooperative decisions and actions on pragmatic matters will not be great. The theological challenges of, and to, dialogue remain paramount.

Jørgen Nielsen, noting how the twentieth century had, in the end, triumphed over fascism, Nazism, and Soviet communism, observed that the twenty-first century has thrown up a new challenge: the assertive, even aggressive, return of religion into the public sphere.[22] The so-called secular world – west and east; north and south – is now faced with the reality that religion, in varying ways, is making a strident comeback; an old problem, of religion as an imposing social force, has surfaced in a new way. And yet this is taking place in a situation, within secularised western countries at least, where increasing proportions of the population register as having no religious affiliation or identity; where religion is increasingly marginalised and privatised, if only because of increasing religious diversity. Assertive religion, in a variety of guises, constitutes a new societal as well as interreligious challenge. Indeed, as Nielsen notes in respect to the European context (and which applies as well elsewhere), by the turn of the century 'the Islamic world was beginning to be seen as a source of such a challenge, whether from outside Europe or in the form of Muslim communities now settled in Europe itself. In this environment, relations between Christianity and Islam moved from the margins to become one of the key dimensions of developments'.[23]

Interestingly, if not also significantly, the first issue of the *Christian-Muslim News Digest* for 2016, produced by the Anglican Network for Interfaith Concerns (NIFCON), featured two 'good news' events from late 2015 that shine a welcome and all-too-rare light on the field of Christian–Muslim relations. This was not the usual fare of the mass media. The first item concerned 'how faith communities across the globe were able to promote unity among Christians and Muslims through the rare convergence of Christmas and Mawlid, the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday' which fell on Christmas Eve; the second had to do with an episode in which 'Kenyan Muslims shielded Christians

22 Jørgen S. Nielsen, 'The Current Situation of Christian-Muslim Relations: Emerging Challenges, Signs of Hope', in Douglas Pratt, Jon Hoover, John Davies and John Chesworth (Eds), *The Character of Christian-Muslim Encounter: Essays in Honour of David Thomas*. (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2015), pp. 415-427.

23 Nielsen, The Current Situation, p. 415.

from death in a bus attack by Al Shabaab' and also reported on the 'impact of their heroic acts on terrorism-weary Kenya'.[24] Christians and Muslims co-celebrated their respective feasts in such diverse – and challenging – contexts as Iraq, Nigeria, Egypt, Malaysia, and the UK. And following episodes of the slaughter of innocent Christians in Kenya by the extremist movement out of Somalia, ordinary Muslims stood up – at great personal risk – for their co-religionists, challenging the extremists' interpretation and application of Islam in the process. These may be relatively isolated incidents, but they are not necessarily so uncommon in representing a much larger groundswell of mutual regard, recognition and acceptance of Muslim for Christian and vice versa. This is certainly not what a wider, and ill-informed, public would today be led to believe is the case. Too often it is negative portrayals, and recourse to crusading imagery and jihadi rhetoric, that dominate the headlines and capture the imagination.

So, where are we going in all of this? It is clear that, today, Muslim and Christian intention to engage in dialogical relationships, whether locally or globally signalled, is unambiguous and beyond question. This is well demonstrated through the dialogical engagements that have been the subject of this study. Yet the journey into this most critical of interfaith dialogue arenas is by no means an easy one. Resistance, detraction and criticism from within both religions are constants. At times it seems that the links are fragile and the depth of mutual understanding achieved is rather thin. Pope Benedict's now infamous Regensburg address,[25] though arguably taken – and so misunderstood – out of context, was nevertheless more than a simple *faux pas*; it is a reminder that the interfaith dimension of Christian–Muslim relations ever requires attention to be paid to the intra-faith challenge of bringing, and keeping, the communities of faith on board. This is where the work of the Christian–Muslim Theological Forum, along with the Building Bridges seminar series, needs to become more widely known throughout the Christian and Muslim worlds as both a testimony to and resource for ongoing substantial dialogical engagement. And, as the Muslim 'Common Word' letter reminds us, '…our common future is at stake'. The task of dialogue between Christianity and Islam remains a priority; the need for sustained engagement continues.

24 Anglican Network for Interfaith Concerns, *Christian-Muslim News Digest*, Issue 1 (27) 2016, np.

25 Widely reported at the time, and arousing much controversy on account of the inclusion of a citation of a negative perception of the Prophet Muhammad, from a centuries old source, this Papal address, 'Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections', was given at the University of Regensburg, Germany, on 12 September, 2006. Pope Benedict had previously been a professor at the University.

Perhaps the key thing to note, as a first element pointing toward the future, is the importance of simply keeping going – of simply 'keeping the faith' in the dialogical engagement process. Dialogue has no end; it is necessarily ongoing, for it is by virtue of the constancy of the dialogical conversation that relationship flourishes. Cease the dialogue, for whatever reason, and the relationship will inevitably atrophy; opportunity for mutual engagement for the purpose of deepening knowledge, understanding, and the chance for mutual correction, will be lost. The future requires the continuation of the dialogical process itself and, with that, consistency of witness to the values, perspectives and intentions implied. Second, the future demands an extension of the scope of dialogical engagement, and at a multiplicity of levels. The Building Bridges series and the Christian-Muslim Theological Forum belong to an important category of intentional academic dialogue of appropriate specialists. As well as the dissemination of the fruits of these dialogues to a wider audience, the need for relational engagement between the various constituencies of Islam and Christianity is an imperative, if only as a counter to the rise of reactionary radicalisations, exclusivisms and mutual hostility that currently beset many situations of Christians and Muslims. And, with this widening, there needs to be recourse to the broader diversity of dialogical modalities – of life, action, experience – that sit alongside the discursive dialogue of scholars and specialists.

Fostering friendly relations and mutual acceptance is no bad place to start. But as well as attending to the grassroots dimensions of relationship, the third element of the future of Christian engagement with Islam returns us to an intellectual task, namely the important and sensitive matter of self-critical reflection in the light of the dialogical experience. If dialogue provokes no change, no development, no modification in either the understanding of the dialogical partner, and also self-understanding in relation to that partner, then the sceptical dismissal of the value of dialogue wins. In the end, dialogue is vitiated as no more than a friendly monological exchange. Is that the future? I think not. Christians and Muslims have come too far – yet perhaps not yet far enough. The interreligious dialogue of Christianity and Islam also calls for respective intra-religious dialogues to occur. How well are Christians and Muslims engaging here? And how well are they addressing the critical issue of reflecting upon and re-thinking their received traditions in the light of the dialogue? As the dialogical engagement continues into the future so, as I have argued elsewhere, the task of undertaking self-reflective theology after dialogue[26] weighs upon us as an urgent task still.

26 Douglas Pratt, Theology after Dialogue: Christian–Muslim Engagement Today and Tomorrow, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 26/1 (January, 2015): 89-101.

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